The Pennsylvania State University

The Graduate School

College of Communications

PLAYLIST PASTS: NEW MEDIA, CONSTRUCTED NOSTALGIC

SUBJECTIVITY AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SHARED HISTORY

A Dissertation in

Mass Communications

by

Ryan Lizardi

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2012

The dissertation of Ryan Lizardi was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Matthew F. Jordan
Assistant Professor of Media Studies
Dissertation Advisor
Chair of Committee

Matthew P. McAllister
Professor of Media Studies

Marie Hardin
Associate Dean for Graduate Studies

Thomas Benson
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Rhetoric

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School

ABSTRACT

Contemporary convergent media has proven to be nothing short of obsessed with nostalgic mediated pasts. Examples of this trend include the current rash of remakes in film, the video game industry's reliance on vintage game downloads, and television's nostalgic flow carried through programming and advertising. Just being preoccupied with the past is not inherently problematic, as any history can teach us about the present and future. However, this is not the specific type of nostalgic subjectivity engendered by contemporary media. Instead of encouraging an engagement with the past that functions as an adaptive mirror with which we can compare and contrast our contemporary situation, the past is presented as an individualized version that transfixes us as uncritical citizens of our own culture. Melancholic attachments to beloved lost media objects are encouraged; ones that refuse to properly mourn and release the object of their attention. This contemporary phenomenon is explored from a cross-media perspective, examining divergent but interrelated topics. These include the creation of a collector's mentality and playlist past through the increased availability of a digital-archive apparatus, the behavioral repetition of nostalgia in explicitly and implicitly nostalgic video games, the epistemology of the film remake in the age of the re-imagined "classic," and the commodity flow of nostalgia through all areas of televisual content.

The cultural implications of a cross-media eternal return to nostalgia is an arresting of individuals in an uncritical mindset that has increasingly defined who we are as people and societies by what media we consumed as children. Whether it is wearing a t-shirt with a favorite *Karate Kid* reference or rearranging a DVD shelf full of television box sets, the unblinking eye towards the past knows no progress, or at the very least does not employ the past as a comparative tableau to adaptively engage with the present or future. It is not that one still loves any of the specific texts mentioned in this dissertation, from *Back to the Future* to *The Legend of Zelda*. Instead, it is that media doggedly encourages a devotion of libidinal energy towards one's own specific and myopic playlist past that feigns a shared cultural base but really points to an insular and postmodern surface understanding of history.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Perpetual Individual Nostalgic's Playlist Past

<div align="right">

"It does not do to dwell on dreams Harry, and forget to live"
- Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

</div>

At the heart of the first *Harry Potter* is a dilemma that paralyzes the young protagonist, one that speaks to a similar dilemma in contemporary media's construction of the individual. Harry has always been nostalgic about his parents, victims of the dark wizard Voldemort's evil magic. He is shown an enchanted object that allows him to live in a past that was lost to him, the Mirror of Erised, and he finds himself unable to pull away from this pleasant reflection of a world where everything appears to be uncomplicated. Albus Dumbledore speaks the words in the epigraph to Harry in an attempt to stop him from looking into the Mirror of Erised (an anagram for desire), an object that shows each individualized viewer their "deepest and most desperate desires of our hearts" (Rowling, 1997, p. 213). Dumbledore warns that the images created by this mirror will "give us neither knowledge or truth" and that "men have wasted away in front of it" (Rowling, 1997, p. 213). The viewer of contemporary media culture has been placed in a similar position, lured by a recent narrative trend that is constructing us as past focused-subjects and has us fixing on a recent past. Just as Harry is made to stare transfixed at an idealized version of his past, rendering him incapable of dealing with present problems, so too has our convergent media presented us with an analogous dilemma, situating us as viewers face-to-face with our own mirror of narcissistic nostalgic desire. Where we could use the past as an adaptive functional mirror with which we could compare and contrast to our contemporary situation, possibly learning something along the way, the past instead is the same individualized version that transfixes Harry, thereby constructing us as uncritical citizens of our own culture.

Philosophers of history and critical theorists have long considered the individual and cultural dangers of history in excess. As historian Hayden White says, advocating for adaptive historical discourse, "the study of the past 'as an end in itself' can only appear as thoughtless obstructionism, as willful resistance to the attempt to close with the present world in all its strangeness and mystery" (1985, p. 41). While White was concerned with literary and later filmic representation, the representations of the past witnessed in contemporary mass media have exponentially amplified this nostalgic trend and modality, seen in forms from film to video games to television. White, then, can be used to understand how a myopic and perpetual view of history, such as the one Dumbledore warns can be destructive, is dangerous to a healthy past engagement that might utilize and learn from history.

