

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE PERFORMANCE OF REMASTERY IN
THEATRE AND MEDIA

Alexander Williams Miller, Doctor of
Philosophy, 2023

Dissertation directed by: Professor James Harding, PhD, Department of
Theatre History and Performance Studies,
School of Theatre, Dance, and Performance
Studies

Within the field of mediatized performance, there are many terms that rely upon the “re-” prefix. Terms like remediation and remix have been utilized for the last two decades in discussions of how digital media has affected our perceptions of live performance. This dissertation analyzes the potential of a third “re-:” remastering. Remastering refers to the act of “touching up” older mediums, mostly vinyl discs and reels of film, digitizing the media they contain while improving the overall quality of sounds and/or images. With this sort of digital augmentation affecting the audience reception of media, the question emerges: how can we think of the remastering process as performative?

This project centers on the notion that performance studies provide an excellent template to begin to answer the questions that arise surrounding remastering. It explores technical acts of remastering through the lens of performance and performativity to develop a working theory of remastery. This theory draws upon and expands previous conversations surrounding both digital

media and performance. Starting with a discussion of the technical requirements that go into remastering in general, I develop a working understanding and theory of remastery. This theory centers remastery as a performative action that can shed light on the power dynamics that underpin our cultural interest in obsolescence, nostalgia, and technology.

In discussing this theory of remastery, four case studies of remastered media are analyzed, each providing a different facet of my theory. The first is *The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records*: a remastered collection of work from a defunct inter-war recording company that produced a wide variety of African American Artists and performers. The second is the various remastered versions of *Star Wars* and their effect on the prospects of authenticity and alteration within remastering. The third is *Warcraft III: Reforged*, a remastered videogame from 2020 that was met with critical and commercial failure. The fourth is *Elements of Oz* by The Builders Association, a live production of multimedia theatre that demonstrates the usefulness of remastery as a theoretical concept to bridge the gap between performance and technology.

THE PERFORMANCE OF REMASTERY IN THEATRE AND MEDIA

by

ALEXANDER WILLIAMS MILLER

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2023

Advisory Committee:

Professor James Harding, PhD, Chair
Professor Jason Farman, PhD
Associate Professor Alexis Lothian, PhD, Dean's Representative
Doctor Caitlin Marshall, PhD
Associate Professor Jared Mezzocchi

© Copyright by

ALEXANDER WILLIAMS MILLER

2023

Dedication

To George Williams and Gwen Miller.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been written if not for the belief, trust, and love shown to me by so many others. While the journey has been long and full of many characters, the following deserve special thanks – my cohort fellows at the University of Maryland, College Park: Medha Marsten, Jared Strange, Lindsey Barr, and Tara Demmy; my mentor and friend Michael Chemers and his unwavering belief in my ability; my family: Kim, Trevor, Dawn, Rob, Moira, Ben, and Becca, for their support all through my life; my committee, past and present: James Harding, Caitlin Marshall, Melissa Blanco Borelli, Jared Mezzocchi, Jason Farman, and Alexis Lothian. Lastly, my partner, Amelia Britton, who has been a beacon of love and guidance. Thank you all.

Table of Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Illustrations	vii
Introduction: Technology, Power, and the Theory of Remastery	1
What is Remastering?	1
The Technology of Remastery	3
From Mastery to Remastery: An Exercise in Performance	8
Mediation and Remediation, Mastery and Remastery	15
Remastery as Power	19
Chapter Summary	24
Chapter 1: Re-heard: Paramount Records and the Historiography of Remastery	28
Remastering As Aesthetic	31
Technology of Aural Remastering	31
“Paramount Radio:” The Remastered Sounds of Paramount Records	33
“Tomorrow’s Conveniences TODAY!” Aesthetics in <i>The Rise and Fall of Paramount</i>	39
Remastering as Historiography	45
The Myth of Paramount	47
The Third Man Cometh: Jack White and <i>The Rise and Fall of Paramount</i>	57
Aesthetic as Historiography	63

Paramount’s Records	63
Nostalgia and the “Hidden History” of Paramount.....	67
Chapter 2: Re-imagined: <i>Star Wars</i> and the Authenticity of Remastery	72
Star Wars: Remastered.....	75
Authorial Intent and Artistic Integrity in Film.....	76
The Changes in Star Wars: Remastered.....	79
Historiography of Star Wars: Remastered	84
Power and Performance in <i>Star Wars: Remastered</i>	87
Star Wars: Despecialized	90
“Harmy’s Edition”	93
Digital Media and Authenticity in the age of the Copyright	99
Performativity in <i>DEED</i>	102
OriginalTrilogy.com: <i>DEED</i> ’s online home.....	105
Preservation, Authenticity, and Remastery in the Age of Digital Reproduction	109
Chapter 3: Re-Forged: <i>Warcraft III</i> and the Failures of Remastery	114
Remastery in Gaming: Theories and Methods.....	115
Performance in Game Remastery	122
Warcraft III: A History	124
The “Legitimate” <i>Warcraft</i> Experience	132
Classic Vs. Reforged: An Analysis.....	135
Authenticity, Performativity, and Fandom in <i>Warcraft III: Reforged</i>	141
Gender and Race in <i>Warcraft III: Reforged</i>	145

Games and Control	153
Demastered Games as Reparative Performance	156
Chapter 4: Re-Embodied: <i>Elements of Oz</i> and the Potential of Remastered Theatre	160
New Media and Theatre	163
Remastered Theatre, Digital Theatre, and Cyborg Theatre	163
Theatre, Media Studies, and the Avant-Garde	166
Digital Editing and Mastering in Theatre and Performance	181
The Builders Association and Elements of Oz	184
Elements of Oz and Digital Media.....	188
“OZVISION:” Augmented Reality and Remastered Theatre	188
<i>Elements of Oz</i> and the Digital Fandom	191
The Power of Embodiment in Remastered Theatre	195
The Wicked Witch of the Web	199
Conclusion	212
Looking Ahead.....	216
Bibliography	219

List of Figures

Figure 1: The Rise and Fall of Paramount, Volume 1. (Photograph by Author).....	40
Figure 2: The Rise and Fall of Paramount, Volume 2. (Photograph by Author).....	41
Figure 3: The Paramount Book of Blues. (Photograph by Author).....	60
Figure 4: Complete Catalog of 1924 Records. (Photograph by Author)	61
Figure 5: Warcraft III: Classic. Thrall’s Original Look (Photograph by Author)	137
Figure 6: Warcraft III: Reforged. Thrall’s Remastered Look (Photograph by Author)	137
Figure 7: Warcraft III: Classic. Arthas stands alone... (Photograph by Author)	140
Figure 8: Warcraft III: Reforged. Arthas stands alone... (Photograph by Author)	140

Introduction: Technology, Power, and the Theory of Remastery

What is Remastering?

The advent of recording technologies created a challenge for the creation of cultural products that has never been fully considered. As technology has advanced to bring humans more and more content, it has also forced a sort of shelf life for that content. This shelf life is not the same as media's cultural relevance. After all, plays, books, and music written centuries or even millennia ago can still find audiences. What I am talking about is a technological shelf life in the way we interface with and consume media. Whereas live performance simply requires an assembled audience and, in this respect, has remained relatively constant for centuries, newer media technologies – like those that provide the opportunities for watching a film, listening to a musical record, or playing a digital game – are contingent upon finding a means of playing the media. VHS tape players are hard to come by these days, rendering millions of hours of film unwatchable to most consumers. The same is becoming true of compact disk drives, older games consoles, and computer operating systems. Short of an active intervention, some or all this material may be made virtually inaccessible to future generations.

Fortunately for those future generations, the “generous” spirit of late-stage capitalism affords a possible reprieve from its otherwise uncompromising logic of planned obsolescence. Using the latest production technologies, older media can be “remastered.” This process not only allows for this media to continue to find relevance to the present day, but it effectively provides media with a kind of “digital face-lift.” Remastering can make audio sharper and pictures

cleaner. Music, films, and games from years ago can be raised up to the current standards that we have associated with “good media.” This process might seem simple or straightforward, but the underlying mechanisms of remastering are more complex, both technologically and culturally, than they might initially appear. I suggest that this underlying complexity obfuscates a series of questions about agency, authenticity, and authority that surround the creation of modern media.

At a cultural level, remastery is always close at hand. Indeed, it is writ large across everyday commodities. For example: when I was around seven, my family had a VHS set of the *Star Wars* trilogy (at the time, there were still only three, with *The Phantom Menace* still a glimmer in George Lucas’ eye). I distinctly remember the shiny coated paper covers, denoting that the films had been “digitally mastered for superior sound and picture quality.” At the time, I didn’t really know what that meant, but this memory coincides with the release of a “Special Edition,” of the trilogy. I remember trying to attend a screening of this new edition of *A New Hope* with my dad at the local movie theatre, but ultimately only getting to see this “new and improved” version on VHS. And again, the sleeves had the assurance “digitally remastered with THX.” There is a technical answer to what it means for a VHS to be remastered with THX technology, but at a larger and perhaps more important level, no one has ever really examined the underlying social, political, and cultural assumptions of “remastery” as a concept.

This dissertation takes up the largely neglected and hence unanswered questions posed by the processes of remastering. But at its core, the dissertation centers on the question of how remastery be seen as a performative action. This is the guiding question as I explore the technological, historical, and cultural significance of several remastering projects. Through this exploration, I develop a performative “theory of remastery” that can be applicable not only to

digital media, but also to live performance. This is because I see remastery as the performative turn that occurs when media, be it analog, digital, or live, is enhanced beyond its original expression. This enhancement is grounded in technological expertise and alters both the structural dynamic and reception of the piece. In essence: to remaster is to change the performance of the media itself. Remastery not only deals with the performative turn of the process, but it also sheds light on the ubiquitous, if not hegemonic, structures that make such a turn possible.

The Technology of Remastery

As remastery requires technological augmentation to complete its performative turn, it is wise to first examine the technology that makes remastering possible and profitable. From a technological standpoint, remastering has its roots in the creation of musical records. Mastering engineers are long standing and integral members of the sound mixing and recording industry. They take the raw sound mixes and refine them using their sound editing and mixing tools. In this respect, the music we purchase – the music we hear daily – is always already augmented. The result is “the master,” the standardized media product that can be used to manufacture future copies of the product for sale or for broadcast. While the mastering engineers are responsible for creating “louder, punchier, and clearer” sound mixes, their work is also contingent upon the initial quality of a mix; a good engineer could save a mediocre mix, but nothing can save a poorly recorded original.¹ Remastering sound and music tracks is a continuation of this process.

¹ Edward Vinatea, “Understanding Mastering,” The Directory of Mastering Studios, April 25, 2010, <https://musicmasteringonline.com/understanding-mastering/>.

The mastering engineers return to the masters and continue to fine tune the mixes, using technology that was not previously accessible.

If the master is already an instance of augmentation or enhancement, how then does the remastering add to this conversation? I suggest that the answer to this question requires an understanding of their relationship through the lens of performance. The “re” prefix indicates a doubling, a repetition, or a restoration: all actions that are widely engaged in acts of performance. Though there is some augmentation in the mastering process, remastering repeats this augmentation...with a difference. The differences present in the remastering trace atop the original master, overlapping and reinscribing new meanings to it. This result is akin to something we might call “a digital palimpsest” for the 21st century, where a new inscription is traced over a previously existing one.

As with the case of musical recordings, the remastery of film and video is a process of restoration and technological augmentation. Films from the first half of the 20th century are usual candidates for the same sort of “touching up” that is applied to analog audio recordings due to the health of the medium. Time is not kind to photosensitive film reels, even when they are stored in proper conditions. As film reels are recorded, edited, and then used in projectors, there are ample opportunities for them to become scratched or blurry because of temperature changes, dirt, or damage from general use. The digital remastering process formats the individual cells of these film reels into pixels, which can be then improved through additional programs to restore

faded color or repair damaged or missing scenes.² Digital remastering preserves and enhances films that might otherwise be lost. In performance parlance, the remastering is latching onto the advantage digital media theoretically has over live performance: the seeming ability to view the same performance repeatedly.

In addition to the decay of the film itself, some of these older films were subject to large scale alterations during the editing or even distribution process. One of the most well-known success stories in the remastery of film is Fritz Lang's 1927 sci-fi epic, *Metropolis*. The film itself was cut down multiple times from the original director's cut (the edit of a film ostensibly representing the director's initial vision), and many of the original reels were lost in a studio fire. It was only in 2008, after an extensive search, that copies of the reels were found and digitized by film restorers. However, even this process is imperfect for analog film, as these new-found reels still appear washed out compared to the previously restored material.³ The initially fractured *Metropolis* has been painstakingly remastered through the aesthetic lens of Lang. This aesthetic in turn was only possible to restore through the work of several film scholars and professional editors, they were attempting to not only restore the movie itself, but also the aesthetic integrity of Lang's work.⁴ This story provides the template for the aesthetic experience of remastery. Whether watching, listening, viewing, or playing a remastered media, the remastery warps the initial experience, no matter how accurately it may attempt to do justice to

² R.L., "What It Means for a Film to Be 'Digitally Remastered,'" *The Economist*, April 4, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2017/04/04/what-it-means-for-a-film-to-be-digitally-remastered>.

³ Sean Axmaker, "Remastering 'Metropolis,'" Fandor, accessed December 2, 2019, <https://www.fandor.com/posts/remastering-metropolis>.

⁴ Axmaker.

the original masters. I propose that rather than considering this patchwork of intervention and affect as a flaw in the remastering, one needs to see it as a core element of the performance of remastery. In fact, remastery proves there is more in common between media and live performance than has been assumed: it assumes a half-life of media and presupposes a need for future “re-remasters.”

Another popular form of remastery in film is the transition to IMAX. IMAX is a film recording and projection system that relies on specialized 70mm film stock or the digital recording of the picture. The result is a picture that can be projected on a substantially larger screen. The Digital Media Remastering (DMR) technology, developed in 2002, allows for movies shot on the more common 35mm film to be transferred to this larger format.⁵ As with other forms of remastering, the IMAX format and DMR are not without marks against them. Setting aside the issues of the space and location needed for a movie screening on the titanic level as an IMAX cinema, there is an issue of utilization of the form. Margitházi, writing early in the history of DMR, hypothesizes that many of IMAX’s technical characteristics are perhaps unsuited for films shot for a traditional screen.⁶ This hypothesis accurately assumes that movies recorded on 35mm film were aesthetically designed to adhere to a conventional cinema experience. When the film is artificially doubled through DMR, issues can arise from the film’s aspect ratio or cinematography, while the conversion process may also highlight underlying flaws in the sound editing and mixing when projected through the improved IMAX surround

⁵ Beja Margitházi, “See More, Think Big: The IMAX Brand Before and After the Digital Remastering,” in *Film in the Post Media Age*, ed. Ágnes Pethó (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 144.

⁶ Margitházi, 153.

sound. Like the instance of *Metropolis*, DMR exposes media to alternative affective responses. The difference is that DMR's intervention incidentally critiques the original performance. It raises the possibility that perhaps not every piece of media is an appropriate subject for remastering. This possibility further raises a question for my theory of remastery: is there something in the performance that can be made worse, not improved, by remastering? In other words: does remastery have to be an inherent improvement?

In September of 2013, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of *The Wizard of Oz*, the film was subject to a significant remastering project. After an initial restoration and digitization of the technicolor masters by Warner Brothers, the film was handed over to the visual effects studio Prime Focus World to be converted into a 3-D IMAX format. The restored film footage was then processed shot by shot, as each frame was broken down into its component mise-en-scene and rearranged to add the illusory effect of depth that accompanies 3-D films. The result of this fourteen-month process is a film demonstrating the full range of stereo-visual cinema. Details such as the Wicked Witch's chin and fingers are exaggerated, while the Munchkins have been scaled down through manipulation of the depth of objects surrounding them.⁷ While these details may individually appear as subtle shifts in the aesthetic of the film, they are only made possible through the quite blatant manipulation of remastery. The 3-D cinematic format is not a subtle tool, nor is IMAX. Applying these two technological enhancements to the visual saturation of color that is *The Wizard of Oz* creates an unmistakable performance of spectacle.

⁷ "Behind the Curtain on 'Wizard of Oz,' Remastered in IMAX 3D," *All Things Considered* (89.3 KPCC, September 20, 2013).

Upon reviewing this remastered edition of *The Wizard of Oz*, the MPAA adjusted the rating of the film from G to PG.⁸ At some level, this demonstrates a quantifiable distinction in the reception of the remastered film. These examples of remastered media indicate the conceptions at the core of remastery. Remastery begins as a performative turn involving technological augmentation, ostensibly as a means of tracing over the original media only to refurbish what already exists. But performance theory demonstrates that, intentionally or not, this overwriting is never neutral. To complete its objective, remastery adds new layers that become part of the new media. In addition, because of the nature of the technological augmentation, remastery is not always an improved performance, but has the potentiality to fall short of the original affect. As I move forward in my breakdown of remastery, first as theory and then practice, the technological performance remains a core component of the analysis.

From Mastery to Remastery: An Exercise in Performance

As the practice of remastering has become more commonplace, it has sparked a general argument over the value of these remasters since the new technicians and equipment available may in fact shift the aesthetic qualities that made the original production so endearing.⁹ For theatre practitioners, this may not seem like a particularly shocking exercise. In many respects, theatre and performance are centered rely on changing aesthetics. A production of *Oedipus the*

⁸ "Behind the Curtain on 'Wizard of Oz,' Remastered in IMAX 3D."

⁹ Tim Anderson, "How CDs Are Remastering the Art of Noise," *The Guardian*, January 18, 2007, sec. Technology, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2007/jan/18/pop.music>.

King with the aesthetic qualities of Hellenist Greece would be likely be unpalatable to a 21st century audience, and vice-versa. The process of remastering is not quite as severe an aesthetic shift as this, but it does demonstrate that even minute shifts can be appreciated over a relatively short amount of time, particularly amid the accelerated pace of technology today. This argument demonstrates the clear and present need for the application of performance theory to the problem of technological remastering, and why I feel that the theory of remastery is inherently performative.

Mastery is a performative action. The mechanics may be different depending on the media or activity that is being mastered, but in each case, mastery is an act that requires some kind of physical presence. The physicality of that act suggests a classic term utilized by performance theory: embodiment. For the purposes of my research, I define embodiment in the words of Diana Taylor as, “the politics, awareness, and strategies of living in one’s body.”¹⁰ Those strategies include the potential ways of that body taking on other lived bodies, such as the case of acting and performing. What is important to me about this definition is that Taylor does not preclude the digital world from embodiment. Rather, she acknowledges that “simulated or virtual” embodiment can be just as valuable in understanding the way people interface with their environments and their bodies.¹¹ Mastering and expressing mastery can be political or strategic actions that are derived from lived experience. The process is derived either from personal effort (mastering an instrument or profession, creating a master tape) or from a hegemonic power

¹⁰ Diana Taylor, *Performance* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 138.

¹¹ Taylor, 138.

dynamic (represented through a dialectic of master/slave, master/student, etc.). Mastering and mastery are embodied actions that made manifest through performance. Continuing this train of thought, remastery can be understood as a re-iterated performance based on the initial process of mastery. But this begs the question of what that re-iteration entails.

With operative concepts like “twice behaved behavior” (Schechner), “embodiment” (Taylor) and “liveness” (Auslander), performance studies have provided an excellent template for answering the kinds of theoretical questions that haunt remastering. But so too do those questions – particularly the one mentioned above about reiteration – tend to complicate established performance studies concepts regarding behavior, embodiment, and liveness. In part this is because remastery draws us deeper and more permanently into the economies of digital performance where debates about notions like “liveness” no longer have the critical traction that they once did when Auslander published *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* at the beginning of the 21st century and was arguing that there is no clear-cut definition between live and digital performance.¹² At the moment when Auslander published his book, he provoked a scholarly debate about whether multi-media performance supported or refuted his claim. I do not dispute Auslander’s claims, but I want to suggest that the debate that unfolded between Auslander, Phelan and Schneider has been eclipsed by the technological realities that have emerged over the last twenty years. So, I want to push the conversation past the argument about

¹² Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd ed (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008), 7.

liveness through to a conversation involving the current potentials and realities of digital performance.

While operating within this world of “liveness” and digitized performance, one needs, it seems to me, to also consider the role of mediatization in the process of remastering. This is a term I borrow from Philip Auslander, who in turn borrows it from Jean Baudrillard. Auslander uses mediatization to define performances that have been specifically formatted or expressed through recorded media rather than just through a live experience. An example of the distinction would be between watching the Rolling Stones play live at Wembley Stadium vs. the mediatized performance of the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1964. While any individual concert of the Rolling Stones may be recorded for posterity, the actual act of watching them live is a fundamentally personal experience between the band and the audience. On the other hand, mediatized performances such as the Beatles’ famous outing on the Ed Sullivan show may have or have had live audiences, but they have been conceived, produced, and circulated through media. The same could be said of any musical record, film, or video game produced: each is designed to be consumed through media rather than experienced live. Though Auslander wrestles with Baudrillard’s assumptions that this process of mediatization is inherently negative, I share Auslander’s view that mediatized performance is a vital expression of culture.¹³ Mediatization is another way of demonstrating the way media is, to paraphrase Lisa Gitelman, always already augmented. It indicates that remastery is a natural outgrowth of discussions of performance and media rather than a curious appendix. By drawing on Auslander’s observations,

¹³ Auslander, 4.

I argue that remastery assumes that all performances are somehow augmented or mediatized, and that all augmented media can be analyzed through performance.

Despite the hand-in-glove fit of mediatization and remastery, I believe that Auslander's arguments require augmentations of their own to continue to provide insight into the continued technological developments that make my research possible. Part of these augmentations relies upon the methodology of "media archeology." While not focused entirely on theatre, performance driven media archeology has illustrated recurring themes such as "transparency, immediacy, and proximity"¹⁴ amongst theatre traditions in history. These themes can be found in Auslander's examples of "mediatization," but it is with remastery they find purchase. Remastery is about restoring and enhancing the performance of media using technology previously unavailable. Katherine Gough writes about this process as crafted through performance art. She describes the work of William Basinski, a sonic composer who sees the transcription of analog media to digital formats as a form of remembrance of something (the decaying analog tape) that had died.¹⁵ Gough sees the restoration Basinski undertakes as a representation of a performative loop, one that links together the digital and the analog with both contemporary and medieval temporality and performance. The restoration of decaying (or in some cases simply outdated) media using modern mediums coincides with a presence of personal agency, creating a performative loop of mobilization between object and subject.¹⁶ This loop calls attention to its

¹⁴ Nele Wynants, ed., *Media Archaeology and Intermedial Performance Deep Time of the Theatre* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 12.

¹⁵ Kathleen M. Gough, "The Art of the Loop: Analogy, Aurality, History, Performance," *TDR/The Drama Review* 60, no. 1 (March 2016): 94.

¹⁶ Gough, 95.

dependence on technology, as without the new technologies, no restoration is possible. This is not something that Auslander's notion of mediatization can quite reconcile. If mediatization is meant to be a conceptual framework for experiencing recorded performances, then Gough's performative loop enhances that framework by proposing mediatization is itself an evolving process. I borrow Gough's performative loop theory to understand remastery's interrelationship between the technology, the media, and the users of the media: their audience.

A similar performance to Gough's example is found in Derek Jarman's *Blue*, a film consisting of a single image of a monochrome blue background and a voiceover. In its current iteration at the Tate Modern (or indeed if one was to view the film online), *Blue* is effectively eternal. The color does not shift. The voice over remains as it has since 1993. But its initial conception was one based in Jarman's own developing blindness due to an AIDS related infection. As the original film reel ages, the monochrome blue becomes less monochrome, with streaks, fading, and imperfections developing over time. To digitally remaster this piece for posterity may rob Jarman of one his artistic tools: decay. Jarman and Basinski represent the gamut of potentials for remastering as performative, from a performance that would not have been possible without the process to one that is made impossible by the same process. This provides an alternative example to Gough's theories of performative loops. Each loop of *Blue* begins with a mediatized performance, but upon the second viewing/listening/iteration, that performance alters. It would be as if, to reuse the above example of the Beatles' Ed Sullivan Performance, George Harrison's guitar suddenly changed octaves or overpowered Paul McCartney's vocals on "I Want to Hold Your Hand." Both works of Basinski (discussed by way of Gough) and Jarman are concerned with their mediatization and augmentation, but where

Basinski's work calls attention to way that the augmentation benefits the performance, Jarman's work calls attention to the way augmentation is a determinant. My theory of remastery needs to accept both answers as a possible way to view the performance inherent in remastering.

The process of decay and remastery can also reinforce the "performativity" of performances that may otherwise be considered static. There has long been the sense that filmed performances are fixed. Unlike seeing a live production of *Wicked* change each night, Judy Garland's performance presumably will not alter after the umpteenth viewing of *The Wizard of Oz* – at least not in the way a live performance does. But if that viewing is of a video tape, there is an alteration. With each viewing, older film becomes more and more worn: colors fade, holes appear, and the aesthetic qualities that affect viewing of the performance are fundamentally altered. Similar changes occur in the performance of vinyl disks. Digital remastering is an attempt to return to that original performance and encase it in amber. All this then points to the crux of my own project, which is, at its heart, an historiographic project whose central objective is to shed light on theatre and performance studies' own relationships with advancing technology and the constant decay of history, its documentation, and its representation.

These observations reveal a throughline of how media performs through and because of the constant drumbeat of technological development. Both performance and media are in a constant with their own obsolescence. The argument goes that performance is ephemeral; once born, it can no longer be captured in the same way. Performance scholarship has been about coming to terms with this relationship and figuring out ways to understand and document the loss that comes with it. Remastering is media's attempt at staving off its own obsolescence. Remastering performs an act of restoration upon media that has decayed to a point of

unsuitability but remains culturally relevant, however one might determine what constitutes “suitability” and “relevance.”

Mediation and Remediation, Mastery and Remastery

As a theory discussing restoration, remastery operates within the same sphere of critical influence as the process of remediation. Just as remastery is derived from a process of mastery, so too does remediation grow out of the processes of mediation. To best approach digital media on their own terms, it is important to consider the role that mediation plays in their conception. Mediation emphasizes the importance of the media used to represent cultural artifacts, where the differences apparent in the media change the reception of the artifacts. This school of mediation comes out of the theories laid down in the 1960s by Marshall McLuhan. In “The Medium is the Message,” McLuhan correlated technological developments with a subsequent cultural alteration for those that adopt the newer technology or medium. This applies not only to technological innovations such as the plane or the microchip, but also artistic media such as theatre and television.¹⁷ McLuhan’s observations have aged, but the mediation school has built upon them, and this too is a kind of re-modeling, a revitalization and a remastery of McLuhan for 21st century realities.

In the last two decades, this school of study has defined media as a sequential and constantly progressive form of cultural expression. And yet, scholars like Wendy Chun in her

¹⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994), 8–9.

book *Updating to Remain the Same* has refined this discussion in ways, seen even in the title of her book, that implicitly suggest remastery. Chun's work conceptualizes media as an expression of *habit* and the importance of new (or, as I read it, digital) media within these habits.¹⁸ This train of thought understands and develops media as a cultural construct in addition to its technical aspects. Kember and Zylinska emphasize these camps of culture and technology as the major frameworks within "new media studies."¹⁹ These scholars have built towards a process of augmentation and mediation in a way that lays the groundwork for a theory of performative remastery. Chun's habits are performed behaviors by any other name. Remastery theory builds upon these observations and habits, if not only does the media's performance change with the augmentations, but also its reception and role within the cultural matrices that surround it.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's theory of "remediation" looms large in current conversations about digital media. This is also true for my own theory of remastery. Indeed, their work serves as a useful touchstone and launching point. In their book *Remediation*, Bolter and Grusin develop this concept as a strategy for understanding how new media borrow from previous formats. Remediation conceptualizes digital media as the products of a cultural context, one link in the chain of cultural development.²⁰ More importantly, Bolter and Grusin see this process as a form of rehabilitation, hence their use of "remediation." In this chain of cultural development, the past media that is being superseded is often found to be wanting or in need of

¹⁸ Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same : Habitual New Media* (Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press, 2016), 19.

¹⁹ Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska, *Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process*, First MIT Press paperback edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: The MIT Press, 2015), xv.

²⁰ J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999), 19.

repair or restoration, leading to the new form that succeeds it.²¹ *Remediation* is largely used to identify and explain the dialectic that occurs between older forms of media and the new forms that supposedly replace them. Bolter and Grusin point out that this is not a phenomenon unique to the creation of digital media. Rather, remediation has been a way for society to develop new forms of media while at the same time obfuscating the mediation of reality that naturally comes from these forms.²² Mediation and remediation share the common root of examining technology and its effects on how humans interface with each other and how we interface with our world. Lisa Gitelman even goes so far as to see media as a social construct and not an ever-growing list of technologies.²³ This interplay between culture and technology is vitally important to understanding the remastering process. Updated technology is one reason behind a remastered edition of media, but another is a continued cultural relevance. The social constructs that surround not only the original media but also the technological augmentation serve as another grounding point for remastery theory.

Despite remediation's usefulness as a starting point for understanding remastery, some of its elements do not quite line up with my observations of remastering. One of the mechanisms that makes remediation possible is *transparent immediacy*. Transparent immediacy is the conceit that when a person engages with media, they do so directly with the media, oblivious to the layers of mediation that make engagement possible.²⁴ In effect, remediation depends upon the

²¹ Bolter and Grusin, 60.

²² Bolter and Grusin, 5.

²³ Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006), 7.

²⁴ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 22–23.

apparently invisible apparatus of mediation. Reality is the keyword to be drawn from the concept of remediation. Artists and designers are working within or around the concept of reality, either by attempting to capture or subvert it. As the seeming transparency of the mediation is so important to the process of remediation, it would stand to reason that it might sit at the core of remastering too. However, I see the exact opposite occurring. Transparent remastering, i.e., remastering without any attention paid to the mediated process, would leave audiences questioning why the remastered edition is worth the price of purchase. Within the act of remastery lies the blatant manipulation of media for aesthetic purposes, and it is this instance of what I dub “opaque immediacy” that brings people to the remaster rather than engaging with the original production. This then highlights the “master” at the center of the process. By demonstrating an improvement, remastery renders the initial performance of mastery meaningless, but cannot entirely extricate itself from it.

Nothing is remastered in a vacuum; the impact and value of a cultural media artifact helps to determine the likelihood of its remastering. There is a continuity in the way that remediation requires the acceptance of mediation as integral to cultural interchange throughout history. It would be valuable then to consider remastery from the same perspective: as a process that requires an acceptance of the principals of mastery. Remastery draws upon the same objective as remediation to reform or reimagine past formats. Taking it as given that mastery is integral to the creation of media represented by the creation of specific “masters,” then to understand remastery is to acknowledge this power dynamic, what drives it, and how it may be disrupted.

Remastery as Power

While the term remastery is derived from the “media masters,” the etymological foundations for the term remain, ghosting media creation with an already fraught history. It is impossible to not consider the term master without also being reminded of centuries of slavery. References to Audre Lorde’s argument against the “master’s tools” notwithstanding, the term is derived from power dynamics. I refrain here from breaking into cliché and quoting the Oxford English Dictionary but suffice to say that “master” is a word always used to denote authority over a subject, be it conceptual, physical, or interpersonal. As discussed earlier, this authority is largely performative, played out through physical action. With this vocabulary as a starting point, the conversation around remastery takes on a significance to the way society creates and consumes media.

Nowhere are mastery’s unavoidable ties to notions of authority more famously elucidated than in Hegel’s famous dialectic of “Herrschaft und Knechtschaft,” and, however subtle its presence might be, that dialectic is in many respects the ubiquitous point of reference in these frameworks. Indeed, there are some interesting applications of this dialectical model for understanding “remastery” that inform my project. It has been translated colloquially as the “master-slave dialectic,” and I understand the deeply loaded history that comes with this terminology, particularly in the United States. Instead, I offer to use the alternative translation of “Master and bondsman,” which is the more accurate translation. Briefly stated, Hegel’s master is a consciousness mediated by its relationship to another consciousness, “the bondsman,” whose existence is dependent upon the master. Eventually, the bondsman can overcome this

dependence as the bondsman has the expertise required by the master.²⁵ In the case of the remastered media, the remaster is bonded to the original master media. They do not consist of a consciousness as Hegel would understand them, but the extent to which their technical performances echo the relationship in Hegel's famous dialectic can be surmised from the basic questions: how well does the remaster "restore" the behavior of the original master and how well does the original master then stand on its own? These questions offer an epilogue to the collapse of the dialectic. By studying the creation and reception of these remasters, I can find out what happens once the remastered bondsman has outgrown the original master.

Hegel's dialectic is a useful starting point for understanding the power dynamics inherent in remastery, but it is by no means an end point. In studying remastering's role in altering the performance of media, Hegel helps to ground this analysis in social power structures. Remastery theory can start by seeing the technological augmentations as symbolic of the power structures that underlie digital media, but it then helps to name and categorize those structures. The power over who controls remastery and what gets remastered can be broadly construed along two lines: financial and social. As my analysis of remastered media unfolds, these two lines begin to overlap and intertwine, blending to push beyond Hegel's dialectic. By understanding where these power dynamics lie, remastery theory can shed light on the cultural significance of the performances.

²⁵ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit: Selections*, trans. Howard P. Kainz (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 58.

Financially, remastering allows for a continued revenue stream from media that may have otherwise lost its market share. Consider the Beatles' "1." A collection of number one singles from the Fab Four, "1" was released in 2000 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the groups' breakup. Initially remastered as part of the release,²⁶ the collection was remastered twice more, in 2009 and 2015. The initial 2000 release of "1" garnered 5.1 million copies in the United States alone, placing it at number six on Billboard's list of Best-Selling Records of 2000.²⁷ Long after The Beatles stopped making new material, their work began to outsell the Backstreet Boys at the height of their popularity. These sales represent millions of dollars in the pockets of producers for less overall investment than developing entirely new material. The further re-releases in '09 and '15 demonstrate that not only is there something commercially viable in rehashing media that has been available for forty years in some form or another, but that the media is viable enough for consistent updates.

Socially, remastering offers a chance for fans to recapture the emotional connection to media. Ryan Lizardi's work *Mediated Nostalgia: Individual Memory and Contemporary Media* discusses the role nostalgia has on modern society's media consumption. Based on postmodernist arguments of media and history, Lizardi's argument is focused on the creation of the remake, they do open the conversation to the remaster through a discussion of the "anniversary edition." Typically, a repackaged collection of a remastered film and additional behind the scenes content, Lizardi argues that these sorts of releases hit a particularly rich vein of

²⁶ *One*, [sound recording] \ (Hollywood, Calif: Capitol Records, 2000).

²⁷ "Best-Selling Records of 2000," *Billboard*, February 10, 2001.

nostalgic potential, “a link is forged backwards to the original ‘infantilizing’ childhood experience and flattens distinctions between all versions.”²⁸ These remastered media can all be seen through the lens of a postmodern nostalgia trip. While they offer the possibility for new audiences to be exposed to the history of media, they are primarily driven by an expression of what people want to re-experience. In doing so, the distinctions between the old and new blur. Lizardi’s expression of nostalgia in media is an expression of what can be discussed through a theory of remastery. The performance of nostalgia through remastered media is exactly what Lizardi is discussing in his work. Remastery borrows Lizardi’s notion that this kind of nostalgia works atemporally to understand the cultural implications of the performance.

Critically, remastering can offer a glimpse into the unspoken power structures at the core of the media industry. At the core of the nostalgic and financial arguments for remastering is a simple question: who is benefiting? Lizardi argues that “History is now about what we loved and consumed, not what happened to us as a culture.”²⁹ Arguments such as these offer a potentially dark take on postmodern historical development, but they also remind us that there is a series of subjective decisions being made about what is becoming history, namely what is loved and consumed and by whom. In this regard, it becomes hard to tell which consideration comes first in remastering: does the nostalgia drive the financial motivations, or do the financial motivations for “milking” a product drive the creation of a nostalgia machine? Remastering is still an intensive process, meaning that there is a limit to what can be made. Further, there is a question

²⁸ Ryan Lizardi, *Mediated Nostalgia: Individual Memory and Contemporary Mass Media* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 107.

²⁹ Lizardi, 4.

of not just who is deciding on the projects being remastered, but who is doing the remastering itself. If we are to take Lizardi's argument at face value, remastering becomes tantamount to writing history. The producers of these projects become gatekeepers to a collective cultural experience whether they intend to or not. What is important to track in these instances are the decisions that go into the process. Deleuze and Guattari identify the motion of power and control through Capitalism and the State, "Capitalists may be the masters of surplus value and its distribution, but they do not dominate the flows from which surplus value derives...What power centers govern are the assemblages that...continually adapt variations in mass and flow to the segments of the rigid line, as a function of a dominant segment and dominated segments."³⁰ This statement can be readily applied to the creation and diffusion of remastered media. Capitalist enterprises can dictate the flow and access to cultural outputs through their mastery of the media masters. Through the process of remastering and the manipulation of nostalgia they can control that flow through continual adaptation. They not only can control the supply, but they can also manipulate the demand.

Drawing from the theories of power and capital, nostalgia and history, and technology and augmentation, I am distilling a larger theory of performative remastery. As media is augmented through remastering, there are several performances taking place: the performance of the media itself, the performance of the technology that enhances, and the performance of social structures that made the remastering necessary. Each of these performances cannot be viewed

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 226.

independently, but still require different frames of reference to break down. The work of scholars like McLuhan, Gough, and Auslander helps inform my understanding of the performance of the media, understanding that there is a sense all media is somehow augmented and to track that augmentation is to track its reception. Remastery uses a performative analysis of technology alongside the theories of Bolter and Grusin to track the additional augmentations atop the “original” performance of media, proposing that the technology itself is attempting to usurp the importance of the media it augments in a kind of “opaque immediacy.” Lastly, by utilizing an analysis of power grounded in theorists like Hegel, Deleuze and Guattari, my theory of remastery offers the analysis of what the performances of media and technology mean to audiences, artists, and producers. These three pillars form the basis of my theory of remastery, a theory that can be applied broadly to understanding both recorded and live performances that rely upon an interrelationship between the performance and technology.

Chapter Summary

This dissertation maps my general observations of remastery onto four case studies, each a different form of media that has been remastered in some way. Each study addresses a different question that remastery poses, building upon the overall impressions of remastery that demonstrates how the study of each unique media can contribute to not only the wider theoretical framework but also to each individual study. Underlying each of these studies is the belief that they are obfuscating the power structures and dynamics that make their production possible. In

exposing these structures, I demonstrate the interconnectedness of media responses to cultural shifts.

Chapter One, “Re-heard,” takes a deep dive into the remastering of the Paramount Records back catalog by Jack White’s Third Man Records. This chapter begins with a historiographic analysis of the original Paramount Records. By defining the history of the record company as one of Black American excellence marred by institutional racism and economic mismanagement, I set up the potential of remastery to act as a historiographic reparative. The first section of this chapter is devoted to the history of Paramount Records, in particular the means and technology that they utilized to craft their catalogue of Black musicians and performers in the early 20th century. Then, I turn to an analysis of the remastered collection produced by Third Man Records in 2014. This is an examination not only of the remastered musical tracks, but also of how the collection itself performs. The performance of the collection is embodied through its chosen aesthetic as much as the technical improvements performed upon the music, and this analysis reconciles these two sides of the collection. Along the way, a conversation of mediation and control surrounding the catalogue of Paramount Records unfolds. I also find it important at this juncture to discuss the performance and meanings that emerge from a modern white musician such as Jack White to be involved in the remastering of such a vital component of Black American aural history. I conclude this chapter by bringing together the historical and material analysis, finding a reparative reading of this history that can only be possible through remastery.

Chapter Two, “Re-envisioned,” explores remastery through the lens of visual media vis-a-vis the *Star Wars* Saga. As with chapter two, I begin with a historiographic study of the various

incarnations of what is colloquially known as “the original trilogy:” *Episode IV: A New Hope* (1977), *Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), and *Episode VI: Return of the Jedi* (1983). This study covers the significant re-masters of these films, including the 1997 special edition rerelease, the 2004 release, and finally the 2011 rerelease. I refer to the responses to these films gathered from archives, while also discussing the reaction of the Star Wars fan community, or “fandom.” Through this study and an analysis of the major alterations brought on by the various remasters, I discuss the potential for dramatic shifts because of remastery, ultimately discussing the concept of authenticity within the remastering process. This analysis continues the threads that I begin in “Re-heard,” understanding how race and gender can affect the reception and engagement of these updated films and their fan remakes.

Chapter Three, “Re-forged,” takes my theory of remastery entirely into the virtual realm, exploring a case where the remastery has somehow failed in its efforts, namely the 2020 game *Warcraft III: Reforged*. Itself a remastered version of the 2002 Blizzard Game *Warcraft III*, *Reforged* was released in January of 2020, the game was met with critical and commercial catastrophe, which would be surprising to many familiar with both the franchise and its producers. I compare the original player experience with the remastered player experience, finding exactly what it is that has made *Reforged* such a critical failure. This comparison draws from my observations surrounding the game fandom as well as my own observations and analysis. This analysis is divided into changes in the graphic/audio aspects of the game, the narrative aspects of the game, and the “mechanical” aspects of the game; the aspects that change how players interface with the engine of the game. This exploration also engages critically with

the legacies that the *Warcraft* games perpetuate, hypothesizing the effects that remastering may have had on them.

Chapter Four, “Re-embodied,” is a culmination of the application of my theoretical lens, exploring live performance as a possible field of remastery. This chapter draws upon the analysis of a 2019 production of *Elements of Oz* by The Builder’s Association. This chapter begins by grounding The Builder’s Association (referred to from now on as TBA) as one of America’s premiere digital media performance groups. This distinction is well deserved, as they have been working to blend digital and new media with live performance for over twenty-five years. After this grounding in TBA’s methodology, I turn to proving mixed media productions such as *Elements of Oz* as a means of bringing the remastery process into live performance. This not only discusses the technology that is used to enhance the live performance but also hypothesizes the importance of the act of restaging performances, leading to a larger conversation about remounting older productions utilizing newer theatrical technologies. I then turn to the discussion of personal performance as augmented by technology. This is focused on the performance of actor Hannah Heller as she embodies two characters with the help of technology: Ayn Rand (read as an embodiment of the Wicked Witch of the West) and Judy Garland. This discussion concludes my specific conversations around *Elements of Oz*, demonstrating the utility of considering these technically enhanced performances and a method of remastery.

Chapter 1: Re-heard: Paramount Records and the Historiography of Remastery

In 2013, a project was undertaken to remaster the back catalogue of Paramount Records, a company that dominated the market of “Race Records,” a catch-all term for recordings created for an almost exclusively Black audience, throughout the 1920s until the company collapsed in the aftermath of the Great Depression. The remastering project was led jointly by Revenant Records and Third Man Records, the latter being the production company of Jack White, formerly one half of The White Stripes. The culmination of this project is *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, a collection of over 800 remastered works from both well-known artists and one hit wonders.

This chapter examines the performativity of *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* from two avenues. The first avenue is its aesthetic performance. By looking at and listening to *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, I demonstrate that its aesthetic concerns are tied to a very specific performance and consumption of media. The second avenue is the performance of history in this remastering project. *The Rise and Fall* approaches the history of Paramount Records in a way that augments it to the point of mythology, creating a historiographic approach that could be considered “remastered history.” As these arguments unfold, they will begin to inform and engage each other. Both aesthetic and historiographic arguments highlight that performance of augmentation at the core of mastery is a way to dissimulate dynamics of control, power, and consumption in media. Looking at remastering as a historiographic and aesthetic project illuminates its role in perpetuating systems of control in media.

Evidence for both aesthetic and historiographic arguments can be found to differing degrees throughout *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*. The collection itself consists of two volumes, each a collection of vinyl records, recreated memorabilia, original written materials, and digital archives of music and advertising copy that have been digitally remastered and preserved. The original written materials are divided into four books spread over both volumes. *The Red Book* and *The White Book* contain the histories of Paramount Records, while *The Pink Book* and *The Blue Book* contain biographies and discographies for Paramount artists. The digital collections are held on so called “Jobber-Luxes:” two usb thumb drives that have been encased in larger shells. All these parts are contained within two hefty square boxes, one made of wood and bronze and the other made of shining aluminum. Volume one gives the impression of a phonograph case from the 1920s, and even its Jobber-Luxe is made to appear like the stylus that detaches from the phonograph arm. Volume two more resembles an aircraft hangar with its polished aluminum shell and its jobber-luxe shaped like a gleaming mid-century hood ornament, but within the shell there is an embossed burnished cover decorated with a wheel and stick that resemble the silhouette of a record and phonograph needle. The aesthetic performance of this collection is influenced by the historical period that the music comes from.

By analyzing *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, I am demonstrating that remastering is not only an inherently historiographic project, but also an inherently racial project as well. Remastered albums are released every year, all of them re-releases of famous or well selling albums. Discussions of late capitalism permeate the entire industry, but they do not tell the story of all the cultural components that are engaged in remastering. Questions of how race affects not only the initial media but also the potential for remastering are needed to draw the most accurate

conclusions about the potentiality of remastery. The idea of the “racial project” is one that I borrow from Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s book *Racial Formation in the United States*. They lay out their definition of racial projects as an attempt to understand organizational structures along racial lines.³¹ These projects can take many forms and can engage either or both dominant and non-dominant groups within cultures. What comprises a racial project can be micro or macro in scale, but in all cases, they are grappling with race as a central definer of social systems. They are the vehicles of mediation for how race is understood and disseminated socially, and they are a cornerstone to what Omi and Winant call “racial formation theory.” Racial formation theory helps to explain the development and maintenance of the music industry and sonic culture at large. I see the development of Paramount records to begin with as a racial project. The entire recording company was designed to market to an exclusively black audience and was committed to that cause. Through its curation of talent and marketing, Paramount records was able to position itself as a tastemaker and gatekeeper of African American culture. From 1919 to 1929, they could define who was being listened to and who wasn’t. Not only that, the very nature of what were called “race records” (of which Paramount was one of many) denotes a racial project. Black music and sonic culture were rendered distinct from what was considered the mainstream sonic culture, which was (and still largely is) driven by the prevailing tastes of white America. This distinction is represented in the dual performances of aesthetics and historiography that *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* is engaging in.

³¹ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, Third edition (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 125.

Remastering As Aesthetic

Of the two performances that occur within a remastered collection, the aesthetic performance is the most outward facing. As such, it is the performance that carries with it much of the meaning and engagement for the collection's audience. Whatever the aesthetics are meant to convey, they restore a particular kind of behavior or feeling, one that is reinforced by the entire experience. For a remastered audio collection such as *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, this experience can be found in both the sonic aesthetics of the remastered music, but also in the material aesthetics of the collected materials, the LPs, and even the boxes of the collection themselves. The aesthetics of *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* are meant to perform nostalgia for their audience, a performance based in an "idealized" vision of technology and the past.

Technology of Aural Remastering

The augmentation processes that encompass the mastering and remastering are inherently performative. A discussion of this process requires an addendum to my previous definition of remastery that is specific to audio recordings. Julio D'Escrivan Rincón provides a useful set of guidelines for those who are interested in the process of audio mastering in their book *Music Technology*. These guidelines include finding an "ideal" listening environment, devoid of all extraneous sounds, allowing the technician to focus solely on the audio.³² Audio remastering is something not necessary to the actual act of recording music, but integral to the act of selling music. When combined, these elements of audio remastering help those who sell the music know

³² Julio D'Escrivan Rincón, *Music Technology*, Cambridge Introductions to Music (Cambridge ; Cambridge University Press, 2012), 40.

how it will perform for the auditors. Everything from listening to the album in an “ideal” environment to tweaking the compression sound levels informs the performance of the media once it is heard by its waiting audience. This implies that there is, indeed, a “right” way to perceive the music, at least according to those who are selling it.

The aesthetic performance of music comes from the perceptions ingrained by the mastering technicians. Clues to these are found through what Jennifer Lynn Stoever coined “The Listening Ear.” Broadly speaking, Stoever’s “Listening Ear” is the historical amalgamation of auditory practices of a culture. Everyone has been conditioned to understand certain sounds/voices/melodies in particular ways. Importantly, Stoever sees “The Listening Ear” as a hegemonic tool to encode race into sound, a theory Stoever refers to as “The Sonic Color Line.”³³ By crafting an “ideal” sounding product through re/mastering, technicians and producers are relying upon their auditor’s listening ears. Every auditor already has an idealized performance of the music in their mind; they know how the music should sound based on what they know of the track and the artist. If the sound matches this ideal, the music should sell well. But this is where the process of re/mastering comes in. By adhering to the listening ear, re/mastering helps to shape it through its crafting of the ideal. When an auditor hears a remastered version of a song, there is an assumption that this is how it was meant to sound like. In the case of “The Sonic Color Line,” this performance adopts the racial biases that are systemic to the auditor’s culture and sound. A Black artist will be thought to sound a certain way

³³ Jennifer Lynn Stoever, *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*, Postmillennial Pop (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 13.

compared to White artists, even though the distinctions to their performance are not integral but are incorporated by audio technicians. This integration of the “ideal” listening experience is important to understanding how *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* functions within the broader context of remastered sound.

“Paramount Radio:” The Remastered Sounds of Paramount Records

The recorded material of *The Rise and Fall* represents not only an example of digital remastering, but also physical remastering in action. The vinyl records that provide the physical copy of the digitized music in both collections are pressed tortoiseshell vinyl. Their central disk is a gold inlay that has been embossed with shapes that echo the original black and gold stickers plastered onto Paramount Records. The LP covers all appear to be etched parchment and appear to be taking their embossed decorations from original drawings from 1920s LP covers. These records are identified as belonging to several labels under the larger banner of Paramount: Broadway Records, Famous Records, Puritan Records. The decorations and embossments all appear to be playing off specific narratives or aesthetics. Some show the Paramount phonograph itself; a wooden cabinet functional and fit for every home, evidenced by the puritan woman moved to tears. Others show what appears to be an album cover: portraits of the artists or caricatures of jazz musicians blowing trombones. Another record shows the potential future of the audience: a well-dressed party of men and women dancing while they pick out the next disc to play.

Listening to the remastered collection, both as Mp3 and as Vinyl record, provides evidence of its performative affects. To perform this analysis, I picked one song from each of the

LP file in Volume 1 of Rise and Fall, each recorded at some point during 1925. In listening to the songs in both fully digital and physical forms, I listened for differences and similarities in the sonic experience, identifying anything that seemed integral to the music's performance, rather than the performance of the musicians themselves.

From LP#1, I listened to "Coffee Pot Blues" by Papa Charlie Jackson. The most apparent sound to a non-musician like me is the white noise that almost sounds like it lies atop the music itself. It's a cyclical white noise with a rise and fall that is apparent after a few repetitions. The sound conjures the image of the gramophone needle as it tracks repeatedly along the vinyl grooves. As Jackson's banjo begins to play, it sounds like he is play far off from the microphone. Jackson's vocals sound as if they are coming through a telephone speaker; they feel even more distant than the banjo track. The white noise is dominant, and as a result it is difficult to make out individual lyrics to the song. Instead, the vocals become almost a melodic hum, a complementary wave to the banjo. Some words can come through mostly through the strength of their consonants or through context clues, words like "mama and daddy," "chickens," and, appropriately, "coffee pot."

From the second LP, I listened to "Coffin Blues" By Ida Cox. In this track, the white noise is far less apparent than in "Coffee Pot Blues." Instead, a wall of brass instruments hits me the moment I press play. The sound is powerful, and I struggle to identify how it is made, though my first thought is that there are at least two instruments playing in harmony. The song turns mournful as Cox's vocals begin. Here her voice is far louder than Jackson's. Instead, it sounds as if Cox's vocals are layered atop the instrumentals rather than the other way around. It makes her

lyrical intent far easier to determine: a woman mourning the loss of her partner and recounting her last moments with him as his body lay in his coffin.

With “Bessemer Bound Blues” by Gertrude “Ma” Rainey on LP#3, the white noise of the gramophone returns, but in a far more subtle way than in “Coffee Pot Blues.” While this might be thought of as a blessing initially makes it harder to pick out the individual instruments of the song’s opening refrain. When Rainey begins to sing, her vocals cut through but are occasionally overwhelmed by the melancholy refrain of her horns. The combination of loud vocals, loud music, and loud but not overpowering white noise occasionally muddles the three of these tracks together. I am left to guess at most of what Rainey is lamenting. Like Jackson’s vocals in “Coffee Pot Blues,” Rainey’s voice becomes an additional musical instrument: strong and forceful but with a melodic theme rather than many punctuated lyrics.

“When I Was a Moaner” by the Norfolk Jubilee Quartet and located on LP #4 of the collection presents a slightly different audio experience. Instead of instruments, the four voices of the Norfolk Jubilee Quartette are in acapella. When they sing in harmony, it becomes difficult to hear lyrics, but in solos it is a little easier to hear the words. And unlike in previous tracks, the white noise is present, but only in moments of silence. When the Quartette is singing, it is nearly impossible to hear the buzzing of the recording. I don’t even think that this white noise is even what is responsible for not being able to differentiate the quartette when they sing as a group, as soloists are far clearer than might be expected in this situation.

The last two examples share the distinction of being the first songs I listened to in the collections without any vocals whatsoever. The first, LP#5’s “Hot Hot Hottentot” by Jimmy O’Bryant’s Washboard Band, was surprisingly clear. The white noise, though present, did not

overpower or muddle the musician's efforts. Instead, I was able to pick out not only the various wind, brass, and string instruments of the Washboard Band, but also the percussion. What was interesting about this was that, to my ears, this percussion did not sound like a drum set, but instead was more akin to members of the band striking their feet against the floor or their hands against wood. It was a duller, softer sound with less echo than I traditionally associate with a drum set and would likely have been overtaken if there had been a vocal track in this recording. "Peepin' Blues" by Lovie Austin and her Blues Serenaders on LP#6 shares many of the same characteristics as "Hot Hot Hottentot:" an instrumental track with a more muted white noise than other tracks. Thanks to this, I was able to really feel the rhythm and melody of the musicians. Unlike "Hot Hot Hottentot," "Peepin' Blues" percussion was more subtle, possibly coming a bass drum.

In addition to samples from the LPs, I wanted to draw from several of the other collections of music in the set. "Prisoner's Song" by Milton Charles was taken from the collection "Its Whatness: Dispatches from that wond'rous rare 'other.'" Given the observations of Jack White's role as a "collector of musical oddities," I thought it merited an observation of exactly what amongst this already rare collection could be categorized as "other." This, like "Peepin' Blues" and "Hot Hot Hottentot," was an instrumental, and admittedly quite distinct from the other songs of the collection. While the other songs I had listened to were played with instruments commonly associated with the blues (trumpets, trombones, piano, etc.), "Prisoner's Song" seemed to have been played on an organ. Another unique element was the quality of sound. While the white noise was the most apparent of any song I had listened to, the music itself sounded the most crisp and clear as well. The songs until this point all sounded very much like

they were still being played through an old gramophone. In the case of “Prisoner’s Song,” it almost sounded as if I was listening to a nearby organ, albeit through an indoor rainstorm.

“The Wagoner” by B.E. Scott was taken from the all-digital collection titled “Old Time Favorites: White Musicians play into the horn.” I wanted to compare what Paramount was recording in their guise as “the Premier Race Record ” with tracks they recorded that catered more to White America. This is less about content, although that is a curiosity, and more about attempting to see if the quality of the remaster might tell me something about the initial effort put into recording white artists vs. Black artists at Paramount. Based on this very limited sample, the quality of Scott’s recording is like the Black artists that I have listened to. The same white noise is heard throughout the piece, though instead of blues, Scott’s recording is a rather quintessential tune that might be used for a line dance.

Using my own “Listening Ear,” I am left with a distinct impression of what the songs are meant to sound like. With each MP3 song, there is a constant conflict between the music and vocals and the white noise that accompanies them. In “Coffee Pot Blues,” the white noise is dominant, and as a result it is difficult to make out individual lyrics to the song. However, in “Peepin’ Blues” the white noise is more muted, allowing the rhythm and melody of the instrumental track to be carried through and entirely audible. The cultural impression of phonograph records features that scratchy white noise that provides an almost metronomic quality to the rhythm of the music. In crafting a remastered audio experience, *Rise and Fall* can tune out or downplay that sound, but in most cases that has not happened. Instead, the audience is left with some tracks more audible than others rather than a uniform clarity of tone, rhythm, and verse. These tracks sound as they might have sounded when they were first played on a

phonograph in the 1920s and not in comparison to how modern recordings sound. There is a sense that with all these records, accuracy to the audible aesthetic is of paramount importance.

The creation of Paramount's remastered edition falls within the domain of sonic fidelity. Jonathan Sterne proposes the notion of sound fidelity in *The Audible Past*. Sound fidelity illustrates that the reproduction of sound is more than just a relationship between the original sound and the copy. There is a social element to the fidelity of sound: the intersocial and labor relations that lead to the creation of the sound.³⁴ To be faithful in the reproduction of the sound is to acknowledge these relationships as much as creating a copy of the original. The remasters are not just faithful to what was recorded by the artists eighty years ago, they are faithful to the experience of the listening audience. Remastery then becomes not just about the ability to restore or enhance media, it is about the ability to define media fidelity.

Comparing the experience of the Mp3 to the vinyl audio, surprising similarities emerge. By which I don't mean there are some similarities to the experiences; the listening is almost the same as in the Mp3 file. The only difference is an extra occasional crackle that comes from the physical needle as it tracks across the grooves of the Vinyl record. This crackle is less noticeable, especially with the volume of the track itself, and could almost be heard to blend in with the overall background noise that accompanies the track. Here then are almost two records of the sound being played: the first being overlaid onto the file directly, the second being my layering of own experience of listening to it.

³⁴ Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 219.

When considering the similarities in listening experiences, it is clear the vinyl records are meant as a nostalgic affect. Stoever's listening ear is not just a tool to understand the mediated performance of sound, it is meant to highlight systemic inequities along racial lines. The supposed sonic fidelity of songs like "Coffee Pot Blues" and "Peepin' Blues" captures a musical experience almost one hundred years old. The sound that is deemed faithful is one that is imperfect, bound up in the technological expertise of the time. But because these songs were performed by Black artists and recorded by white producers for a Black audience, that faithfulness is bound up in what whiteness of the 1920s.

Approaching the sonic experience as a racial project demonstrates the importance of this listening experience. The recording/production/consumption dynamic of Paramount Records was constructed as a racial project that assumes the Black artists recorded by Paramount were of universal interest to Black communities across America. In effect, Paramount Records was defining a hegemonic Black cultural experience that they could then capitalize upon. The aural experience that *The Rise and Fall* is recreating is the result of this macro-level racial project.

"Tomorrow's Conveniences TODAY!" Aesthetics in *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*

The physical aesthetics of the collection continue this performance of a remastered past regardless of anachronism. As mentioned earlier, the aesthetics are expressed through the musical collection, but also in the physical cases for *The Rise and Fall of Paramount's* two volumes. The first volume of the set, covering Paramount's history from 1917 to 1927, is presented in a polished wooden case like one a phonograph might come in, harkening back to Paramount's connection to the Wisconsin Chair Company. Volume one is contained in a dark

wooden exterior. Stamped on the outside is the emblem of Paramount records crafted in bronze. The same bronze is used for the corner covers, latch, handle, and hinges. (Figure 1)



Figure 1: The Rise and Fall of Paramount, Volume 1. (Photograph by Author)

The insides of the box are lined with crushed green velvet. The inner roof of the box has a stamp from the “Wisconsin Chair Company,” along with a bronze plaque with the Paramount Records seal and their official registration under the U.S. Patent Office. This is a performance of a historical period that is covered by the music of the collection. The wood, the bronze, and the velvet all give a performance in the same way that the Vinyl LPs do; creating a nostalgic affect that recalls a certain Edwardian style of luxury; industry mixed with analog artistry. Audiences are given a taste of the grandeur of the turn of the century.

This nostalgic aesthetic continues to be expressed in the second volume. Covering the last eight years of Paramount's operation, *Paramount's Rise and Fall Volume Two* is presented in a burnished aluminium case. Third Man's store points out that this case is treated with a period specific finish. Unlike modern aluminium forms which are dulled to hide imperfections in the casting, the period specific finish provides a high gloss on the product, revealing those same imperfections.³⁵ Inside, instead of the bronze and crushed green velvet of volume one, this case the inside is lined with crushed blue velvet and trimmed with the same aluminium as the outside. The vent in the front of the case is a facsimile of what seems to be a speaker for the case. This case is a prime example of an art deco expression of the 1920s and early 30s. (Figure 2)



Figure 2: The Rise and Fall of Paramount, Volume 2. (Photograph by Author)

³⁵ "International: The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records," accessed May 18, 2020, <https://thirdmanstore.com/the-rise-and-fall-of-paramount-records-volume-1-volume-2-bundle>.

These aesthetic expressions, affectively meant to perform a sonic past, disguise some strange anachronisms. The most incongruous thing about volume two's case is its use of plastic. Both volumes have handles that allow for ease of transport. However, where volume one's is a burnished bronze handle that fits neatly within its aesthetic, volume two's handle is made of a clear resin plastic. Plastic feet are mounted to the outside of volume two's case on two different sides. This clear plastic may fit the stylized metallic sheen of the case well, but it creates the impression of an Airstream RV or a kitschy 50s inspired diner rather than anything that would be found in late 1920s America. A look at volume one reveals some other, slightly more well disguised anachronisms. As mentioned earlier, the inside of volume one contains a small bronze plaque that imitates the patent registration of the Wisconsin Chair Company. However, instead of any contemporary information, the collection's serial and model number is etched, somewhat anachronistically, onto the plaque. Finally, along the side of the case is a bronze latch that can be used to hold the lid vertically. Looking closer, one can see a magnet embedded in the lid that holds the latch in place when it is not in use. Individually, none of these anachronisms are particularly egregious. After all, they have purpose in the safety or ease of use of the collection itself. Rather, the questions that they present do not exist in vacuum, but instead present once there is a fuller image of how the collection performs.

The racial project that exists in *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* is told through the struggle for representation of Black artists and their control of their own artistic production. Throughout most of the late 20th century, the remaining Paramount collection, including the metal masters, remaining LPS, as well as the contracts and copyrights that had not been reclaimed by artists or their estates, was owned by two men: John Steiner, a businessman and

former teacher from Milwaukee, and George Buck, a “label entrepreneur” from New Orleans.³⁶ Over the years, Steiner was able to extend most of these copyrights and licensed the music for reissue by select companies, a process that Buck continued. Of Paramount’s artists, van der Tuuk only references a single case where an artist was successfully able to reclaim the copyright over their music.³⁷ From such a rich and deep back catalogue of artists, only one was able to take some claim over the music they recorded for Paramount. The rest of their combined works had become a commodity bought and traded between an avid fan and “a label entrepreneur,” a position whose responsibilities I can’t even begin to guess at. In these cases, remastering of the work only continues to financially benefit those who hold the copyrights, or those who hold the masters. Understanding Paramount Records as a racial project that developed a distinctly Black sonic culture, this separation of labor from product is an act of capitalized racism. Black labor has been distilled into a physical form and held as investment or ornament. For *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* to correct this kind of economic racism, the collection should be some disconnected from this collector mentality. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

Not only is the remastering of an album a direct decision of what is “good” in music, the decision is made by those who actively have power over this media. Within *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, Jack White’s presence as a curator is a forceful example of this. As the remastered collection was being assembled, White listened to the assembled Paramount tracks, picking out songs that he believed were unique or anomalous. He compared the process to that of Harry

³⁶ Alex van der. Tuuk, *Paramount’s Rise and Fall : The Roots and History of Paramount Records* (Denver, CO: Mainspring Press, 2012), 234.

³⁷ Tuuk, 232.

Smith who compiled the famed “Anthology of American Folk Music:” “picking things that he thought were weird or an anomaly in the culture.” He continued, “I like that philosophy, because it brings you to history, a strange and uniquely American history.”³⁸ White’s positioning in the *Rise and Fall* is complicated by his dual roles. On one hand, and in White’s eye (at least as far as Rohter’s article can tell us), he is the curator and musical anthropologist, finding diamonds in the rough masters of Paramount: using the music to document a history and a culture. On the other hand, he is a producer and recorder, crafting an experience that is aesthetically pleasurable, whether that is for himself or his audience.

In both cases, White is placed as an arbiter of both “taste” and history. He decides what is “weird” or an “anomaly,” and he decides what form the final collection should take. This entire concept of “producer as anthropologist” is a delicate positioning that I am not entirely comfortable with for precisely that reason. Roshanak Kheshti discusses this intersection in *Modernity’s Ear*. Kheshti traces the development of the modern music industry through the collection of sounds belonging to displaced and immigrant communities, a process that was inherently grounded in racialized and gendered terminology. For Kheshti, the commercialization and ethnographic study of music produced by people of color are not two separate industries, they are twins.³⁹ White functioning as producer AND anthropologist dovetails with this observation. No matter how much White may wish to engage in a positive or restorative

³⁸ Larry Rohter, “A Menagerie of Music Lives in a Box,” *The New York Times*, October 25, 2013, sec. Arts, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/27/arts/music/jack-white-explores-history-of-paramount-records.html>.

³⁹ Roshanak Kheshti, *Modernity’s Ear: Listening to Race and Gender in World Music*, 2016, 6.

expression of Paramount's collection, he is reinscribing some of the same behaviors that are grounded in racialized behaviors.

The aesthetics of both the physical collection and digital remasters of *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* express remastery as a complex project tying together concerns of race, taste, and nostalgia. The physical collection is an embodiment of an idealized past in its aesthetics: shiny, cultured, and sophisticated. The music itself is remastered to provide a sonic fidelity to the sounds of the early 20th century, a fidelity that is carried across both the digital and physical copies of this music. However, this fidelity is more in line with a nostalgic affect than an actual historical moment. Furthermore, this fidelity is largely defined along lines determined by the production staff, including producer/musical anthropologist Jack White. Upon examining those production tastes, a throughline presents itself in the form of systemic racist practices in the music industry, practices that are unintentionally reinforced in the remaster. If the presentation of *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* is an exercise in performative nostalgia, then this nostalgia is tied together with the troublesome racial project that Paramount Records represents. The aesthetics of the collection act as an obfuscation of this project.

Remastering as Historiography

If the aesthetics of the remaster are obfuscating larger discussions of the legacy of Paramount Records, then by examining and dismantling this legacy a deeper performance can be found. This legacy is drawn not only from the historical record of Paramount itself, but also how that record has been maintained, altered, or reinscribed by the remastering efforts of Jack White, Third Man and Revenant Records. This will in part be a discussion of the mythology that

Paramount attempted to create around itself as “the popular race record” of the 1920s. As mentioned earlier, this term was used extensively during the inter-war years in America by several record companies: Paramount, Okeh, Black Swan, Victor, and Columbia Records, all companies that made their profits by producing Black musicians for consumption by a largely Black audience. Another part of this legacy will be in the way that the remastering effort has taken up this history. The restoration project of Paramount records attempts to re-align the legacy of the record company, linking the company not to its failures as a brand but rather to a sense of nostalgia for the analog industry it represented. In so doing, *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* wrestles with issues of race, representation, and restoration.

To discuss these issues, I want to consider *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* as a historiographic project. I propose that in acknowledgement of the history at large of Paramount Records and the restorative efforts of Revenant and Third Man Records, it would be wise to consider remastering as a form of historiography, specifically a digital historiography. Sarah Bay-Cheng posits the utilization of digital historiography as we move further and further into the Age of Mechanical (and now digital) reproduction. Bay-Cheng specifically notes the ephemerality of digital media as a constantly changing format, with technology outpacing the ability to access content.⁴⁰ This fluidity of the digital is in turn a way of affecting the context and impact of the histories that it contains. Digital historiography then is to be seen to construct a “genealogy of media” through tracking these format changes.⁴¹ The tracking of the archive that

⁴⁰ Sarah Bay-Cheng, “Theater History and Digital Historiography,” in *Theater Historiography: Critical Interventions*, ed. Henry Bial and Scott Magelssen (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 131.

⁴¹ Bay-Cheng, 133.

the remastering is “augmenting,” while also acknowledging the mediation that is being visited upon the archive through the remastering process, contextualizes the history that is present within the recording process. In the remastering, there is an appreciation of some of the work at the expense of other pieces. No longer is the work on the record a static medium, but instead it is an active, evolving part of a repertoire, brought to life, and given notice of its obsolescence by the augmentation visited upon it. Paramount Records’ remastering project highlights the strengths and flaws of the company and its self-styled mythology, offering a new way to read their scant archive.

This analysis is concerned with how Paramount’s digital historiography operates across the archive, including the archive that *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* contains. As mentioned previously, the two volumes of the remastered collection contain books and records that have been meticulously crafted in consultation with music historians. Not only do these books and recreated historical artifacts represent another aspect of the aesthetic performance of the remaster, but they also present examples of Bay-Cheng’s digital historiography. Through their aesthetic and historic claim to authenticity, they reinforce the historiographic bend begun in the 1920s by Paramount Records, a bend that justifies the racial project that they were engaged in and capitalizing upon. In a sense, *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* is responsible for a remastering of history.

The Myth of Paramount

The project of restoring the catalogue of a long defunct record label inevitably brings with it questions about the label’s past. In looking at Paramount’s history, it is important to

remember that much of it has been long lost to the archive. By 1929, Paramount Records was already on poor economic footing, and when the depression hit, they folded like many other companies.⁴² Historians are left with the knowledge and echoes of Paramount's brief tenure as a recording studio, but those who are dependent upon an archive for research are sorely under-equipped to study this piece of history. Because of this archival lack, it is helpful to read this history with as one would a history of performance. There are ripples and traces of the event, but for the most part, Paramount Records is as traceable as a theatrical premiere production. The history of Paramount records can be analyzed by following the signifiers and codes we know are part of the historical consciousness of pre-depression American, as well as the recollections and histories of those that have a personal connection to those involved in the history of Paramount. Through this analysis, the history that the remastering preserved is shown to be a complex racial project.

Looking at what is left of the archive of Paramount records, there is a strong preference towards viewing it as an adjacent history. In his work *Early Blues: The First Stars of Blues Guitar*, Jas Obrecht pieces together the histories of several prominent 1920s Blues musicians, including several who produced almost their entire discography through Paramount. These histories are almost entirely pieced together not through the records of Paramount, but by a combination of census data and personal research or interviews. Some of this research takes the

⁴² "Paramount Records: The Label Inadvertently Crucial To The Blues," *NPR.Org*, accessed April 30, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2013/11/02/242428973/paramount-records-the-label-inadvertently-crucial-to-the-blues>.

form of hearsay and alternative history, such as the story of Blind Lemon Jefferson, one of the earliest stars of blues, signing to Paramount Records.

There are two versions of how Blind Lemon was signed to the label. In one, Sam Price, a black pianist...reportedly recommended Jefferson to Paramount. Another account holds that Paramount recording director Arthur C. Laibly heard Jefferson playing on a Dallas street.⁴³

There is a dependence on word of mouth and a lack of reliability in these accounts. While some facts can be corroborated, both accounts could be historically valid. There are even other historical records of Jefferson that account for only one of these versions of the story.⁴⁴ And this story is not the only instance of rumor and speculation in the archive of Paramount Records or in the records of its stars. The early records and even death records of many of the artists are shrouded in mystery, with US census forms only providing scant information about the lives of the artists outside of the studio.

Paramount's artists and the studio itself offer an interconnected history that is incomplete without both halves. While these materials may not exactly be considered gossip, the work of historicizing gossip can help here. Luise White sees the process of rendering gossip and word of mouth legible to history allows for historians to engage with a more intimate analysis of their subjects, revealing "an intellectual world of fears and fantasies, ideas and claims that have not

⁴³ Jas Obrecht, *Early Blues: The First Stars of Blues Guitar* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 53.

⁴⁴ William Barlow, *"Looking up at down": The Emergence of Blues Culture* (Philadelphia, PA.: Temple University Press, 1989), 67.

been studied before.”⁴⁵ Seeing these viable alternatives to a single history provides a glimpse into the mythic history that Paramount nurtured. In both cases, Paramount is seen as a beacon within the world of black American popular music. If the story is either told as a black musician recommending another or a white producer finding a blind diamond in the rough of Texas, it does not change Paramount’s location at the center. Though the gaps in the biographic information of these artists can be attributed to institutional disregard of people of color, they do focus the gaze of history squarely on the artists’ time with Paramount. The intellectual exercise of piecing together the lives of the artists can only be accomplished through their work. In this way, Paramount has achieved a kind of symbiotic immortality that is intrinsically linked to the fame of a fraction of its artists who have endured thanks to the promotional work of the studio. Considering Paramount’s “Race Records” as a racial project that engages race on a macro-scale, this symbiotic immortality becomes a troublingly parasitic relationship. Paramount is using these artists to capitalize upon a shared African American culture and using the systemic lack of historical record to establish themselves as the starting point for this culture.

The only to fill in the blanks of Paramount’s archival history is to analyze the advertising materials that remain, a component found in *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*. Paramount commissioned and published a significant number of books and posters to market their extensive catalogue of artists. These works were meant to establish the style and flavor of their recording artists but did so in a way that emphasized the work itself.⁴⁶ One of these works is the

⁴⁵ Luise White, *Speaking With Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

⁴⁶ “Paramount Records.”

Paramount Book of Blues, a 1927 booklet that gave glowing biographies to their artists. The following is a segment from the biography of “Papa” Charlie Jackson:

When he first contracted to sing and play for Paramount—many pessimistic persons laughed, and said they were certain no one wanted to hear comedy songs sung by a man with a banjo. But it wasn’t long before they realized how wrong they were.⁴⁷

There is no mention of who these pessimistic persons are, or even if their assumption was in any way valid. Paramount is utilizing these strawmen as proof of their superior repertoire in the face of competitors such as Okeh or Columbia records. Paramount’s own publication places them as a prophetic oracle: a sybil with a finger on the pulse of black popular culture. In other promotional material, Paramount claims Charlie Jackson as “the only man living who sings, self-accompanied, for Blues records,” even though he had been preempted by Ed Andrews, an Atlanta bluesman who had been recorded by Okeh Records five months earlier.⁴⁸ Paramount’s promotional material attempts to perform an erasure to better establish the mythologies of its racial project.

Within the historical record that the remastery is reaffirming, Paramount’s ableist and fetishizing approach to the artists is a commonplace practice. “Blind” Lemon Jefferson, a guitarist from Dallas, TX, was one of Paramount’s most successful discovered talents. His company biography, listed in *The Paramount Book of Blues*, describes him with such flowery language as, “Can anyone imagine a fate more horrible to find that one is blind?...He could hear—and he heard the sad hearted, weary people of his homeland...singing weird, sad melodies

⁴⁷ Obrecht, *Early Blues*, 23.

⁴⁸ Obrecht, 26.

at their work and play...moaning his weird songs as a means of forgetting his affliction.”⁴⁹ The rhetorical flourishes that this front piece does are textbook disability inspiration porn mixed with a perverse uplifting of Black American experience. Jefferson isn’t given a state, but a homeland. That language further distances his own lived experience from ones that might be shared or understood by Paramount’s listeners, and certainly alienates Paramount’s producers from the causes of the “sad hearted weariness” that seems to drive Jefferson’s music. This kind of alienation is in line with Omi and Wynant’s racial formation theory. Like the disconnection of the artists to their own work and Paramount’s capitalization on a Black sonic culture, their fetishization of artists such as Jefferson demonstrates how exactly Paramount went about fostering their market.

Other ads for Paramount artists attempted to generate an affect of irresistibility and authenticity of the Blues lifestyle. Ads for Charlie Jackson’s “All I Want is a Spoonful,” show a man chasing stylishly dressed women with an oversized spoon while the women glance back playfully.⁵⁰ Copy and art for Blind Lemon Jefferson’s “Long Lonesome Blues” play up Blues’ mournful style and Mississippi River origins.⁵¹ On the other hand, illustrations for blues guitarist Blind Blake’s “Wabash Rag ” highlights the power of Blake’s music as it literally jumps out of his guitar to serenade a dancing couple.⁵² None of these ads feature the same racial caricature that was prevalent in art depicting African Americans, though conversely they also border on white-washing their Black subjects. Perhaps most importantly, they focus the affective responses

⁴⁹ Sarah Filzen, “The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 82, no. 2 (1998): 113.

⁵⁰ Obrecht, *Early Blues*, 29.

⁵¹ Obrecht, 59.

⁵² Obrecht, 82.

to the songs in question: desire, melancholy, joy. These responses trigger a very specific performative outcome amongst Paramount's audience; they are meant to listen to these songs to generate pathos. However, these affective responses do still essentialize race and conjure stereotypes that essentialize race, conjuring themes of blackface minstrelsy and plantation songs that lauded similarly two-dimensional emotional expressions from Black Americans.

These affective responses, maintained and expanded by the remastered collection, opens the door to further racial critique. Entman and Rojecki discuss how cultural Blackness operates within the White mind through media by illustrating a "social hierarchy of judgement." This hierarchy means that African Americans can never entirely escape the automatic generalizations of danger that White media has presented them, even when they present within White spaces.⁵³ Even as these advertisements present Paramount's Black musicians as "presentable," there is still in the White mind a sense of danger or riskiness that accompanies their portrayal in the media. The use of "desire" as an affect clearly plays in this space, offering a performance of Black musicians as purveyors of sexuality that has its roots in depictions of Blackness as "exotic," and "more primitive/less than" Whiteness.

The mythologizing of Paramount's artists contrasts with the actual business model Paramount was run under. While the narrative of Paramount being a historical and prescient trendsetter is compelling, they were largely jumping on a trend that began because of the success of their competitor, Okeh Records.⁵⁴ Paramount's acquisitions in the music industry were ones of

⁵³ Robert M Entman and Andrew Rojecki, *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America* (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 52.

⁵⁴ "Paramount Records."

financial necessity and capitalist predation. Its first major purchase in the world of “race records” was Black Swan Records, a New York recording studio that had recorded early singles for Ethel Waters and Alberta Hunter. The two companies had been connected from Black Swan’s founding in 1921. Three years later, when Black Swan was facing insolvency, Paramount purchased the record company and their catalogue of ninety records.⁵⁵ Paramount’s legacy as a recorder of great Black artists is built on this absorption of a Black owned and operated recording company. Just as their first forays into phonographs came out of the misfortune of Thomas Edison’s phonograph company, the beginnings of what became known as “the popular race record” were nearly coincidental. It wasn’t due to a desire to showcase black talent. This grounding in the capitalist realities affecting Paramount records is well documented throughout the history projects of Paramount Records, but the historiography of the remastering leaves it somewhat obfuscated.

These almost accidental moves into the Race record business are accented by other questionable business decisions. In October 1928, Paramount terminated Ma Rainey’s contract. Despite her success in the industry, Paramount executives believed that her style was going out of fashion, and the continued success of the company lay in artists like Charlie Jackson and Blind Lemon Jefferson.⁵⁶ Given Rainey’s continued popularity in live performance right until the Depression, this sort of estimation seems to have been a misjudgment.⁵⁷ Seeing as Paramount’s own historiography is centered around their influence as the cultural trend-setters of black

⁵⁵ Filzen, “The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records,” 112.

⁵⁶ Obrecht, *Early Blues*, 34.

⁵⁷ Sandra R Lieb, *Mother of the Blues: A Study of Ma Rainey* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981), 43.

America, this oversight casts a shadow over this narrative, leading to further doubts about Paramount's attempts at mythologization on the back of Black culture.

This mythologizing was continued on through the physical materials that were used to record and produce the records of Paramount. In many of the ads that tout Paramount's discography, their reliance on "Electrical Recording" is a prominent selling point. Purchasers of the records were assured of "greater volume, amazingly clear tone," and "always the best music."⁵⁸ Some of the historical records that have been found back up some of this approach. Alex Van Der Tuuk describes the processes that were utilized to craft the original records, "The graphite-coated wax was hung in a tank of copper sulfate to copperplate it and produce a 'master.' ... After the metal waster was stripped off of the wax, the wax master could not be used again, because the process ruined the recording indented in it."⁵⁹ Tuuk's further investigations of the mastering process at Paramount reveal a process deeply concerned with quality. "When recordings were auditioned as tests, they risked rejection for being too much like something else, for being generally inferior, or for being poorly recorded or dirty. If a recording did not pass this test, the metal master was dismantled."⁶⁰ The general sense of this original mastering process emphasizes Paramount's performance of the vanguard. Like their signing of talent, Paramount's recording process is only the best, utilizing the most advanced technology available for their product.

⁵⁸ Obrecht, *Early Blues*, 82.

⁵⁹ Tuuk, *Paramount's Rise and Fall*, 34.

⁶⁰ Tuuk, 41.

However, further examination of these materials reveals a familiar story of lionization in the industry. The actual recording material Paramount utilized was inferior to most other forms of recording during the 1920s. Although Blind Lemon Jefferson's recordings from 1926 to 1927 are regarded as some of the best work in his discography, Obrecht acknowledges that their original quality is far inferior to other contemporary pressings.⁶¹ Despite the popularity of Ma Rainey, even the electrically recorded material she published for Paramount kept her work from reaching the same quality as some of her contemporaries who recorded for rival studios such as Columbia.⁶² Material quality of these records can be linked to the maximization of profit from Paramount's production line, as the company cut corners in quality and workplace standards in order to meet the tremendous demand across their collection.⁶³ While Paramount was one of the major distributors of "Race Records," the quality of those records reflected a cynical manipulation of the market rather than an assurance of respect and custodianship toward the Black artists and their fans which paid the company's bills.

Compared to this shoddy craftsmanship disguised as "new technology," the records contained in *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* tell a very different story. When viewed using the whole collection of material still available, the story of Paramount records presents a rather predictable narrative wrapped in a Cinderella story. The narrative history that is present in the remaining artifacts of Paramount provide credence to a company that is providing a platform for Black American popular culture. This aesthetic expression is aided by the lessons from the

⁶¹ Obrecht, *Early Blues*, 57.

⁶² Lieb, *Mother of the Blues*, 22.

⁶³ Lerone A. Martin, *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion* (New York, N.Y.: New York University Press, 2014), 74.

hegemonic cultural machine but is unapologetic and uncompromising in its pursuit of a distinct representation. However, when this narrative is exposed to the realities of Paramount's economic model, the question asked changes from “how did they close?” to “how did they not close sooner?” While Paramount gave a platform to black musicians who may not have been discovered otherwise that platform was still largely geared toward the profit of the white owners of the company. This profit driven model keeps the quality of content creation possible, diminishing the potentiality of the cultural expression. The work of some artists such as Charlie Patton, Ma Rainey and Blind Lemon Jefferson have been maintained and nurtured, but who knows how many other potentially influential artists have been consigned to the dustbin of history?

The Third Man Cometh: Jack White and *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*

The Rise and Fall of Paramount retells and remasters the history of Paramount records, a history that is incomplete and prone to misleading errors, an issue that is only exacerbated by the remastering process. Of the potentially 100,000 recordings produced by Paramount during its operation, this restoration project has restored a little over 1%.⁶⁴ Dean Blackwood, cofounder of Revenant Records and one of the driving forces behind the restoration, sees this project as less of an attempt at preserving the records of Paramount and more as an archival museum project to capture a snapshot of Paramount’s legacy.⁶⁵ Herein lies the flaw in the project. The snapshot that

⁶⁴ “Paramount Records.”