Before beginning, it will be helpful to provide a working definition of key terms that will be important throughout this dissertation: nostalgia, narcissism as it pertains to nostalgia, melancholia as compared to mourning, and perpetual as it relates to melancholia. The nuances of nostalgia and its progression from a 17th century malady to a contemporary description of longing that is polysemic will be discussed later in this chapter, but for the purposes of this dissertation nostalgia will refer to a yearning for the past or some past state, which results in the focusing in on the past or a past object to assuage this yearning and to reassure already held ideological positions. Nostalgia should not be considered automatically or universally problematic, though some critics have warned of the "dangers of stasis, the failure to change" inherent (Bonnett, 2010, p. 3), as even a yearning consideration of the past could have adaptive potential for the future if utilized in a comparative manner. What will be developed is that contemporary media nostalgia engenders a perpetual melancholic form of narcissistic nostalgia as opposed to a comparative, collective, or adaptive view of history.

Narcissism, in connection with nostalgia, will be defined as the focus of yearning on an individual and solipsistic level, though not simply in terms of the history of one's life. Instead, narcissistic nostalgia is exploited by contemporary media to develop individualized pasts that are defined by idealized versions of beloved lost media texts pumped up with psychic investment to a level of unreality. These media texts are returned to on a continuous loop of nostalgic behavior/practice, engendering subjectivity that for many scholars comes down to a difference between Freud's conceptions of mourning and melancholia. For Freud, mourning is a healthy and natural form of longing for the past where the "mourner" works through the past as an avenue for improving the present or future (Jordan, 2002, p. 89). On the other hand, Freud views melancholia as the attempt to recreate the past, demonstrating the "loss of capacity to adopt a new object of love" (Freud as quoted in Jordan, 2002, p. 89). Related to later discussions of misrecognizing an idealized past reality in a nostalgic media object, the melancholic refuses to relinquish the beloved childhood text. Michael S. Roth highlights nostalgia's childhood-rooted tendency by noting "almost all identified the origins of the disease in the first affective connections to people and places in the child's world" mainly "because the first impressions on the brain were permanent" (1991, p. 9). The nostalgic experiences the "desire to return to the scene of those impressions" and "[s]ince they were never erased, they could become the object of attachment at almost any time" (1991, p. 9). Never being erased points towards melancholia and Roth goes on to say that nostalgia outwardly presents itself paradoxically as those who are afflicted – soldiers for Roth – "did not even call attention to their malady but quietly pursued their desire to return to the past until death" (1991, p. 22). Walter Benjamin expresses a similar sentiment when describing his "difficulty of stopping" the nostalgic activity of unpacking his library (1968, p.

66), while Adorno describes "regressive listening" as the desire to reverse to childhood happiness (2001, p. 47). These sentiments bring us to the definition of perpetual nostalgia; that like a perpetual motion machine it continues to persist by coming back to the same point and reproducing itself. It is the construction of this narcissistic, melancholic, and perpetual tendency in contemporary media that this dissertation explores.

Though the contours and strategies for nostalgic subject construction vary from medium to medium, the individual past-centered subject highlighted in this examination is created by tapping into affective connections to our own past and our desire to feel a part of a collective cultural past. Yet it is a collective past of a peculiarly individualistic type. In today's hypermediated world, technological affordances make it easy to create our own "playlist past" of downloaded vintage video games and DVD box sets of long forgotten television shows. In this case, the playlist is best understood in light of new technologies like computers, cell phones, DVRs, and iPods, which enable the inclusion, exclusion, and ordering of individual media texts to be played back at anytime. It is the "mix-tape" of the digital era, and has important implications for its dismissing of collective cultural experiences. Music insider Simon Reynolds posits the iPod as a device that "launched" contemporary generations into a "second adolescence" by enabling them the ability to "venture into unexplored corners of the past" (2011, p. 95). Jeremy Packer advocates for a similar understanding of how technologies as apparatuses enable certain modes of thinking and doing by drawing from Raymond Williams and arguing "mobile privatization could not come into being without television" (2010, p. 90). Packer describes how determining a specific archival mentality needs to go beyond examining the signifying elements of texts and include the "technologies of inscription and maintenance" that make the archive possible

(2010, p. 94). Examining contemporary nostalgic texts, it is important to note Packer's

position that archives function to "credentialize" and "legitimize" the "authenticity of a

historical investigation" (2010, p. 91). The perpetual individual nostalgic makes their archive

out of their own media-soaked past, legitimizing and credentializing this way of viewing

history as an individualized playlist compiled from nostalgic texts.