⁶⁵ Jon Blistein, “Third Man Records to Co-Release 800 Song Archival Collection,” *Rolling Stone* (blog), September 24, 2013, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/jack-whites-third-man-records-to-co-release-paramount-records-set-112384/>.

the remastering project endeavors to contain is created to honor the African American musicians that Paramount recorded, but the project also brings along the mythology of Paramount as the champion of these artists. Although there is an acknowledgment of Paramount's capitalist objectives within the project, replicating the materials available enshrines these objectives as a kind of profit driven archive, only bound to maintain the products within the context of Paramount's history.

The restoration project of Paramount records presents the challenge of preservation of history through corporate intervention. The history that is continued within this collection continues the mythology that is set forth by the surviving material of Paramount. Paramount's failures as a business are washed away and what is left is the narrative that theirs was the way forward for the industry. It rewards their ingenuity and business acumen, where the actual records that remain indicate that said acumen was spotty and one of the major reasons for their collapse. Nevertheless, Revenant and Third Man's restoration of their discography vindicates Paramount's narrative.

This is not to say that there is no possibility of change of history through the remastering. The inferior quality of materials used in the initial Paramount recordings fail to truly match the importance of the music that was put to them. The remastering of these records, even if only a small sample, rights a historic wrong within the archive. This allows future historical study and analysis of these works to draw upon the material as a primary source. While the work of preservation may also continue to solidify the collective myth of Paramount, it is also preserving and maintaining work that might otherwise have been lost to time.

The history of Paramount records is intrinsically connected to the history of its artists, and vice versa. Regardless of its intentions, it did serve as a significant historical function by using its platform and distribution to showcase a wave of heretofore underrepresented black musicians. This advanced African American cultural expression in a way that would have profound effects on future generations of musicians. However, this history is left largely unchallenged due to the gaps in the archival records. All that can be pieced together from the remains of these records are the materials that Paramount used to establish their mythical presence in the industry, as well as some scant readings of their errors as a company. In the efforts to preserve the musical heritage of current generations, the remastering project conducted by Revenant and Third Man Records allows for many of these errors and gaps to be filled in. In so doing, they provide a method to augment the historical record, but also preserve the myth of Paramount.

The records of performers are only one aspect of the remastered historiography. Amongst the many pieces of loose paper and booklets found in Volume one is a booklet titled “The Paramount Book of Blues.” The book itself is made from what feels like pulp paper. (Figure 3)



Figure 3: The Paramount Book of Blues. (Photograph by Author)

The entire book gives the impression that it could fall apart just by handling it a few dozen times. The book contains the music scoring from 30 different songs. Well-known artists published by Paramount are represented: Blind Lemon Jefferson, Ma Rainey, Blind Blake, Ida Cox, Charlie

Jackson, Elzadie Robinson. This preservation of notation serves as another method of remastering.

A companion piece to the Paramount Book of Blues is “The Complete Catalog of 1924 Records.” This collection, contained in *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* Volume two, has the same level of preservation as the Paramount Book of Blues. (Figure 4)

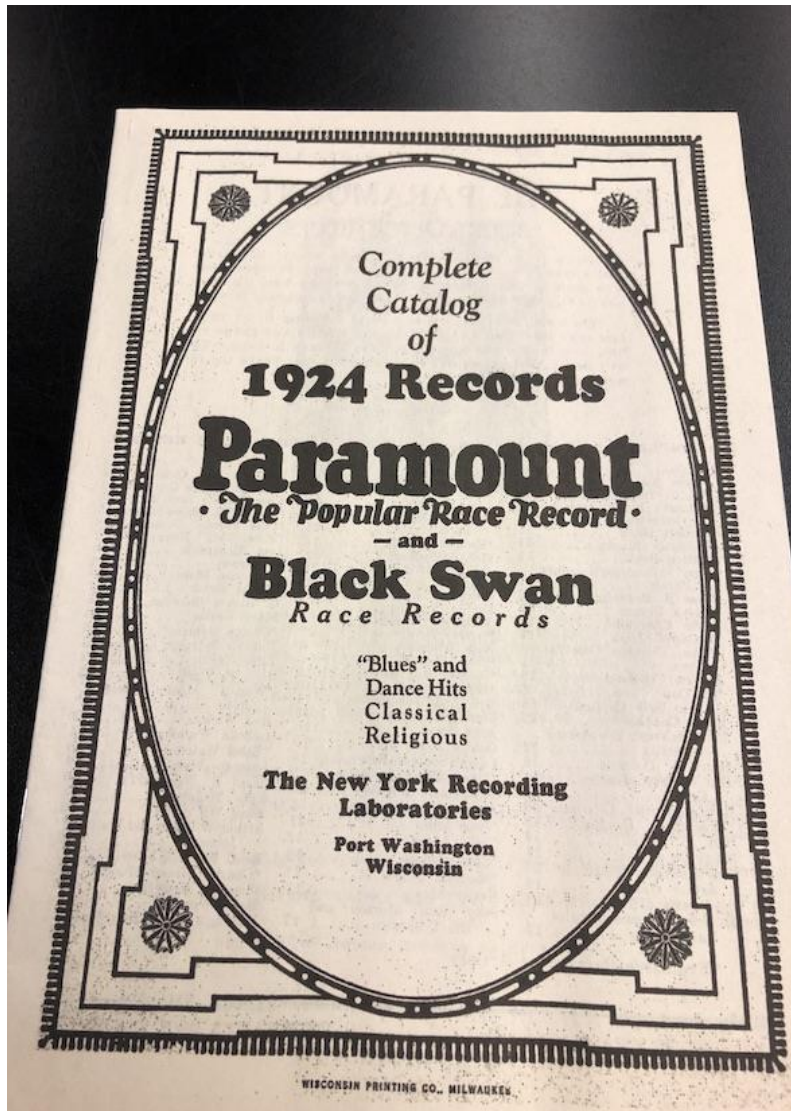


Figure 4: Complete Catalog of 1924 Records. (Photograph by Author)

Its apparent fragility places it within the same design philosophy as its sibling book. The “Complete Catalog” describes “over 400 selections to choose from” for blues singers, jazz singers, concert singers, spirituals, quartets, recitations, humor, et cetera. The book contains short descriptions of the singers and catalogs of the songs available to purchase from Paramount. Amongst these descriptions are several intriguing lines. For instance, Ma Rainey is described as, “the only blues singer of the Race elevated to the title of ‘Madame.’”⁶⁶ Ida Cox is described as, “The Uncrowned Queen of the Blues.”⁶⁷ Ethel Waters is described as, “Largely responsible for the tremendous success of Black Swan records and now you can get her best Blues on Paramount Records.”⁶⁸ Finally, Florence Cole Talbert is described as, “The Premier Concert star of the Race.”⁶⁹ Each of these descriptions distinctly place Paramount’s performers, and by extension Paramount itself, as “The best of the best.” Each of these female performers are singular talents: the one “Madame,” the “uncrowned queen,” the “premier star.” These are prime examples of the mythologization Paramount engaged in for their artists, ostensibly to continue to build their brand and market the unique Black sonic culture that they were selling. For these to be collected within *The Rise and Fall* shows that its performance as a historical artifact is validated.

This historiography sits beneath the aesthetic concerns of *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*. In bringing the legacy of Paramount to the forefront, Third Man Records is bringing with it the racial project of “Race Records.” This is not inherently a negative prospect, nor do I

⁶⁶ Alex van der Tuuk and Scott Blackwood, *The Complete Catalog of 1924 Records*, *The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records: Volume 2* (Third Man Records/Revenant Records, 2014), 2.

⁶⁷ Tuuk and Blackwood, 5.

⁶⁸ Tuuk and Blackwood, 9.

⁶⁹ Tuuk and Blackwood, 18.

imply that the *Rise and Fall* is inherently malicious or racially insensitive. But it does engage the racial coding that is at the core of Paramount's "Race record" business model. Where before there were only the aesthetic concerns of a remaster, the work done on *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* proves there must also be historiographic considerations for what is remastered, how it is remastered, and how the original work and its history is framed. Once these considerations are considered, even the aesthetic considerations that had previously been dismissed as superfluous take on new meaning and import.

Aesthetic as Historiography

The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records is an archive striving for a form of authenticity that is largely unwarranted. The experience curated by the two-part label is very carefully crafted to generate a nostalgic affect. While the remastering process is all about enhancing the media and removing its flaws for the appreciation of a modern audience, the presentation of that remastering is all about the appreciation of classic construction. Drawing again from Sarah Bay-Cheng's concept of digital historiography, *The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records* demonstrates a genealogy of media, but one that is not clear cut or direct. Rather, it is a genealogy that doesn't demonstrate advancement into the future, but instead enhancement of the past. *The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records* is not attempting to bring the 1920s into the future, but instead bring the 2010s back to the Roaring Twenties.

Paramount's Records

The volumes that represent the physical version of *Paramount: Rise and Fall* present a hybridization of my two discussions. Through their aesthetics, they present the idea of

remastered history. The aesthetics are not just expressed through the cases, the vinyl records, or even the Jobber-Luxes that house the digital copies of the music. The extraneous materials that comprise the bulk of both volumes of the *Rise and Fall of Paramount* continue to perform a remastered history that refines and augments the history that place Paramount at the center of its artists' successes, despite its clear failures and the pervasive presence of systemic racism.

Each book and piece of written material in *Rise and Fall* contributes a different component to the overall remastering project and provide different points of context for the aesthetics of the project as historiography. Fortunately, most of these books pair with a companion from the other collection. For the purposes of this analysis, I am looking at three pairs of items: *The Blue Book* and *The Pink Book*; *The Paramount Book of Blues* and *The Complete Catalogue of 1924 Records*; and *The Red Book* and *The White Book*. The entire collection is an artifact from Paramount that has been recreated to a heightened detail. These books don't exist as separate entities, but instead as parts of the larger collection. It is useful then to think about these books as an aspect of the remastery project, one that projects a historiographic reading onto the collection and legacy of Paramount Records.

The written materials examined provide context that further enhances the performance of Paramount's musical collection. *The Blue Book* lists itself as a "Field manual for Dealers, jobbers, agents, and representatives" *The Pink Book* that accompanies volume two is structured identically to the Blue Book, but with different coloring. Both contain a long biography of artists, complete with a photograph (if available). The artists presented in *The Pink Book* are slightly different, however, and are representative of the talent that recorded under the Paramount banner. Amongst the many pieces of loose paper and booklets found in Volume one is a booklet titled

“The Paramount Book of Blues.” The book itself is made from what feels like pulp paper. The book contains the music scoring from 30 different songs. Well-known artists published by Paramount are represented: Blind Lemon Jefferson, Ma Rainey, Blind Blake, Ida Cox, Charlie Jackson, Elzadie Robinson. Its companion, “The Complete Catalog of 1924 Records,” describes “over 400 selections to choose from” for blues singers, jazz singers, concert singers, spirituals, quartets, recitations, humor, et cetera. The book contains short descriptions of the singers and catalogs of the songs available to purchase from Paramount. Taken together, these four books complete the “jobber” aesthetic that was begun with the vinyl disks and Jobber-Luxes. They give *Rise and Fall’s* audience the catalogue of all of Paramount’s artists, ostensibly for purchase and distribution, just like consumers would have practiced in the 1920s. While generating a very powerful nostalgic affect, these books do recenter a narrative of consumption and marketability that emphasizes Paramount’s control over the art, bodies, and legacy of their Black artists.

The final pair of books serves a slightly different purpose. *The Red Book* is an archive of pictures and stories wrapped in the history of the phonograph and the legacy of blues. It is large, bright red, with a gold inner cover with pictures of flapper girls in various dances. The font and type face of the individual chapters is large, set against a cream-colored paper stock. Each chapter is devoted to a part of the story of Paramount Records, mostly how its various artists came to sign with the company. These chapters begin with large illustrations, like the ones found in *The Blue Book* and “The Complete Catalog.” But these pictures are shaded red and white with illuminated frames. The start of each chapter also begins with the first letter of the first word illuminated with a gold and red vine pattern, a pattern repeated on the cover of the book. This

color pattern and trimming gives the whole volume the impression of a fairy tale book: larger than life and containing stories that are fantastic tales of dreams coming true.

Volume two's companion volume is named aptly, *The White Book*. Its outside is white, pink, and silver. Like its accompanying case, art deco styling inspires the outside of the book. Like *The Red Book*, the book is voluminous, despite only covering four years of Paramount Records' business, 1928 to 1932. The aesthetics of the individual chapters follow the same art deco style, but some of the type facing gives a slightly different impression. For instance, chapter four, "The Discoverers" is introduced with a pink upwards cutting font that seems reminiscent of a golden age comic book. The introduction of the book follows this same kind of optimistic storytelling even as the story is tinted with a sadness, "The second of our two-volume telling of Paramount curious tale, this collection of words, images and music covers the label's final, furious push from 1928 until it ceased operations in 1932. A push for a kind of immortality, it turned out, though no one involved would have deigned to even dream of such a thing."⁷⁰ While designed to match the collection it accompanies, *The White Book* continues *The Red Book's* attempts to frame Paramount Records as a Cinderella story: a kind of fairy tale tome that illustrates the long reaching legacy of the company.

These books represent the use of aesthetic *as* a method of historiography. They each utilize the aesthetics of their collections to reinforce the story of Paramount's history that the whole collection is interested in telling. This kind of remastering of history through the

⁷⁰ Alex van der Tuuk and Scott Blackwood, *The White Book*, The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records: Volume 2 (Third Man Records/Revenant Records, 2014), 12.

collection is what allows the power dynamics and incomplete images of Paramount's legacy to continue to bake into its history, solidifying the producer's role at the expense of the artists that the remastering is purportedly attempting to honor.

Nostalgia and the "Hidden History" of Paramount

The presentation of aesthetic as historiography stretches into the content of the books as well. At the beginning of *The Blue Book*, there is a single page titled "Quality." While the rest of *The Blue Book* and collection is designed to appear historical, this page blends both anachronistic language with historical aesthetic.

Use this Field Manual and your Jobber-Luxe to acquaint yourself with our famous artists and their knockout numbers-every one eager to sell...Listed here are EIGHT HUNDRED BEST SELLERS. Every one has proven its merits. Check your stock carefully, and cash in on Paramount popularity.⁷¹

This advertising is in direct conflict with the work that White and the producers have done for this collection. The "Eight Hundred Best Sellers" that are advertised are the eight hundred works that were curated based on White's musical anthropology and the work that was done to salvage the remaining masters. In the interviews conducted, no mention of these works as the "best sellers" is made. It is indeed possible that some of Paramount's best sellers are contained within this collection, but that seems in some ways incidental to the stated intentions of the project.

"The Complete Catalogue" continues to regurgitate Paramount's popularity propaganda. Amongst the descriptions of the artists who signed under Paramount are several intriguing lines.

⁷¹ Alex van der Tuuk and Scott Blackwood, *The Blue Book, The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records: Volume 1* (Third Man Records/Revenant Records, 2014), 2.

For instance, Ma Rainey is described as, “the only blues singer of the Race elevated to the title of ‘Madame.’”⁷² Ida Cox is described as, “The Uncrowned Queen of the Blues.”⁷³ Ethel Waters is described as, “Largely responsible for the tremendous success of Black Swan records and now you can get her best Blues on Paramount Records.”⁷⁴ Finally, Florence Cole Talbert is described as, “The Premier Concert star of the Race.”⁷⁵ Each of these descriptions distinctly place Paramount’s performers, and by extension Paramount itself, as “The best of the best.” Each of these female performers are singular talents: the one “Madame,” the “uncrowned queen,” the “premier star.”

This storytelling not only captures the history, but it also captures the sensations associated with the music. *The White Book* contains passages which not only play upon the history of Paramount but legitimize their performance as legitimate. “Etched into its wax was what America *really* sounded like—on its street corners, in its nightclubs and theaters, in its show tents, at its fish-fries and picnics, in its mining camps, on its farms and plantations.”⁷⁶ The listening ear at play here is one that plays on a historical aesthetic. The collection’s retelling of Paramount’s history place it on the musical pulse of America.

Both Red and White Books have similar aesthetic concerns when it comes to the pedigree of their charges. In *The Red Book*, each chapter begins with a small quote from members of the literary canon: William Faulkner, James Joyce, William Blake, Ralph Ellison, amongst others. In

⁷² Tuuk and Blackwood, *The Complete Catalog of 1924 Records*, 2.

⁷³ Tuuk and Blackwood, 5.

⁷⁴ Tuuk and Blackwood, 9.

⁷⁵ Tuuk and Blackwood, 18.

⁷⁶ Tuuk and Blackwood, *The White Book*, 12.

the White Book, each chapter begins with a short tale that connects to the story of the chapter. Some are about the artists themselves. Others tell stories like Charles Darwin's grappling with his faith over his developing theory of evolution.⁷⁷

The White Book goes a step further from the canon by incorporating critical theory into its aesthetic. On page 16, Tuuk and Blackwood bring up Stephen Greenblatt's effect of wonder. Mentioned in his book *Marvelous Possessions*, the experience of wonder is categorized as a way humans process an unfamiliar situation and is tied to his notion of "anecdotal history."⁷⁸ But in doing so, the experience makes a case for encasing Paramount Records in a kind of amber. The anecdotal histories that comprise Paramount's archive are not created out of a sense of wonder or surprise, but out of neglect. The luster that *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* provides flies in the face of many of the actual histories that have occurred. While Tuuk and Blackwood do attempt to engage with the profit motive of Paramount Records,⁷⁹ this book, like the "Red book," spends a long time glorifying the consequences of Paramount's actions.

The White Book is also full of the histories that Paramount almost told. The book calls many of the artists that it covers, "Ghost voices—imitations of all we'll never hear."⁸⁰ However, the White Book is not just telling the stories of the artists; it's telling the story of the company and producers like H.C. Speir and Art Laibly. Despite its attempts at telling the "hidden histories," its language is still troubling. Discussing some of the signings of artists to Paramount, *The White Book* states that "(Laibly) is the likely discoverer (possibly co-discoverer) of Geeshie

⁷⁷ Tuuk and Blackwood, 57.

⁷⁸ Tuuk and Blackwood, 16.

⁷⁹ Tuuk and Blackwood, 20.

⁸⁰ Tuuk and Blackwood, 20.

Wiley & L.V. Thomas and was at least present for Blind Lemon Jefferson's discovery in Dallas."⁸¹ The use of "discover" in this way has a strange echoing of colonializing language which, when paired with the Black artists that are supposedly "discovered," leave a very uncomfortable power dynamic in place, one that is backed by the larger racial project of commercializing Black music for a Black audience by White executives.

The nostalgic factors at play in *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* exist across both the aesthetic and historiographic concerns of the collection. Because *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* was conceived and designed to introduce new generations to the music of Paramount, this nostalgia is not geared towards hundred-year-olds who heard the music in their youth, but people who can draw inspiration from it and historians who can use it to document a history that has been obfuscated by systemic racial inequalities. To an extent, this goal is largely met. The music of Paramount Records, or at least a portion of it, has been committed to both a digital and physical format that will add longevity to their reception that matches their cultural relevance.

Yet in meeting this goal, their performance as archive and media is troubling. The presentation and performance of *The Rise and Fall* engages with the nostalgic affect mentioned above, but this nostalgia is tied into the racial project that Paramount Records was engaging in. The archives that *The Rise and Fall* now present continue to mythologize Paramount Records, and even the entire musical culture of the 1920s and 30s. Despite the clear evidence of a company chasing a model of vertical integration and capitalizing on the labor of Black artists, Paramount Records wrote their own copy as a kind of white savior complex. When Jack White

⁸¹ Tuuk and Blackwood, 51.

performs the role of producer and “anthropologist,” crafting both the aesthetic and historiographic experience around *The Rise and Fall*, he is reembodying this racial project regardless of his intention.

Ultimately, this kind of re-embodiment is a component to the experience of remastered media. Remastered media offers a particular performative outcome, one that attempts to embody a particular experience or nostalgic affect. In creating this outcome, those creating the media need to be aware of the historiographic project that they are engaging in alongside their aesthetic and technical enhancements. Without this awareness, remastered media will remain a vehicle hegemonic control, failing to live up to its potential as a historiographic corrective and, as Jack White seems to hope, a tool for future generations of artists to discover their own expression.

Chapter 2: Re-imagined: *Star Wars* and the Authenticity of Remastery

Remastery provides a template to understand the performative turn that occurs when media is augmented beyond its initial parameters. This turn effects the performance that is documented through the medium, but also how its audience receives or understands this performance. The turn can and often does bring with it historical contexts of the original medium that, if left unaddressed, can serve to reinforce issues of power and inequality that may have gone unnoticed by the new producers. This interrelationship is what defines the three points of contact when discussing commercialized media: the audience, the artist, and the producer. Sometimes these points overlap with one another, as is the case with artist-producers who have remastered their own work. But often when dealing with remastered media the artist has often long left the picture, leaving only the producer or those who hold the rights to the masters to control and profit from this augmentation.

The previous chapter concerned a case study where this relationship between producer and audience was the core of the remastering project. Because of the temporal gulf and systemic inequalities of the original work, *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* has lost the engagement with the artists in its remastering. This chapter will discuss a different breakdown of this relationship, one that presupposes that collapse of the artist and producer. Where disenfranchised artists place the power and benefits of remastering squarely in the camp of producers, artists who have secured and maintained control over their media trouble this narrative. Instead, the benefits and control of the master are split between the artist/producer and the production companies. Seemingly, this could indicate a win-win-win for this kind of remastering. The audience is given

a shiny new piece of media that gives them warm feelings of nostalgia, and both production company and artist cash in on the nostalgia machine. However, there are ways for audiences to exert their own power and control over the media they consume and enjoy, ways that can run antithetical to the expectations and wishes of the artists and producers.

In the search for case studies of remastered films, it is hard to look anywhere else but the *Star Wars* Saga. The stories behind the creation of *Star Wars* are stuff of Hollywood mythology. George Lucas' 1977 space opera became a financial success and cultural touchstone almost overnight, and to date has spawned five sequels, three prequels, and an entire interconnected universe of media including films, TV shows, video games, and an a very misguided Christmas Special. Produced by then 20th Century Fox, Lucas maintained his creative hold on the work through his own production company, Lucasfilm. While a great many people helped to shape and grow *Star Wars* into the multi-platform phenomenon that it is today, Lucas remains a central figure in its creation and success.

Naturally for such a large presence in the cultural media, the original trilogy of *Star Wars: Episode IV: A New Hope (1977)*, *Episode V: The Empire Strikes Back (1980)*, and *Episode VI: Return of the Jedi (1983)* have received the remastering treatment. Because of Lucas' continued control, these remasters were not without supervision, and in fact were largely drive by Lucas' desire to improve his own work. Even more unusually is that these films were not just remastered/restored once, but four times to date: in 1997, 2004, 2011, and 2019. The remasters not only covered the traditional areas of remastering, but they also featured computer generated imagery (CGI) that changed existing scenes or even added brand new ones to the

films. In essence, the remastered editions of *Star Wars* constituted new performances and new films to be experienced.

This chapter examines the nature of these changes from the lens of performance. Like *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, the remastered *Star Wars* trilogy (referred to as *Star Wars: Remastered*) carries with it a deeply complex matrix of power over who is benefiting and who is controlling the media. Unlike *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, which focused those power dynamics against the artists, the underrepresented element of this relationship are the fans. This chapter will also analyze the reception of these remasters with the fans, namely the actions that led to the creation of fan made versions of the *Star Wars Films*. I will be drawing upon the 2013 *Star Wars: Despecialized Edition*, a fan made film that reverts many of the changes of the remasters back to their original form. This analysis will demonstrate that remastery's performative turn effects the notions of authenticity and ownership, especially when dealing with media with a large fan following, as is so often the case with remastered media. In the case of *Star Wars*, the changes made possible through remastery run against the nostalgic grain, leading fans to create a nostalgia engine of their own.

While utilizing the same terminology and methodology, remastering film clearly has its own distinct approaches than remastering sound or music. There is a complexity in restoring and enhancing filmed images. The most prominent components to address in the remastering are visual noise (giving the image a grainy visual), deterioration (various expressions of wear and tear on the film), and artifacts (visual holdovers from when the film was originally created). These components all affect each other, making them an interlinked system that must be

addressed wholesale.⁸² The upshot of these components is that older films are largely blurrier, grainy, and more visually cluttered for audiences as a result. Like remastered audio, remastered film is intended to be sharper, cleaner, and provides a better audience experience. This is also highly reminiscent of the conversation surrounding Derek Jarman's *Blue*, a visual work that engages with the artifacts and deterioration of film. What is at work here is performative: a restoration of a past action. Whether the technicians involved in the remastering process had no connection to the original piece or if the process is overseen by the original producers, removing the visual noise, and sharpening the image does alter the way audiences see and receive the visuals of the film. Performativity is the pervasive reminder in media that nothing is neutral. My study of the various iterations of *Star Wars* depends upon remastery's ability to illuminate the changes in media and the power dynamics behind them.

Star Wars: Remastered

My interests in understanding *Star Wars: Remastered* lie predominately in two factors: the changes themselves and the motivations behind them. The development of the original *Star Wars* trilogy is, as said before, a rather spectacular tale, but also outside of the scope of this discussion. The original *Star Wars* films will find their way into this discussion at different points to reinforce examples, but the focus for this argument is on the relationship between the artist, namely George Lucas, and the legions of *Star Wars* fans that were the theoretical target audience for *Star Wars: Remastered*. In the book, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, Chris

⁸² Satoshi Iizuka and Edgar Simo-Serra, "DeepRemaster: Temporal Source-Reference Attention Networks for Comprehensive Video Enhancement," *ACM Transactions on Graphics* 38, no. 6 (December 31, 2019): 2.

Taylor describes the context behind the creation of the various iterations of *Star Wars: Remastered*, recounting in detail Lucas' many interviews on the subject, some of the alterations and realterations of the films, and the audience and critical responses around them. What is important in these stories is Taylor tracks all of Lucas' official statements on how *Star Wars: Remastered* is meant to express the films as he wished he could have made them from 1977 to 1983. From Lucas' earliest interviews describing the half-finished nature of his films⁸³ to his antagonist repudiation of the fandom's love of those supposedly half-finished films,⁸⁴ the running theme is that Lucas was committed to remastering his own films. What is interesting in these descriptions is this "half-finished" descriptor. What it does it ties together thoughts about film and performance in a way that is very useful to my examinations. An unfinished film, constantly requiring updates, demonstrates the performativity of the media in a better way than the image of the static, unchanging film, which of course is not entirely accurate either, because the different iterations will actively change the audience experience. This approach to cinema seems to be what rests at the core of Lucas' vision, and as such is the primary lens through which to view my exploration of *Star Wars: Remastered*.

Authorial Intent and Artistic Integrity in Film

The discussion of *Star Wars: Remastered* is also tied up in the larger conversations of ownership and intent in the film industry. The ability for filmmakers to preserve their own intent

⁸³ Chris Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe: The Past, Present, and Future of a Multibillion Dollar Franchise* (Boulder, UNITED STATES: Basic Books, 2014), 263.

⁸⁴ Taylor, 268.

within their work has been long codified within the United States. As far back as the 1920s, legal precedents have established that studios reediting films without the permissions of the artists involved. These precedents have largely been placed under the “rights of integrity,” moral rights that are more prevalent in European copyright law than in the US.⁸⁵ This lesson in artistic jurisprudence is to establish that authorial integrity and intent has been a concern of film media since film media became an industry.⁸⁶ It is a reminder that the conversation surrounding media, particularly “newer” media such as film or video games, is a three-way discussion between producer, artist, and consumer. This echoes the same three-way conversations that surround digital remastery. In fact, I would argue that these “rights of integrity” that have been recognized to provide security to artists are just as integral in the production of remastering. When such rights can’t or won’t be recognized (such as the case with Paramount Records), the performance of the media ceases to benefit the artist and becomes an avenue of control for producers.

George Lucas’ rise as an auteur was made possible partly through the attempts by both producers and film artists to reconcile this conflict. Through the mid 20th century, filmmakers were able to build their own production companies, which in turn not only produced the filmmaker’s work, but financed the work of up-and-coming auteurs, including Lucas. However, the production studios still held control over the distribution and sale of these films. This

⁸⁵ Peter Decherney, *Hollywood’s Copyright Wars: From Edison to the Internet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 112–13.

⁸⁶ This jurisprudence in the United States is complicated by both Congressional intervention and the continued efforts by Studios to gain more power over the films they distribute. Decherney catalogues this history well enough to not need to go into it here, but the upshot is that although these moral rights for filmmakers are established precedent, they are not enshrined into the contracts between filmmaker and producer. Currently, federal law around this subject seems to favor the production and distribution company.

distribution included not only putting films into cinemas nationwide, but also repackaging the films for television broadcast.⁸⁷ In addition, it is important to remember that the power dynamics here were predominantly between white auteurs and white producers, with BIPOC artists largely relegated to niche corners of American film. The power dynamics at work here were not dissimilar from those found within Paramount Records in the 1920s, but the scale was far larger and, as will be discussed, the rights off the artists were far more beneficiary. While this project may not hit the same macrolevel of racial project that Paramount Records engaged in, the auteur/production model of Hollywood that laid the groundwork for *Star Wars* is a racial project, equating whiteness with opportunity and artistic protection. This is an important distinction to the work of *The Rise and Fall of Paramount's* remastering project and will continue to inform this chapter's discussion of *Star Wars* and authorial expression.

Lucas' status as an auteur was accompanied by strict maintenance and control over his media. Decherney describes one of Lucas' first efforts immediately following the release of *Star Wars*: a licensing bureau that was intended to police copyright infringement amongst the growing fan base. Decherney finds this approach overly punitive against not only fan fiction, but also against rival studios and creative endeavors such as *Battlestar Galactica* (1978). This approach is especially confounding considering science fiction's legacy of borrowing or sampling from other media.⁸⁸ Indeed, it is no secret that Lucas owes much of the narrative of *Star Wars* to Akira Kurosawa's *The Hidden Fortress* (1958). These initial efforts, like the legal

⁸⁷ Decherney, *Hollywood's Copyright Wars*, 123–24.

⁸⁸ Decherney, 130–31.

precedents of the 1920s, provide the historical context for the relationship between Lucas, *Star Wars*, and its fans. As Lucas began his career under the shadow of the conflict between auteur and distribution company, it would stand to reason he might want to maintain his artistic integrity in the face of corporate intervention. What Lucas' approach adds to this conversation is the consideration of the production from fans. The precedents in this industry have been meant to protect from upward intervention; to nominally protect the artist against the corporation. This is an instance of downward intervention-preventing and stifling creative expression towards the art. Lucas' history as an auteur ties into creating *Star Wars: Remastered's* performative turn. Lucas' insistence of on creative control is reminiscent of the fights over "rights of integrity" within filmmaking. Based on his interviews, Lucas is not against the changing or alteration of films, but those changes must be to the director's vision and not at the behest of the financial motivations of the production company. This situation demonstrates that remastery's performative turn is partly based on how the artist/director is related to their work. Whether it is Lucas' need to fix his "half-broken" film or attempting to clamp down on rival properties or fan work, when the artist is still involved in the media, they can exert a surprising amount of control through and in the remastering process.

The Changes in *Star Wars: Remastered*

The changes made in the various iterations of *Star Wars: Remastered* can fit into three broad categories: technical enhancements, narrative/continuity alterations, or world building. These categories are not mutually exclusive, as most of these changes fall within the technical enhancement category while also serving as alterations or world building. They are all discussed

by academics and journalists who have discussed *Star Wars*, but these categorizations have, to my knowledge, not been specifically cataloged. For the purposes of my work, I define them as anything that might fall under my broad definition of “remastering.” This includes augmented sound and picture, computer generated imagery, or any changes that are made with technical or mechanical expertise that would have been impossible in previous releases of the film.

Narrative/Continuity alterations are scenes or moments that have been altered to change the narrative development or continuity of the *Star Wars* series at large. These changes can occur through technical enchantment but can also be made possible through the addition of previously unseen or unused footage. An example of the latter is in *Star Wars: A New Hope*, where Luke (Mark Hamill) shares a reunion with his childhood friend, Biggs (Garrick Hagon). The scene establishes a relationship that had been mentioned in passing earlier in the film as one of Luke’s primary motivations to leave his home on Tatooine, reinforces Luke’s skills as a pilot, and provides context for Biggs’ sacrifice during the final moments of the film. An infamous example of the former is a scene in *Star Wars: A New Hope* featuring Han (Harrison Ford) in a bar standoff with the bounty hunter Greedo (Paul Blake). In the original film, Han, while being interrogated at gunpoint by Greedo, draws his pistol under the table and guns down Greedo. In *Star Wars: Remastered*, Greedo fires a shot before Han does, but misses when Han shifts a fraction of an inch before firing himself. This change generated the famous slogan “Han Shot First,” as it changes the way that audiences relate to Han. In the original scene, Han has no compunction about shooting his foe in an “unsporting manner,” reinforcing the character’s persona as a scoundrel and a cad. If Greedo shoots first, it lets Han off the hook, so to speak, and

gives him less of a moral deficit that he overcomes to become a hero by coming to Luke's rescue at the end of the film.

The final category of changes, world building, is like the narrative/continuity alterations. However, they are largely more superficial in their approach, they serve mostly to reinforce what is already in existence rather than adding new material. Examples of these changes are the CGI enhancements to Luke and Obi-Wan (Sir Alec Guinness)'s entrance to Mos Eisley in *Star Wars: A New Hope*. In *Star Wars: Remastered*, this scene features star ships taking off and landing from the busy spaceport, while on the ground dozens of computer-generated beings and vehicles populate the streets that were previously largely barren.

An example of a change that fits both world building and continuity is the redubbing of Boba Fett's lines in *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* by Temuera Morrison, who plays Fett's clone progenitor in the prequel films. This change is largely superficial, the lines are the same as are said by Jason Wingreen, the original voice actor from 1980. But Morrison's voice adds an aspect of retroactive continuity that would have been unavailable to previous incarnations of the films, given that the established lore of Boba Fett was only made possible with the release of *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* in 2002.

These classifications allow me to understand where and how different augmentations effect the overall performance of *Star Wars: Remastered* in comparison to the originally released films. While they are not directly lifted from official channels, they largely correspond with Lucas' motivations for creating the Remastered films. In interviews, Lucas has talked about his belief in the continually unfinished nature of cinema: that films are often released long before a director is happy with them. Lucas has even said that the original release of *A New Hope* was

only “60%” of what I wanted it to be” and that the 1997 special editions were closer to “80%.”⁸⁹ This means that the augmentations and enhancements of all kinds are meant to be in continuity with the original film. In practical terms, this means that remastery can serve not just as an act of recovery, but rather as an attempt to use newer technology to meet previously unmet expectations in already released media. Remastery then serves as another avenue of maintaining and enhancing creative control over a project that already exists and has developed an audience and a following. Whether they actively push the narrative along or just provide a depth to the world that Lucas was not able to realize, these changes alter the performance of *Star Wars* in different ways.

These three types of changes have all been railed against in different ways by different critics of *Star Wars: Remastered*. Alex Leadbeater from WhatCulture.com created a list in 2021 of the “10 Most Pointless Changes to the *Star Wars* Movies You Never Even Noticed.” This list included a collection of what I have defined as world building or continuity alterations from several different iterations of *Star Wars: Remastered* across all three films (and one from the prequel series). These included additions and cuts made by Lucas, from the removal of certain characters or shots from one scene but the imposition of CGI characters into already established scenes. While the changes themselves are important to understanding how critical the *Star Wars* audience has been towards these shifts. Leadbeater argues that many of these changes that might be considered “contextual” do nothing to improve the performance of the film or the narrative

⁸⁹ Joe Bergen, “‘Star Wars: Special Edition’: George Lucas Breaks Down Why He Made Changes to O.G. Trilogy (Flashback) | Entertainment Tonight,” Entertainment Tonight, January 31, 2022, <https://www.etonline.com/star-wars-special-edition-george-lucas-explains-changes-for-trilogys-1997-re-release-flashback>.

flow, and in fact some of them detract from narrative development. Leadbeater cites the inclusion of a scene where Darth Vader (David Prose/James Earl Jones) returns to his ship in *The Empire Strikes Back*, an addition which comes during a thrilling rescue of one of the other central characters of the film. Leadbeater even points out that because this footage is reused from *Return of the Jedi*, the following film, it creates a continuity warping effect rather than the world building that it was theoretically meant to inspire.⁹⁰ This analysis stands in critique of how Lucas seems to have wanted his changes to function, or at least how I have categorized them to function. Because of this, it is in fact worth considering how the changes alter the performance of *Star Wars*. Where world building such as watching Vader return to his ship may be closer to what was originally intended by Lucas, the addition does stretch out an otherwise tight narrative, taking focus from the audience away from important developments. It is also important to remember at this point Leadbeater is not alone in their categorizations of the changes to *Star Wars: Remastered*. Many other articles have been released regarding the apparent “pointlessness” of changes in *Star Wars*, and most fall along the same lines as Leadbeater.⁹¹ The differing viewpoints and dislike of many of the changes in *Star Wars: Remastered* are a continued through line for this analysis. They demonstrate the disconnect between audience and artist in this case study, a disconnect that is important not just because of how audiences received

⁹⁰ Alex Leadbeater, “10 Most Pointless Changes To The Star Wars Movies You Never Even Noticed,” WhatCulture.com, September 1, 2015, <https://whatculture.com/film/10-most-pointless-changes-to-the-star-wars-movies-you-never-even-noticed>.

⁹¹ David Miller, in his article “Why the *Star Wars* Special Editions are so Hated” discusses many of the scenes and changes that I and Leadbeater have mentioned, including the infamous Han/Greedo scene. Miller is of the same mind as Leadbeater, calling most of these changes “distracting” and “unnecessary.” Conversely, Miller’s counterpoint article “How *Star Wars: A New Hope’s* Special Edition actually Improved the Movie” points out several changes, such as the scene between Luke and Biggs, that changed the movie for the better.

the remaster, but how that reception led to unauthorized remasters that add to the tapestry of *Star Wars*' legacy.

Historiography of Star Wars: Remastered

Star Wars: Remastered opens a door to historiographic analysis of the franchise. Because of the relationship between Lucas and *Star Wars: Remastered*, it is not a stretch to consider them a kind of "Director's Cut." This is a kind of commercialized cut of a film unique to the age of home video that emerged with the advent of the VHS along with the rise of the auteur filmmaker. Now, "Director's Cut" films can be marketed to artificially reignite interest in an older film, boosting sales to those who have already watched the film rather than those who have never seen it. Vinzenz Hediger sees this act of capitalism as a historiographic act, "Film students now perceive the latest authenticated version as the true original... Thus the deferred action of the director's cut rewrites, or overwrites, film history, turning previous originals into palimpsest."⁹² Lucas' continued re-releasing of *Star Wars* has all the hallmarks of both the auteur and producer engaging in a historiography of authenticity. Each subsequent remastered version of *Star Wars* has always been meant to supersede the ones that came before it. Changing the history of *Star Wars* by altering the canon, but also effects those who have an interest in *Star Wars*. This is a different form of historiographic project that occurs in *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, but it is wise to also consider the ways that this kind of alterations can be affected by the remastering of history. The historical moment of 1977 to 1983 is full of specific events and contexts that were

⁹² Vinzenz Hediger, "The Original Is Always Lost," in *Cinephilia*, ed. Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, *Movies, Love and Memory* (Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 144.

engaged through *Star Wars*. Those moments had passed by 1997 and 2004, replaced by new history that would have been influencing the decisions of the remastering. Unlike *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, which brings the projects of the past into the present, *Star Wars Remastered* brings the projects of the present into the past.

This approach of historiography dovetails nicely with the nature of the changes at work in *Star Wars: Remastered*. Consider the following example: in the 1997 remastered edition of *Star Wars: A New Hope*, Lucas included a scene between Han Solo and his employer, the crime-slug Jabba the Hutt, where Solo convinces Jabba to give him time to make restitution for a botched smuggling job. The scene has been filmed back in 1976, and originally featured actor Declan Mulholland as a humanoid Jabba. In the remastered scene, Mulholland is digitally replaced with the computerized Jabba, a character that was introduced in *Return of the Jedi* as a live action puppet. Because of the change in Jabba's volume, at one point Solo is seen stepping on Jabba's tail, providing a comic moment amid a scene with deathly serious implications. This is an example of technological augmentation intersecting with world building changes in *Star Wars: Remastered*. Jabba was once bound to the specifications of his puppet and the limitations of reality, but in *Star Wars: Remastered* he can slither and move with an agency of his own, presumably demonstrating the superiority of computer technology for character development. Similarly, the scene sets a deadline for Solo, a deadline that looms in the final scenes of the film and plays out through the following films. So, ostensibly this scene's inclusion is meant to retroactively expand upon the history of one of *Star Wars*' central characters.

When analyzing the Jabba/Han scene in its historical context, a more complicated story comes together. If it taken as read that Lucas' goal with *Star Wars: Remastered* was to craft a

series that closer hewed to his original vision, each added component must have its roots in the original design. Yet according to Chris Taylor's research on the history of *Star Wars*, this is not exactly the case for this scene. Taylor's story recounts Lucas' ambivalence over the scene's placement in the film in 1976, and even documents its lack of importance for the 1981 rerelease of *Star Wars*. Important also is that Jabba's CGI body was enhanced for the 2004 rerelease as well.⁹³ So how then does this mesh with the "official" story and the historiography of *Star Wars: Remastered*? Taylor believes that this Jabba served as a herald of sorts for future CGI characters in *Star Wars*.⁹⁴ With the imminent arrival of *The Phantom Menace* and its CGI mascot, Jar Jar Binks, this is a very reasonable assumption. This then turns *Star Wars: Remastered* into a project that attempts to legitimize the future by pre-empting the past. It is not simply a matter to consider this scene as more "adherent" to Lucas' vision, but rather to see Lucas' vision as something that encompasses the entire *Star Wars* saga, even the films not included in the original trilogy. *Star Wars*' historiographic project is deepened through remastery. The performative turn of *Star Wars Remastered* is one that relies upon the performance of technology to enhance and alter the performance of the film's emotional impact as well as its aesthetic impact. The films' enhancements are, much like the restoration of *The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records*, shows that there can be connections to attract new audiences for *Star Wars*. With newer technology and the development of CGI, there is the expectation that these updated film techniques are expected and desired. It's also worth remembering that because of the performative nature of remastery,

⁹³ Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 262–63.

⁹⁴ Taylor, 263.

the enhancements at play are non-neutral. They are telling a story, completing an iteration of their own, bound by the contexts and biases of those that create them, namely Lucas.

Power and Performance in *Star Wars: Remastered*

The power and control behind the production of *Star Wars: Remastered* is highlighted through its financing. One of the more pressing concerns of power within the film industry is, of course, who picks up the bill. In the case of *Star Wars: Remastered*, this conversation is a little complicated. While Lucas maintained creative and production control on *Star Wars*, he required a deal with 20th Century Fox to produce and release it. This was evidently an easy sell, as by 1996 Lucas' *Star Wars* prequel series was on the horizon, and Fox was apparently eager to distribute these golden geese in the same way that they had distributed the first trilogy.⁹⁵ Fox invested around \$10 million in the project, which would go on to net over \$250 million worldwide.⁹⁶ The reason this is important is that it further complicates Lucas' motivations for creating *Star Wars: Remastered*. It also ties my previous notion of *Star Wars: Remastered* as a form of historiographic project that validates the future of Lucas' art. While Lucas may have retained creative control over the remastering project, 20th Century Fox still had a vested financial interest in creating it. This makes the project less of a vanity-exercise in the completion of what was seemingly Lucas' unfinished past work, and more of a continued commercialization of the nostalgia machine. Similarly, like the CGI characters of the remastered films serving as preludes to the upcoming prequel trilogy, *Star Wars: Remastered* seemed to serve as a test

⁹⁵ Taylor, 263.

⁹⁶ Taylor, 266.

balloon for Fox to demonstrate the market for and their interest in the future of the *Star Wars* franchise. While 20th Century Fox does not have the same control over the remaster that Third Man Records has over *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, their involvement does demonstrate that both producer and artist in this case are aligned to capitalize upon the interests of the audience.

The marketing of *Star Wars: Remastered* reinforces the power imbalance between audience and artist/producer through the nostalgia machine of remastery. Namely, *Star Wars: Remastered* is not marketed using the “remastered” terminology. Instead, the first iteration of this new performance was titled *Star Wars: Special Edition*. However, the changes that were iterated within even this first production, including the literal remastering of the audio and visual through Lucas’ media company THX, classify this edition, and all future versions of *Star Wars*, as remasters under my broad definition of the concept. The final remaster Lucas approved for *Star Wars* was the 2011 4K remaster, just before he sold his company and the *Star Wars* properties to the Disney Company.⁹⁷ More than this, future iterations of *Star Wars: Remastered*, such as the 2004 DVD release or the 2011 Blu-Ray release, do away with the “special edition” language, implying that they are now the definitive editions of the films rather than appendices or intended for a die-hard fanbase. The most recent official version of these films, found on the streaming service Disney+, continues this naming tradition. This shifts the performance of remastery into the mainstream. As a historiographic project, now *Star Wars: Remastered* is not only the “right” way to view and understand these films, but also the only way to understand

⁹⁷ Ben Kirby, “Who Shot First? The Complete List Of Star Wars Changes,” Empire, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/star-wars-changes/>.

them. By un-marking their remastered qualities, *Star Wars* is reinforcing Lucas' vision of the "incomplete film," as every release, from 2011 to 1977, is part of one chain of films, each iterating upon the last.

The performance of *Star Wars: Remastered* is affected not only by the technical changes to the film, but by the meta-textual network that surrounds *Star Wars*. This network is where the interactions with fans begin. Because of this, it is where the financial motivations that have been discussed in remastery are most relevant to the discussion. After all, it has been demonstrated that unlike a project like *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, *Star Wars: Remastered* was intended not just to inspire future generations, but to make money. The *Star Wars* fandom seemed to be reinvigorated by the first release of *Star Wars: Remastered*, indicated by the increase of fan clubs and collectives devoted to the shared interest in the films.⁹⁸ However, this open development of *Star Wars: Remastered* was not without backlash. One such incident was the creation of multiple online petitions to restore and release the original cuts of the film, a request granted by Lucas in 2006.⁹⁹ This release was classified as a "Limited Edition," returning the exclusive performativity of the 1997 "Special Editions." This situation serves to set up the conflict at the heart of the performance of remastery in *Star Wars*. It indicates that although the power and authority in the remastering project are in the hands of Lucas and Fox, the audience of *Star Wars* is not entirely without power of its own to indicate what it is willing to engage with. The "Limited Edition" seems to indicate a concession shrouded in a marketing ploy. There is an artificial decay rate

⁹⁸ Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 266.

⁹⁹ Taylor, 268.

placed upon the original version of *Star Wars*; it is now a limited and fading copy despite being digitally preserved as a DVD. Future iterations of the performance will leave it behind, and fans who want it will be left without it. Or so it is believed.

Star Wars: Despecialized

With the creation and support of *Star Wars* fan communities that occurred alongside the creation of *Star Wars: Remastered*, it is not unexpected that these fans would begin to craft their own records and details of *Star Wars*. These records are where my analysis of *Star Wars: Despecialized* begins. These kinds of records are placed in contrast to Lucas and Lucasfilm's own archive of *Star Wars*, serving as a kind of "rogue archive." Abigail De Kosnik defines the rogue archive as something made possible through the development of digital media. In particular, the hallmarks of the rogue archive are shared by the ideals of the open internet: free access and a lack of barriers to information that is not limited by copyrights. For De Kosnik, these rogue archives operate as an alternative memory institution, housing information and media that, for one reason or another, would not be stored in traditional museums or archives.¹⁰⁰ This specific definition leads me to believe that that *Star Wars: Despecialized* serves as a kind of rogue archive, a foil to the archive that is *Star Wars Remastered*. There are archives of the original recordings of *Star Wars*, but these have largely existed in opposition to, not with the aid of, those in charge. Instead, *Star Wars Remastered* is meant to serve as the sole archival project for the films, while older versions are not "authorized." This places *Star Wars Despecialized* in a

¹⁰⁰ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 2.

unique position to be a rogue archive that preserves a specific institution of memory. This memory is *Star Wars* as it inspired its first generation of fans.

Importantly, the rogue archive does not ascribe to the traditional archive, but rather fits within the performative productivity of the Repertoire.¹⁰¹ This connection point to performance studies by way of Diana Taylor is ideal to helping understand the relationships between this case study and larger performance theory. It means that *Star Wars: Despecialized* is even more open to the iterative nature of performance than *Star Wars: Remastered* is, at least in theory. While *Star Wars: Remastered* is an official record and an engagement of archived material (though this archive does shift and change), *Star Wars Despecialized* has grown within a space that nurtures changes and alternatives. It can accept and process multiple influences, and, as a repertoire, still can contain and engage with past materials. De Kosnik also highlights that these Rogue Archives are not inherently a system that benefits the marginalized. In essence, the narratives of marginalized communities are doing work in affecting cultural memories in these digital spaces.¹⁰² This is an important element of the rogue archives to remember, and one that I will continue to engage as I explore the fandom that made *Star Wars: Despecialized* a possibility. After all, *Star Wars* is built as a story that lauds rogues and scoundrels, and the title “rogue” is embedded in the very fabric of the property.

Much of my discussion of *Star Wars: Despecialized* is tied up in the ways that fans are discussed. This is the case with most remastered media, but *Star Wars* presents an opportunity

¹⁰¹ De Kosnik, 8.

¹⁰² De Kosnik, 12.

not offered by *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*: extraordinary popularity. A term popularized to discuss the larger communities of fans of media such as *Star Wars* is “fandom,” a term that originally referred to the communities of fans surrounding sports.¹⁰³ The terminology and criticism of fans and fandom are heavily influenced by the worst influences amongst them. Joli Jenson points to many para- and anti-social behaviors in fandom as a way for analysis to pathologize fans as “deviant.” While it would be simple to write off fans as delusional fanatics across the board, Jenson breaks that pathology down along its natural division, between fans and what she refers to as “aficionados:” people who can, according to society, healthily express interest in a field of subject. Jenson finds this division as a status division, based on class associated behaviors such as passion vs. logic.¹⁰⁴ Jenson’ critique of fan pathology highlights the power dynamics that are engaged in discussing fandom. For my purposes, it is important to be engaging the *Star Wars* fandom in this discussion with an eye to these politics of “respectability” that are used to dismiss or dramatize fan interest or fan creation. Indeed, Jenson exemplifies that fans and aficionados exist on a spectrum, a spectrum that is largely defined by society and by expressions of passion. Fans are, as discussed earlier, key to the success of the performance of remastered media. With *Star Wars* particularly, fans enjoy an excised role in how new *Star Wars* media is received. My discussion of remastery in *Star Wars* will hit upon behaviors that may be

¹⁰³ “Fandom Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster,” accessed August 17, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fandom>.

¹⁰⁴ Joli Jenson, “Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization,” in *The Adoring Audience*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis, 0 ed. (Routledge, 2002), 20, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781134899197/chapters/10.4324/9780203181539-8>.

considered para-social or deviant, particularly in a legal sense. But in this discussion, Jenson's understanding that fandom is a means of social control will be important to keep in mind.

In understanding fandom and fan culture regarding performance and historiography, I utilize De Kosnik's notion of "Fan Time." This is a conceptual model of time that deconstructs the hegemonic controls of time and productivity in favor of a focus on self. Fan time does not exactly delineate between work and leisure or self and other, but instead focuses on pleasure instead of productivity, repetition instead of progression, and community instead of work relationships. The result of this "Fan Time" is the creation and sharing of pleasurable media and artifacts, not necessarily something that can be capitalized upon.¹⁰⁵ This idea of time is antithetical to the way that remastery operates within time. Remastery favors productivity, progression, and inter-work relationships in its understanding of media in culture.

"Harmy's Edition"

The Despecialized edition of *Star Wars* (referred to from here as *DEED* in deference to the naming conventions already established) was conceived and created by Petr Harmáček, a Czech English teacher who operates under his internet handle/alias "Harmy." For all intents and purposes, *DEED* has also been referred to as "Harmy's edition." This places *DEED* in contrast to *Star Wars: Remastered*, as several of those versions (particularly the 1997 and 2004 versions) could be considered "Lucas' edition." The use of Harmáček's online name gives a few hints on how to read and understand *DEED*'s relationship with the fandom and *Star Wars* proper. It first

¹⁰⁵ De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives*, 159.

engages De Kosnik's concept of Fan Time. "Army's Edition" denotes the production of media using the time and effort of a fan, not a production company, or producer. The edition is a reproduction—a restoration—rather than a direct progression of material, capturing the essence of the Fan Time that led to it. Furthermore, the online handle informs the specific performance that Harmáček is engaging in, one that falls along the lines of the online rogue fan archive. At the same time, it captures the impression of the auteur, the same impression that drives the creation of director's cuts and "definitive editions" like *Star Wars: Remastered*. But this is not "Harmáček's edition," this is "Army's Edition." This connects the editor as auteur with the online performance of self. This analysis sets up *DEED* as a foil to *Star Wars Remastered* in not only content, but also in style, intention, and importance.

Harmáček's interview with Dominik Jun explores some of his motivations in the creation of *DEED*. Harmáček is a Czech millennial: part of the generation that was born as communism was collapsing in Eastern Europe. As such, his experience with *Star Wars* (the original *Star Wars*) occurred in 1993, only a few years before Lucas' first remastered edition was released. With the fast and furious releases of remastered editions and the apparent degradation and obsolescence of the original version, Harmáček became frustrated with Lucas' efforts. With no official word from Lucas or 20th Century Fox about the release of the original films, Harmáček took it upon himself to provide a high-definition edition of the original trilogy as a means to preserve what could be preserved.¹⁰⁶ Harmáček acknowledges that he is not the first person to

¹⁰⁶ Dominik Jun, "The Czech Guerilla Restorationist Battling to 'Save Star Wars,'" Radio Prague International, November 8, 2014, <https://english.radio.cz/czech-guerilla-restorationist-battling-save-star-wars-8278571>.

begin this process of preservations, but to his knowledge (and mine) he is the first to endeavor a high definition restoration of *Star Wars*. Harmáček does not seem to be opposed to Lucas' efforts per-say. He goes to great lengths to describe his comfort with the creation of Director's cut films in general. His motivations are in the lack of care in the preservation, archiving, and access for the previous cuts. This seems to align with the analysis of *DEED* in relationship with rogue archives, but it is goes against the grain of the "rogue" part of the archive. Something about the need to preserve every iteration of art smacks of a certain colonialist/imperialist effort of control; the same efforts that led to items like the Elgin Marbles or the Benin Bronzes being preserved "for posterity." Lucas is the auteur behind *Star Wars*, particularly the original trilogy. In some sense, it is within his legal and moral purview to destroy or alter the work however he may want. Harmáček, engaging in a labor of love for a piece of media integral to his childhood, is presenting an alternative viewpoint.

In addition to Harmáček's motivations, Jun's engagement as interviewer highlights some of the reverberations found in the larger *Star Wars* Fandom. In Jun's discussion with Harmáček, Jun calls out Lucas' refusal to provide a print to the US national Film Registry, saying, "A Critic could almost say it was an act of Orwellian petulance."¹⁰⁷ Jun also compares Harmáček's work to the legacy of Czech resistance to communist revision of history.¹⁰⁸ There's a very strong thread of resistance or rebellion tied into the Jun's characterizations of Harmáček and *DEED*. Jun's chosen works conjure images of memory holes and secret police and characterize Lucas as

¹⁰⁷ Jun.

¹⁰⁸ Jun.

a kind of Big Brother figure who defines what is “truth” or “history.” Harmáček, and by association *DEED*, is cast as a kind of resistance fighter or rogue archivist, holding on to the “legitimate” version of history that Lucas is attempting to hide or destroy. This is another example of the rogue archives of historiography that remastery can play with and around. Jun is ascribing a repertoire of actions to Harmáček in the hope of restoring the behavior of resistance that modern Czech’s have associated with their resilience.

At the same time Jun is lionizing Harmáček and *DEED*, their words demonstrate an ongoing challenge to *Star Wars Remastered* that is unique to newer remastered media: the fandom. Jun’s article makes repeated mention of the *Star Wars* fans, and Jun’s take on Lucas’ actions as a kind of crime against history are echoed in other *Star Wars* journalism. Amongst the vitriol the *Star Wars* fandom is known for, an underlying current is that the fandom, not the artist, knows best. Part of this impression may come from the repeated changes and shifts that Lucas has made to the canon of *Star Wars*, either through the remasters or the development of the prequel trilogy. In any case, Jun underscores the major challenge that remastery faces when analyzing the performative turn of technology in media: if this technological turn is meant to be for an audience, who then really has the power over the media? *Star Wars* fandom may turn those power dynamics to favor the fans at the expense of the artist and producer. After all, the fans are those who the nostalgia engine that drives remasters is geared towards. If the fans do not purchase the remaster, then the purpose of the performance falls apart.

Largely speaking, *DEED* disregards any changes that would fall into either World Building or Narrative/continuity and keeps only alterations that are exclusively technical enhancements. Watching a companion shot between *DEED*’s *A New Hope* and the current

edition of *Star Wars: Remastered* (watched on Disney+), Harmáček's definition of what can stay and what can go is clearly on display. Additions such as Han Solo's scene with Jabba the Hutt are gone. Luke and Obi-Wan's entrance to Mos Eisley Spaceport, retooled in *Star Wars: Remastered* to capture an impression of population and scale for the city, has been paired back to a single establishing shot. The result is two identical films that start synced but slowly grow further apart as *Star Wars: Remastered* adds its additional elements. What does remain are sharp and crisp details that, on occasion, appear even crisper than *Star Wars: Remastered*. Even while watching the opening shots of the space battle over Tatooine, there is a coolness to *DEED* that renders the details of the Imperial Star Destroyer more impressive than in the warmer colors of *Star Wars: Remastered*.

However, these technical enhancements are limited in scope. Harmáček specifically states that throughout the films, there will be, "no obvious CGI" present in the despecialized films.¹⁰⁹ Of particular interest to Harmáček are elements of the original special effects of *Star Wars* that cannot be brought back while retaining the High Definition of the remastered film. Harmáček specifically names the matte-lines from the original films as one such element. Matte-lines occur in older special effects when an image has been overlaid onto a backdrop. Mattes were largely used in the original *Star Wars* to create the impression of vehicles hovering over the ground or star fighters flying through space and can often be identified by their darker lines that outline them. In *Star Wars: Remastered*, the matte-lines have been entirely erased by the digital

¹⁰⁹ Harmy, "There Will Be No Obvious CGI. I Think That the Fact That I'm Removing the Prison Cell Block Corridor Extension Speaks for Itself as to How Much Will Be Despecialized :-)," *Original Trilogy*, April 5, 2011, <https://originaltrilogy.com/topic/Harmys-STAR-WARS-Despecialized-Edition-HD-V2-7-MKV-Released/id/12713/page/1#488684>.

technology utilized. Harmáček states that these lines are less of a bug and more a feature of the effects and are high on his list of elements that he would like to restore if he could.¹¹⁰ This stance is an interesting take on the performance of the technical effects of *Star Wars*. In performance parlance, the exposure of matte-lines serves as kind of reminder of the disbelief required of film audience members. They also show the efforts that go into creating layered effects, which might be why Harmáček wishes to preserve them.

This technical expertise, while impressive, does raise an interesting question about clarity in *DEED*. An example of Harmáček's devotion to restoring the original *Star Wars* is found in the Death Star prison escape. As Han, Luke, and Chewbacca have rescued Princess Leia from her prison cell, they are trapped in the cell block by a squad of stormtroopers. In the background, the cellblock continues down a long, hexagonal hallway. In *Star Wars: Remastered*, this image is very clear, with the cellblock walkway continuing towards its vanishing point. But in the original *Star Wars*, as well as *DEED*, the matte background is much more obvious use of three-point perspective set painting. To the eye, it is very clear that the scale of the hallway stops suddenly before jutting off at an odd angle seemingly into its infinite hallway. This is a change that would have provided an aesthetic world building change; the seemingly long hallway of the cellblock further enforces the stark brutality of the Empire. It's a change that the casual observer may not even notice either; the hallway is hardly the most interesting thing in the thrilling escape attempt complete with lasers and explosions. But Harmáček actively went back and returned the image to

¹¹⁰ Harmy, "Well, like I Said a Million Times before, I Don't Think the Matte-Lines Are Faults and If I Could Return Them All While Keeping the HD Quality, I Would but That Would Be an Impossible Task.," *Original Trilogy*, April 5, 2011, <https://originaltrilogy.com/topic/Harmys-STAR-WARS-Despecialized-Edition-HD-V2-7-MKV-Released/id/12713/page/1#488684>.

its pre-remastered version, while keeping the same high-quality video. Does this change then serve any other purpose except to create an “authentic” viewing experience of the original *Star Wars*? Harmáček would likely say “no.” But it also places a value judgement that no change, no matter how small, should remain in *DEED*. *DEED* then becomes this performance of authenticity, or rather Harmáček’s idea of authenticity.

Digital Media and Authenticity in the age of the Copyright

The digital age of film making, of which digital remastering is a firm component, similarly shifted the conversation surrounding media and production. The advent of the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) and the arrival of the DVD as a new digital medium for films introduced computing to the conversation and with them an even greater possibility for pirating films. As *DEED* sits as a possible rogue archive, it is worth examining how it orients itself around performance of legality. And indeed, *DEED* is fully performing within the confines set about by the DMCA.

DEED is a piece of fan media created within the confines of the DMCA. The litigious responses of companies to groups who share or enable the sharing of their copyrighted material is an integral element to the culture the DMCA is responsible for.¹¹¹ Unlike in the case of Paramount Records, where contracts and law were tools to establish the power dynamics between artist and producer, the DMCA and the digital age establishes that the power relationships are between the producer and the consumer. This seems to largely come down to

¹¹¹ Decherney, *Hollywood’s Copyright Wars*, 222.

the way that media technologies have been “democratized” through the digital revolution. Unlike in the days of Paramount Records, the VHS and home computers have given the audience for media the ability to produce work, blurring the lines between the three parties involved.

However, the DMCA forces this work to remain in the amateur realm, however. *DEED* can trade on the name recognition of *Star Wars*, but it can’t leave the online theatre.

Evidence for this is found in *DEED*’s instructions for downloading. In “The Ultimate Introductory Guide to Harmy’s *Star Wars*,” a Google document written by the internet user HanDuet, the first section is devoted to the limitations and expectations of users who download *DEED*. Two stipulations stand out. The first is that anyone who downloads *DEED* must also be a legal owner of the official source material, I.E. *Star Wars*. HanDuet takes care to acknowledge that this can include either a hard copy (VHS, DVD, or Blu-ray) or a digital collection of *Star Wars*. The second is HanDuet’s insistence on community responsibly to keep *DEED* alive. “This *Star Wars* fan community is built on the honor system with the understanding that if people who don’t own legal copies of the *Star Wars Original Trilogy* to [try to] obtain the *DEED*, it’s possible that the entire project will be shut down due to piracy allegations. So please encourage people to support the *Star Wars* franchise and purchase the official releases!”¹¹² HanDuet exposes how fragile *DEED* is, and how dependent upon Lucasfilm that the entire endeavor really is.

¹¹² HanDuet, “The Ultimate Introductory Guide to Harmy’s *Star Wars* Trilogy Despecialized Editions,” July 14, 2020, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yLsvexWBVM8IYSGopKuSfsGk5YIgCwQWd23bqb5ryD4/pub>.

Another aspect of understanding the development of *DEED* is the relationship between film and home recording. From the Video Cassette Recorder to the Sony Betamax, early public facing video recording hardware became another battleground between audience and producer surrounding filmed media. Fair use and copyright take new meanings when a performance can be easily replicated, and while film studios began to consider this as a new avenue of commercialization, early legislation altered their approach.¹¹³ This is important because without the securities created by this legislation, *DEED* would not have been either created or shared to the public. The legacy of the home recording revolution is present in Harmáček's careful restitching of multiple source media to craft *DEED*.

Even from the start, *Star Wars* and Lucas have a strong history with fan made and recorded work. This history is largely set along the two lines of fan engagement: bootlegging and fan-made films. The bootlegging of *Star Wars*, made possible by the technological intervention, has been traditionally far more aggressively pursued by Lucas and Lucasfilm.¹¹⁴ The fan-made films surrounding *Star Wars* is one with a more complicated relationship with the source material. Through a combination of End User License Agreements (EULAs) and Lucasfilm's licensing bureau, Lucas was able to maintain creative control while also encouraging "fair use" amongst *Star Wars* fans to produce their material. However, there has always been a delicate balance between the threat of legal action on the part of Lucasfilm and the rebelliousness of *Star Wars* fans. Decherney acknowledges that this relationship plays fast and loose with the term "fair

¹¹³ Decherney, *Hollywood's Copyright Wars*, 178.

¹¹⁴ Decherney, 194.

use.” Because of the haphazard process of trial and error involved in the process between 20th Century Fox and the fans, often these guidelines are defined by those who create these works. *DEED*, although far younger than most of these initial test cases, is still bound in the history and trial and error that they instilled.

Performativity in *DEED*

DEED is not just a presentation of a uniquely remastered experience; it is an exercise in performative expression. Included amongst the materials posted by Harmáček is a link to “printable covers and disk art.” Following this link gives you the ability to download inserts that can be used for a standard sized DVD/Blu-Ray Box cover, as well as artwork that has been formatted for a Compact Disk. The inserts feature the standard production credits for each of the films as well individual artwork for them, presumably designed by Harmáček, although I cannot confirm this. The front art depicts helmets of iconic characters from each film (Darth Vader, Boba Fett, and a Stormtrooper), while their eyes reflect pivotal moments or scenes from the films (Vader’s duel with Obi Wan Kenobi, Han Solo encased in carbonite, and the battle of Endor). This imagery is highly evocative of the *Star Wars* VHS releases from 1994, before the rise of the “special edition era.” These box covers featured three characters (Darth Vader and a Stormtrooper are joined by the jedi master Yoda), while underneath their heads are iconic battle sequences from the films (the battle of Yavin, the battle of Hoth, and Vader’s duel with Luke Skywalker). In addition to this art, the *DEED* inserts feature a picture of Luke Skywalker from each of the films and are billed as “The Adventures of Luke Skywalker.” This sets the *DEED* trilogy as a distinct and concise series, one that begins with *A New Hope* and concludes with

Return of the Jedi. Historiographically, it erases the prequel trilogy from the minds of its audience, which turn the focus of the *Star Wars* films away from Luke Skywalker and places it on Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader. Instead, *DEED* directs its audience on a past when these three films were the saga in its entirety. The back insert writing includes a summary of each film, along with the same postscript: “Feel the Force once again with this Despecialized Edition of the STAR WARS Trilogy. Just sit back and enjoy the ride uninterrupted by unnecessary additions to these classic movies.” Here is that same performance of nostalgia, offering audiences a chance to “feel the Force again” and avoid what the audience must also agree are additions that don’t contribute to the overall performance of the film.

This performance is highly reminiscent of the aesthetic presentation of *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*. Harmáček has created a nostalgia engine that feeds on a time before *Star Wars: Remastered*, and his aesthetic is purposefully engaging that engine. While much of the written material is legally obligated to acknowledge the creators of the film and the precarious copyright situation *DEED* is in, it also performs a certain legitimacy that *DEED* is recognizing. Like *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, *DEED* trades upon the time of its artists in its performance of remastery. If we follow the idea that *DEED* ostensibly operates as a rogue archive under the notion of fan time, then the pretense of legitimacy might be unnecessary. Considering fan time is about creation and pleasure, then the time spent crafting these elements for *DEED* would seem to fit in that. After all, the inserts and CD art are to improve an audiences’ experience, adding to the overall performance. However, with their connections to the historiography of *Star Wars* releases is also a performance of respectability that lifts *DEED* above both the traditional rogue archive and even Jenson’s notions of fandom. In effect, they play up an authenticity for *DEED*, an

authenticity that is a continuation from Harmáček's stated goals of creating a viable alternative to *Star Wars: Remastered*.

Finding *DEED* online is not exceptionally difficult. A cursory google search for "Despecialized *Star Wars*" or "Harmy's *Star Wars*" will bring up the web page that holds all the information and links needed to download your very own copy of the film. The page was first published on 5 April 2011, and immediately below the fold of the first scroll there is a familiar image for fans of *Star Wars*. A color drawing of the scene from *Episode IV: A New Hope* featuring Luke Skywalker, Obi-Wan Kenobi, and C-3PO on the streets of Mos Eisley as they attempt to talk their way past a stormtrooper checkpoint. The drawing has no citation, but it has the same artistic style as the concept art created by Ralph McQuarrie for the 1977 film. The title *Star Wars: Despecialized Edition* is emblazoned across the top of the image, with *Star Wars* written in its iconic and copyrighted font, while "Despecialized Edition" is written in all capitals in what looks like Helvetica. This image alone is doing a lot of work in encapsulating the performance occurring in *DEED*. The connections to both the past and present of *Star Wars* are apparent. The image evokes an iconic image of *A New Hope*, one that in the remastered version comes at the end of an extended period of CGI additions. The art style of this image cranks the nostalgia surrounding the original films. The title evokes the imagery and pedigree of *Star Wars* and attaches *DEED* to that pedigree by association. At the same time, it acknowledges that *DEED* does not have the same level of originality. It is as if the authenticity of *DEED* is being disconnected from the authority of Lucas and Lucasfilm.

OriginalTrilogy.com: *DEED*'s online home

Harmáček's project may be a monumental undertaking, but it represents the tip of a larger iceberg in the fandom. *DEED* is housed on Original Trilogy.com, a website run by and devoted to fans of the *Star Wars*. They label themselves as a place to discuss and share fan projects like *DEED*: preservations and edits of the films. But their subforums also offer places to share fan art for case covers and movie posters, scripts and rewrites for fan films, and how-to guides for fans technically inclined but without much knowhow. The welcome forum post, the place where new members are asked to introduce themselves, is still largely active, with six posts from the past month and one posted on the day that I am writing this analysis. This indicates that there is still an influx of new members into the community, usually a good sign.

The fan archives of Original Trilogy.com provide are replete with performative engagement that challenge what is the "ideal" version of watching *Star Wars*. There is a discussion in the forum of Star Wars Preservation titled "Theatre Performance Preservations." The author for this post is unknown, but the thread, started on 20 November 2010, is intended to provide a single source for recordings of *Star Wars*' many theatrical releases. By their nature, these recordings would be bootlegs—technically illegal under the many copyright laws that govern fan groups and films. But what is interesting is what the poster is looking for and how they are attempting to gather it. The author is looking for films that recorded "crowd interaction:" hearing the boos, cheers, and gasps of the audience as they experience the film. The poster actively is looking for archives in private hands or in older forums that may have these

bootlegs.¹¹⁵ This forum conversation is an interesting demonstration of how the rogue archives of *Star Wars* operate. These recordings that are being searched for are technically illegal, but this post lists directives on how to find and access them as necessary. Importantly as well, the search for these bootlegs is not for any sort of cheating the system, but instead is about finding and documenting the changes in live performance that are often left aside when discussing film recordings. As the poster comments, most times theatrical bootlegs are about creating a “pristine copy” of the film.¹¹⁶ With the distribution of so many more “pristine” versions of *Star Wars* (including the legal *DEED*), these bootlegs become archives for performance rather than media.

The rogue archives of fandom have the possibility to reconceive and refocus western media’s erasure of race. Given the dominance of white stories and characters and main characters and dominant representations in media, fandom can offer ways to insert characters of color into central roles. De Kosnik refers to these efforts as a type of “dark archive:” a way to force inclusively and representation and thus transform the western media with the hope that it can better reflect the diversity of western culture.¹¹⁷ *DEED* does not seem to be interested in developing this kind of “dark archive,” despite the possibilities that it could represent. There is then conflict in fandom represented in this discussion, a conflict between possibility and preservation. *DEED* seeks to build a “perfect” preservation of *Star Wars*, exactly as it was. This includes the decidedly monochromatic cast (except for Billy Dee Williams’ Lando Calrissian in *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*, and to a degree the voice of James Earl Jones as

¹¹⁵ None, “Theater Performance Preservations - Original Trilogy,” *Original Trilogy*, November 20, 2010, <https://originaltrilogy.com/topic/Theater-Performance-Preservations/id/12161>.

¹¹⁶ None.

¹¹⁷ De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives*, 169.

Darth Vader). There is no critical engagement, no critique, no attempt to “re-envision” or transform the film. Race does not seem to enter the conversation, nor do any other hegemonic dynamics that have influenced the creation of, and engagement with, *Star Wars*.

This presents a missed opportunity for *DEED*, which seems to reinforce the idea of technology as apolitical or neutral in issues of social justice. De Kosnik demonstrates this in part through her development of the “dark archive,” but there are other scholars who have proven this notion as facile at best and dangerously naive at worst. Algorithmic discrimination is a well-documented and discussed component to what Ruha Benjamin calls “the New Jim Code:” a term used to describe the racial biases and inequities that are entangled in technological development. Benjamin notes, “by decoding the racial dimensions of technology and the way in which different genres of humanity are constructed in the process, we gain a keener sense of the architecture of power—and not simply as a top-down story of powerful technology companies imposing coded inequity onto an innocent public.”¹¹⁸ Benjamin and other scholars of Race Critical Technology/Media/Code Studies such as Safiya Noble and Simone Browne are concerned with the ways that technology has been constructed to propagate anti-Blackness for profit. This approach does not quite apply to *DEED*, as *DEED* is not a profit seeking machine, nor does it actively engage in anti-Blackness. However, it is worth an examination of *DEED* along the lines of Benjamin’s analysis of the architecture of power.

¹¹⁸ Ruha Benjamin, *Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Cambridge, UK ; Polity, 2019), 32.

By restoring *Star Wars* “as it used to be,” *DEED* prevents it from engaging with how the intersection of technology and fandom highlights power structures and authority. This comes down not necessarily to overt anti-Blackness, but to the carrying over of older history. Like the historiographic project of *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, *DEED*’s attempt at a “perfect” archive of films from the 1970s and early 1980s would include the social engagements of their white director and producers. In summary, *DEED* in its intentions falls short of the potential presented to it as a form of dark or rogue archive. This leads to the question: if *DEED* is not necessarily a rogue archive, but not an official one either, then what might it be?

DEED and the Original Trilogy fandoms’ motives also ring a bell regarding race and power. On 5 April 2011, the day Harmáček released the first edition of *DEED* on OriginalTrilogy.com, forum member Hal 9000 posted their support about the process. Hal 9000 is quoted in saying “we’re all purists here.”¹¹⁹ While speaking about the notion of *DEED* as the quintessential, unaltered version of *Star Wars*, the idea of purity is, like term master, tied up in some very discrete conversations about power and authority to do with race. Importantly, it recalls Benjamin’s ideas that the architecture of power is built into the remastering technology.

As I’ve discussed previously, *DEED* is a rogue archive meant to hold a repertoire of film knowledge that might otherwise be lost. But *DEED* is less interested with the possibilities presented as a rogue archive, and more in crystallizing a historical media moment. This crystallization is ostensibly done to help feed the nostalgia of fans like Harmáček; fans who grew

¹¹⁹ Hal 9000, “Yeah, In My Humble Opinion, Merely Recompositing Original Elements Doesn’t Constitute a ‘change,’ per Se.,” *Original Trilogy*, April 5, 2011, <https://originaltrilogy.com/topic/Harmys-STAR-WARS-Despecialized-Edition-HD-V2-7-MKV-Released/id/12713/page/1#488684>.

up watching the original, unaltered *Star Wars*. However, as years go on and the first *Star Wars: Remastered* becomes as temporally historic as the original release, it is worth questioning how this nostalgia operates. There is now a new generation of *Star Wars* fans who have grown up with *Star Wars: Remastered*. Like Harmáček and others like him, this new version has become their version of the films. What use would they have for the nostalgia that is engaged by *DEED*? Harmáček and other fans from Eastern Europe present an interesting holdover case; people who were only exposed to what was then a fifteen-year-old film long after most of the world had already seen and processed it. So, does *DEED* then unintentionally attempt to control the authenticity argument for future generations? With its creation, there becomes a conflict in what is the “fan favorite” version of the films. Older generations may flock to rogue archives like *DEED*, while younger generations, not tied to the feelings of nostalgia, may attach to the official archives such as *Star Wars: Remastered*, as well as the newer trilogies.

Preservation, Authenticity, and Remastery in the Age of Digital Reproduction

Harmáček’s *DEED* is not the only version of the original *Star Wars* that exists. The 1977 35mm negatives have been preserved at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. These were the negatives that had been submitted for Lucas’ Copyright claim on the films, have been reserved for preservation and are non-accessible to most visitors to the Library of Congress, ostensibly to preserve them in their best form. However, as of 2015, the Library’s Moving Image Research Center had created a 2k digital scan of these negatives.¹²⁰ While not as crisp as

¹²⁰ Lance Ulanoff, “The Search for the ‘Star Wars’ George Lucas Doesn’t Want You to See,” Mashable, December 17, 2015, <https://mashable.com/archive/star-wars-original-cut>.

DEED's 4k HD or the current editions of *Star Wars: Remastered*, the Library's scan does adhere to Harmáček's vision of allowing for the unadulterated *Star Wars* to be viewed by the public. Unlike *DEED*, the Library's scan is not a restored or remastered version. According to Lance Ulanoff, the fading of the 1977 negatives is visible, and "every good, bad and in-between 1970s-era special effect is intact."¹²¹ In some ways, this version of the film represents exactly the kind of shifting performance that emphasizes the changes film makes. The film's scenes on the desert planet of Tatooine are caked with a yellow tinge: the faded colors of the film's negatives preserved in digital form. But Ulanoff points out that this tinge actually helps provide a distinction to the clean and shiny Death Star.¹²² Watching the same scenes in *DEED*, there is a slight yellowish tinge to these scenes, but the fading of the film is not evident. This is an interesting example of the performance of the film itself changing and meshing with the world building category of change. Because a full third of the film is set on a desert planet, the yellow tinge of the decaying film accents the action of the scenes in a complementary way. While not specifically a remastering, the Library edition of *Star Wars* is a demonstration of the performative nature of film, changing the relationship between audience and media through the aging of the medium.

The aging of the Library edition is not limited to its coloration. Ulanoff notices the scratches on the film or the wear and tear on the outside of the reels, material artifacts of the media's performance that have been erased by *DEED* just as they have been erased by *Star*

¹²¹ Ulanoff.

¹²² Ulanoff.

Wars: Remastered.¹²³ This is an example of the relationship between decay in media and remastery. Remastery cannot bear the physical artifacts of decay; its performance must be brand new, as if the media had been just created. The Library edition, as an archived copy, can showcase these alterations in the performance of the media. They are, after all, part of the experience of watching the older video.

With the Library of Congress' preserved version of *Star Wars*, there are three data points for this single case. There is *Star Wars: Remastered*, the "authorized" version of *Star Wars*, complete with updated audio, video, and new plot points. Then, there is the *Star Wars* as it lives in the Library of Congress. This version is divided into two: the unviewable negatives, slowly decaying despite the best efforts of the preservation teams caring for them, and the digitized 2k copy which preserves the viewing experience of the Library version as of 2015. Finally, there is *DEED*, possibly the most unofficial of the three. This version is the rogue performance: the one that enhances and restores the imagery just like *Star Wars: Remastered*, but also similarly preserves the narrative that the Library version maintains. These disparate versions, while sharing commonalities, demonstrate how different this application of remastery can be from its application in *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*. Where with Paramount there was a more direct 1:1 conversion from older masters to remastered tracks. Even when there were multiple ways to listen to the music (as was the case), these differences were entirely performative affect and did not affect the way an audience was able to hear the music. This is not the case with *Star Wars*, where there are three distinct ways to view it: an official version, an unofficial version, and an

¹²³ Ulanoff.

archived version. To compare this to *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, it would be as if a solitary mastering technician created their own LPs of Paramount's tracks and sold them as bootleg copies, while musical historians could go to a special archive to listen to the digitized, but not remastered, versions of the same songs.

Ulanoff acknowledges that while the Library version hits all the same nostalgic beats, *Star Wars: Remastered* does a better job of maintaining the “vibrancy” of when the film was first in cinemas.¹²⁴ In this case, *Star Wars: Remastered* and *DEED* are attempting to capture a greatness that may never have been: reperforming the visual and audible experience of the film. *Star Wars: Remastered* attempts to go a step further, envisioned not only the film that was, but the film that should have been, at least according to George Lucas. However, *DEED* is also attempting to be the film that Harmáček remembers it being. Neither remastered film hits upon the original performance of *Star Wars*, though one attempts to recreate it while the other attempts to become it.

If remastery can serve a tool that can address the systemic inequities of power within the performance of media, its potential has yet to be fully realized in any of the case studies examined so far. *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* was too engaged in bringing a nostalgia to the history of Paramount Records to fully grapple with the systemic racism that pervades the original performance despite being able to do so. *Star Wars: Remastered* is too engaged in profit motivated decisions, though the retroactive changes that Lucas makes in each production again demonstrate that remastery can and does change the original performance, offering a way to

¹²⁴ Ulanoff.

create reparative performances through remastery. *DEED* comes close to achieving the promise of remastery by operating outside of the traditional production structures put in place by the media industry. However, *DEED* is so focused on the “authentic experience” of *Star Wars* that it ignores the possibilities of reparative performance that are open to it. *DEED* then becomes just another version of archived media, struggling to capture the nostalgia of the way *Star Wars* never really was. Even the fully preserved *Star Wars* in the Library of Congress does not capture the original’s performance, content with stopping the decay of the media. In developing a language and theory of remastery, thus far no actual remastered project has proven capable of creating a performance that not only technologically augments the original work, but also realizes a new performance for future audiences.

Chapter 3: Re-Forged: *Warcraft III* and the Failures of Remastery

So far, my research and development of remastery has discussed the augmentation and enhancement of music and film. These discussions have led to the conclusions that remastery operates historiographically and within an interdependent network of performance, relying upon the relationships between audiences, artists, and producers. These relationships also mean that remastery deals in the performance of authenticity, a performance that is aided by and influences the historiographic networks that surround the media. Ultimately, these conclusions boil down to who controls the media, be it the artists who create, the producers who market, or the audiences who receive. This control is determined largely by the systems of race and class that influence everything in this realm. All these conclusions remain in play as I turn to a third medium that has frequently been the subject of digital remastering, that of the video game.

The video game is a very broad and loose category of medium, used to describe things as diverse as six-foot-tall arcade machines to applications on modern smart phones. For the purposes of this discussion, I understand video games as any digital game played on electronic device, be it console, arcade machine, phone, or personal computer. So many of these games are locked to their specific mechanisms. While they all share a commonality, what mechanisms enable video games changes how players can engage with the performance of the game.

The video game industry is rife with remastered older games, but few have reached the level of infamy as *Warcraft III: Reforged*. Released by Activision-Blizzard in 2020 for Windows and Macintosh computers, *Warcraft III: Reforged* was a remastered edition of 2002's *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos* and its expansion, 2003's *Warcraft III: The Frozen Throne*. When it

released, *Warcraft III: Reforged* was met with near universal condemnation by fans and journalists alike. This came after several years of advertisement and buildup for the remastering of what was one of Blizzard Entertainment's most well-loved game. This dissonance of anticipation and rejection is the area I am interested in exploring as another facet of remastery.

The utility of speaking about *Warcraft III: Reforged* is in how remastery can be understood as a process. While it was largely considered a "failure" by fans and critics, *Warcraft III: Reforged* technically fulfilled its task. The game had been enhanced beyond its original scope using technology that was not available at the time the original game was released. So, what then can *Warcraft* and Activision-Blizzard teach us about remastery and failure? As in the case of *Star Wars: Remastered*, this question lies in the relationship that the audience has with the media. This relationship is complicated by the power dynamics that are present in remastery, particularly those that shift the control of the media to the producers at the expense of the audience. In the case of *Warcraft III: Reforged*, the failure of remastery lies not just in the ability to uphold expectations of performance, but also to understand and respect that the audience has a potentially deep control over remastery.