       The apparatus, for Packer, is about what technologies enable and what they disable,

and this notion can be used to understand what the difference is between a healthy, self-

reflective, and critical past and one that discourages complex and comparative thought.

Robert Ray noted that when television began running old films in the 1950s, audiences'

memories of Hollywood, and subsequently American ideology, were remade and

complicated (1985). As television's need for content grew, those in charge of programming

"began to scour Hollywood's past…indiscriminately" including films that were "clearly

intended as disposable" (Ray, 1985, p. 264). This resulted in a collision of the past with the

present that did not necessarily paint a rosy picture of classic Hollywood quality and

ideology. Classics like *Casablanca* (1942) were followed on television with the forgettable

and derivative film *Action in the North Atlantic* (1943), and the resulting implicit critique

"afforded by such juxtapositions was new to the television age" (Ray, 1985, p. 265).

Previously, "Hollywood had effectively protected its products from such potentially

damaging contrasts by isolating the moviegoer in a theatre" (Ray, 1985, p. 265). More

important for Ray is that this not only served to call into question classical Hollywood traits

and dominance, but also created "stimuli encouraging self-consciousness" about ideology

and the past (Ray, 1985, p. 266). Similarly, through the spike in availability of nostalgic

material today made possible by technological apparatuses, contemporary nostalgic texts

have the opportunity to present a potentially comparative and radical view of history. The issue at hand is that instead of affording consumers the capacity to reflect more on their collective and radical pasts, a narcissistic and idealized version of nostalgia will be argued to be the norm. With this commentary, it is the hopes of this author that a form of critical intervention can be exercised, whereby the scales can be tipped in favor of a contemporary technological apparatus that uses the past in a more reflective manner. Perhaps, when new media like digital streaming achieves its lofty goal of total content availability, Ray's ideal of media encouraging self-reflexive contemplation will be a reality. For now, the apparatus' technology is selective about its nostalgic modes of representation, and the result is a reliance on media that focuses consumers' attentions on a mediated and individualized past.

In this way we are keyed into media artifacts that are all about us – our desires and patterns of consumption – or at least about the texts we loved. Instead of being subjected to diverse, even critical representations of the past that Ray and this dissertation advocates for what philosophers of history like Jameson have called "radical past," or what is characterized as a past that is different from our own present, the trend instead is to compile one's own individualized library of nostalgia. Reynolds describes the individualized tendency of nostalgia by admonishing that the "social aspect is completely absent" from media consumption on iPods, offering its users only the "solitary thrill of total mastery" (2011, p. 117). History is now about what we loved and consumed, not what happened to us as a culture. All of the current generation of video game consoles, the Nintendo Wii, Sony Playstation 3, and Microsoft Xbox 360, allow for the downloading of vintage video games that for many consumers derive from eras and systems popular during their childhood. DVD box sets of television shows have become a popular way to recapture texts from a medium

historically cumbersome to personally preserve. ITunes, among other downloading sites, sets up structures for this playlist mentality by pricing individual songs and videos inexpensively compared to full albums and television seasons. The dominant modality is a playlist mentality that archives, compiles, and treasures media important to consumers' pasts on an individual level and encourages melancholic connections to a media-defined history.

A Pervasive Playlist Past

Today's media are increasingly dominated by a nostalgic logic that focuses the gaze of the viewer perpetually on the past. The term pervasive, and synonymously ubiquitous, will be used throughout this dissertation when discussing contemporary nostalgic media to approximate the penetration of this individualized phenomenon across media. The particulars of the past, the content of the media representations, are still important but will be of secondary importance to the fact that the viewer or player of these produced worlds is constructed as a past-centered consumer unwilling to relinquish lost media objects. This relationship to the past can become at best problematic and at worst pathological. Freud, whose thinking about psychological health focused on the subject's relationship to his or her past, noted that there was a difference between healthy and unhealthy connections to the past. In healthy mourning, the subject "gradually and painfully," separated from the past and the "libido is withdrawn from the lost object, so that when the mourning process is completed 'the ego becomes free and uninhibited again'" (Dickinson & Erben, 2006, p. 229). In unhealthy mourning or melancholia, "the libido continues to be attached to a lost object, and the pain of loss does not lessen in the normal way" (Dickinson & Erben, 2006, p. 229). In what will follow, I will argue that in contemporary media, the focus is on encouraging a melancholic stance towards lost past media objects. The economic benefits of this particular

brand of consumer construction will be explored, as the perpetual purchasing of already

produced or remediated properties is very lucrative. Instead of creating new video games,