Remastery in Gaming: Theories and Methods

Like film and music, video games have their own methodologies and strategies of preservation. These strategies are influenced by the medium that video games present. Much of the conversation around preservation in video games is like the conversation around celluloid films; both media can become lost in decay and obsolescence. The difference is in what kind of decay and preservation can occur. Raiford Guins discusses these strategies in his book *Game*

After: A Cultural Study of the Video Game Afterlife. Guins acknowledges that even after a games' relevant lifespan, official and unofficial institutions, from museums to private collections and even landfills, have roles to play in the history of video games.¹²⁵ This approach of understanding a game system's afterlife demonstrates a more nuanced understanding of the obsolescence that pervades the conversation of remastery. While a game may become obsolete, its historical record does not end with its de-platforming. Instead, tracking where games and consoles have found their resting places demonstrates what has been deemed of "value" and what has not. Remastering disrupts this process by re-platforming a game that may have been rendered obsolete by its successors. In doing so, it alters the historical artifact that is the game itself.

The remastering of video games presents a clear example of obsolescence and augmentation in modern media. Unlike film and music, video games do not have an analog version. While there are physical components to playing games, the games themselves are largely based on digital frameworks. This makes the potential of preservation and remastering of video games a digital-to-digital conversion. Instead of an instance like *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, which converts a digital remastering back into the analog vinyl, the remastering of something like *Warcraft III* is using the same medium but with improved technologies. This means that studying *Warcraft III: Reforged* is a way to see the performative turn of augmentation in a controlled setting. The shifting of technology in video games is as sharp a distinction as

¹²⁵ Raiford Guins, *Game after: A Cultural Study of Video Game Afterlife* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2014), 8.

sharp as in other media, but both master and remaster are in some ways recognizable as each other.

Video game technology, operating as it does at the speed of modern digital technological development, is constantly attempting to be “the next big thing.” New game consoles appear in a roughly six-year cycle, with the graphics and processing power of computers increasing in even shorter intervals. James Newman, studying the process of obsolescence in video games, observes: “where we see old games and platforms referred to at all...it is often in this comparative mode as a baseline by which we are invited to judge the additional processing power or graphical resolution of the replacement.”¹²⁶ Newman demonstrates that the performativity of technology is bound to the enhancement and augmentation that are the core of remastery. As a medium, video games are linked to the ever and always new. Old games are lost in the churn, serving to highlight the performance of their replacements. To remaster them is to offer an alteration to this performance that makes the comparison somewhat masturbatory. The comparisons drawn around *Warcraft III: Reforged* are not just to recent games in terms of the quantum changes of games from 2018 and 2019, but also to the original *Warcraft III*.

Because of this dependence on digital tools, video games have strong potential to last much longer than analog media. Yet for all its potential longevity, digital material can and does decay. This is often because of the storage medium itself breaking down, though it is referred to as “bit rot” in deference not to the technology but the value of the media itself.¹²⁷ This then

¹²⁶ James (James A.) Newman, *Best before: Videogames, Supersession and Obsolescence* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2012), 9, <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1016029>.

¹²⁷ Newman, 17.

provides a useful context to remastering older games. By bringing the games “up to code,” as it were, development teams are ensuring that the bit rot can be stopped, at least for a time. Of course, the reality of digital decay would have this process continue indefinitely, which, while working to preserve history, might endanger continued development of new projects. After all, the people that can develop older games with new technology are utilizing the same skill sets as those who create new games with new technology.

Studying remastery in the case of *Warcraft III: Reforged* serves to illustrate key distinctions between game production and preservation. While many remastered games can preserve a game and delay its decay, it is also done so on a scale of production not seen in traditional preservation practices. Guins believes that mass production’s goals are not in line with those of preservation. For him, “Preservation is happenstance, usually contemplated in dire circumstances well after an end product disintegrates.”¹²⁸ Guins is specifically discussing the creating and preservation of arcade machines, but by engaging the larger window of mass production, there is room for me to discuss his observation through the lens of digital remastering. In this case, I believe that Guins’ overall point still holds true, if not its specifics. Preservation through remastery is not happenstance, though it can occur as the original has begun to disintegrate. However, I agree with the intention that preservation is not the end goal of remastery, but rather a useful side effect of the needs to capitalize upon a product once again before its inevitable obsolescence. Guins’ study and appreciation of arcade machines is valuable

¹²⁸ Guins, *Game After*, 257.

in that it prefaces the challenges that companies like Activision-Blizzard face to market and revive older games, challenges that I have endeavored to address through remastery.

The processes of decay and restoration in video game technologies also present a difficult challenge to the concept of authenticity in remastery. Newman acknowledges that there is a “Ship of Theseus” style paradox present in the continuing preservation of video games, “if the emulated incarnation of *Donkey Kong* does not look like the original...does not sound like the original...is not controlled in the same way as the original...then to what extent is it an appropriate archival or display resource?”¹²⁹ As the efforts of preservation and archiving continue to preserve older and older games, the technologies that are required will eventually be unrecognizable to what the games originally required. Remastering suffers a similar problem, though the corporate interest in remastering is less interested in the “appropriateness” of the media. Instead, the “appropriateness” of media is replaced by the “continuity of media:” the ability of a remastered game to perform a similar aesthetic to its predecessor.

This does not mean that remastery is entirely without its own changes to the authenticity of the game. In writing about the remastering of classic games in 2012, Newman provides an interesting observation. Using the 2005 video game *God of War* as an example, Newman posits, “The ability to experience *God of War* ‘in its true form’ works to decouple ‘the game from the specific technologies of any given historical implementation. As such, *God of War* is rendered as gameplay potential that is both realized and restricted by the technologies of any particular

¹²⁹ Newman, *Best Before*, 37.

console or computing generation.”¹³⁰ Newman sees remastering as a way to disconnect the performance of a game with its historical context. Without the original hardware that a game was produced on and for, the game is instead bound up in the same technological cycle of performance and obsolescence that the consoles are bound to. Newman’s observation is valid, but through my own discoveries of remastered media, I don’t see the historical implementations of a game as lost in its remaster. Rather, these implementations haunt the remaster, particularly when the remaster is built to adhere to an “authentic” play experience.

Remastering games is not the only method of preserving games for the purpose of play, but it is the most theoretically “authentic” one. Outside of the preservationist archives and collections discussed by Guins, older video games that were distributed on platforms from the 1980s and 1990s have been vanishing steadily over the past decade. Game systems like the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), Sega Genesis, or the Atari 2600 have become collectible items and antiques, leading to the games they hosted to become largely lost to time. Productive fans have attempted to salvage games from these systems by emulating them on ‘ROMs,’ adapting computer memory software to preserve and play games such as *Donkey Kong* (1981). However, these ROMs fall under two challenges in a familiar pattern to the discussions of *Star Wars*, that of legality and authenticity. Although these games are no longer distributed, they all still fall within the legal protections of their copyrights, meaning that distribution of them by anyone other than their copyright owners is technically illegal. Newman also points out that these ROMs also suffer from a performance challenge. Many of these games originally made use

¹³⁰ Newman, 116.

of specialized hardware to play them: pads, buttons, joysticks, or controllers.¹³¹ Remastering games, while not taking advantage of the same specialized hardware, does keep hardware at the forefront of its performance. This focus, combined with the fact that remasters are legally distributed by the production companies themselves, means that the remastered game experience could be considered the authentic performance.

ROMs and remasters serve as two sides to the same coin. Newman also sees a relationship between the illegal ROM and the updated remaster. Newman believes that both attempt to decontextualize a game for future aesthetic and ludic enjoyment. Both also serve as imperfect copies of the original, ostensibly due to the inability to map the original inputs atop the newer technology.¹³² While I agree largely with Newman's interpretation, I believe that the decontextualization, if intended, does not take place the way that is expected. Rather, due to the historiographic nature of the games' performance, the remaster and the ROM are left with a kind of "history without context." This, combined the nostalgia generated in playing, obfuscates issues within a games' narrative or mechanics that, without the original context, threaten to be reinscribed into the present.

Preservation in digital gaming, from remastering to restoration to emulation, functions largely at the behest of an audience. Preservation creates the link between older audiences holding on to performances that were once captivating to them or hold historical value to newer audiences seeking to make that value for themselves. However, preservation also demonstrates

¹³¹ Newman, 8.

¹³² Newman, 120.

the fractious relationships between the audience and the producers of digital games, who stand the most to benefit from some forms of preservation (remastering) while losing the most due to others (emulation). This model of remastering as preservation is a reminder of what “successful” remastering can accomplish. To weave it into my theoretical framework, remastery as a performative turn serves to document and preserve historical connections between past and present media and past and present audiences. This is important as I explore where *Warcraft III: Reforged* apparently went wrong in its remastering, and how that effects my understanding of remastery.

Performance in Game Remastery

In addition to understanding performance as it applies to video games, performance in game remastering requires a few borders and stipulations. Like all mediated or remediated products, remastered video games can open new avenues of discussion through historiographic analysis. Guins sees video games as historical objects, bound to a specific time and space.¹³³ This approach places video games on the same level as live performances. Both are historically bound to the time they were created, and recreations, be they a remounting or remaster, are going to be wrestling with that historical and spatial legacy. In the case of remastery, this also plays upon the nostalgic affect that is generated.

Like writing and recording music, shooting film, or producing a play, digital games require certain boundaries for them to function within their expected scope. For my purposes, the

¹³³ Guins, *Game After*, 11.

most important of these rules is that games are interactive. Tekinbaş and Zimmerman define interactivity in games as the following: “It takes place within a system, it is relational, it allows for direct intervention within a representational context, and it is iterative.”¹³⁴ From these definitions, the interactivity of games also make them a performative media. Forming relationships between players or between the player and the game creates similar lines of performance engagement as between actors and audience, and the iterative nature of games’ interactivity mean that each “playthrough” can be rendered as a copy of a copy; no performance of a game can ever be truly repeated. Because remastery also emphasizes the iterative nature of media, this also provides a point of connection to digital media that is, if not unique, then certainly more emphasized than even in remastering of audio or visual media.

To engage in the performance of a digital game, a player must engage with the systems that surround the game. Just as listening to an LP requires one to use a record player or watching a film realm requires a projector, digital games require both hardware and software components. But these are not the only components necessary to understand the systems of the game. In understanding digital games, Tekinbaş and Zimmerman identify four traits that comprise these digital game experiences: Immediate but narrow interactivity (being able to provide instantaneous feedback to its audience but within a very limited scope),¹³⁵ Information Manipulation (hiding and showing information and data from and to players),¹³⁶ Automated Complex Systems (placing the more complicated mechanics of the game inside a programming

¹³⁴ Katie Salen Tekinbaş and Eric Zimmerman, *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003), 59.

¹³⁵ Tekinbaş and Zimmerman, 87.

¹³⁶ Tekinbaş and Zimmerman, 88.

“black box” to improve player immersion), and Networked Communication (allowing for digital connections between different players of the game).¹³⁷ These systems are important to understanding *Warcraft III: Reforged* because they provide the set of expectations that players expect the game to meet. This is especially true of remastered games, as these systems have already been established. *Reforged* is relying upon the game experiences that *Reign of Chaos* created. Indeed, all four of these traits are present in some way in *Reign of Chaos* and are echoed in *Reforged*. However, where Activision-Blizzard alters these expected traits in unexpected ways are places that have been critiques as “failures” of the remaster.

Warcraft III: A History

Before I dive further into the discussion of *Warcraft III: Reforged*, it is important to define the performance experience that it has endeavored to remaster. *Warcraft III* is a real-time strategy Game (RTS), a genre of game where players take charge of a miniaturized military industrial machine. Players begin games with a small base and a group of resource gathering units, and harvest materials from the map to construct buildings, research upgrades, and hire combat units that they will use to complete their objectives. Most often, this is the destruction of the enemy’s base, but when playing the game’s main story as a single player, objectives are often more elaborate or nuanced. But even when playing in the games’ single player storyline (often referred to as its “campaign”), the basic gameplay experience remains. In the case of *Warcraft III*, this campaign is divided into four parts, each focused on one of the four factions available for

¹³⁷ Tekinbaş and Zimmerman, 89.

play in the game. Taken together, these parts tell the story of the world of Azeroth and the coming of the Burning Legion: an army of demons who wish to claim Azeroth for their own.

Warcraft III: Reforged's history stretches back to the early 2000s. The original game, *Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos*, was released July 2, 2002. A sequel to 1995's *Warcraft II: Tides of Darkness*, *Reign of Chaos* was a well-received addition to then Blizzard Entertainment's stable of RTS games. The game enjoys a 92% score on Metacritic.com, based on 40 critical reviews and over two thousand user reviews.¹³⁸ By the end of July 2002, *Warcraft III* had sold over 1 million copies worldwide and seized the title of fastest-selling video game to date.¹³⁹ *Reign of Chaos* was soon followed up by an expansion, 2004's *The Frozen Throne*, which continued the storyline from the primary game and expanded upon the options available to players. The last update *Warcraft III* received was in 2018, when Activision-Blizzard released changes to the game including widescreen support and announced an officially supported tournament. This was the first time that the possibility of a remastered *Warcraft III* was imagined.¹⁴⁰

Fans would not have to wait long for these dreams to be confirmed. On November 2, 2018, during their yearly "Blizzcon" convention, Activision-Blizzard announced the impending release of *Warcraft III: Reforged*. At the time, the announcement offered everything that a remastered game would be expected to offer and more, "rebuilt versions of all the original games' art made with cutting-edge animation technology, hours of updated in-game cinematics

¹³⁸ "Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos," Metacritic, accessed January 29, 2021, <https://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/warcraft-iii-reign-of-chaos>.

¹³⁹ B. Wiley, "Warcraft III Shatters Sales Records," IGN, July 22, 2002, <https://www.ign.com/articles/2002/07/22/warcraft-iii-shatters-sales-records>.

¹⁴⁰ Ryan Gilliam, "Blizzard's Warcraft 3 Updates Have Fans Hoping for a Remaster," *Polygon* (blog), February 23, 2018, <https://www.polygon.com/2018/2/23/17042578/warcraft-3-remastered-invitational-patch>.

plus an overhauled World Editor and full integration into Blizzard Battle.net for a new era of multiplayer gameplay.”¹⁴¹ The announcement was accompanied by a proof of concept: an updated version of the game’s introductory cinematic, featuring a human and orc, the two races who have served as the primary sources of conflict in all *Warcraft* games. True to form, the new video showcases crisper and more detailed animation than the video of sixteen years earlier, but the content is identical. The only major difference is the title sequence adds the subtitle *Reforged* to the game’s name.

Also available at Blizzcon was a demonstration (demo) copy of the game for those on the convention floor. The game demo featured a single mission, “The Culling.” Video of the demo made available on YouTube featured updated character models for three of the games’ human protagonists: Arthas, Uther, and Jaina, as well as clips demonstrating the game engine’s overall enhancements. While retaining the exaggerated definitions of animations that Activision Blizzard has come to be known for through their games, the models present as updated improvements to the original, brought up to the graphical standards of the late 2010s.

The continuity and world building components of remastery, present in *Star Wars: Remastered* were advertised as an element of *Warcraft III: Reforged*. The original *Warcraft III* was the precursor game to the now wildly successful Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft*, first released in 2005. By 2018, *World of Warcraft* has become the primary vehicle of expressing the Warcraft canon for Activision-Blizzard in a way

¹⁴¹ Blizzard Entertainment, “Lok’Tar Ogar! Warcraft III: Reforged Announced at Blizzcon,” Blizzard Entertainment, November 2, 2018, <https://news.blizzard.com/en-us/blizzcon/22636891/lok-tar-ogar-warcraft-iii-reforged-announced-at-blizzcon>.

that could not have been foreseen by *Warcraft III*. As such *Warcraft III: Reforged* created an opportunity to retroactively address the history and geography of the *World of Warcraft*. For instance, Stratholme, the titular city of the demo mission first available, would go on to serve as the backdrop for several missions in *World of Warcraft*. As such, the designers behind *Warcraft III: Reforged* worked to bring Stratholme in line with its now-canonical appearance. The map's layout now features geography from *World of Warcraft*, completely removing and reworking elements of the map that had been present in *Warcraft III* such as Greek columns, a river, and even a zoo.¹⁴²

With the popularity of the original game and the pedigree of the game company responsible for creating *Warcraft*, it would stand to reason that the remastered *Warcraft III* would be a massive financial and critical success. Flashforward to 28 January 2020, *Warcraft III: Reforged* is released. Within days of the release, the performativity of the past announcements became clear to the game's audience. While there were graphical enhancements present and higher resolution graphics throughout the game, the improvements teased in 2018 have been paired back. Even the cinematic scenes used to mark the act breaks in the game's campaign are still the same scenes used from the 2002 version, a notable break with the promise of the updated introduction cinematic.¹⁴³ Though the character models (referred to as "sprites") have been improved, scenic elements that could and should have been enhanced have not been. Cass

¹⁴² Steve Watts, "Warcraft 3: Reforged Making Changes To Fit World Of Warcraft Lore," *GameSpot* (blog), accessed September 1, 2022, <https://www.gamespot.com/articles/warcraft-3-reforged-making-changes-to-fit-world-of/1100-6463028/>.

¹⁴³ Fraser Brown, "Warcraft 3: Reforged Review," *pcgamer*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.pcgamer.com/warcraft-3-reforged-review/>.

Marshall references a particular scenic element, the font of elven magic known as the Sunwell, “upgraded in *WoW* to look like a golden basin of power, is relegated in *Reforged* to a shiny pool of water surrounded by rocks.”¹⁴⁴ Marshall takes umbrage with the apparent haphazard approach of the scenic elements of *Reforged* when contrasted by the new details of the character sprites. “The environments are all stark and simple, looking more like bases of homemade Warhammer models than a lush world to explore. The quality of the units themselves only makes this shortcoming more noticeable.”¹⁴⁵ Here, the retroactive continuity of *WoW* has become a double-edged sword for Activision-Blizzard. Newman’s observations on augmentation and gaming are useful in understanding this problem. With the designs and aesthetics of *WoW* now as a comparison, what may have previously had been seen as a marked improvement can be read as a failed promise. The error here seems to be then that the remastering of *Reforged* is not just in a direct comparison to the performance of the original *Reign of Chaos*, but also with every augmentation and enhancement that *WoW* has had over the last fifteen years. In this way, the three games become inexorably linked in the discussion of *Reforged*’s performance.

Game design and user interface has changed in the fifteen years since *Reign of Chaos*, a fact that is reinforced by some of the choices made in experience continuity in *Reforged*. Most modern games place their main menu button on the Escape key of the keyboard, but *Reign of Chaos* (and by extension *Reforged*) place it on the F10 button. This is not a game breaking problem, but in my own experience of the game, it took me substantially longer to find an

¹⁴⁴ Cass Marshall, “Warcraft 3: Reforged Review: A Relic Ruined by Upgrades,” *Polygon* (blog), February 4, 2020, <https://www.polygon.com/reviews/2020/2/4/21116683/warcraft-3-reforged-review-pc-mac-issues-cutsscenes-remastered-glitches-complaints>.

¹⁴⁵ Marshall.

important menu than I would normally expect because I was pressing the modern interface key. Other abilities or menus in the game have been assigned to specific keys on the keyboard that are not readily apparent or universal across the game, leading players to need to scramble to find them. Two different characters even in the same faction may use the same button for completely different skills, meaning that a player misremembering at a key moment may mean the difference between victory and defeat. Marshall points out that successive games to *Reign of Chaos* had long ago solved these problems, but Activision-Blizzard's commitment to the "Warcraft III Experience" have returned them to the forefront.¹⁴⁶ Modern game design relies upon user interfaces that are intuitive: how easy it is for a player to access information effects their reception of the game. Bad user interfaces could easily give the impression of a cluttered or slow game performance.¹⁴⁷ *Reforged's* commitment to crafting the "authentic" remastered experience risks just this kind of impression of its performance. In this case, while the remastering is, in fact, quite successful, both Moore and Marshall's experience, along with my own, would place this part of the game's performance as failing a major test for its audience. In other words: authenticity of design has led to a subpar performance.

In addition to the design and interface, game performance had been affected for many users. While *Warcraft III* was well known for its single player experience, it also hosted functionality to not only compete against other players and the tools for players to craft their own game modes and campaigns. The World Editor promised by Activision-Blizzard is an interesting

¹⁴⁶ Marshall.

¹⁴⁷ Michael E. (Game designer) Moore, *Basics of Game Design* (Boca Raton: A K Peters/CRC Press, 2011), 315.

selling point for the game. The original game did come with an editing program, allowing players to craft their own maps or stories using the game's engine, animations, and sprites. This kind of freedom for fans led, rather directly, to some of the most well-known and regarded games in the modern era. The hit game *League of Legends* traces its origins directly to a modified version of *Warcraft III*.¹⁴⁸ However, when *Reforged* was released, both the multiplayer and world building features were incomplete and prone to error. Players were dogged by connectivity issues, problems accessing custom game material that had been created before *Reforged* released and complained about lack of support for the game's multiplayer environment.¹⁴⁹ The possibilities opened by the World Editor from the original game were curtailed largely by Activision-Blizzard's aggressive new End User License Agreement (EULA) that governed the creation of custom game material. This policy effectively gave Blizzard full creative and copyright control over the materials created in *Warcraft III* by its users.¹⁵⁰ This creates a unique copyright experience that is not shared across other remastered media in the same way. While there were a great deal of stipulations surrounding *Star Wars: Demastered's* usage and ownership, the labor that Harmáček put into it is still his. He cannot profit off his labor, but on the other hand, neither can Lucas. This is not the case with *Warcraft III*, as Blizzard

¹⁴⁸ Allegra Frank, "Warcraft 3: Reforged Is the HD Remaster of the Classic," *Polygon* (blog), November 2, 2018, <https://www.polygon.com/2018/11/2/18056530/warcraft-3-reforged-hd-remaster-release-date-blizzcon-2018>.

¹⁴⁹ Charlie Hall, "Warcraft 3: Reforged Changes How the Original Game Works, and Fans Are Upset," *Polygon* (blog), January 29, 2020, <https://www.polygon.com/2020/1/29/21113975/warcraft-3-reforged-downgrade-launch-issues-fan-response-cutscenes-performance-custom-games-dota>.

¹⁵⁰ Eric Van Allen, "Blizzard Is Taking Extra Steps to Ensure It Owns Your Warcraft 3: Reforged Custom Games," *USgamer* (blog), January 29, 2020, <https://www.usgamer.net/articles/blizzard-is-taking-extra-steps-to-ensure-it-owns-your-warcraft-3-reforged-custom-games>.

would technically be able to market and profit off anything created using their customization engine.

The criticisms of *Reforged* at the time were, vocal, numerous and spread throughout the various elements of the gaming community. Articles released at the time pointed to fans of the game voicing their frustrations in official and unofficial online forums such as Activision-Blizzard's *Warcraft III* message boards and the game's message board on Reddit.¹⁵¹ The highlights of these frustrations were documented on the website, "Warcraft III: Refunded." While sharing an aesthetic to *Warcraft III*'s official website and using official artwork, "Refunded" lays out the grievances against Activision-Blizzard, including the cut features that were promised, poor consumer-facing practices, and lackluster improvements. The criticisms leveled against *Reforged* fall in line with what R.M Milner considers standard expression of fan culture. Milner sees fan criticism as an outlet for fans to object to violations of the contract between what the fans expect and what the producers have released, particularly when a company has chosen profitability over creativity.¹⁵² "Refunded," with its apparent legitimacy through imitation, lays out exactly what the consensus was for the violation of the social contract between Activision-Blizzard and its audience.

¹⁵¹ Hall, "Warcraft 3"; Ryan Gilliam, "Blizzard Is Offering Automatic Refunds for Warcraft 3: Reforged," *Polygon* (blog), February 3, 2020, <https://www.polygon.com/2020/2/3/21120965/warcraft-3-reforged-blizzard-refunds-ticket-instant>; Matt Kim, "Warcraft 3 Reforged: Fans Unhappy With Launch Version," IGN, January 29, 2020, <https://www.ign.com/articles/warcraft-3-reforged-fans-unhappy-with-launch-version>.

¹⁵² R.M. Milner, "Beyond the Virtual Realm: Fallout Fans and the Troublesome Issue of Ownership in Videogame Fandom," in *Social Exclusion, Power, and Video Game Play: New Research in Digital Media and Technology*, ed. David G. Embrick, J. Talmadge Wright, and András. Lukács (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 224, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10552022>.

The “Legitimate” *Warcraft* Experience

A unique challenge to understanding the remastery of *Warcraft III: Reforged* is that Activision-Blizzard has rather successfully overwritten the original game. In each case study of remastery before, there has been some conflict between the original work and the remaster owing to their coexistence. To play *Warcraft III: Reforged*, it must first be bought through Activision-Blizzard’s application/website, Battle.net. Originally the name for Blizzard’s online multiplayer service, Battle.net has grown to become Activision-Blizzard’s online storefront. Both companies’ stable of games is available for purchase and download. Sure enough, *Warcraft III* has a position of its own amongst these games. But when one opens this page for purchase, only the remastered version is available. While *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* presents the “only” way to listen to Paramount’s back catalogue, the original masters for many of these works still exist. The situation surrounding *Warcraft III: Reforged* more closely resembles how *Star Wars: Remastered* has become the “official” version that can be found through primary channels, but projects like *DEED* or the Library Edition allow for some version of the original films to continue to exist. *Warcraft III*, as a game from the early 2000s, can still be found on Compact Disc, but the ability for computers to read these CDs and install the older software has rapidly depreciated. Activision-Blizzard have engaged their power to supplant the history of their own game with its present. Regardless of intention or value, *Warcraft III: Reforged* is not just the “legitimized” way of experiencing the performance of *Warcraft III*, it is rapidly becoming the only way to experience the performance.

This approach, while like *Star Wars: Remastered*, poses a problem for both the history and historiography of game studies than *Star Wars* does for film studies. The problem is in the

material performance of the games themselves. Unlike *Star Wars*, which is maintained in some form by preservation groups like the Library of Congress, the maintenance and preservation of video game history is, as discussed by Guins, a patchwork project between official and unofficial channels. What Guins finds troubling about this approach is that “Without dedicated preservations and documentation game historians will lose access to materials vital to their historical research. They will have little recourse but to base future histories on the back of chronicle era works rather than apply their interpretative methods to materials that allow for critical histories that run deeper than fact checking.”¹⁵³ The concern is not just for those who play games being unable to find and experience the old, there is attention that must be paid to future scholars who will lose out on potential studies in the history of games. This approach represents the challenges that remastered games can have to the historiography of game studies as well. Because Activision-Blizzard controls the specific performance, that performance is what future histories will be based on. This provides another example of Remastery serving as a historiographic expression, though not in a corrective or positive sense.

The ability to purchase *Warcraft III: Reforged* also speaks to the material performance of the game. Unlike *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, *Star Wars: Remastered*, or *DEED*, there is no fanfare to *Warcraft III: Reforged*. Purchasing the entire game with three clicks of a computer mouse is a far cry from being able to physically hold and experience the box set of Paramount Records. The performance this experience is trying to convey is one of direct transaction rather than aesthetic pleasure. This may not be a particularly crucial issue in the remastering, but

¹⁵³ Guins, *Game After*, 26.

remastery requires an understanding of the entire performative turn, including how media is presented to its audience.

Once a player purchases and downloads *Reforged*, a more nuanced view begins to take shape. In the settings menu of *Reforged*, there is a submenu to allow players to change the graphics settings for the game. At the bottom of this menu, there is a switch that allows players to switch between Classic and Reforged graphics settings. In effect, this means that *Warcraft III: Reforged* functions not only as a remastered game, but as an archive for its original game. This function is not an addition to the game from a later date, but in fact has been in the game since *Reforged* was first released in January 2020.¹⁵⁴ There are some references to this feature in contemporary reviews,¹⁵⁵ but they mostly serve to reinforce the criticisms of *Reforged*'s apparent failings. I find this interesting because it adds depth to one of the central pillars of remastery: the performative notion that the remaster overwrites the master. This is also one of the biggest complaints against remasters, and the dominant complaint against them. But *Reforged* addresses this by placing both options along-side each other. Now, the complaint leveled against something like *Star Wars: Remastered* (the audience has no choice but to accept the new) can't be made; audiences can always choose to return to *Warcraft III: Classic*. This approach crystalizes the arguments in favor of *Reforged* as failure, as there is now an active mode of comparison, and the lacking features are clear.

¹⁵⁴ Kaivax, "Warcraft III: Reforged Patch Notes - General Discussion January 28, 2020," Warcraft III: Reforged Forums, January 28, 2020, <https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/warcraft3/en/warcraft3/t/warcraft-iii-reforged-patch-notes/14023/1>.

¹⁵⁵ Marshall, "Warcraft 3."

The performative language that Activision-Blizzard uses to describe these game modes indicates a deep understanding of the performance of nostalgia. Also consider Activision-Blizzard's 2019 release, *World of Warcraft: Classic*. Like *Warcraft III: Reforged*, *World of Warcraft (WoW) Classic* is, technically, a remastering of the 2005 hit massively multiplayer game, but instead of just augmenting the audio-visual quality, *WoW Classic* turns the clock back on fifteen years of changes to the base game, restoring the player experience to exactly what it was like in 2005, only with better character models. In both instances of "Classic" gameplay, Activision-Blizzard is creating a game that performs the past for its audience.

Classic Vs. Reforged: An Analysis

Understanding the criticisms of *Warcraft III: Reforged* requires a detailed analysis of the games' actual performance. For comparison between both *Warcraft III Classic* and *Reforged*, I walked through two separate scenarios from the game's main campaign: "Chasing Visions," the first mission from the tutorial "Exodus of the Horde," and "The Culling," the sixth mission from the games' human campaign, "The Scourge of Lordaeron" and the mission showcased in 2018 as proof of *Reforged*'s potential. The first of these missions represents the first experience players would have with either version of *Warcraft III*, while "The Culling" was showcased for its various changes to the graphics, gameplay, and continuity of the game. I played both missions first using the games' classic mode, before turning on the reforged game.

This playthrough confirmed one of the most prevalent critiques of the games' release, still present two years later, which was that of the in-game video montages. While the games' opening film was a showcase of improved textures and rendering, the films that begin both

campaigns are identical in both *Classic* and *Reforged* mode. There is a sharp decrease in the sharpness and smoothness of textures and details in these clips that indicate they are, in fact, the same films that released with *Classic*. This matches with the reviews from 2020 that called out the surprising lack of changes, indicating that in the two years since the game was released, an effort on Activision-Blizzard's part to improve the game were not spent on improving the reused assets of the game.

In a side-by-side comparison between *Classic* and *Reforged*, the graphic augmentations are readily apparent. Though the maps of both instances of "Chasing Visions" are identical, the appearance of *Classic* has a definite angularity that *Reforged* does not share. The animated picture of Thrall, the protagonist of this campaign, shows a green skinned fanged orc with long dark black hair braided along both sides of his face. His eyes are white ovals, while his face has a very boxy and shallow appearance. Thrall's image in *Reforged*, on the other hand, is a crisper image that displays Thrall's features in intricate detail. His wrinkled brow is deeper and more pronounced, his tusks are longer and more numerous, and his eyes have pupils. More than enhancing what is there, Thrall's appearance has been augmented and changed by the remastering. His hair no longer covers his ears, which are now pierced, and rather than a short soul patch, he sports a full black beard. The biggest similarities are in Thrall's sprites (their animated character that is controlled in the game), which both feature him wearing black and gold armor, riding a dark furred wolf, and sporting a red aura that glows from beneath the wolf. (Figures 5 and 6)



Figure 5: Warcraft III: Classic. Thrall's Original Look (Photograph by Author)



Figure 6: Warcraft III: Reforged. Thrall's Remastered Look (Photograph by Author)

Not only are the graphics augmentations apparent, but these details can be picked out at even closer levels. Players in *Reforged* can zoom the camera in to detailed close ups of the character sprites and environment. When zoomed in, the intricate details of these models are crystal clear. The clothing and facial expressions of the characters can be made out, and individual flowers can be seen in the grass of the map. Comparatively, the models in classic mode cannot be picked out in as fine a detail (the zoom is far more limited) and what detail there is harder to make out. For example, Thrall's bodyguards in *Reforged* sport detailed leather straps across their chests, while in Classic they are clearly bare chested. While essentially the same, *Reforged* attempts greater immersion through its augmentation.

Looking beyond the graphical enhancements of *Reforged*, its user interface has also been remastered. *Warcraft III*, like most RTSs, requires a display that shows the player the data they require to make good decisions. The UIs of both *Reforged* and *Classic* are mostly identical, but where classic has stretched its UI across the top and bottom of the screen, *Reforged's* UI does not. Instead, what is empty space in *Classic* reveals the map behind, showcasing the improved graphics of the game. This freedom of interface continues through the game's many cutscenes: short movies using the models from the game rather than individually animated like the opening films for the game and campaigns.

Side-by-side analysis of both versions of "The Culling" showcases the most significant reworks made possible by *Reforged*, both mechanically and narratively. Both classic and remastered missions play out in the same manner: the player controls the forces of Prince Arthas, who has resolved to kill his subjects in the city of Stratholme to save them from the plague of undeath. Racing against the players is the computer-controlled demon Mal'Ganis, who also seeks

to kill the city's residents to bring them into his service. Players also are treated to several cutscenes featuring an increasingly unhinged Arthas accusing his mentor, Uther, of high treason, being abandoned by his ex-girlfriend, Jaina, and being taunted by Mal'Ganis who, in true villain fashion, escapes unscathed.

The remastering present in the current version of *Reforged* demonstrate the ability to change the performative experience of an otherwise static experience. The mise-en-scene of the cutscene in "The Culling" where Arthas relieves Uther of his command has been significantly changed between *Classic* and *Reforged*. In *Classic*, Arthas stands upon a hill, backlit despite an overwhelmingly dark sky, with Uther, Jaina, and several mounted knights in the foreground. (Figure 7) In *Reforged*, Arthas is still positioned above Uther, but Jaina stands by Arthas' side on the bridge into Stratholme, and the three are entirely alone. (Figure 8) The lighting is substantially better, and Arthas' figure can be readily seen.



Figure 7: *Warcraft III: Classic*. Arthas stands alone... (Photograph by Author)



Figure 8: *Warcraft III: Reforged*. Arthas stands alone... (Photograph by Author)

The actual gameplay performance of *Reforged* vs. *Classic* is important to understanding remasters in playable media. In playing through both missions in sequence both in *Reforged* and *Classic* mode, I was struck by the substantial drop in performance in *Reforged*. While the game was far more visually appealing, that appeal was accompanied by a noticeable slowness to the game. Moving the camera around the map, directing characters to different areas, or watching the characters engage in combat all caused the game to momentarily stutter or slow before returning to normal. Comparatively, *Classic's* gameplay performance was smooth and without any unusual jarring.

Taking the *Reforged* and *Classic* experiences hand in hand, one finds a clarity over what is constituted as a “failure” in the remastering. Part of this “failure” may also be considered

within the financial constraints of play. *Warcraft III: Reforged* costs \$29.99 US, not an insignificant amount, especially once it is remembered that this new game must be purchased by even users who had purchased the previous game. Along with this price tag is included: an identical plotline to the previous game, a graphical improvement that increased resolutions for character models but not significantly for backgrounds, and a user interface that is from the early 2000s. The fault in this performance of remastering is not just in the false promises and hewing too close to the original master, but also in the additional surcharge that has been added, creating a lack of incentive for audience members to really engage with the new performance.

Authenticity, Performativity, and Fandom in Warcraft III: Reforged

With all this talk of audience and authenticity, I return to the concept of fandom. Like *Star Wars*, fandom plays a large part of the reception and engagement in the video game industry. Importantly for *Warcraft III: Reforged*, the video game fandom has a reputation for being even more reactionary than most others. While fandoms are generally spaces built and maintained by white men, the video game fandom has actively resisted many efforts to critique it or make it more inclusive. Instances of weaponized abuse such as 2014's "Gamergate" prove that these spaces have both a deeply toxic foundation and the capability to use the tools of control and power to gatekeep these spaces.¹⁵⁶ This kind of toxicity helps understand the reactions that occurred following the release of *Warcraft III: Reforged*. Both speak to an

¹⁵⁶ Ingrid Richardson, Larissa Hjorth, and Hugh Davies, *Understanding Games and Game Cultures* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021), 60.

entitlement and expectation that is not being met by the fandom space or the industry that caters to it.

One of the avenues that the fandom's power is expressed is through a hegemonizing cultural experience that equates whiteness with gamer culture at large. Ritsema and Thakore note that when challenged with critical engagement of these whitewashed spaces, white male gamers will often aggressively shutdown said engagement by claiming "it's only a game." This attitude, connected to the ways that these worlds have been mechanically and thematically constructed, demonstrate how white supremacist culture is allowed to operate within these virtual spaces.¹⁵⁷ This is relevant to the reading of both the reception and performance of *Reforged*. While aspects of *Warcraft III* reinforce White patriarchal approaches to marginalized ethnicities and genders, they are obfuscated by the idea that as a game it has no political power. However, as discussed earlier and reinforced by Ritsema and Thakore, *Warcraft III* flows with political power. *Reforged* offers a place to engage these spaces but does not.

To productive consumers, the intent of the producer is less important than the integrity of the narrative, so texts may rightly be appropriated by fans. As fans begin to understand a text in terms of their entitlement and ownership, they often must contend with their relative powerlessness in the face of producers who may alter it in ways the fans find unsuitable.¹⁵⁸ This helps to explain the performative outrage that occurred around the release of *Reforged* and may

¹⁵⁷ Joel Ritsema and Bhoomi K. Thakore, "Sincere Fictions of Whiteness in Virtual Worlds: How Fantasy Massively Multiplayer Online Games Perpetuate Color-Blind, White Supremacist Ideology," in *Social Exclusion, Power, and Video Game Play: New Research in Digital Media and Technology*, ed. David G. Embrick, J. Talmadge Wright, and András. Lukács (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), 144, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10552022>.

¹⁵⁸ Milner, "Beyond the Virtual Realm: Fallout Fans and the Troublesome Issue of Ownership in Videogame Fandom," 223.

help to contextualize remastery at large. In instances of popular media with established fandoms, fans are at once both the object and subject of the remastering project. Fans are who are expected to purchase the remaster, but when it comes to the narrative or structure of the media, fans have little control. The *Reforged* reaction is a way for fans to process this perceived shift in ownership of the franchise. While *Warcraft III* has now become the foundations for other independent games and has developed a dedicated fan base, it is still under the control of Activision-Blizzard. Characters that originated in *Warcraft III* as secondary characters but became major elements of the *World of Warcraft* narrative were earmarked for improvements. Through a combination of changes to dialogue and cutscenes, the design team would bring these characters into line with their later iterations.¹⁵⁹ These retcons were worked on by writers who were familiar with the *Warcraft* canon.¹⁶⁰ This one change represents one of the most liberatory practices that can be engaged through remastery. The game's aesthetic experience is not only enhanced by the remaster, but also its thematic and narrative experience. Activision-Blizzard could use these continuity adjustments in the same way as George Lucas alters the continuity of *Star Wars: Remastered*, but they could also use the remaster to bring *Reforged* to a more equitable representation of characters.

Gone also were many of the “reforged” changes to the canon that would have aligned *Warcraft III* with *WoW*. While these changes had been announced, they were largely jettisoned

¹⁵⁹ Nathan Grayson, “Blizzard Is Adding World Of Warcraft References To Warcraft III: Reforged,” Kotaku Australia, November 7, 2018, <https://www.kotaku.com.au/2018/11/blizzard-is-adding-world-of-warcraft-references-to-warcraft-iii-reforged/>.

¹⁶⁰ Aron Garst, “Blizzard Hopes to Modernize Classic With ‘Warcraft III: Reforged,’” *Variety* (blog), November 5, 2018, <https://variety.com/2018/gaming/features/warcraft-3-reforged-interview-1203020041/>.

by 2019. Activision-Blizzard's official stance was that these changes were removed as a result of fan feedback after the announcement at Blizzcon 2018.¹⁶¹ An observation that might be telling of this fan criticism is that the two referenced characters from the reports about these changes are Jaina Proudmoore and Sylvanas Windrunner, two female characters that rose to prominence in the *Warcraft III* expansion, *The Frozen Throne*, and became (and remain) integral characters to the ongoing *Warcraft* storyline. They are also two of a staggeringly small number of prominent female characters in the *Warcraft* canon. While Activision-Blizzard could have added narrative structure to improve representation from a ten-year-old game, they bowed to the pressure of fans who seemed to not be interested in improvements. If true, this represents a perfect example of Milner's notion of entitlement in fandom, an entitlement that has been sharpened to shut down an actual potential reparative purpose to *Reforged* that could have rendered it an important product. Instead, *Reforged* in all its promise is an exact rehash of *Reign of Chaos* with cosmetic changes to its performance. This also confuses the problem of why exactly the game was rejected as failure by the fans, considering that it cleaved to the fandom's supposed desires. This push and pull of audience expectation and entitlement with the studio's improvements and augmentation is an important component to keep in mind, especially once turning to the narrative remains that were deemed important to keep by the fans.

¹⁶¹ Michael McWhertor, "Warcraft 3: Reforged's Story Won't Be Retconned by WoW after All," *Polygon* (blog), November 1, 2019, <https://www.polygon.com/2019/11/1/20944518/warcraft-3-reforged-story-retcon-world-of-warcraft-wow>.

Gender and Race in *Warcraft III: Reforged*

As I have attempted to demonstrate repeatedly through my case studies, if the performative turn of remastery does not challenge cultural norms and imbalanced power dynamics that were present in the original master project, it can wind up reinforcing and crystalizing them for the next generation of media. One of the continuing reinforcements engaged by the remastering of *Warcraft III: Reforged* is the bioessentialism of race that has been perpetuated through *Warcraft III's* successor, *World of Warcraft*. Melissa Monson traces the influences of essentialism in the *Warcraft* canon, exploring its intersecting origins and implications. Monson focuses racial hegemonies in video games, and *Warcraft* in particular, as a means of developing a more “authentic” gaming experience, “in other words, racial stereotyping becomes substitution for authenticity, a way of legalizing the virtual world by engendering it with the tenets of a race-based society.”¹⁶² While Monson’s observations are grounded in *World of Warcraft*, these tropes that are mentioned are drawn straight from *Warcraft III*, only to be reinscribed, beat for beat, in *Warcraft III: Reforged*. For instance, Monson cites the origins of the Undead, a playable “race” in *World of Warcraft*, as a variant of humans that succumbed to a supernatural plague. “No longer considered Human, they find themselves under constant attack by their former brothers and sisters.”¹⁶³ Arguments of othering through monstrification notwithstanding, to “perform” as an Undead is to perform as a sentient being ripped from one life and forced to create another. These origins are explored more fully in *Warcraft III*, as players

¹⁶² Melissa J. Monson, “Race-Based Fantasy Realm: Essentialism in the *World of Warcraft*,” *Games and Culture* 7, no. 1 (January 2012): 53, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412012440308>.

¹⁶³ Monson, 59.

can experience both sides of this divide. First in the mission, “The Culling,” discussed above, and then as part of the campaign story that deals with the ramifications of Arthas’ massacre of Stratholme and the development of the Undead as a unique group. Because of these connections between *Reforged*’s origins of *WoW*’s races, the arguments of bioessentialism still carry water. The blending between *WoW*, *Classic*, and *Reforged* becomes even more apparent once these arguments are considered, as all three games speak to the same performed experience but through two different lenses. The first lens, represented by *Classic* and *Reforged*, is the top down, big picture view of cultures represented through construction, research, and conflict. The second, represented by *WoW*, is a reflexive, immersive view of living, adventuring, and performing individually within those cultures. While the observations of the latter are important, I have been and will continue to focus on the former.

Warcraft’s cultural performativity does not stop with bioessentialism. Monson points to *WoW*’s racial encoding through behavioral and mechanical characteristics. Different races are given different intrinsic abilities or skills that no other race can replicate, motivating players to pursue paths that fall along racial lines.¹⁶⁴ While Monson’s analysis is focused on the ways that these characteristics alter individual performances, as befitting for a Roleplaying Game such as *WoW*, some of these behavioral and mechanical characteristics can be felt in the architecture of *Warcraft III: Reforged*. Each playable faction (Orcish Horde, Human Alliance, Night Elves, and Undead Scourge) has strengths and weaknesses that are on display in the gameplay of *Warcraft III*. Activision-Blizzard themselves refer users back to a website created for the original games to

¹⁶⁴ Monson, 60.

get an understanding of these mechanics. For instance, the following is listed as the “Racial Identity” of the Alliance, offering the various advantages of playing them in game:

The Human Alliance is a conglomeration of Humans, Elves, and Dwarves. They are the most versatile army in Warcraft III, with good ground and air troops, excellent siege capability, and powerful spellcasters.

Peasant Militia

The workers of the Human Alliance can be converted into Militia when the need arises. You can transform Peasants individually by clicking on the Call to Arms icon on each Peasant's command card or convert them en masse by ringing the Call to Arms bell at your Town Hall. Peasants will then rally to the Town Hall, where they don armor and wield axes to fight invaders. After a set amount of time, Militia will revert back to Peasants, or you can prematurely end their military tenure at the Town Hall with the Back to Work bell.

Cooperative Building

Humans can speed up the construction of a building by tasking extra Peasants to repair the structure. While the building is under construction, each additional Peasant assigned to repair the structure will ensure that the task is finished much faster.

Sturdy Construction

Humans can improve the armor and durability of their structures at the Lumber Mill with the Improved Masonry technologies. Each upgrade provides increasing armor and hit points to the Alliance buildings.¹⁶⁵

The dissonance of a “racial identity” of a collection of Elves, Humans, and Dwarves is already pretty resounding. More than this, the Alliance seems to be circling cooperation as their primary identity. Applying Monson’s critique, the implication of these identities is that other factions in *Warcraft III* produce shoddier buildings, do not cooperate in important projects, and that their civilian communities are helpless in the face of attack. Also integral to this description is that from out of cooperation comes versatility. The alliance seems to have solid access to everything,

¹⁶⁵ “Warcraft III - Humans,” accessed September 13, 2022, <http://classic.battle.net/war3/human/>.

from magic to combat to air units. This is often a very common trope amongst humans in fantasy worlds, who are most often coded as western European, thereby equating the performance of whiteness with a “default.” This also means that players new to *Warcraft III* are likely to focus on humans in starting the game, meaning this performance is the introduction to their experience, and coloring their relationship with the other factions.

Comparing this summary to that of the Orcish Horde reveals how deeply rooted some of these identities are in racialized language. Like the Human Alliance, the Horde is a collection of different racial groups, each quite distinct from one another. However, in terms of game play mechanics and colloquially, all these groups are clustered around the dominant racial group: the green-skinned and tusked orcs. The original *Warcraft III* website describes the gameplay style of the orcs as follows:

The Horde possesses the game's most powerful ground units, including the savage Grunt and gargantuan Tauren. The Orcish Horde has modest air and ranged capabilities, but their true strength lies in their brute strength and raw melee power. Even the magic of their spellcasters is designed to enhance their frontline troops.

Spiked Barricades

The buildings of the Orcish Horde can be outfitted with spikes that damage all enemy melee units that attack them. There are multiple upgrades, each empowering the spikes to do more damage. The Spiked Barricades upgrades are researched at the War Mill.

Pillage

Certain Orc units can be upgraded to salvage gold and lumber when attacking enemy buildings. Once trained, Pillage enables Peons, Grunts, and Raiders to add gold to your coffers every time they hit an enemy building.

Protective Burrows

The Orcish food supply building is the Orc Burrow; however, it also doubles as a defensive structure. When garrisoned with Peons,

it can provide defense against land and air units in the form of a ranged attack.¹⁶⁶

Performatively, the orcs have mechanically predisposed to aggressive action. Where their constructive potential is limited compared to the human Alliance, they tear down what others build and are rewarded for doing so. Yet despite this, their resource gathering units (Peons) are largely helpless, relying upon the safety of buildings if attacked. Monson maps ethnic identities atop many of the races of *Warcraft*, including those found alongside the Orcs in *Warcraft III*. In particular, she finds the Tauren (a race of large bipedal bovines) as mapped as Native Americans, while Trolls (a race of blue skinned, tusked jungle fighters) are an amalgam of Afro-Caribbean cultures.¹⁶⁷ These identities have their roots within *Warcraft III*, and can clearly be seen in the influences of both buildings that the orcs can construct, such as the Tauren Totem, and units that can be recruited, such as the Troll Witch Doctor. While Orcs are not specifically coded to an ethnic identity, they do have certain markers that place them firmly in the camp of the “other” when compared to the “white” performing Humans. These performances are not only part and parcel of the mechanical and aesthetic experiences of *Warcraft III*, but they have also been further cemented by the augmentation of the remastering process. While *Reforged*’s remastering focuses solely on the graphic augmentations to the game, as discussed early the game play experience is by and large identical. The Horde is still rewarded for tearing down buildings, and their own constructions are sharp and crude, and to perform well the game requires you to be aggressive and adversarial. Racialized identities of the Tauren and the Trolls are not only

¹⁶⁶ “Warcraft III - Orcs,” accessed September 13, 2022, <http://classic.battle.net/war3/orc/>.

¹⁶⁷ Monson, “Race-Based Fantasy Realm,” 62.

present, but they are also visually enhanced, giving them greater clarity and value in the audience experience of the game. Everything that was deemed appropriate for gamers in the early 2000s has made the nearly twenty-year time jump to reinforce conceptions from the original audience, while also serving to inundate a new generation with the same problematic depictions of race and gender.

The remastery of *Warcraft III: Reforged* even serves to reinforce some of these essentialized tropes through its enhancements. Consider the following description for the redesigned model of the Elf Sorceress, a unit recruitable by the Human Alliance.

As terrifying as they are vain, elven sorceresses whimsically turn the tide of battle by slowing the fabric of time around their enemies, [sic] or turning them into helpless sheep. Baaaa!

The new Sorceress proudly displays her allegiance and the Eye of Dalaran on her cloak, and wears stylish, beautiful armor. But a Sorceress isn't just content with manipulating space-time; it's important to do so while looking fabulous. She goes as far as checking her nails while idling to ensure that her fashion sense is as devastating to her enemies as her spells.¹⁶⁸

A magic user with the ability to slow time or turn enemies into sheep, the sorceress' appearance is the central focus of the remastered *Warcraft III: Reforged*. Her model has been given more detail to demonstrate her magical pedigree through the addition of the Eye of Dalaran, the mage led city in Warcraft canon. Other additions to the sorceress do not focus on the sorceress' abilities but her aesthetic appearance. She performs a particular avenue of femininity that seems

¹⁶⁸ "Tales from the Smithy: Reforging the Humans," accessed September 13, 2022, <https://news.blizzard.com/en-us/blizzard/23150108/tales-from-the-smithy-reforging-the-humans>.

to hit upon patriarchal expectations of beauty at any cost. Now, this could and can be an acceptable performance of femininity, with the major problem that there are no other presentable options. Unlike in *World of Warcraft*, where a player would be able to choose their character's gender identity, there are no other presentations available to the sorceress. Every sorceress that a player creates on the map uses the same model of an elven woman who, when idling, will check her nails. Critiques of the hyper-sexualization of women in gaming are not rare, and indeed since Gamergate have taken on an urgency that was previously lacking. Activision-Blizzard's remastering process does not seem to have picked up upon this. Rather, they give the impression that the remastering needs to engage its audience in *the same* way as the original from 2002, hyper-sexualization included.

Something that should be reinforced at this juncture is the reception and engagement of *Warcraft III: Reforged*. The games' critics were focused predominately on the failed promise of remastering that was offered from two years earlier. The material that was at its core, such as the gender and race essentialism that infuses these examples, was not engaged. If anything, the call and clamor for remastering *Warcraft III* seems to accept and embrace much of the material that I am endeavoring to critique. What is important about that is that remastery has the power to address and change the legacy of media. In this regard, *Warcraft III: Reforged* fails on another level.

As I've discussed before, remastery brings the historical moment of the original with it through augmentation, reinforcing or reintroducing biases or instances of inequality in unintended ways. This also includes the biases that influence the present remastering process. The video game industry, being significantly younger than the film or music industry, is

approaching these two periods after a matter of years rather than decades. This is also in part due to the fast-paced technological developments and obsolescence that drives the industry. This means that the performative turn of remastery deals with the historical moments that are far closer iterations in video games than with other media.

Activision-Blizzard's approach to the performance of race and gender in *Reforged* is tied to its position of authority as a game studio. Richardson et al acknowledge that diversity and inclusion are beginning to be engaged in the traditionally white patriarchal gaming industry. However, they recognize that the model that would help this process is rather limited in its scope. Independent game studios, companies that are typically smaller than the larger AAA studios such as Activision-Blizzard, have been more capable of integrating diversity and inclusion on racial and gender lines.¹⁶⁹ This observation goes hand in hand with Newman's observation of mass production vs. preservation in video games. Considering that remastery is a method of preservation through mass production, AAA studios like Activision-Blizzard are driven in their recreation of the game by financial motivations. This includes the reperformance of race and gender that would require significant investment, both financial and emotional, from the development team. It is also worth noting here that in the years since the release of *Reforged*, serious allegations of sexual harassment and an endemic hostile workplace have surfaced at Activision-Blizzard, including multiple lawsuits filed by the state of California.¹⁷⁰ This news

¹⁶⁹ Richardson, Hjorth, and Davies, *Understanding Games and Game Cultures*, 48.

¹⁷⁰ Maeve Allsup, "Activision Blizzard Sued Over 'Frat Boy' Culture, Harassment (1)," *Bloomberg Law*, July 21, 2021, <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/daily-labor-report/activision-blizzard-sued-by-california-over-frat-boy-culture>; Nicole Carpenter, "Another Activision Blizzard Worker Files Sexual Harassment Lawsuit - Polygon," *Polygon*, October 13, 2022, <https://www.polygon.com/23402323/activision-blizzard-sexual-harassment-lawsuit-discrimination>.

helps understand not just the advertised and critical failures of *Reforged*, it also goes to demonstrate the creative context for *Reforged* and speaks to what might have been its idealized reception.

Amidst the discussion of failure through remastery, *Reforged* has several points that seem to indicate a “failure.” While technically an augmentation, and therefore a successful remastering project on one account, remastery needs to consider not just the performance of the technology, but its reception from its audience. It is through this relationship that remastery can determine failure or success in the same way that a theatrical performance might: determine what it was the artist and producer were trying to do, see if they accomplished this goal, and if this goal was worth accomplishing. The stated objectives of *Warcraft III: Reforged* were to bring a classic video game up to the standards of its modern descendants. This it did to an extent, but it did not go as far as the fandom were assured it would in this regard. But what the fandom may have deemed successful about the remaster, namely a commitment to preserving the gameplay experience, serves as a failure of a different sort. This is a more ephemeral failure, as it is more an acknowledgement that a remaster cannot live up to its restorative historiographic potential by cutting too closely to the past.

Games and Control

Wrapped up in the conversations of remastering and production in video games are the old refrains of power and control that have been woven within my other case studies. It has already been demonstrated how *Reforged* continues to inscribe deeply troubling performances of race and gender, but there are mechanisms of control that stretch even farther. Dyer-Witford

and De Peuter see games, and video games, as vehicles for maintaining the mechanics of Empire. Borrowing from Empire Theory, Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter define those mechanics largely upon the lines of hyper-capitalism. The systems that Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter are focused on are “global ownership, privatized property, coercive class relations, military operations, and radical struggle.”¹⁷¹ Above all, the importance of labor, both bio- and virtual, in the game system. Their analysis lines up well with my understandings of how remastery functions within the wider system of power and control. I would only endeavor to add an extra layer of intersectionality through an acknowledgement and critique in race. After all, the systems of Hyper-capitalist bio-labor that Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter critique comes out of Capitalism’s dependence upon the institution of slavery and the exploitation of the Global South. While my analysis so far has been predominately focused on the ways that critical race theory can inform remastery, turning to video games allows me to add an additional focus of how race and capital intersection in the conversation of who exactly is benefiting from the augmentation of media.

Through the game industry, familiar concerns of power and authority return to the conversation of remastery. Intellectual property, cultural appropriation and hybridization, and the manipulation of cognitive function to produce capital are all hallmarks of the way the game industry has been able to accumulate power and control the market.¹⁷² Intellectual property as power has emerged repeatedly through both the conversation surrounding *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* and *Star Wars: Remastered*. Many of these methods of accumulation are actively at

¹⁷¹ Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig De Peuter, *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*, Electronic Mediations 29 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), xxix.

¹⁷² Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter, xxix.

work in *Warcraft III: Reforged*. Between Activision-Blizzard's updated EULA to maintain creative control, the unsettling racial and gender appropriation and fetishization in the character designs and game development, *Reforged* is attempting to assert hegemonic controls over its audience. While the motivations of these controls are up for debate, following Dyer-Witthford and De Peuter's argument would mean that they are in place predominately for financial gain. While some of these controls are holdovers from *Reign of Chaos*, *Reforged* does offer Activision-Blizzard an opportunity to augment them based on fifteen years of experience in the gaming industry. With the ways that *Reign of Chaos*' world editor has been used to spawn new revenue streams for companies that are not Activision-Blizzard, their updated EULA makes business sense. The EULA is also important to the performance of *Reforged*, as it is required to engage with the performance of the game itself; if you do not sign the agreement that places all creative control in the hands of the company, you cannot play their game.

While this analysis of control illustrates the powers at work through remastery in games, there is still an optimism in what can be achieved. Important to Dyer-Witthford and De Peuter's analysis of games and Empire is, like many game studies scholars, they do not see the fight as lost. Rather, they see that by calling attention to the interrelationship between virtual games and empire, that virtual games can be reconceived as liberatory media. At its core, this dissertation shares the same value. By understanding how power and control is performed through technology, remastery can reconceive these relationships towards a more equitable engagement of preservation and distribution of older media.

Remastering may be permanently tainted by its affiliation to the power structures that enable and profit off it. Remastery can point to those controls that operate through the

performance of media, but in all three of case studies so far, the remastering process has had the potential to offer a historiographic or equitable corrective that could expose those power dynamics where they may be. *Reforged* represents the third example of a remaster failing to achieve what I believe technological augmentation of media can accomplish. If that is the case, perhaps there are other more suitable media experience that can better embody remastery's acknowledgement of power correctives.

Demastered Games as Reparative Performance

Like the film fandom, video game fandom has engaged in a rather creative misuse of the remastered media. Unlike film fandom, this misuse moves not to restoring old games the way they used to be, but instead seeks to “demaster” modern games. Demastered games take either a modern game or intellectual property and use a combination of older models and different textures to create the impression of a game using older technology. One of the more recent examples of this genre is *Bloodborne: PSX*. This game, coded by Lilith Walther, takes the 2015 action role-playing game *Bloodborne*, originally released by FromSoftware on PlayStation 4, and recreates the first act of the game as it would have appeared on the original PlayStation, originally released in 1994. Walther's website for the game features multiple pictures of the game in all its boxy glory on a backdrop that would appear right at home on an Angelfire website from the 90s. The pictures themselves give the appearance of *Bloodborne* as it would have looked if it had been designed using the gaming technology of the 90s. Walther's promotional material on the site talks up the games' “10 unique hunter weapons” (*Bloodborne* features over 26) and its “next generation 3D experience that blends RPG and Action in a way you've never

seen before.”¹⁷³ Like *Warcraft III: Reforged*, *Bloodborne: PSX* and other demastered games are attempting to trade upon the performance of nostalgia. However, unlike *Warcraft III: Reforged*, there is no financial motivation. It is a labor of love, like *Star Wars: DEED*, falling within the realm of De Kosnik’s fan time and production. Walther has even continued her development using the *Bloodborne PSX*, creating games that use the same engines but with different mechanics. Her most recent game, *Bloodborne Kart*, creates a racing game in the style of Nintendo’s *Mario Kart* using the polygonal graphics and models of *Bloodborne PSX*.

The demastered experience also bridges a gap between the remastered and emulated game performances. Like emulation through ROMs, demastered games are focused on the gameplay experience rather than a specific mechanical performance that would have completed the audience reception. Like remastered games, demastered games also trade on a nostalgia for a game experience, but in a formula that is the reverse of the remastered game.

Demastered games present an interesting comparison to remastered games beyond how their naming conventions may call attention to their parallel processes. Much of the aesthetic performance of demastered games are shared by the larger independent game movement. Jesper Juul, discussing the variety of independent games available, notes that they largely draw upon the styles and motifs of the earlier game industry as an act of anti-modernism. Whether they are adopting pixelated graphics or feature simple mechanics that would be found in earlier games, independent games can be implicitly or explicitly rejecting the conventions of the modern AAA

¹⁷³ Lilith Walther, “BloodbornePSX by LWMedia,” itch.io, accessed August 31, 2022, <https://b0tster.itch.io/bbpsx>.

game industry.¹⁷⁴ The demastered and independent game movements seek to return to the most basic elements of games to respect the history of the industry. They are, in some ways, using older tools to tell new stories. Remastery, as a tool of control for the AAA game companies like Activision-Blizzard, seeks the opposite: to tell old stories with new tools. This approach lacks a creativity in adaptation that is present in demastered and independent games, a creativity that might disguise or mitigate faults in the nostalgic performance. This is not to say that demastered and independent games are not playing in the realm of nostalgia. Juul notes that independent games largely perform between two poles of nostalgic affect. “They are in constant tension between a heavy-handed restorative nostalgia, desiring to return to a somewhat imaginary authentic past of video games...and a more reflective nostalgia, merely using the past creatively and selectively to make something new.”¹⁷⁵ This balance is key, as remastered games only operate within the context of restorative nostalgia. Conversely, *Bloodborne: PSX* fits snugly between these two extremes. Demastered games, through their value as expressions video game history, offer a more reparative model than that of remastered games.

This development of demastered games is promising, given the reinforcement of hegemonic power structures that have been demonstrated throughout my exploration of remastery. *Warcraft III: Reforged* does more than just passively reinforce social inequalities of its original performance, it doubles down on them. This complete inability to craft a reparative performance, coupled with Activision-Blizzard’s inability to live up to its promises of an

¹⁷⁴ Jesper Juul, *Handmade Pixels: Independent Video Games and the Quest for Authenticity*, Unofficial Guides Junior (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2019), 8.

¹⁷⁵ Juul, 28.

enhanced play experience, are the factors that lead to *Warcraft III Reforged* to be considered not just a commercial failure of remastery, but also a failure of the potential remastery can present.

Chapter 4: Re-Embodied: *Elements of Oz* and the Potential of Remastered Theatre

Throughout this dissertation, I have built a theoretical groundwork to understand digital remastering as a performative construct. I have analyzed case studies using this intervention, and from those observations refined and focused my theory of remastery. In all this discussion, an understanding of the concept of remastery emerges. The remaster in any format is dependent on the acts of restoration, enhancement, and opaque immediacy. The performative turn of these acts is what enables the concept of remastery. Despite my engagement in performance terminology, there is still a medium I have yet to properly analyze: theatre.

It may be considered that live theatre and performance does not quite match to the same depth of digital entanglement as the other media I have analyzed. As with much of human endeavor, the history of theatre is one that has been shaped by technological innovation, augmentation, and enhancement. Recent theatrical and dramaturgical scholarship has brought this relationship to the foreground, but in the field of media studies there has been a decades old comparison between newer media and theatre. While digital media and technology has become more and more utilized by theatre at large, the avant-garde theatre companies such as The Wooster Group and The Builders Association are some of its longest and most ardent supporters. To understand how remastery can function within the perspective of theatre, I will turn to an example that embodies many of the technological and performative turns that I have discussed: The Builders Association's production *Elements of Oz*.

Returning to the key elements of remastery, *Elements of Oz* draws upon technical enhancement, restoration, and opaque immediacy to develop its unique aesthetic. True to its name, The Builders present *Elements of Oz* as a deconstructed form of Victor Fleming's 1929 film, *The Wizard of Oz*. First produced in 2016, the action of the play unfolds as reconfigured portions of the original film. Most of the "greatest hits" of the film are brought to stage including Dorothy's arrival in Oz, Dorothy meeting the Scarecrow and the Tinman, and the attack of the flying monkeys. Three actors, Moe Angelos, Hannah Heller, and Sean Donovan, stand in for every character portrayed on stage. Throughout each of these scenes, a camera crew follows the action around, projecting the performance to displays onstage. This sort of ghosting is present as more than just a framing device. Dorothy's entrance into Oz consists of a conscious doubling: a technicolored Dorothy shadows one who is dressed and lit in a muted sepia tone. The staging practices use Fleming's work as a point of departure: a master tape upon which they derive their meaning. From that master, they begin to reconstruct the pieces in ways that are at once instantly recognizable and distinctly different from what has come before. With technical acts of remastery, there is always the clear tether to the original media. However, the original media has been in some way reordered or manipulated. This is exactly the relationship *Elements of Oz* has with its inspirational material. While the narrative and aesthetic of *The Wizard of Oz* remains an integral part of *Elements*, The Builders have stepped into and begun to mediate the film for a specific aesthetic purpose.

Elements of Oz represents a synthesis of previously discussed forms of remastering. It uses the lessons of digital augmentation found in film production to create and foster different perspectives on live and recorded performance. Similarly, the same takeaways found in the

discussion of digital audio remastering, especially for older productions, can be seen in the relationship between *Elements of Oz* and its source material. Lastly, it plays within the realm of authenticity and ownership, exploring the relationship of a remaster to both the original and its audience.

Elements of Oz returned the stage in December 2019 as a practiced reproduction of a remastery. What is different in the second production to the first is the performative present and its effect on the restored behaviors that comprise the play. In a sense, the Builders Association attempted what audio-visual technicians may consider superfluous; they produced a re-remaster. The actors returned to their scripts and blocking, years divorced from their reality, and attempted to remaster their embodied practices. The remastery that is present in 2019 is recognizable from that of 2016, but these subtle alterations make obsolete the past performance. Perhaps then, it is worth considering if each theatrical production, regardless of mechanical augmentation, could not be some exercise in remastery.

Elements of Oz, through its foregrounding of digital and alternating temporality, presents as a study of remastery through a theatrical medium. While the theatrical remaster may fall under the larger umbrella of adaptation, the key to differentiating remastery as a distinct category within this field lies in enhancement through technology. It is this dependency that the mixed media productions of the Builder's Association play upon. *Elements of Oz* represents an example of what I am referring to as "Remastered Theatre."

New Media and Theatre

Remastered Theatre, Digital Theatre, and Cyborg Theatre

My conception of remastered theatre is informed by several other styles of postmodern theatre. Overarching the entire field is the idea of “digital performance:” a way of understanding how new media can be used to create dance, interactive artistic experiences, and performance artwork. Under this umbrella sit the theatre practices that have been directly influenced by new media, the most relevant to my work being cyborg theatre and digital theatre. Cyborg theatre is a term developed by Jennifer Parker-Starbuck to understand how multimedia theatre can be understood through the fragmented biological and mechanical body that encompasses the cyborg. For Parker-Starbuck, cyborg theatre is one that is concerned with how the physical bodies of performers and audiences have integrated with technology through the 21st century, creating hybrid “subjects” that reframe the subject/object dichotomy.¹⁷⁶ For the purposes of my research, I am drawing my definitions of digital theatre from Nadja Masura’s work *Digital Theatre: The Making and Meaning of Live Mediated Performance, US & UK 1990-2020*. Masura recognizes digital theatre as distinct from both digital performance and traditional theatre through four conditions: “a limited interactivity of message, the presence of verbal communication, a co-present audience and actor, and the existence of digital technology in the central creation of the performance (not as an archival tool).”¹⁷⁷ Masura recognizes cyborg

¹⁷⁶ Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, *Cyborg Theatre: Corporeal/Technological Intersections in Multimedia Performance, Performance Interventions* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4.

¹⁷⁷ Nadja Masura, *Digital Theatre: The Making and Meaning of Live Mediated Performance, US & UK 1990-2020*, 2020, 6.

theatre as a kindred form of digital theatre, with both recognizing the importance of the live/mediated dialectic, but sees cyborg theatre as less discriminating in its use of non-digital media.¹⁷⁸

Remastered theatre serves as a subset of digital performance, not entirely dissimilar from either cyborg or digital theatre. It requires an interaction between mediated and live components. As with other forms of remastered media, it requires technological augmentation or enhancement to the performance. It builds upon the four pillars of digital theatre, but the augmented or technically enhanced components do not necessarily have to be digitally focused. All that is required is that they represent an evolution or progression of technology from a previous work. I do not see remastered theatre as entirely distinct from either digital or cyborg theatre, but rather a subset of a subset. It is possible that remastered theatre can even bridge the gap that Masura notes between the two forms by not relying upon digital media. As I discuss *Elements of Oz*, I refer to both its cyborg and digital elements. I draw these distinctions to acknowledge that they are not interchangeable but complimentary. What remastered theatre adds to the conversation is a renewed focus not only on the technology, but also the iterative nature of the performances themselves. While digital and cyborg theatre can and do focus on works entirely conceived as original works, remastered theatre plays upon a kind of adaptation or restoration of a past piece of work. Other scholars have discussed this possibility of creating original works through creative (mis)use of original work. While commenting on the work of Sherrie Levine, Rosalind Krause notes that the act of replication in art shatters the precepts of modernism, offering

¹⁷⁸ Masura, 10.

Barthes' Pastiche (creating the copy of a copy) as a new way forward in creating art.¹⁷⁹ The remastered theatre may not be a direct descendent of the original work, but as with other remastered media, that does not matter as much as the new work's dependence upon the old for meaning and significance.

The idea of master/remaster is not an unheard-of discussion within live performance. Indeed, as the postdramatic theatre has given way to digital and new media theatre, technology has begun to shift theatre's appreciation of what may be considered "text." Jennifer Parker-Starbuck discusses the Wooster Group's 2007 production of *Hamlet* with a similar language to my discussion of *Elements of Oz*. Parker-Starbuck recognizes The Wooster Group's use of Richard Burton's 1964 production of *Hamlet* as a sort of "master text." This master text presents and performs alongside the physical bodies of The Wooster Group, drawing comparisons between the analog, which Parker-Starbuck terms "an imperfect copy," and the digital, which creates identical performances.¹⁸⁰

There is a third possible avenue with which to consider remastered theatre. In 2016, Matthew Causey proposed the possibility of *Postdigital Performance*. Like with cyborg theatre, postdigital performance is concerned with the positioning and identity of subjects and objects within performance. Where postdigital performance differs is in its interest in the critique of the networks of control present in in the technologized subject.¹⁸¹ The "post" in postdigital also

¹⁷⁹ Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985), 170.

¹⁸⁰ Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, "The Play-within-the-Film-within-the-Play's the Thing: Re-Transmitting Analogue Bodies in the Wooster Group's *Hamlet*," *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 5, no. 1 (June 2009): 25, https://doi.org/10.1386/padm.5.1.23_1.

¹⁸¹ Matthew Causey, "Postdigital Performance," *Theatre Journal* 68, no. 3 (2016): 431.

conjures up connections to buzzwords within the avant-garde like postmodern, post-theatrical, and post-Brechtian. Most importantly to remastered theatre, Causey lays out several modalities that he sees affecting the aesthetics of postdigital theatre. Amongst these modalities is an emphasis on replication and simulation at the expense of traditional representation. This is an important distinction for the technological enchantment and restoration that accompanies remastering, and Causey even states, “The digital copy of the original is another original, and identical replication.”¹⁸² In this way, postdigital performance is less of a distinct set, but rather a descriptor to understand the kind of performance that necessarily emerges from digital, cyborg, and remastered theatre.

Theatre, Media Studies, and the Avant-Garde

Understanding remastered theatre requires a historical discussion of theatre and media at large. Media studies and the modern Avant-Garde, within which The Builders Association holds a prominent position, have developed parallel to each other for the last sixty years. Scholars such as Marshall McLuhan crafted theories that were used to build the field because of his keen appreciation of the role electronic technologies and media would come to play in civilization. Of particular interest for my research is McLuhan’s own use of theatrical terminology. McLuhan’s delineation of the “global theatre” contrasts with the simultaneous developments in the avant-garde theatre of the 1960s. These developments were championed by scholar practitioners such as Richard Schechner and performance groups like The Living Theatre. While McLuhan was

¹⁸² Causey, 434.

attempting to interject theatre into media philosophy, the Avant-Garde was approaching the problem from the other direction: injecting technological and mediated experiences into their open theatre. Like tunnel drillers missing each other by inches, it is not until the further development of post-dramatic and digital theatre like The Builders Association that McLuhan's theories can be fully understood through performative language. To shed light on how The Builders Association operates, it is important to examine the value McLuhan put in the language of performance, the value the Avant-Garde put in the language of media, and how the two camps misunderstood and diverged from each other.

McLuhan's global theatre is less a single unifying observation and more a collection of theoretical musings. The global theatre's predecessor, McLuhan's "Global Village," is meant as the metaphor for the reconfiguring of western civilization around improving communication and media technologies. For McLuhan, the global village meant that the world was no longer oriented around a center and margin, but instead is organized as a single "organic whole."¹⁸³ From the present perch in the age of instant communication, this observation is easy to pass by, but it is an important point in the relationship between McLuhan and the theatre. This is because it provides an intriguing overlap in ideals, and one way to see this overlap is by comparing it briefly with the ideals that Richard Schechner formulated in his 1963 essay "Intentions, Problems, and Proposals." In that essay, Schechner dreams of a "decentralized theatre." For him, this theatre is one that recognizes the vibrancy of localized performance cultures while providing

¹⁸³ McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 102.

a method or area of exchange and exposure to other theatres.¹⁸⁴ Schechner's decentralized theatre offers to turn American theatre into an "organic whole," but his vision is limited in a way that McLuhan's is not. McLuhan hopes that this organic whole allows for people to communicate on their own terms. People can "come from wherever they are" and with the possibilities of global communication never have to leave the comfort of their own communities to engage with other world views. Schechner's description of a "decentralized theatre" still revolves around a sort of hub/spoke system of regional theatres making a pilgrimage of sorts to New York City to gain exposure for themselves and to other regional styles, a model he borrows from French artist Planchon.¹⁸⁵ This approach of decentralization through centralization is at odds with the possibilities presented by McLuhan's global theatre, and focus on a distinctly Eurocentric model of theatre and performance that Schechner seems to be operating under. While both Schechner and McLuhan have similar goals, Schechner is still bound in the reality of a physical theatre that requires people to be in the place and time of performance.

Clearly, then, while the Global Village is a useful metaphor to understand the development of theatre, there is some room for improvement. McLuhan's own work tacitly acknowledges the imperfect metaphor of the global village as the term is later abandoned in favor of "the global theatre." This metaphor is first referenced in the 1970 work *From Cliché to Archetype* and reveals a great deal about McLuhan's use of theatre terminology. For starters McLuhan's observations are based in a classic theatrical tradition, imposing the "proscenium

¹⁸⁴ Richard Schechner, "Intentions, Problems, Proposals," *The Tulane Drama Review* 7, no. 4 (Summer 1963): 21.

¹⁸⁵ Schechner, 21.

arch” as the marker of the transition from the “global village” to the global theatre.¹⁸⁶ While this image would certainly be relatable to those who are familiar with what Schechner refers to as “Broadway theatre,” it is by no means the only expression of the performative form when McLuhan puts his philosophy to paper. Brechtian style theatre that favored alternative spaces and the dismantling of the proscenium’s fourth wall had been developing for decades, and the 60s presented this style with new opportunities for popularity. Work such as The Living Theatre’s *The Connection* experiments with a “formal slipperiness”¹⁸⁷ to the fourth wall with an international audience. Though the proscenium arch still arch to this day provides an understandable metaphor, it does not quite line up with either the developments of progressive theatre during McLuhan’s time or even his exact expectations of what “global theatre” might mean.

Additional investigation of McLuhan’s “global theatre” further muddies his metaphor. McLuhan seems less interested in the delineation offered by fourth wall theatre and more a form of “total theatre” or what Schechner may refer to as “environmental theatre.” In an interview entitled “The Global Theatre,” McLuhan refines his position, “There are no spectators with global theatre-only actors...the present demand is for roleplaying—for a total involvement in one’s work, so that work itself becomes play and leisure. This is the privilege enjoyed by the artist.”¹⁸⁸ First, this final statement betrays a certain view of performance and art that makes it

¹⁸⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *From Cliche to Archetype* (New York, N.Y: Simon & Schuster, 1971), 12.

¹⁸⁷ Erika Munk, “Only Connect: The Living Theatre and Its Audiences,” in *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*, ed. James Martin Harding and Cindy Rosenthal (Ann Arbor, Mich: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 39.

¹⁸⁸ Marshall McLuhan, “The Global Theatre,” *Ekistics* 32, no. 190 (September 1971): 183.

challenging to engage with the rest of McLuhan's argument. Though envious of artists for their apparent ability to blend work, leisure and play, this blending has a certain odor of late Capitalism, where one should strive to convert their leisure into labor and thus capital.

The prospect of a world with only actors seems at odds with the initial proscenium arch McLuhan has used to set up the Global Theatre. Even when actors emerge from behind the arch to intermingle with the audience, there is some kind of delineation. However, there is room here to consider that McLuhan used the word "spectator" rather than "audience." While grammatically interchangeable, the two terms open the possibility to amend the "global theatre" to be one of no spectators, but instead one where everyone is engaged as either audience or actor. These two roles are of equal value and neither acknowledge a passivity, but instead an active "role" to play that McLuhan recognizes as vital to the global theatre. This nuance opens McLuhan's argument through the lens of performance theory. Consider, for example, The Living Theatre's *Paradise Now*. Written shortly before "The Global Theatre," *Paradise Now* may be an example of McLuhan's "only actors" theatre with its engaging and pervasive mise-en-scene. The audience are encouraged to take up the same space as the actors, serving as participants to "fill the temple" of the performance.¹⁸⁹ This is perhaps the closest point in the opposing tunnels of Theatre and Media, and exactly where the seeds of remastered theatre can be planted. McLuhan's Global theatre engages performance to understand how media will bring together and engage an active experience for all. If remastery is an exercise in power, then McLuhan's

¹⁸⁹ The Living Theatre, "'Paradise Now': Notes," *The Drama Review: TDR* 13, no. 3 (1969): 97.

Global Theatre is an attempt to democratize through technology; to redistribute power into the hands of an active and enthusiastic audience.

Further critical engagement of McLuhan's global theatre raises questions about his definitions and delineations surrounding performance. Laureano Ralón discusses the implications of McLuhan's global theatre in "From Global Village to Global Theatre: The Late McLuhan as a Philosopher of Difference, Sense, and Multiplicities." Ralón's view is that McLuhan's shift allows for a new foundation in his philosophical approach, one that is grounded in an ontological "new realism."¹⁹⁰ For Ralón, this new realism has its grounding in a philosophical focus on the navigable portions of life and reality while eschewing attempts to reduce reality to larger or smaller notions.¹⁹¹ However, when considering the term from a theatrical perspective, it takes on the baggage of performative realism, in some ways a performance tradition that also focuses on the navigable portions of life and reality.

The Living Theatre's work is known to also play with the possibilities of realism. Erika Munk points out their unique approach in their productions of *The Connection* and *The Brig*, "the scripts were near nearly as documentary as any slice-of-life but staged as if naturalism were indeed out of the question, a contradiction that pulled the audience in deeper than could either theatricalism or realism alone."¹⁹² This sort of blending of natural and theatrical could easily fit within a definition of "new realism" for theatre. This sort of theatre is not designed to explain but to engage the audience in the reality of the now, not demonstrating reality that is both

¹⁹⁰ Laureano Ralón, "From Global Village to Global Theater: The Late McLuhan as a Philosopher of Difference, Sense, and Multiplicities," *Review of Communication* 17, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 304.

¹⁹¹ Ralón, 310.

¹⁹² Munk, "Only Connect: The Living Theatre and Its Audiences," 38.

recognizable and uncomfortable. Because of this, the praxis of The Living Theatre pairs well with Ralón's reading of McLuhan's new realism. Both McLuhan and The Living Theatre are concerned with exactly how an audience engages with a communicated message. To continue my metaphor from earlier, this is another thin point between the two tunnels of media and Avant-Garde performance. The tunnels appear less as divergent paths but rather parallel ones. Although both have moments of similarity, where their methodological approaches align and the walls between them become thin, they are at their core concerned with differing conceptual models. These connection points, as well as where the walls between the two are stronger, are where remastered theatre can operate.

This relationship between McLuhan's technical philosophy and 60s avant-garde theatre can be further explained through interpretation of McLuhan's research. Ralón clarifies McLuhan's terminology in a compelling manner, "In McLuhan the term 'global' is not intended to encompass the entire world; it no longer signals an organic whole like the 'global village,' but refers to an open whole that emerges from the free play of multiplicities. The global theatre also implies an *integral* kind of experience or awareness."¹⁹³ This interpretation helps to push McLuhan's work away from its initial connection point to theatre in Schechner's decentralized theatre. Leaving the "organic whole" behind opens new possibilities for theatre that remained unrealized through this focus. Instead, the multiplicities and integral experiences that Ralón highlights can be read in a similar manner to the ideals of The Living Theatre. Both value a relationship between praxis and philosophy that favors the former. This focus lays the

¹⁹³ Ralón, "From Global Village to Global Theater," 316.

groundwork for a continued relationship between McLuhan's school of media in reality and The Living Theatre's school of reality in performance.

McLuhan's work does not call out the avant-garde theatre of his day in any explicit manner. If anything, his emphasis of "the global theatre" favors a style of theatre that is mainstream to this day. However, when looking within the language and philosophy that McLuhan uses, threads of connective thoughts begin to emerge. These connections are highly valuable due to the historical evolution of both McLuhan and the American avant-garde. McLuhan's work becomes the basis of new media studies. This field prizes the technical expertise and philosophy of McLuhan and has largely internalized his notions of the multiplicities made possible by his "global theatre." At the same time, the avant-garde theatre of today has developed to incorporate technology and media in a way undreamt of by the manifestos of the 60s and 70s. This incorporation has placed theatre and performance scholars in a unique position to engage historically with both media and theatre.

Marshall McLuhan's invocation of the performative through the term "Global Theatre" sheds an interesting light on his expectations for media and technology through the 20th century. McLuhan's theories are built out of the growing anxieties surrounding the proliferation not only of communications technologies but also weapons technologies as well as the former's role in conducting warfare. McLuhan uses the term theatre to remind us that with the possibility of direct connections to people across the globe, maintaining a community becomes a global responsibility. Even those who are not directly involved in an action are actively spectating and have the potential to effect change. Yet for all this stark realism, McLuhan's stance is one that feels profoundly hopeful through these possibilities. This connects to my theoretical stance that

the performance of remastery itself, while manipulated for the purposes of power and control by those who produce media, can also be profoundly hopeful and reparative. However, as demonstrated by my previous case studies, this possibility has yet to be realized except through edge cases. McLuhan's gesturing towards personal connection and theatre gives me hope that my optimism for remastery is not misplaced, only misaligned.