one simply has to resell old ones. Instead of writing and producing original films, one simply

has to remake, repackage and "re-imagine" already proven properties (Wasko, 2008). Rather

than seeking to create representations of the past, or recreating texts from the past that are

critical and discussion provoking, one can simply create presentist versions of the past that

situate the consumer as concerned only with their own personal nostalgia for texts and brands

that represent a simpler time in their lives. Significantly, these strategies of production go far

beyond the simple extraction of profit from individual consumers. Today's ubiquitous

nostalgia stretches to obscure places like websites dedicated to the celebration of beloved

childhood cereals (Buckholtz, 2011), and even soda revisions (Figure 1), but is most fully

manifest in media. Simon Reynolds describes the minutiae of nostalgia as a turn from

"neophilia" to "necrophilia," saying "we can't get *past* this past" (2011, p. 411).

Figure 1: 2009 Pepsico ad that commodifies the past, while claiming its ephemeral nature.

Examples of this kind of obsessional "retro" logic in popular culture abound. One growth sector of the contemporary mediascape speaks volumes about this trend: the remake. When filmmakers and television producers remake, or to use the popular buzz word "re-imagine," films like *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) and *Wall Street* (1987) or television shows like *V* (2009-2011) and *Hawaii Five-0* (2010-present), the primary goal is to exploit the connections one feels to the texts one grew up with. Research on remakes concentrate on the split between accusations of the new versions being "derivative" or "formulaic" (Lukas & Marmysz, 2009, p. 1), and claims that a new take on an old text can highlight differences and "work through and linger with our collective experiences" (2009, p. 15). Many scholars like Constantine Verevis note the political economic considerations seeing remakes "as commercial products that repeat successful formulas in order to minimize risk and secure profits in the marketplace" (2005, p. 37). Todd Gitlin describes the remake phenomenon as part of a recombinant media trend, which is not only economically beneficial for media producers because they can "capitalize on and mobilize demonstrable tastes" (1979, p. 77), but also stand as "consumer society's tribute to our hunger for a stable world" (1979, p. 77). Other works on remakes and recombinant media, such as Matthew P. McAllister's deconstruction of recombinant television genres (1992) and Jonathan Burston's examination of recombinant Broadway (2009), will be explored for their importance in understanding the explicit nostalgic media combinations of film remakes.

Less obvious than the remake, however, is the more implicit ways in which media that does not reference specific texts from the past still constructs a similarly nostalgic subject based on the practice of nostalgia and anchoring oneself in an individual past-centered world. This form of implicit nostalgic subject construction is dramatized by shows

like *How I Met Your Mother* (2005 - present), which is based on a man in 2030 telling his children stories about his youth while linking the age of its protagonists, around thirty years old, to an obsession with their pasts. In this show, not only is the present being told from the future as a nostalgic narrative, but also the present tells its own stories of the past. This past within a past points to the idea that media constructs its target audience as nothing short of obsessed with their individual histories. These two types of past-centered texts, those that explicitly construct representations of the past and those that implicitly validate and reify perpetual individual nostalgia, will be the focus of this dissertation. By examining some explicit representations and implicit subject effects, we can better understand the ontological and cultural implications of this increasingly dominant mode of relating to the past.

Sometimes, it is the way that characters embody a problematic relationship to the past that helps to normalize this kind of fixation for audiences. When characters like Rob Gordon from *High Fidelity* (2000) own an extensive record collection arranged in "autobiographical" order, an individual past is validated as incredibly important to those in the media and those targeted by these texts. Gordon's autobiographical record categories are not near as extensive or complete as Borges' character Funes the memorius who famously developed an idiosyncratic enumeration technique where each number was given an arbitrary name (1962, p. 113), but when Gordon forgoes broad sweeping music genres for his own individualized categorization he further advances contemporary narcissistic nostalgic construction. Gordon is not an anomalous character, as even this dissertation is born partly out of the recognition that my self-made iTunes playlists were organized not by genre, artist, or mood, but by the time period in which I listened to specific music, such as in my "Summer '05" list that contained a disproportionate amount of Green Day. Rather he indexes or is symptomatic of a

larger cultural trend as much of the media today is transfixed on an individual past, evident

even in Rob's "top list" mentality. Everything from music to movies to Internet memes must

be ranked and organized around an individual's media history, and barely hidden beneath the

surface of these rankings is an obsession with all things past.

The ranking phenomenon is not new, as cultural artifacts like Casey Kasem's

American Top 40 radio show (1970-1988, 1998-2004) have been around for quite some time.