There is an opportunity to consider the Global Theatre within the context of 60s Avant-Garde performance. Both McLuhan and The Living Theatre practiced active engagement, blurring the lines between passive witness and active spectators, proposing new spaces for performance that were inviting and timely. Both saw performance as an integral element to the changing times and worked to live within this praxis. McLuhan's work equated media and performance in a way that had not quite been explored before, and The Living Theatre engaged technology in a similarly unexplored method through work such as *Frankenstein*. As the legacy of both McLuhan and The Living Theatre is embodied by performance companies who live at the intersection of the avant-garde and digital media such as The Builders Association, this historical note becomes a cornerstone to my conversation of remastery and performance.

The Living Theatre were only one of several artists to make use of technological arguments and communications technologies. Michael Kirby discussed the importance of film and projection in the performance and visual art of the mid 60s. Milton Cohen, Carolee Schneemann, and Robert Whitman all pushed against the relationships between the body, the

screen, and the projection.¹⁹⁴ Though all these artists fall under the larger umbrella of new media performance rather than my narrower field of remastered theatre, they are important to acknowledge because they set the stage for remastered theatre. The Living Theatre, Cohen, Schneemann, Whitman, and their associates were all concerned with the capabilities with how theatre could adapt to an increasingly technological world. While they were interested in telling new stories with this technology, they were not limited to this view, as evidenced by productions such as The Living Theatre's *Frankenstein*. Their approaches, coming as they do at the same time as modern media theory was being developed, provide a contemporary context to where remastered theatre has come from.

Few theatrical companies are more evocative of the 60s Avant-Garde as The Living Theatre. Building out of the post-war Avant-Garde movement, theatre artists Judith Malina and Julian Beck created the Living theatre as an experimental performance community that welcomed all forms of artistic practice. This involved not only challenging the conventional thought surrounding theatre but replacing it with a practical alternative using European antirealist performance.¹⁹⁵ This practice continued into the 60s and The Living Theatre's exile in Europe. During this time, Beck and Malina devised *Frankenstein*, a work that Saul Gottlieb considered the "fusing of political and aesthetic directions in which the Living Theatre had been groping for many years."¹⁹⁶ As with McLuhan's contemporaneous writings, The Living Theatre's political

¹⁹⁴ Chris Salter, *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010), 154.

¹⁹⁵ Munk, "Only Connect: The Living Theatre and Its Audiences," 36.

¹⁹⁶ Saul Gottlieb, "The Living Theatre in Exile: 'Mysteries, Frankenstein,'" *The Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 4 (1966): 137.

and aesthetic directions were highly stylized and indicative of the times they found themselves. Their approach to theatre helps shed further light on McLuhan's use of the "global theatre."

The Living Theatre's *Frankenstein* presents similar anxieties to McLuhan. Like McLuhan's theoretical framework, it is helpful to analyze The Living Theatre's work through detailed historicization. James Harding provides much needed context for *Frankenstein* in his work *Ghosts of the Avant-Garde*. Out of the comparison between The Living Theatre's production and a contemporary film of *Frankenstein* by Andy Warhol, Harding finds a troubling connection between the 60s avant-garde and the legacy of the Romanticism through Mary Shelley.

Shelley's novel not only sets the avant-gardes' questioning of the role of the artist as producer into critical relief. In doing this, her work encourages scholars and historians to consider how, for all of their radical questioning of the artist as producer, the avant-gardes continued to embrace a notion of genius that had its grounding in eighteenth-century aesthetics.¹⁹⁷

Harding's interpretation opens the door to a direct comparison between the contextualization between The Living Theatre and McLuhan. Both are simultaneously tethered to the historical past through their methodologies as they look toward the present and future.

A collection of performance elements in *Frankenstein* provides the foundation for a McLuhanesque reading of the performance. First is the so called "control booth." This element is set up in the first act of the play in segment B5 of the set's superstructure, initially as an information distribution service for the audience. Pierre Biner describes the control both as, "a

¹⁹⁷ James Martin Harding, *The Ghosts of the Avant-Garde(s): Exorcising Experimental Theater and Performance*, First paperback edition (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 110.

representation of a world where everyone is keeping watch on everyone else.” Importantly, as the action of *Frankenstein* unfolds and the structure reconfigures itself into a prison, the control maintains this positionality by becoming the guard house.¹⁹⁸ This control booth has both strengths and weaknesses when seen through McLuhan’s eyes. A McLuhan reading would acknowledge the same flaws in the control booth as in Schechner’s theory of a “decentralized theatre.” The image of the control booth coupled with the prison suggests Bentham’s Panopticon, itself a kind of anti-McLuhan ideal for its centralized view of surveillance. However, Biner’s argument is that although the control booth is an important aspect, it is but one cell in an entire network of surveillance. This returns the view to McLuhan’s globalized theatre, one where the audience is as much participant as observer and the performers are as much observers as participants. With everyone keeping watch on everyone else, *Frankenstein* offers a stark re-envisioning of McLuhan’s vision.

What The Living Theatre refers to as “Automation-collage” provides a second example of an inverted vision of life in McLuhan’s Global Theatre. Beginning with an homage to Chaplin’s *Modern Times*,¹⁹⁹ this sequence represents an embodied example of the technical anxieties. From a single figure enacting “a series of mechanical gestures,” the sequence transitions into a sequence of Marxists slogans and leftist philosophy in conflict with capitalist theory, all overseen by the control booth operator who is lauding the virtues of automation for the modern society.²⁰⁰ This is again indicative of the continuing chain of critique of technology

¹⁹⁸ Pierre Biner, *The Living Theatre* (New York: Horizon Press, 1972), 116.

¹⁹⁹ Saul Gottlieb, “The Living Theatre in Exile: ‘Mysteries, Frankenstein,’” *The Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 4 (1966): 25.

²⁰⁰ Biner, *The Living Theatre*, 120.

and media that McLuhan is a part of. The Living Theatre is drawing out comparisons to the mediated critique of mass production that Charlie Chaplin made famous and juxtaposing it with a “shouting match” between left- and right-wing economic philosophies. This recalls McLuhan’s call for a media education in the name of “civil defense.” The Living Theatre is endeavoring to build an educated and developed audience surrounding the possibilities of technology in the mechanical age.

The Living Theatre’s *Frankenstein* seems deeply concerned with the technological ramifications not only within the story, but within a wider historical context. As Frankenstein creates the monster on stage in Act II, he first attempts to communicate with the body on the slab through use of a “Cybernetic X-Ray Computer” which generates answers that are incomprehensible to the scientist.²⁰¹ *Star Trek* sounding technobabble notwithstanding, the act of communication through technology is a perfect connection point for McLuhan. Only through computerized and digital media and communication can McLuhan’s Global Theatre be accomplished. The Living Theatre places this digitized media at a similar gatekeeping role, that of mediating interaction between the current generation (Frankenstein) and the one yet to come (The Creature).

The Creature’s responses indicate a point of departure in the Living Theatre’s criticism. Frankenstein’s inability to communicate through technology indicates some missing component to the process, perhaps a failure of the earlier generations to truly acknowledge the scope of exchange possible. This investigation of communication technologies is engaged multiple times

²⁰¹ Gottlieb, “The Living Theatre in Exile,” 148.

in *Frankenstein*. In Act 1 a pair of actors use walkie talkies to coordinate their search for an actor hiding in the audience.²⁰² Unlike the interaction between Frankenstein and The Creature, there is nothing lost in translation, no failure of communication. The actors can use technology to navigate through the audience, altering the theatre space and breaking the proscenium arch. This enacts The Living Theatre's engagement of the audience and in so doing it delineates the active spectatorship that is at the core of McLuhan's use of the Global Theatre. Though the audience does not have access to the communication technology, they are not necessarily hapless spectators. They are being engaged not only by the hunters but by the hunted, who moves amongst them, and they have the potential to interact with either party.

This communication technology leads into another of The Living Theatre's exercises with technology through performance: a series of executions. One by one, members of the cast are caught, dragged into one of the many cells of the set and murdered. As each member is executed, their executioner becomes the next victim in the line. The methods of death are all unique, but each represent a mediated method of death: "the victims are killed in a gas chamber, an iron maiden, an electric chair, on a rack, a crucifix, garroted, stabbed, or shot by a firing squad."²⁰³ This sequence demonstrates a mechanized approach to the taking of life. Each method of murder separates the killer from the victim through an act of technical mediation. Though far more morbid than a classic instance that McLuhan's philosophy may apply to, this scene could

²⁰² Gottlieb, 147.

²⁰³ Gottlieb, 147.

be understood along the same lines. McLuhan's Global Theatre is concerned with the potential of war and death, but also in the ability for each global citizen to enact change within it.

Biner comments on *The Living Theatre's* reading of *Frankenstein*, describing him as “an impotent spectator of violence and injustice...All his actions, which come from a sincere desire to do good, take a wrong turn. He is creating evil against his own wishes. He seeks solutions where there are none.”²⁰⁴ This interpretation stands in relief to *The Living Theatre's* conception of breaking the audience out of their passivity through what James Harding refers to as “a kind of intense, visceral immediacy.”²⁰⁵ However, it does compelling line up with *The Global Theatre's* experiential spectatorship. In Act One, *Frankenstein* stands as a hapless observer, acutely aware of the wrongs of the world but unaware of the ways to enact change. Only through acting (albeit a grisly action predicated on violence) does *Frankenstein* begin to find his way to engage with the world, but still finds himself out of step, seen in his inability to process the responses of *The Creature*. *Frankenstein* serves then as a kind of failure within the *Global Theatre*, a critique against the over dependence upon technologies of communication or mediation that *The Living Theatre* positions as catalysts for the worst atrocities of humankind.

Media Studies and the Avant-Garde Theatre have now coexisted for over six decades. The challenge is McLuhan's approach was inherently optimistic, while *The Living Theatre* served to warn and lament the development of communication technologies. Both have neglected more nuanced and intersectional views of power dynamics surrounding race, media, and

²⁰⁴ Biner, *The Living Theatre*, 124.

²⁰⁵ Harding, *The Ghosts of the Avant-Garde(s)*, 102.

performance. While helpful on their own, both digital media studies and avant-garde performance studies can be made more compelling through the study of remastery.

Digital Editing and Mastering in Theatre and Performance

While remastered theatre productions such as *Elements of Oz* require engagement in the history of media studies and the avant-garde, they also require a distinctly dramaturgical lens. After all, theatre is no stranger to technological innovation. There is continued interest in the ways that even the ancient theatre of Athens and Rome was able to utilize technological marvels of the day. But the speedy pace of development in the 20th century has forever tied technology to performance. It has already been discussed how the post-war avant-garde evolved side by side with media technologies, but as projection and filming technologies became cheaper and more user-friendly, their demand in theatrical productions skyrocketed. Works from mainstream playwrights such as David Henry Hwang became more spectacular with projected images, and by the 1990s companies across the world had begun to incorporate what Chris Salter calls “projection-drive and/or -augmented scenography.”²⁰⁶ Sure enough, the steady drumbeat of progressive obsolescence gave rise to utilizing digital editing and video at the cost of older slide-based and analog film projections.²⁰⁷ This is the history of remastered theatre. As technologies change, the potential to reform, restore, and augment past performances becomes real. Yet as Chris Salter reminds us, this change is not a smooth progression towards a modernity. As technologies evolved, performance artists and theatre architects found ways to reincorporate the

²⁰⁶ Salter, *Entangled*, 159.

²⁰⁷ Salter, 159.

screen and projected image, the immediate predecessors of digital projection, back into their productions.²⁰⁸ This echoes the challenge that other remastered forms have faced in their audience's desire for "the original" or "de-mastered" experiences.

Since technology has been such a large component of various world theatres, it might be easy to equate technology to the sort of spectacular displays that Salter illustrates. Yet just as Salter's examples are not a linear progression of spectacle, spectacle cannot be the only component analyzed within theatre's use of technology. Michael Chemers and Michael Sell remind us that all sorts of technological advances have been utilized by actors and dramatic theorists around the world. They find the connections between developments in nutrition, medicine, philosophy, and electricity and innovations in acting practice, dramatic theory, and playwriting.²⁰⁹ It is for this reason that Chemers and Sell have developed a new dramaturgical methodology that specifically addresses the interweaving between theatre and technology. Coining the term "systemic dramaturgy," Chemers and Sell see its methodology as useful to understand technology not as a new component of theatre, but instead as a central pillar of theatre's approach to understanding the human condition. Importantly, systemic dramaturgy understands that the murkiness of technical progression that Salter describes is a function, not a bug, of theatrical development. Theatre is not just about innovation for its own sake, but rather innovation in service of telling the best story that can be told.²¹⁰ This is an important lesson to remember when considering remastered theatre. Technological augmentation is not just about

²⁰⁸ Salter, 159.

²⁰⁹ Michael Sell and Michael M. Chemers, *Systemic Dramaturgy: A Handbook for the Digital Age* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2022), 11.

²¹⁰ Sell and Chemers, 20.

being “the next big thing” in theatre, but always is meant to express or expose certain threads. While new media studies can help to understand that augmentation on its own terms, being able to discuss the theatrical elements of the performance on their own terms is equally important.

The ways that theatre practitioners must meet these challenges have their own distinct merits and detriments. Financial constraints and technical specifications make theatrical adaptation of technologies more inclusive than remastering in film or sound. Unlike most remastered projects, most theatrical productions are not backed by a seemingly endless well of cash from production companies or financiers. Nor are they necessarily expected to recoup their costs in the way that remasters of well-known works are. While all these media consider how and audience will engage with the augmentation, but only theatre has the augmentation occur in an almost one to one exchange. Those that are utilizing the technology to enhance their storytelling are still in the room with the audience. To bring back a previous example, it would be as if a remastering technician was altering Ma Rainey’s “Bessemer Bound Blues” while the audience listens in the same room.

The examples listed above provide an even more succinct view of the two tunnels of Media and Theatre studies. Since the days McLuhan and the Living Theatre (and indeed earlier if you consider Chemers’ and Sell’s Systemic Dramaturgy), the two fields have set out to understand human interaction and engagement. In doing so, they have come up with different methodological approaches and reached some similar conclusions. Remastered theatre builds on those conclusions, those points of connection, collapsing the two tunnels and allowing for interchange between media and performance in a way that doesn’t reduce either’s role as subservient to the other.

There is a thread of development that grounds theatre history within the same threads that have been prevalent in other media history. But because of the unique considerations of theatrical performance, those threads are exposed not as direct advancement, but as a lateral development. To theorize remastered theatre is not just to theorize a “new and improved” theatre, but instead from the methodology of systemic dramaturgy. This means remastered theatre has specific technological interventions, ones that are designed to highlight and augment aspects of the performance. This is the field that The Builders Association operates within, creating a form of performance augmented by their technological expertise.

The Builders Association and Elements of Oz

The fusion of digital, live, and interactive components is a hallmark of The Builders Association. Their performance philosophy derives from the philosophy of post-Brechtian theatre. They utilize technology as a means of not only exposing theatrical apparatuses, but also emphasizing their dependence on that same technology to create their work.²¹¹ This conforms with the Shannon Jackson’s belief that post-Brechtian theatre should seek to reveal the support structures that maintain the distinctions between reality and representation, “but also to find in that exposure evidence of [reality and representation’s] intimate and ever-shifting co-imbriication. [Post-Brechtian theatre] thinks about Marxist and Brechtian reality principles even as it remains dialectical.”²¹² Theatre for the Builders is a testbed for these sorts of mediated

²¹¹ Shannon Jackson and Marianne Weems, *The Builders Association: Performance and Media in Contemporary Theater* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015), 9.

²¹² Shannon Jackson, “Postdramatic Labour in The Builders Association’s Alladeen,” in *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political : International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance*, ed. Jerome Carol (Bloomsbury, 2013), 172.

experiences. The technological in their productions becomes a signifier for the real-world innovations that occur outside of their spaces.²¹³ The nature of the Builders' post-Brechtian philosophy is therefore expressed in their technological mastery. In this use of technology, they not only critique social and theatrical structures, but they are also proposing radical new forms for these structures.

The Builders Association's production history is a tapestry of collaborative live plays featuring multi-media landscapes, digital components, and avant-garde theatre practice. Even with, or perhaps despite this digital media hybridization, the physical body is still of paramount importance to The Builders Association. This aligns with Parker-Starbuck's idea of cyborg theatre, in that it creates, "bodies embodied and aware of the transformations around them – to remind us of the presence of 'real life' bodies that threaten to 'be disappeared'."²¹⁴ Within the context of The Builders' post-Brechtian theatre, this discomfort is manifested through the exposure of the dialectical nature of reality and representation.

Much has been written about the use of multimedia and technology within the repertoire of The Builders Association. Greg Giesekam tracks the development of film, projection, recording, and digital animation in their works all the way back to *The Master Builder* (1994). The path that Giesekam charts is one of experimentation to exploration. Earlier works such as *The Master Builder* are concerned with how multimedia can fit within the productions, while later works such as *Alladeen* (2003) or *SUPER VISION* (2006) are attempting to reckon with this

²¹³ Masura, *Digital Theatre*, 256.

²¹⁴ Parker-Starbuck, *Cyborg Theatre*, 191.

technology as it has insinuated itself into societal identities in a way undreamt of in the early 90s. Gieseckam recognizes how this shift may be construed as “succumbing to the spectacle,” but feels that aesthetic remains a useful interrogative tool within live performance.²¹⁵ While written without the gift of foresight, Gieseckam’s analysis meshes with the overall experience of *Elements of Oz*. Within the various elements of technology, there is a danger of being wrapped up in “the next big thing” within media. Indeed, when watching the live production of *Elements of Oz* there is no singular focus. With so many components of performance and media unfolding at the same time in any given scene, it becomes harder than normal to understand what is supposed to be viewed. This is true with all live performance, but it seems even more apparent when said performance is engaging with the famously narrowly focused medium of film. However, in “succumbing to spectacle,” The Builders are better able to engage in critique with a society that has integrated technology to degree unimagined in even the mid nineteen nineties.

These observations are compounded by the words of the Builders themselves. In speaking with key members of the Builders and their production of *Elements of Oz*, Masura confirms and refines the observations that Gieseckam makes. For the Builders, technology has become an integral element to the artistry of their productions. For Weems and the Builders, technology is at the root of how their stories need to be told, an assumption that is not particularly out of place from the way technology is integrated into everyday life.²¹⁶ In this way, it becomes clear that the Builders do not exactly “succumb to spectacle” as easily as critics may

²¹⁵ Greg Gieseckam, *Staging the Screen: The Use of Film and Video in Theatre* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave, 2007), 175.

²¹⁶ Masura, *Digital Theatre*, 258.

find. The challenge such a critique presents is when a production indulges a little too much in escapism; the work no longer becomes a critique but instead a way for participants to forget about the world. This is not the case with *Elements of Oz*. Even with the technology present, the deconstruction that occurs within the production keeps participants grounded. There becomes no way to slip into escapism thanks to the way that the familiar entertainments are presented and utilized.²¹⁷ This demonstrates one of the advantages that remastered theatre can provide. Where other remastered media use their opaque immediacy to allow audiences to “succumb” to the spectacle, remastered theatre can utilize performative techniques to keep the audience’s attention on the productions’ themes and intentions. In this way, the “spectacle” that critics attempt to critique is an avenue of remastery that is expressing itself through live performance.

The themes of The Builders Association’s productions lie in the “collective excavation...deconstruction and reconstruction” of familiar narratives and mythologies.²¹⁸ These terms “deconstruction and reconstruction,” used by Jackson and Weems to describe their performance methodology, are very important in this discussion. They conjure references not only of the productive nature of the company’s namesake, but also of a materiality in theatrical production. Their language is in sync with a shift in focus away from the primacy of authorial intent. In excavating and dismantling familiar stories, The Builders present themselves as readers of text rather than as authors or scripters, drawing from fragments of text and binding them together into a new field of meaning.²¹⁹ Considering this view of The Builders along-side their

²¹⁷ Masura, 261.

²¹⁸ Jackson and Weems, *The Builders Association*, 21.

²¹⁹ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Noonday Press, 1977), 148.

utilization of a form of cyborg theatre, it is not difficult to see their theatrical practices as remastery. The Builders draw upon technological processes to restore, enhance, and reconfigure past mediums with a unique aesthetic framework. This representative framework does not render a fully transparent immediacy, but instead calls attention to itself and its fluid relationship to reality.

Elements of Oz and Digital Media

“OZVISION:” Augmented Reality and Remastered Theatre

Elements of Oz utilizes technical enhancement, a vital element of remastery, in its dialogue with *The Wizard of Oz*. Technology is the firm backbone of The Builders’ production. The company makes extensive use of a variety of tech to tell their story in addition to the previously discussed live recording: iPads, green screens, and even the oft maligned selfie-stick.²²⁰ A portion of the productions is told through augmented reality via a smart phone app designed by a team including Jesse Garrison, Austin Switzer, and Lawrence Shea. In an interview with Filmmaker Magazine, Garrison describes the purpose of the app.

The app is meant to serve as another layer of media in the show. One of the initial inspirations for the app was creating an analog for the escapist nature of “Oz” in the devices we carry with us to escape reality on a daily basis. We also were interested in what the

²²⁰ Jordan Teicher, “Review: Elements of Oz at 3LD Center for Art & Technology,” *Exeunt Magazine* (blog), accessed October 17, 2019, <http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/review-elements-oz/>.

contemporary equivalent of Technicolor would be — and that's where we think AR fit.²²¹

Garrison makes clear the connection between Augmented Reality and the apparent remastery of the film medium. AR apps allow their users to access an experience that is beyond what is currently imagined as the normal viewer experience, like the innovation of Technicolor in the 1930s. The concept of remastery draws heavily on the technical augmentation to subtly alter the original master's aesthetic vision. Just as Warner Brothers and Victor Fleming provided a new way to look at Baum's novel, *The Builders'* augmented reality provides the same opportunity to those already familiar with the film.

Discourse around *The Builders'* AR application gives a glimpse into the ubiquity of the technological enhancement present in this remastered performance. The app focuses and enhances the live embodiment through visual as well as audio effects. Jordan Cohen's review of the 2016 production provides a detailed look at the potentiality of this experience.

The images and sounds are carefully curated and coordinated, intricately crafted, and whimsical. Like the many meanings and interpretations of the Oz story, they're there should you choose to look, even if additive rather than essential to the production.²²²

While the live action of *Elements of Oz* unfolds in front of them, the augmented reality of the app gives audience members a fully realized production. The live recording cameras present on stage, constantly following the cast, provide the structure for the mediated experience. The app and the reality that it presents furthers this experience. In this way, Cohen is not entirely correct in his assessment of the essentiality of the AR app. While not everyone may be able to utilize the

²²¹ Randy Astle, "Elements of Oz: Producing Live Video and Interactive Theater," *Filmmaker Magazine* (blog), accessed October 16, 2019, <https://filmmakermagazine.com/100908-elements-of-oz-producing-live-video-and-interactive-theater/>.

²²² Jordan Cohen, "An Oz for Us All," *Performing Arts Journal* 116 (2017): 75–78.

application as they watch the production, they are missing out on the “technicolor” experience of the play, as if they were watching *The Wizard of Oz* on a black and white TV. The appreciation of the remastered enhancement is contingent on technology sensitive enough to pick up on the changes.

For the audience, the application’s presence is found almost immediately upon entering the theatre. On the back of the show’s program as well as on posters around the lobby are a set of instructions for downloading and operating the app. The instructions fold in some familiar elements of theatre etiquette into a new and strange setup for theatre goers. For instance, once in the theatre, you are instructed to “turn your ringer on and volume up” as well as to set your phone to “airplane mode.” This simultaneously creates the possibility for loud interruptions from your phone, but also prevents any incoming calls from your data network. However, there is still nothing that could be done to prevent email or application notifications, and with the ringer on and volume up, you certainly will know if you receive one. Once the application is installed, you are meant to always keep it open and available during the show. Pressing the large “OZVISION” button on the main menu will open your phone’s camera. As different elements of augmented reality are triggered by the production crew, your phone will buzz or provide you a notification to raise it up to view the stage.

The augmented elements of the play layer atop the live show through the mediation of your camera phone. The elements are clearly computer generated; there is no attempt to craft a “real” tornado atop the recreation of Dorothy’s transportation to Oz. The stalks of flowers that layer over the wilderness of Oz have a strange shine and color to them, standing out even amidst the technicolor film backdrop. The poppies that put Dorothy and company to sleep creep across

the phone's camera but look like a single mat across which a pattern of red poppies and green leaves has been layered on. If any of these images depicted humanoids, it might be easy to call them "uncanny" in their appearance.

Elements of Oz and the Digital Fandom

Remastered media is largely driven by corporate interests, technical obsolescence, and carefully curated feelings of nostalgia. But within these driving forces, there is a very clear focus on an audience: the consumer base that is targeted by these feelings of nostalgia. As a result of this, consideration of fandom (for lack of a more precise word) must be made in the reception and engagement within the theory of remastery. In *Elements of Oz*, just such an engagement exists. Consider the following examples. In one of the first scenes featuring Augmented reality, actor Sean Donovan begins to lip-sync Dorothy's classic theme "Over the Rainbow." One by one, the phones of the audience begin to play the song. But rather than playing a singular version, the phones play an assortment of videos of people singing the same song. The singers are a diverse band in terms of both appearance and talent. It includes professional singers and amateurs, choirs, and individuals, all joining and creating a new theatrical soundscape that comes at once from everywhere and everyone.

The process of mediation within *Elements of Oz* is decidedly a visible component of its aesthetic. The camera crew referred to above are an integral element of the mise-en-scene. Given the frenetic nature of the staged performance, replete with rapid costume changes for the three actors, this crew are not functioning in the cinematic world but rather in the theatrical. Each

scene can only be shot once before it is committed to the editing process. Amelia Parenteau describes this process as witnessed during the initial 2016 production run of the show.

After shooting the film takes completely out of order on stage, the raw footage is fed through a software called Isadora, which immediately re-sequences, color grades, and sound mixes the film so that actors, technicians, and audience members all watch the reassembled scenes for the first time together during playback on stage.²²³

Three embodied positions of live performance (actors, technicians, and audiences) that have been traditionally sequestered are blended through this editing process. The live viewing of the recorded playback turns even the people responsible for the creation of these recordings into members of the audience. This exposes the technical mechanisms required to craft digital performance, while also highlighting the illusion of separation between representation (the recording of the cast) and reality (the viewing of this recording by an audience). Not only is this exposure an act of the post-Brechtian criticism, but the “cut and paste” style of filming presents an example of opaque immediacy at work.

Elements of Oz is in constant dialogue with the cultural legacy of *The Wizard of Oz*. As the first and most important point of contact with Baum’s work, *The Builders* draw directly from Victor Fleming’s 1939 film adaptation. The costumes, media design, and framing device are drawn from this world of technicolor and film. Further conversation with the novel is again mediated through the fandom of *The Wizard of Oz*. The play feature YouTube clips of theatre/film scholars on the importance of the production, and there are numerous other videos

²²³ Amelia Parenteau, “Elements of Oz: Pay Attention to the Men Behind the Curtain,” HowlRound Theatre Commons, accessed October 16, 2019, <https://howlround.com/elements-oz>.

that discuss the cultural resonance of the film.²²⁴ This incorporation of the critical commentary surrounding *The Wizard of Oz* is an act of restoration, another central pillar of the remastery going on in *Elements of Oz*. This sort of restoration differs from the technical restoration that accompanies the process of remastering film or audio. After all, the critical textuality is evidence that *The Wizard of Oz* itself still a lively and vibrant part of the zeitgeist. What makes this act of restoration different is how The Builders connect the original work back into this criticism, rather than have the relationship be simply a one-way street. Recall Katherine Gough's description of "The Art of the Loop:" a performative loop between what has come before and what is now. This loop between object and subject is what restores the past in the present and injects new meaning into artifacts that may have been previously ignored or replaced. The foregrounding of critical and fan reception creates this feedback loop between the performance and the critique. *Elements of Oz* acknowledges what has come before it and uses these critiques to refine and enhance its experience. This acknowledgement centers the continually restorative relationship between text and criticism. Whereas before critics and scholars could only hold *The Wizard of Oz* as an object (what Gough would claim comes before), *Elements of Oz* has allowed them to be viewed as subjects (what exists in the present).

Elements of Oz is playing with the fundamental nature of building and understanding performance structures. It relies upon remastery of the following elements: the technological innovations that made Fleming's film possible and continue to develop it for future generations, the fabric that comprises the fandom's critical response to *The Wizard of Oz*, and the act of

²²⁴ Cohen, "An Oz for Us All."

creating narrative in performance structures. The Builders Association make this remastery possible using postmodern and cyborg theatre philosophies. The Builders expose the inner workings of live production, render the liveness of bodies through the mediated process of film recording, and layer augmented reality over this mediated presentation as a way of letting the audience derive pleasure from a personalized experience with the performance. This emphasizes both the enhanced and mediated nature of the process of remastery. The only way that this sort of remastery is possible is by recalling a work that has been well worn, so to speak: a work like *The Wizard of Oz* that already has strong critical textuality. The critical engagement that is emphasized in *Elements of Oz* demonstrates the continual restorative process that is made possible through dialectic between object and subject. Once both Baum and Fleming have been removed from the land of Oz, what is left is a loose structuring of themes and images that are then restructured by Weems and The Builders Association. Blending the reshaping and restructuring of the film itself with the critical engagement that surrounds it demonstrates The Builder's expertise in the remastering of theatre. The dangers of this restructuring lie in the aesthetic value of the remastery. As in the process of technical remastering, there may be a limit to how much the new can truly benefit the original material, with the possibility that layering too many updates could drown out what was being remastered in the first place. In the case of *Elements of Oz*, the use of digitized, mediated, and augmented reality in the performance threatens to veer into what Peggy Phelan would consider the "inauthentic."²²⁵ The Builder's Association side steps the problem of authenticity by containing their remastery not just within

²²⁵ Rosemary Klich and Edward Scheer, *Multimedia Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 68.

the technical, but with the performed and critical experience of *The Wizard of Oz*. Drawing on from postmodern critique of the authentic, *Elements of Oz* proves that there is no definitive experience for the original work. What can be understood through this process of remastery is the interrelationship between the past and present, the live and mediated, and the digital and analog.

The Power of Embodiment in Remastered Theatre

When one examines *Elements of Oz* as remastered theatre, the technological enhancement that the production requires echoes into the historiography that the show presents. Interspersed amongst the digital technologies and reembodied performances of the film are vignettes of historical and cultural significance. Amongst these interludes are a series of history lessons led by actor Moe Angelos. These monologues discuss the cultural and historical significance of *The Wizard of Oz*, including the salacious true stories that came from the production of the film. Throughout the experience, Angelos (often dressed as Dorothy) speaks into a camera phone on a selfie-stick, the video projected onto the video screen that serves as a backdrop for much of the production. As Angelos projects these conversations, stories about the original technical achievements of the film are revealed alongside what the story of *The Wizard of Oz* has meant to generations of LGBTQIA+ individuals.²²⁶ The uniqueness of this historicist narration is paired with the specific medium of the smartphone, itself already on display as a method of engaging with *Elements of Oz* vis-a-vis the AR app.

²²⁶ Sean Bartley, "A Review of The Builders Association's Elements of Oz," *PARTake: The Journal of Performance as Research* 1, no. 2 (2017): 1, <https://partakejournal.org/index.php/partake/article/view/385>.

Digital historiography has been discussed in a previous chapter, but this sort of performative engagement benefits from a more precise approach. Fortunately, Sarah Bay-Cheng has just such an approach, the notion of “digital historiography and performance.” This study specifically focuses on how performative practices using digital technologies can construct a unique historiography.²²⁷ Angelos is performing an oral history as an aspect of *Elements of Oz*. This history could easily be retold entirely directed at the audience, but instead is mediated through the digital and fed back out to the live audience. This mediation reinforces the historiographic lens that Angelos is already using, one that emphasizes the technological marvels and shortfalls that allowed *The Wizard of Oz* to become global phenomenon and piece of the cinematic canon. More than this, the use digital historiography propels that message into the future, acknowledging the changes in the technologies of storytelling. Like the remastered historiography of Paramount Records, *Elements of Oz* brings with it the historical complexities of the legacy of the *Wizard of Oz*. Unlike Paramount’s history, there is a more direct engagement of these complexities. This largely is a result of the dialectic that can occur through live performance. No matter how mediated, there is always the possibility of the audience finding new resonances in the performance. Angelos’ use of the smart phone and the clear mediation of *Elements of Oz* allows the audience to draw the direct comparisons between our technological moment and that of *The Wizard of Oz*. This demonstrates the potential for remastered theatre to build upon the lessons of other remastered media. Following with my theory of remastery,

²²⁷ Sarah Bay-Cheng, “Digital Historiography and Performance,” *Theatre Journal* 68, no. 4 (2016): 512–13, <https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2016.0104>.

Elements of Oz not only enhances the already impressive technology present in *The Wizard of Oz*, but it also enhances its audiences' understanding of the history behind that technology. This will forever change how an audience will perceive the original film.

This oral narrative is not *Elements of Oz*'s only attempt at performing a kind of "remastered historiography." There several scenes featuring historical and contemporary figures at various moments in their lives. Of particular interest is a scene where actor Hannah Heller portrays a mature Judy Garland on her deathbed. The scene is a fantasy, a confabulation where Garland records her final words for them to be played back to the audience.²²⁸ This sequence presents as a sort of secret history: the untold final moments of a former starlet reflecting upon her career. The inclusion of a tape recorder continues this digital historiography within the performance in a way. Though any recording device in 1969 would be assuredly analog, it connects the scene, and thus Garland's "Untold History" with the same impulse that is being addressed with Angelos' digital recording.

Like any piece of remastered media, *Elements of Oz* does not operate within a vacuum of power dynamics, including the race dynamics that haunt *The Wizard of Oz*. Analyzing the film, it is hard to escape the Whiteness that pervades such a colorful environment. Sure, there are "characters of color," but those colors are Green (The Witch), Blue (The Winkies), Silver (The Tinman). Colors not usually found in the human spectrum. Alissa Burger argues that this coding allows for Dorothy to be strongly positioned within the film's power hierarchy. The Othering that occurs through both the depiction of the Munchkins and the visualized colors of various

²²⁸ Bartley, "A Review of The Builders Association's Elements of Oz," 1.

characters place Dorothy alongside Glinda and the Wizard, arguably the most powerful beings in Oz.²²⁹ This of course places the technology of technicolor as a powerful tool in the Othering process. In the sepia tone of Kansas, Dorothy is no different from anyone else. In coming to Oz, her Whiteness is highlighted and contrasted through technicolor and made more noticeable and appealing. Here then the technological feats that future remasters of *The Wizard of Oz* build upon are not separate from discussions of race, they are an integral element of those discussions.

Of course, Dorothy's (and by extension, her Kansas friends', and relatives') Whiteness is not only integral, but implicit within the narrative. This implicit Whiteness is a feature of most of the stories of Oz, with the notable exception being Sydney Lumet's 1978 film, *The Wiz*. Lumet's film engages with and subverts the historical racial connotations of *The Wizard of Oz* and centers the African American experience within the Oz mythology.²³⁰ *The Wiz* remains relevant to the discussion present in *Elements of Oz* not because it is specifically engaged by the show (indeed, *Elements* is deeply concerned with the legacy of *The Wiz*'s predecessor). Rather, *The Wiz* offers the possibility of how the story of *The Wizard of Oz* can be made to engage in direct conversations surrounding race.

There is still an engagement of explicit versus implicit Whiteness present in *Elements of Oz*'s use of technology. The stage actors of *Elements* read as White actors. However, the actors are not the only voices on the stage. Early in *Elements of Oz*, there is a collection of YouTube video segments, including one from African American author Agyei Tyehimba. The full video,

²²⁹ Alissa Burger, *The Wizard of Oz as American Myth: A Critical Study of Six Versions of the Story, 1900-2007* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co, 2012), 108.

²³⁰ Burger, 106.

“Black People and the Wizard of Oz,” decodes both Baum’s novel and Fleming’s film through a racial lens. Tyehimba sees the strength of the message in *The Wizard of Oz* is in solidarity. Dorothy and her partners come together and find strength in unity, only to be harassed by the Wicked Witch, who embodies Western ideology and attempts to waylay their progress through surveillance and obstacles such as the poppy fields, which Tyehimba equates to the rise of the heroin epidemic in Black communities.²³¹ Tyehimba’s analysis finds a relevance for 21st century Black communities within this deep allegory of 19th century American economic policy. Placing this analysis at the start of the performance presents the acknowledgement that *Oz* is a story that can be taken on as a racial project. In some ways, Tyehimba’s inclusion into *Elements of Oz* presents as an “remastered” engagement of race in history that *The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records* was not able to provide. *Rise and Fall*, for all its intentions to bring restore a focus on forgotten musicians, was swept up in the historiography of Paramount. *Elements of Oz* highlights the performance of power and race in its source material, acknowledging that although its original media is important and valued, it is not without its issues.

The Wicked Witch of the Web

The theory of remastery allows for unique approaches in analyzing live performances. This includes the possibilities presented through technological othering as in the original film. A particularly powerful example of this comes in the portrayal of The Wicked Witch of the West.

²³¹ *Black People and the Wizard of Oz*, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcWDfP6m11Y>.

A single scene features her presence in a way that blends the various multimedia and live components.

Allow me to set the scene. The stage is darkened while a single area is lit in white lighting. This area is used repeatedly throughout *Elements of Oz* to indicate “moments of reality:” times when the actors slip out of the recreating specific elements of *The Wizard of Oz* or discussing the film’s legacy. Actors Hannah Heller and Sean Donovan sit across from each other in the grey light. Their script is a segment of an interview between Mike Wallace and philosopher/novelist Ayn Rand from February 25, 1959, as part of his “Portraits of Colorful People” series. Throughout the interview, a projector displays over the heads of the actors a live greyscale camera feed of Heller, dressed in a loose-fitting dress that imitates Rand’s outfit. The interview itself is a discussion of Rand’s Objectivist philosophy and its practical expression in America; a probing exploration of what was at the time a novel approach to economic mobility. Throughout the interview, the projection takes in all of Heller’s physicality: her hunched sitting and her bemused smirks that are quintessential Rand. But as the interview goes on, something begins to happen. A new face is projected atop Heller’s Rand: the unmistakable hooked nose of Margaret Hamilton’s Wicked Witch of the West. Though the face is grey instead of the quintessential green, the likeness is noticeable. The face is not a perfect projection. It sits awkwardly on the Heller’s face like a strange Halloween mask. When Heller shifts in her seat, the face disappears only to reappear later. When she speaks, the mouth contorts as the motion capture attempts to path its way onto Heller’s face again. While the Wicked Witch overlays herself upon Heller, Heller overlays the Witch upon Rand. In an off-script moment from the interview, Heller bursts out laughing at a question asked by Donovan’s Wallace. The laugh is not

a bemused chuckle that you might see in watching Rand's interview. Instead, it is a full-throated cackle that invokes Hamilton and brings her onto the stage. The motion capture and the embodiment are overlapping in this moment. The laughter perfectly situates Heller's face to capture the pointed features of Hamilton's Witch.

Motion capture technology has been in use extensively within the field of dance performance, and many media studies scholars have discussed the implications of these works. Artists draw a strong connection between dancing figures and a technology that can capture their kinesthetic movements and transfer or augment those movements in a digital medium. Klich and Scheer argue that this connection makes such multimedia performances far more than the sum of their parts, combining the components in a fusion that makes it nearly impossible to separate them again.²³² Salter's analysis of several multimedia dancers and artists who utilize motion capture finds a similar emphasis on the combination of physical bodies and technological processes. However, an important through line to this analysis is that this relationship begins with the kinesthetic; while there may be virtual bodies in play, the performance requires the physical as a catalyst.²³³ The overlay of the Wicked Witch atop Heller's face matches up with this analysis. While there is a great deal of interplay between the physical face on stage and the digital face on screen, the whole piece requires the physicality of Heller's presence to come to life, as it were. Yet this physicality also highlights the challenge of Klich and Scheer's

²³² Klich and Scheer, *Multimedia Performance*, 118.

²³³ Salter, *Entangled*, 268.

takeaways. There is not the same sense of fusion between the digital performance and the physical through motion capture.

Of course, it is possible in this critique a solution is found. Salter emphasizes the importance of technology in the use of motion capture. In particular, the kinds of physical technology that allows for the software to track the motions of the performer. Images of actors like Andy Serkis, their faces marked with a constellation of dots while wearing an elaborate headpiece housing an inward facing camera, are quite a common sight in “the making of” reels and articles. These dots allow the motion capture software to better track the facial expressions of the actors. In this scene, Heller has no such constellation, no such headpiece. The cameras that track her facial movements are performing as the cameras recording the interview. This might explain why there is a certain lack of fusion between digital and physical that places Heller’s *Rand and Wicked Witch* into the realm of the digital uncanny. In crafting a more traditionally read theatrical performance for the Stage, the Builders sacrifice fusion for artistry.

But capturing Heller’s facial motions is only half the conversation of technology. For the software to understand where and how the *Wicked Witches’* face must be placed on the screen, facial recognition software needs to be utilized. This technology brings in conversations of surveillance and observation that until now have not been addressed my theorizing of remastery. This is largely because while there has been a great deal of focus on the act of data collection and augmentation, most of this has occurred with largely digital bodies or work that has been somehow disembodied. With the actual act of recording exposed and performed for an audience, with the physical body and voice of the performer present, there is an urgency unseen in other media. This is because facial recognition software, apart from allowing for some interesting

technical feats, carries with it the language of surveillance culture. Simone Browne argues that the biometric information necessary for facial recognition software to work is not actually about recognizing the user, but rather acknowledging or becoming aware of “someone” being present.²³⁴ In many instances of the utilization of this kind of technology, Browne also notes that the classification systems that are in place harken back to the pseudo-science of racial and gender essentialist discourse.²³⁵ In other words: facial recognition software, by virtue of being programmed by humans, has picked up the issues of systemic racism. Heller reads as a white actor, therefore sidestepping the potential for facial recognition software to not even acknowledge her as a possible subject to layer the Wicked Witch on top of. Yet even in utilizing this process within the theatrical medium, the Builders leave open the door to understand how Othering can be possible through technology.

Within the contexts of the original novel, debates over The Witch’s inspiration still rage on. Willard Radell Jr. documents the many stakes of The Witch’s allegorical significance in his paper, “Decoding L. Frank Baum’s and W.W. Denslow’s Wicked Witch of the West.” Radell decodes the iconography and symbols crafted around the Witch (her short stature, her one eye, her clothing) to make the case that Baum and his illustrator W.W. Denslow were satirizing the contemporary railroad tycoon James J. Hill. His argument for this satirical bend against a powerful magnate is tied into the larger discourse surrounding Baum’s critique of the gold/silver standard in the novel.²³⁶ Author intent and structure of Radell’s argument aside, this article

²³⁴ Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 109.

²³⁵ Browne, 111.

²³⁶ Willard W. Radell, “Decoding L. Frank Baum’s and W. W. Denslow’s Wicked Witch of the West,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2018): 274, <https://doi.org/10.1353/gpq.2018.0042>.

demonstrates the deep engagement that can be made around the allegorical nature of the Witch. This analysis is not strictly limited to the novel either. Where Radell sees a scathing indictment of an American robber baron, The Builders see an interconnection with the mother of Objectivism. Two very different individuals, but ones that provide some comparison to the glyph at the core of this hierophant.

As with most witches, the Wicked Witch serves as a guardian of power or knowledge deemed unknowable or dangerous by those in charge. In the film, her authority over Oz is a direct challenge to the Wizard, and her pursuit of her sister's Ruby Slippers seems in direct violation to the order enforced by Glinda, the only referenced "Good Witch." Though the Wicked Witch claims to be the only one capable of utilizing the magic within the slippers, saying "I'm the only one who knows how to use them,"²³⁷ Glinda proves this to be at least partly untrue. Yet still, this deception shows that the Witches of Oz, good and wicked, have knowledge inaccessible to others. The Witch is also able to manipulate nature, conjuring a field of poppies to incapacitate Dorothy, as well as possibly the undead, using the unseen "spooks" of the haunted forest to wear down the party. Like her sister's dominance of the Munchkins, the Witch is in control of an army of Flying Monkeys and green skinned Winkies. This dominance is not based out of loyalty, based on their immediate defection after she is killed, and could therefore be assumed that her powers are holding them in check. While she shares many of these characteristics with Glinda, they (along with the late Wicked Witch of the East) do not share them with the other figures of authority in Oz: namely the eponymous Wizard. This is, of course,

²³⁷ *The Wizard of Oz* (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939).

because the Wizard has no inherent power in Oz beyond quick thinking and charisma, but that discrepancy is at the core of the Wicked Witch's apparent danger. While Glinda seems content to live and let live, merely warning Dorothy to not remove the slippers, it is the Wizard who seems to nurture a kind of blood vendetta against the Wicked Witch. In payment for his services to Dorothy and her party, the Wizard demands the Wicked Witch's broomstick, a task which apparently requires her murder. It is then inferable that her broomstick is a magical totem or artifact in line with her sister's slippers. Both represent power endemic to the land itself, power that can only be relinquished in death, power that the Wizard does not have. While Glinda may also share this power, her use of it is rather apolitical; she has no dominion and her only use of magic in the whole film is to transport around and protect Dorothy. The Wicked Witches seemed to have used their magic to take more political power, something the Wizard seems to have claimed for himself. For that reason, they are both punished.

When viewed through the lens of monstrosity, the parallels between The Wicked Witch and Ayn Rand become at once both vehemently clear and somewhat troubling. While a discursive analysis of Rand's objectivism would take up a whole paper itself, for the purposes of this analysis I am drawing my points from the interview The Builders use as their basis for the scene in question. Based on Rand's own words, the Wicked Witch's actions can be construed as objectivist. She acts with utter self-interest and without a consideration for what may be considered "ethical" behavior, at least as the all-American Dorothy may construe it. Rand states

the highest moral value for man should be the achievement of their own happiness.²³⁸ In Rand's defense (a phrase I never expected to write), she would likely criticize the Wicked Witch's attempts at killing Dorothy to achieve her own happiness. And indeed, the Wicked Witch's apparently forced/coerced cooperation of the Winkies and Monkeys might also be categorically opposed by Rand. Clearly then, the comparison between Rand and the Wicked Witch carries some water, but not much. And yet, to return to a previous observation, in her interview Rand lauds the virtues of American industrialists. While she does not mention him specifically, it might not be a stretch to imagine James J. Hill, the possible allegorical inspiration for the Wicked Witch, as among those admirable champions of free enterprise.

Where Rand begins to take more of a Wicked turn is her current legacy. As a staunch opponent of Socialism and all projects that violate her belief in the "separation of state and economics,"²³⁹ Rand has earned an infamy amongst progressive economists and politicians. In the aftermath of multiple economic collapses in concert with the enactment of laissez-faire economics policies Rand championed, some have seen the writing on the wall for Objectivism.²⁴⁰ Perhaps more telling is who has claimed her standard in recent years. Since the 1980s, Conservative politicians in both the UK and US have embraced her economic values. Since the 2010s, Rand has enjoyed even more popularity, with the former Trump administration and the Republican party large chock full of individuals who cite *Atlas Shrugged* as their favorite

²³⁸ Ayn Rand, Interview with Ayn Rand - "Portraits of Colorful People," interview by Mike Wallace, February 25, 1959, Harry Ransom Center Digital Collections, <https://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15878coll90/id/72/rec/6>.

²³⁹ Rand.

²⁴⁰ Victoria Bekiempis, "Confessions of a Recovering Objectivist," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2012, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jun/10/confessions-recovering-objectivist-ayn-rand>.

novel.²⁴¹ Perhaps more troubling is Rand's continued influence as a literary figure, with Jennifer Burns noting, "For over half a century Rand has been the ultimate gateway drug to life on the right."²⁴² This extended influence places Rand on the side of neo-fascists, heightening her legacy to near monstrous levels.

The Builders' layering of the Wicked Witch atop Ayn Rand, while flawed as a one-to-one comparison, does contribute to this monstrification of Rand herself. If we begin with the assumption of "Rand as right-wing bogey-woman," which the discussion above attempts to demonstrate, there is a rich vein of analysis to engage. This analysis comes out of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's Monster theory, a theory that proposes monsters are cultural manifestations of several social anxieties such as fear, desire, and change.²⁴³ Most vitally, Rand has become a cultural body through the adoration of several generations of right-wing politicians. Her physical body is long gone, replaced with an avatar of "might makes right" economic philosophy. As Mike Wallace himself points out in the 1959 interview, Objectivism theoretically strikes at the root of what he considers the Judeo-Christian values at the core of the American experience.²⁴⁴ As Rand would read it, objectivism instead might offer a Cohenian category crisis, crumbling the previous logic of society and presenting an alternative. Because of her threat to both progressive politics and "traditional values," the avatar of Rand polices the possibilities of an ordered society,

²⁴¹ Jonathan Freedland, "The New Age of Ayn Rand: How She Won over Trump and Silicon Valley," *The Guardian*, April 10, 2017, sec. Books, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/10/new-age-ayn-rand-conquered-trump-white-house-silicon-valley>.

²⁴² Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (Oxford, England ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

²⁴³ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.

²⁴⁴ Rand, Interview with Ayn Rand - "Portraits of Colorful People."

providing an ever-present warning of the dangers of rampant anarcho-atheistic-capitalism. Perhaps then the imperfect comparisons between the Wicked Witch and Rand are part of the point of The Builders' discussion. The strange layering of monster atop actor is exactly what has happened to her cultural legacy.

While we can consider the monstrification in the strictest of interpretations of Cohen's monster theory, there is an additional avenue available. Thanks to the presence of media in the performance, it is important to consider what Klich and Scheer dub "the semiotics of virtuality." Klich and Scheer build them out of from Katherine Hayles' *materiality* and combine it with information theory to identify the boundaries of Presence, Absence, Pattern, and Randomness within digital performance. The focus on pattern is one that allows for cross media analysis, "Pattern can move across many media simultaneously, regardless of their materiality or digitality, creative narrative and compositional forms."²⁴⁵ There is a true multimedia performance occurring with Heller's interpretation of Ayn Rand. Heller appears both in person on stage and in virtuality through a video feed. Her patterns of her movement, her costume, her voice, everything present in performance also encapsulates an authenticity to the portrayal. The digital media components of this performance add to these patterns of authenticity. When a new presence, a new pattern in the motion captured Wicked Witch is added to them, this authenticity lends credence and legitimacy to the former. Even in an instance of a surreal doubling, there is a definite sense that this comparison is vital to the reading of the scene.

²⁴⁵ Klich and Scheer, *Multimedia Performance*, 193.

Elements of Oz deals in duplication and re-embodiment as stock characteristics of digital theatre. Throughout the play, there are multiple embodiments of Dorothy on stage, each replacing each other in different scenes and sometimes even appearing on stage together. Heller, Donovan, and fellow actor Moe Angelos all embody Dorothy, both on stage and through video recordings played back throughout the performance. Nadja Masura describes this development through a Bakhtinian lens. In particular, she proposes the conception of the neo-Bakhtinian body, a co-present creation that enables digital theatre. The neo-Bakhtinian body implies that neither digital nor biological performance is dominant over the other. Instead, they function as a form of resistance to each other, contrasting in a way that requires the audience to see themselves within both.²⁴⁶ This neo-Bakhtinian theorizing is a springboard into how the digital and physical bodies relate to each other in digital theatre. For the purposes of the audience, the two must be accepted as one. As the Wicked Witch sits atop Heller/Rand's face like a digital Halloween mask, the performance takes on both a traditional and neo-Bakhtinian form. It creates a third point of contact within the dialectic, not so much a synthesis but a triad of the physical, the digital, and the grotesque. The audience therefore is left not only to parse out their own "human situation" as Masura puts it, but also their "monstrous situation." They must now see how this sort of technology may also make them monstrous.

What might be the most interesting suggestion to the digital doubling is the implication of monstrosity through technology. If Ayn Rand has her own level of monstrosity as a kind of "progressive bogeywoman," which The Builders seem to believe, then the technology that

²⁴⁶ Masura, *Digital Theatre*, 206.

doubles her is something that can also be understood through monster theory. The motion capture charts points of the physical (Heller's literal face) and throws it into the digital world. This adaptation offers to place her embodiment of Rand at a kind of "threshold of becoming" that is different from more traditional performances. In this performance, Ayn Rand is at once dead, alive, corporeal, and supernatural; a digital ghost haunting the stage and screen. But there is also an added component of monstrosity. In this performance, both Heller and Rand become one with Margaret Hamilton and The Wicked Witch. Each movement that Heller/Rand make is mirrored by Hamilton/The Wicked Witch. Four women on one screen, each distinct but inseparable. This interpretation alone conjures up a slew of new monstrous imagery that carries with it the semiotic matrices that comprise the individuals. In further time, analysis of this sort of blending, something only possible through digital technologies, may shed light not only on performance, but on how we make monsters.

Given how *Elements of Oz* crafts new meaning atop older performance through technological augmentation, it would be useful to consider "remastered theatre" as the culmination of the potential that I see in remastery to examine and critique the power structures that underpin media and performance in society. Supported as it is by the theoretical frameworks of digital and cyborg theatre, remastered theatre presents the possibility that performance, thanks to its iterative nature, can best describe, categorize, and engage with the iterations that occur within the performance of technology, particularly once that technology is used in tandem with humans to create meaning through drama. This sort of engagement with technology and performance also realizes the vision of McLuhan's media studies, connecting the tunnels, as it

were, between media and performance studies by acknowledging the similarities between the two fields.

In *Elements of Oz*, The Builders Association addresses many of the challenges remastery is faced with thanks to its interweaving with the hegemonic power structures of our society. They utilize digital media to augment the story of the *Wizard of Oz*, lending weight and authority to marginalized voices and stories that the original film did not directly address but still left profoundly affected. This direct engagement through remastery has so far only been realized thanks to the inclusion of performance. Perhaps then “remastered theatre” presents the best way to consider how augmentation and enhancement can address systemic issues surrounding media.

Conclusion

When I began this project, I set out to develop a theory of remastery. Drawing upon my understanding of performance theory, digital humanities, and media studies, I defined remastery as the performative turn that occurs when media is augmented beyond its original format. This definition would be used to analyze the series of case studies that I set forth, each an instance of remastered media. Each of these cases originated their performances in different periods, from the 1920s to the early 2000s, and each from a different medium that has been a staple of the remastering industry. The differences presented allowed me to see how the performance of the augmentation changes across media and how it can remain the same, which would add component layers to how the performative turn operates.

Like all studies of technology, remastery must also recognize the biases in technology that enable and perpetuate systemic inequity. The technology used to remaster changes the media to match the expectations of the media's audience. Because of the nature of performance, these iterations do have the potential to operate as a performative and historical reparative. However, it is at the same time notable that much of the remastering apparatus has been constructed to benefit those in power, namely the producers of media, at the expense of those who create and consume it.

The Rise and Fall of Paramount offered the possibility for remastering to function as a historical reparative. The restoration and augmentation of an integral part of African American sonic culture presents as an important goal and use of remastering technology. The language and motivations of producer Jack White give the sense that the remastering project was not meant to

be a money-making venture but was intended to give future generations of musicians an archive of inspiration. The restoration of the early work of artists like Blind Lemon Jefferson and Ma Rainey is also valuable to musical historians and those who wish to study the development of Jazz and the Blues in America. Without Jack White and remastering, these works may have completely faded into obscurity.

However, after closer examination of the actual performance of the technology and the collection, this expectation is left somewhat unfulfilled. Using the “listening ear” of the American audience, there is a clear performance in the creation and distribution of these works. The entire collection, from the cases to the LPs, are designed not just to create an archive, but to create a sense of historical nostalgia, a reminder of the times that these musicians were recording in. Only this reminder, just like the history of Paramount Records itself, is largely constructed to adhere to a mythology, not an actual history. This historiography reinforces themes of White ownership over Black labor under the guise of “discovery,” themes that are intrinsically tied to racist overtones at the core of the language of “mastery.” So, while remastery and *The Rise and Fall of Paramount* does provide the opportunity to engage with older material, it does not quite escape the pull of production and consumption that sits at the heart of both American racial politics and the modern media industry. But perhaps there are better ways for remastery to realize the potential I believe it has.

The story behind *Star Wars: Demastered* offers another avenue that might be explored. Unlike *The Rise and Fall of Paramount*, *DEED* was produced entirely under the realm of amateur effort. This was largely by necessity, as the legality of developing essentially an alternative way of viewing a copyrighted film leaves little room for profit. But this freedom may

in fact provide the opportunity to create. Using only the tools of digital audio and digital augmentation, the remastered *Star Wars*, and his memories and records of the original films, Peter Harmáček creates an “authentic” edition of *A New Hope*, *The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Return of the Jedi*. This effort stands opposed to George Lucas’ own efforts to create what was described as the story Lucas always wanted to tell: *Star Wars: Remastered*. A series of changes so expansive, it took five releases to capture them all. This conflict set up two performative turns for remastery, both of which offered an “authentic” experience of the same series of films. One was created by the artist/producer, one by an artist and fan. These two different pathways mean that for remastery, authenticity goes from becoming the end purpose of the performance, but instead a feature, one that can be molded to suit those who create the media.

So, this engagement of authenticity may lead to the thought that remastery’s function as reparative is realized. Continuing the track that Harmáček lays out for his “authentic” *Star Wars*, his fan production is less concerned with the possibilities and more with “authenticity” as an end point. This interest in authenticity and creating the *Star Wars* of a fan’s memories creates a permanent archive in a space that does not need one and should not support one. It runs antithetical to the notions of fandom that *Star Wars: Demastered* operates within, and importantly it crystalizes the errors and problematic power dynamics that were present in the original version. But *Star Wars: Remastered* is not off the hook either, as while many of its changes are meant to craft a more compelling story, they seem largely motivated by novelty for its own sake and continue to not use the opportunity afforded by their augmentation to interrogate their legacy.

So far, these case studies have yet to prove the full potential I set forth, but perhaps a remaster that uses a more recent original copy, such as Activision-Blizzard's *Warcraft III: Reforged*. Given *Reforged*'s legacy in the gaming community as a "failed" remaster, the possibilities of what failure means and how it can apply to remastery mean while it might not have reached the potential to act as a reparative performance, I could at least see what was largely construed as not meeting the standard of remastery. Through my analysis of the game, its remastering, and its reception, I concluded that *Reforged*'s failure was two-fold. The first being the commercial and critical failure of not delivering on the expectations of its fan community. The second being not only its maintaining of racialized and gendered language and attitudes, but also the doubling down of these features in the remastering process.

However, the study of remastering in video games does offer another possible avenue to creating media that endows meaning to the performative turn of remastery. Demastered games, like the Demastered/Despecialized editions of *Star Wars*, are labors of love, taking control of a process that has traditionally been in the hold of producers rather than artists or audience. Unlike *Star Wars: Demastered*, Demastered games such as *Bloodborne PSX* are not attempting to recreate an authentic performance of the game, but instead build a unique experience that plays upon the threads of nostalgia and obsolescence that remastering does. So far, through these observations, my theory is that although remastery can operate as a reparative, the only way it such reparations can occur is outside of the systems that made them necessary.

Enter the importance of theatrical performance. *Elements of Oz* maintains all the hallmarks of a piece of remastered media, but instead of using them to tell the exact story of *The Wizard of Oz*, The Builders Association uses technological augmentation to engage in a

reflective performance. Everything about *Oz*'s legacy and history is interrogated and explored, from its dearth of racial engagement to its relationship with its fans. This engagement I believe is to do with the historical connections the digital performance tradition has with the theoretical framework of media studies. *Elements of Oz* has the capacity to inspire and influence future generations of fans of *Oz*, while also acknowledging the immense power nostalgia has over past and current fans.

Looking Ahead

Despite my very limited scope of study, producers have utilized the term “remaster” to define media that does not fit within the traditional digital augmentation process. Game company Wizards of the Coast occasionally produces “remastered” sets of their ever-popular trading card game, *Magic: The Gathering*. These sets are effectively reprints of older cards, only with new artwork designed for the remastered set. These new sets were initially envisioned in 2014 for *Magic*'s digital game, the aptly titled *Magic Online*, but were then adapted to Wizard's online card player *Magic: The Gathering Arena*. In 2021, these remastered cards found their way into the physical world, with the release of *Time Spiral: Remastered*.²⁴⁷ Now, the first release of these remastered cards may be rather close to the original intention of remastered media. After all, they were previously an analog media that had been digitally recoded, given a new aesthetic, and commercially released. But to use the same language to describe what is effectively a re-released

²⁴⁷ Rosewater, “Mastering Dominaria Remastered,” MAGIC: THE GATHERING, n.d., <https://magic.wizards.com/en/news/making-magic/mastering-dominaria-remastered>.

version of the original cards with new art, in effect cutting out the technological augmentation process, leaves me to wonder how if my observations of remastery could still apply to it.

More than this, there are products that, while they are not called “remasters” certainly could be studied using the larger umbrella of remastery. Consider the imminent arrival of the Volkswagen ID. Buzz. Billed as an electric SUV, the Buzz shares a clear heritage to the classic Volkswagen Bus, a staple icon of the counter-culture movement of the 1960s and 70s. While harkening back to this design, the Buzz is a supposed “car of the future,” complete with all the electronic amenities a driver could ask for: touch screen display monitors, and electric engine, and, unlike the early busses, factory installed seatbelts.²⁴⁸ The specifications of the Buzz are meant to adhere to what is expected and required of modern safety and aesthetic concerns in automobiles, but its design is one that is clearly attempting to trade on nostalgia for a transformative period that was filled with turmoil, conflict, and inequity. Understanding this car through the lens of remastery, Volkswagen is attempting to capitalize upon the feelings of change in the 21st century for their own financial benefit, controlling the history of the cars to match the

With all these understandings of what remastery is and what it can be, there is the question of what to do with these questions I have been raising throughout my dissertation. What is the responsibility of producers to address the tropes and social ills that have been ingrained into the original masters, only to be restored and augmented by the remasters? Remasters are, by their definition, often “touchups” or refurbishes. But by virtue of the technologies involved

²⁴⁸ “The ID. Buzz from Volkswagen,” n.d., <https://www.vw.com/en/models/id-buzz.html>.

changing the performance, they could stand to be more akin to revisions. To study remastery is to study everything that not only changes in the performance of media, but also the things that stay the same, and the powers behind these efforts. Understanding how these things fit together is how we can best make use of technology not only to maintain and restore work that artists and designers have poured countless of hours into, but also to continue the task of improving these works to make them worthy of future generations to enjoy and be inspired by.

Ultimately, my theories of remastery must also come up against their own obsolescence. Like the media I have analyzed, my observations must eventually give way as newer, flashier, and more engaging theories and studies come up. My hope in creating what I called a “theory of remastery” was to create something that could help understand this moment and this movement in technology, media, and performance.

Bibliography

- Allen, Eric Van. "Blizzard Is Taking Extra Steps to Ensure It Owns Your Warcraft 3: Reforged Custom Games." *USgamer* (blog), January 29, 2020.
<https://www.usgamer.net/articles/blizzard-is-taking-extra-steps-to-ensure-it-owns-your-warcraft-3-reforged-custom-games>.
- Allsup, Maeve. "Activision Blizzard Sued Over 'Frat Boy' Culture, Harassment (1)." *Bloomberg Law*, July 21, 2021. <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/daily-labor-report/activision-blizzard-sued-by-california-over-frat-boy-culture>.
- Anderson, Tim. "How CDs Are Remastering the Art of Noise." *The Guardian*, January 18, 2007, sec. Technology. <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2007/jan/18/pop.music>.
- Astle, Randy. "Elements of Oz: Producing Live Video and Interactive Theater." *Filmmaker Magazine* (blog). Accessed October 16, 2019. <https://filmmakermagazine.com/100908-elements-of-oz-producing-live-video-and-interactive-theater/>.
- Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. 2nd ed. London ; New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Axmaker, Sean. "Remastering 'Metropolis.'" *Fandor*. Accessed December 2, 2019.
<https://www.fandor.com/posts/remastering-metropolis>.
- Barlow, William. *"Looking up at down": The Emergence of Blues Culture*. Philadelphia, PA.: Temple University Press, 1989.

- Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." In *Image, Music, Text*, translated by Stephen Heath, 142–48. New York: Noonday Press, 1977.
- Bartley, Sean. "A Review of The Builders Association's Elements of Oz." *PARtake: The Journal of Performance as Research* 1, no. 2 (2017).
<https://partakejournal.org/index.php/partake/article/view/385>.
- Bay-Cheng, Sarah. "Digital Historiography and Performance." *Theatre Journal* 68, no. 4 (2016): 507–27. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tj.2016.0104>.
- . "Theater History and Digital Historiography." In *Theater Historiography: Critical Interventions*, edited by Henry Bial and Scott Magelssen, 125–36. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- "Behind the Curtain on 'Wizard of Oz,' Remastered in IMAX 3D." *All Things Considered*. 89.3 KPCC, September 20, 2013.
- Bekiempis, Victoria. "Confessions of a Recovering Objectivist." *The Guardian*, June 10, 2012, sec. Opinion. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jun/10/confessions-recovering-objectivist-ayn-rand>.
- Benjamin, Ruha. *Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*. Cambridge, UK ; Polity, 2019.
- Bergen, Joe. "'Star Wars: Special Edition': George Lucas Breaks Down Why He Made Changes to O.G. Trilogy (Flashback) | Entertainment Tonight." Entertainment Tonight, January 31, 2022. <https://www.etonline.com/star-wars-special-edition-george-lucas-explains-changes-for-trilogys-1997-re-release-flashback>.
- Billboard. "Best-Selling Records of 2000," February 10, 2001.

- Biner, Pierre. *The Living Theatre*. New York: Horizon Press, 1972.
- Black People and the Wizard of Oz*, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcWDFP6m11Y>.
- Blistein, Jon. "Third Man Records to Co-Release 800 Song Archival Collection." *Rolling Stone* (blog), September 24, 2013. <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/jack-whites-third-man-records-to-co-release-paramount-records-set-112384/>.
- Blizzard Entertainment. "Lok'Tar Ogar! Warcraft III: Reforged Announced at Blizzcon." Blizzard Entertainment, November 2, 2018. <https://news.blizzard.com/en-us/blizzcon/22636891/lok-tar-ogar-warcraft-iii-reforged-announced-at-blizzcon>.
- Bolter, J. David, and Richard A. Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1999.
- Brown, Fraser. "Warcraft 3: Reforged Review." *pcgamer*, February 3, 2020. <https://www.pcgamer.com/warcraft-3-reforged-review/>.
- Browne, Simone. *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015.
- Burger, Alissa. *The Wizard of Oz as American Myth: A Critical Study of Six Versions of the Story, 1900-2007*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland & Co, 2012.
- Burns, Jennifer. *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right*. Oxford, England ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Carpenter, Nicole. "Another Activision Blizzard Worker Files Sexual Harassment Lawsuit - Polygon." *Polygon*, October 13, 2022. <https://www.polygon.com/23402323/activision-blizzard-sexual-harassment-lawsuit-discrimination>.
- Causey, Matthew. "Postdigital Performance." *Theatre Journal* 68, no. 3 (2016): 427–41.

- Chun, Wendy Hui Kyong. *Updating to Remain the Same : Habitual New Media*. Cambridge, MA : The MIT Press, 2016.
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)." In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, 3–25. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Cohen, Jordan. "An Oz for Us All." *Performing Arts Journal* 116 (2017): 75–78.
- De Kosnik, Abigail. *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016.
- Decherney, Peter. *Hollywood's Copyright Wars: From Edison to the Internet*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- D'Escrivan Rincón, Julio. *Music Technology*. 1 online resource (xvii, 215 pages) : illustrations vols. Cambridge Introductions to Music. Cambridge ; Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Dyer-Witheford, Nick, and Greig De Peuter. *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*. Electronic Mediations 29. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.
- Entman, Robert M, and Andrew Rojecki. *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America*. Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 2021.
- "Fandom Definition & Meaning - Merriam-Webster." Accessed August 17, 2022.
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fandom>.
- Filzen, Sarah. "The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records." *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 82, no. 2 (1998): 104–27.

- Frank, Allegra. "Warcraft 3: Reforged Is the HD Remaster of the Classic." *Polygon* (blog), November 2, 2018. <https://www.polygon.com/2018/11/2/18056530/warcraft-3-reforged-hd-remaster-release-date-blizzcon-2018>.
- Freedland, Jonathan. "The New Age of Ayn Rand: How She Won over Trump and Silicon Valley." *The Guardian*, April 10, 2017, sec. Books. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/10/new-age-ayn-rand-conquered-trump-white-house-silicon-valley>.
- Garst, Aron. "Blizzard Hopes to Modernize Classic With 'Warcraft III: Reforged.'" *Variety* (blog), November 5, 2018. <https://variety.com/2018/gaming/features/warcraft-3-reforged-interview-1203020041/>.
- Giesekam, Greg. *Staging the Screen: The Use of Film and Video in Theatre*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave, 2007.
- Gilliam, Ryan. "Blizzard Is Offering Automatic Refunds for Warcraft 3: Reforged." *Polygon* (blog), February 3, 2020. <https://www.polygon.com/2020/2/3/21120965/warcraft-3-reforged-blizzard-refunds-ticket-instant>.
- . "Blizzard's Warcraft 3 Updates Have Fans Hoping for a Remaster." *Polygon* (blog), February 23, 2018. <https://www.polygon.com/2018/2/23/17042578/warcraft-3-remastered-invitational-patch>.
- Gitelman, Lisa. *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2006.
- Gottlieb, Saul. "The Living Theatre in Exile: 'Mysteries, Frankenstein.'" *The Tulane Drama Review* 10, no. 4 (1966): 137–52.

Gough, Kathleen M. "The Art of the Loop: Analogy, Aurality, History, Performance." *TDR/The Drama Review* 60, no. 1 (March 2016): 93–115.

Grayson, Nathan. "Blizzard Is Adding World Of Warcraft References To Warcraft III: Reforged." Kotaku Australia, November 7, 2018.
<https://www.kotaku.com.au/2018/11/blizzard-is-adding-world-of-warcraft-references-to-warcraft-iii-reforged/>.

Guins, Raiford. *Game after: A Cultural Study of Video Game Afterlife*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2014.

Hal 9000. "Yeah, In My Humble Opinion, Merely Recompositing Original Elements Doesn't Consitute a 'change,' per Se." *Original Trilogy*, April 5, 2011.
<https://originaltrilogy.com/topic/Harmys-STAR-WARS-Despecialized-Edition-HD-V2-7-MKV-Released/id/12713/page/1#488684>.

Hall, Charlie. "Warcraft 3: Reforged Changes How the Original Game Works, and Fans Are Upset." *Polygon* (blog), January 29, 2020.
<https://www.polygon.com/2020/1/29/21113975/warcraft-3-reforged-downgrade-launch-issues-fan-response-cutsscenes-performance-custom-games-dota>.

HanDuet. "The Ultimate Introductory Guide to Army's Star Wars Trilogy Despecialized Editions," July 14, 2020.
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yLsvexWBVM8IYSGopKuSfsGk5YIgCwQWd23bqb5ryD4/pub>.

Harding, James Martin. *The Ghosts of the Avant-Garde(s): Exorcising Experimental Theater and Performance*. First paperback edition. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016.

Harmy. “There Will Be No Obvious CGI. I Think That the Fact That I’m Removing the Prison Cell Block Corridor Extension Speaks for Itself as to How Much Will Be Despecialized :-(.)” *Original Trilogy*, April 5, 2011. <https://originaltrilogy.com/topic/Harmys-STAR-WARS-Despecialized-Edition-HD-V2-7-MKV-Released/id/12713/page/1#488684>.

———. “Well, like I Said a Million Times before, I Don’t Think the Matte-Lines Are Faults and If I Could Return Them All While Keeping the HD Quality, I Would but That Would Be an Impossible Task.” *Original Trilogy*, April 5, 2011. <https://originaltrilogy.com/topic/Harmys-STAR-WARS-Despecialized-Edition-HD-V2-7-MKV-Released/id/12713/page/1#488684>.

Hediger, Vinzenz. “The Original Is Always Lost.” In *Cinephilia*, edited by Marijke de Valck and Malte Hagener, 135–50. Movies, Love and Memory. Amsterdam University Press, 2005.

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit: Selections*. Translated by Howard P. Kainz. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

Iizuka, Satoshi, and Edgar Simo-Serra. “DeepRemaster: Temporal Source-Reference Attention Networks for Comprehensive Video Enhancement.” *ACM Transactions on Graphics* 38, no. 6 (December 31, 2019): 1–13.

“International: The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records.” Accessed May 18, 2020.

<https://thirdmanstore.com/the-rise-and-fall-of-paramount-records-volume-1-volume-2-bundle>.

Jackson, Shannon. “Postdramatic Labour in The Builders Association’s Alladeen.” In *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political : International Perspectives on Contemporary Performance*, edited by Jerome Carol, 166–88. Bloomsbury, 2013.

Jackson, Shannon, and Marianne Weems. *The Builders Association: Performance and Media in Contemporary Theater*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015.

Jenson, Joli. "Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization." In *The Adoring Audience*, edited by Lisa A. Lewis, 0 ed., 9–29. Routledge, 2002.

<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781134899197/chapters/10.4324/9780203181539-8>.

Jun, Dominik. "The Czech Guerilla Restorationist Battling to 'Save Star Wars.'" Radio Prague International, November 8, 2014. <https://english.radio.cz/czech-guerilla-restorationist-battling-save-star-wars-8278571>.

Juul, Jesper. *Handmade Pixels: Independent Video Games and the Quest for Authenticity*. Unofficial Guides Junior. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2019.

Kaivax. "Warcraft III: Reforged Patch Notes - General Discussion January 28, 2020." Warcraft III: Reforged Forums, January 28, 2020.

<https://us.forums.blizzard.com/en/warcraft3/en/warcraft3/t/warcraft-iii-reforged-patch-notes/14023/1>.

Kember, Sarah, and Joanna Zylinska. *Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process*. First MIT Press paperback edition. Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: The MIT Press, 2015.

Kheshti, Roshanak. *Modernity's Ear: Listening to Race and Gender in World Music*, 2016.

Kim, Matt. "Warcraft 3 Reforged: Fans Unhappy With Launch Version." IGN, January 29, 2020.

<https://www.ign.com/articles/warcraft-3-reforged-fans-unhappy-with-launch-version>.

- Kirby, Ben. "Who Shot First? The Complete List Of Star Wars Changes." *Empire*. Accessed August 12, 2022. <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/star-wars-changes/>.
- Klich, Rosemary, and Edward Scheer. *Multimedia Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Krauss, Rosalind E. *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985.
- Leadbeater, Alex. "10 Most Pointless Changes To The Star Wars Movies You Never Even Noticed." *WhatCulture.com*, September 1, 2015. <https://whatculture.com/film/10-most-pointless-changes-to-the-star-wars-movies-you-never-even-noticed>.
- Lieb, Sandra R. *Mother of the Blues: A Study of Ma Rainey*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981.
- Lizardi, Ryan. *Mediated Nostalgia: Individual Memory and Contemporary Mass Media*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015.
- Margitházi, Beja. "See More, Think Big: The IMAX Brand Before and After the Digital Remastering." In *Film in the Post Media Age*, edited by Ágnes Pethó, 143–58. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2012.
- Marshall, Cass. "Warcraft 3: Reforged Review: A Relic Ruined by Upgrades." *Polygon* (blog), February 4, 2020. <https://www.polygon.com/reviews/2020/2/4/21116683/warcraft-3-reforged-review-pc-mac-issues-cutsscenes-remastered-glitches-complaints>.
- Martin, Lerone A. *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion*. New York, N.Y.: New York University Press, 2014.

Masura, Nadja. *Digital Theatre: The Making and Meaning of Live Mediated Performance, US & UK 1990-2020*, 2020.

McLuhan, Marshall. *From Cliche to Archetype*. New York, N.Y: Simon & Schuster, 1971.

———. “The Global Theatre.” *Ekistics* 32, no. 190 (September 1971): 181–83.

———. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. 1st ed. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994.

McWhertor, Michael. “Warcraft 3: Reforged’s Story Won’t Be Retconned by WoW after All.”

Polygon (blog), November 1, 2019.

<https://www.polygon.com/2019/11/1/20944518/warcraft-3-reforged-story-retcon-world-of-warcraft-wow>.

Milner, R.M. “Beyond the Virtual Realm: Fallout Fans and the Troublesom Issue of Ownership

in Videogame Fandom.” In *Social Exclusion, Power, and Video Game Play: New*

Research in Digital Media and Technology, edited by David G. Embrick, J. Talmadge

Wright, and András. Lukács, 221–46. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012.

<http://site.ebrary.com/id/10552022>.

Monson, Melissa J. “Race-Based Fantasy Realm: Essentialism in the *World of Warcraft*.” *Games*

and Culture 7, no. 1 (January 2012): 48–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412012440308>.

Moore, Michael E. (Game designer). *Basics of Game Design*. Boca Raton: A K Peters/CRC

Press, 2011.

Munk, Erika. “Only Connect: The Living Theatre and Its Audiences.” In *Restaging the Sixties:*

Radical Theaters and Their Legacies, edited by James Martin Harding and Cindy

Rosenthal, 33–55. Ann Arbor, Mich: University of Michigan Press, 2006.

- Newman, James (James A.). *Best before: Videogames, Supersession and Obsolescence*. 1 online resource (183 pages) vols. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 2012.
<http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=1016029>.
- None. "Theater Performance Preservations - Original Trilogy." *Original Trilogy*, November 20, 2010. <https://originaltrilogy.com/topic/Theater-Performance-Preservations/id/12161>.
- Obrecht, Jas. *Early Blues: The First Stars of Blues Guitar*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. Third edition. New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2015.
- One*. [Sound recording] \. Hollywood, Calif: Capitol Records, 2000.
- "Paramount Records: The Label Inadvertently Crucial To The Blues." *NPR.Org*. Accessed April 30, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/therecord/2013/11/02/242428973/paramount-records-the-label-inadvertently-crucial-to-the-blues>.
- Parenteau, Amelia. "Elements of Oz: Pay Attention to the Men Behind the Curtain." HowlRound Theatre Commons. Accessed October 16, 2019. <https://howlround.com/elements-oz>.
- Parker-Starbuck, Jennifer. *Cyborg Theatre: Corporeal/Technological Intersections in Multimedia Performance*. Performance Interventions. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- . "The Play-within-the-Film-within-the-Play's the Thing: Re-Transmitting Analogue Bodies in the Wooster Group's *Hamlet*." *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media* 5, no. 1 (June 2009): 23–34. https://doi.org/10.1386/padm.5.1.23_1.

- Radell, Willard W. "Decoding L. Frank Baum's and W. W. Denslow's Wicked Witch of the West." *Great Plains Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2018): 273–93.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/gpq.2018.0042>.
- Ralón, Laureano. "From Global Village to Global Theater: The Late McLuhan as a Philosopher of Difference, Sense, and Multiplicities." *Review of Communication* 17, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 303–19.
- Rand, Ayn. Interview with Ayn Rand - "Portraits of Colorful People." Interview by Mike Wallace, February 25, 1959. Harry Ransom Center Digital Collections.
<https://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15878coll90/id/72/rec/6>.
- Richardson, Ingrid, Larissa Hjorth, and Hugh Davies. *Understanding Games and Game Cultures*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021.
- Ritsema, Joel, and Bhoomi K. Thakore. "Sincere Fictions of Whiteness in Virtual Worlds: How Fantasy Massively Multiplayer Online Games Perpetuate Color-Blind, White Supremacist Ideology." In *Social Exclusion, Power, and Video Game Play: New Research in Digital Media and Technology*, edited by David G. Embrick, J. Talmadge Wright, and András. Lukács, 141–54. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012.
<http://site.ebrary.com/id/10552022>.
- R.L. "What It Means for a Film to Be 'Digitally Remastered.'" *The Economist*, April 4, 2017.
<https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2017/04/04/what-it-means-for-a-film-to-be-digitally-remastered>.

- Rohter, Larry. "A Menagerie of Music Lives in a Box." *The New York Times*, October 25, 2013, sec. Arts. <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/27/arts/music/jack-white-explores-history-of-paramount-records.html>.
- Rosewater. "Mastering Dominaria Remastered." MAGIC: THE GATHERING, n.d. <https://magic.wizards.com/en/news/making-magic/mastering-dominaria-remastered>.
- Salter, Chris. *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010.
- Schechner, Richard. "Intentions, Problems, Proposals." *The Tulane Drama Review* 7, no. 4 (Summer 1963): 5–21.
- Sell, Michael, and Michael M. Chemers. *Systemic Dramaturgy: A Handbook for the Digital Age*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2022.
- Sterne, Jonathan. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Stoeber, Jennifer Lynn. *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*. Postmillennial Pop. New York: New York University Press, 2016.
- "Tales from the Smithy: Reforging the Humans." Accessed September 13, 2022. <https://news.blizzard.com/en-us/blizzard/23150108/tales-from-the-smithy-reforging-the-humans>.
- Taylor, Chris. *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe: The Past, Present, and Future of a Multibillion Dollar Franchise*. Boulder, UNITED STATES: Basic Books, 2014.
- Taylor, Diana. *Performance*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

- Teicher, Jordan. "Review: Elements of Oz at 3LD Center for Art & Technology." *Exeunt Magazine* (blog). Accessed October 17, 2019.
<http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/review-elements-oz/>.
- Tekinbaş, Katie Salen, and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003.
- "The ID. Buzz from Volkswagen," n.d. <https://www.vw.com/en/models/id-buzz.html>.
- The Living Theatre. "'Paradise Now': Notes." *The Drama Review: TDR* 13, no. 3 (1969): 90.
- The Wizard of Oz*. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1939.
- Tuuk, Alex van der. *Paramount's Rise and Fall: The Roots and History of Paramount Records*. Denver, CO: Mainspring Press, 2012.
- Tuuk, Alex van der, and Scott Blackwood. *The Blue Book*. The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records: Volume 1. Third Man Records/Revenant Records, 2014.
- . *The Complete Catalog of 1924 Records*. The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records: Volume 2. Third Man Records/Revenant Records, 2014.
- . *The White Book*. The Rise and Fall of Paramount Records: Volume 2. Third Man Records/Revenant Records, 2014.
- Ulanoff, Lance. "The Search for the 'Star Wars' George Lucas Doesn't Want You to See." Mashable, December 17, 2015. <https://mashable.com/archive/star-wars-original-cut>.
- Vinatea, Edward. "Understanding Mastering." The Directory of Mastering Studios, April 25, 2010. <https://musicmasteringonline.com/understanding-mastering/>.
- Walther, Lilith. "BloodbornePSX by LWMedia." itch.io. Accessed August 31, 2022.
<https://b0tster.itch.io/bbpsx>.

“Warcraft III - Humans.” Accessed September 13, 2022. <http://classic.battle.net/war3/human/>.

“Warcraft III - Orcs.” Accessed September 13, 2022. <http://classic.battle.net/war3/orc/>.

Metacritic. “Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos.” Accessed January 29, 2021.

<https://www.metacritic.com/game/pc/warcraft-iii-reign-of-chaos>.

Watts, Steve. “Warcraft 3: Reforged Making Changes To Fit World Of Warcraft Lore.”

GameSpot (blog). Accessed September 1, 2022.

<https://www.gamespot.com/articles/warcraft-3-reforged-making-changes-to-fit-world-of/1100-6463028/>.

White, Luise. *Speaking With Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa*. Berkeley:

University of California Press, 2008.

Wiley, B. “Warcraft III Shatters Sales Records.” IGN, July 22, 2002.

<https://www.ign.com/articles/2002/07/22/warcraft-iii-shatters-sales-records>.

Wynants, Nele, ed. *Media Archaeology and Intermedial Performance Deep Time of the Theatre*.

Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019.