Ernest A. Hakanen calls American Top 40 radio "the most recognized, most referenced and

one of the oldest ranking systems in popular culture" (1998, p. 95). This specific chart and

the ranking of media in general "serve the music business well as a marketing tool" because

they are "driven by the illusion of personal choice" (Hakanen, 1998, p. 97). The term

"number one" is "so often used in common parlance to refer to the self as individual" that it

refers to the "delusional uniqueness of the post-modern self" (Hakanen, 1998, p. 97). With

the media-ranking chart "ever expanding and approaching ubiquity" (Hakanen, 1998, p. 95),

both in terms of nostalgic posthumous ranking and contemporary promotional ranking,

understanding why this current trend is on the rise is vital. The brief demise of *American Top*

40, going off the air from 1995 through 1998, was blamed on everything from the "downfall

of the Contemporary Hit Radio (CHR) format" to cries of ABC's "mismanagement" (Durkee,

1999, p. 231). What made a "countdown program left for dead" (Durkee, 1999, p. 253) return

after only 38 months? The return of Casey Kasem certainly did not hurt, but it does not

explain the expansion of the format to multiple shows. The explanation must take into

account the generational timing of a group of consumers who had grown up constructed as

perpetual nostalgics, surrounded by media-ranking "charts" that had come to "hyperrepresent

historicism and individualism" (Hakanen, 1998, p. 106). There is a reason for not only the

return of the American Top 40 list, but also the rebroadcast of vintage Kasem Top 40 shows on SiriusXM Satellite radio. Not only is there is a niche market for such melancholic fixation, but it confirms the prevailing logic of a consumable past that is pitched to the individual tastes of the consumer. Yet the market logic has problematic implications, as ranking media artifacts not only focuses consumers' attentions on the past, but also does so in a very selective and myopic way. All are classics in the eyes of the "top list" as the texts considered of lesser quality, or more pointedly those less contemporarily marketable, from today and yesterday are ignored.

This kind of consumer culture history has spread out through the mediascape like a plague. Television channels like VH1 entered the new millennium with a similar ranking fever that was already nostalgic for the very recent past with shows like the *I Love...* series (2002-2010), which itself was a remake of the UK series of the same name (2000-2001). This series chronicled the popular culture texts and moments in specific decades, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, in a year specific list. The series' title implies a light-hearted examination of history and the show certainly delivers. These shows all followed the same basic format with lesser-known celebrities, many times comedians, icons from the era in question, and precursors to the B-list reality show aesthetic commentator, quipping about how great pop texts and cultural items from the past were. Examples include everything from *Back to the Future* (1985) to Hulk-a-mania and in each instance the authoritative voices of pseudo-celebrities discuss how they defined their childhood. When 1980s pop star Tiffany discusses 1981, her remarks are restricted to a discussion about playing Atari games in her mother's bedroom, not a complex shared political or social event. Here a "remembering with television is conducted" (Keightley, 2002, p. 396), but as Joe Moran notes of the UK version, it is based

on the "half-remembered individual experience" (Moran, 2002, p. 161). History is simplified

and condensed through the form of these shows, as each text or item is afforded a couple

minutes of screen time with an emphasis on surface-level enjoyment. This series defines the

past through cultural texts, and encourages viewers to do the same. Significant was the

manner in which these shows began to close with the present, as the shows began to run out

of years despite revisiting time periods multiple times, such as the case of *I Love the '80s:*

Strikes Back (2003) and *I Love the '90s: Part Deux* (2005). Taking a cue from *I Love the 90s*,

which debuted a mere five years after the decade ended, VH1 created *I Love the New*

Millennium (2008) before the first decade of the millennium had ended. An inane circular

nostalgia was completed on VH1 with the airing of *Best of I Love The...* (2010), condensing

and ranking the condensing and ranking of media-defined history.

The window between when something occurs and when it should be regarded with

nostalgia has shrunk, and a form of instant nostalgia is constructed as valid. Examples of

instant nostalgia range from reality television to DVD collector's editions, and even to

cultural events that producers want to capitalize on before the zeitgeist dies down. On many

reality television shows the sight is the same. A moments-ago ousted contestant is made to

watch a pre-edited video of their "journey" through the show. Before their tears are dry from

being booted, the viewers and contestant are asked to feel nostalgic about their leaving.

DVDs contribute to instant nostalgia by releasing the ultra-special collector's edition of a film

that was released in theaters three months before; anointed a classic before anyone can even

miss it in theatrical release.

One sees this same strategy of fabricating instant nostalgia across the media

spectrum. Even "events" can carry this same instant nostalgia, rendering useless any form of

critical distance between when it happened and when it is longed for. Sporting events have

become a locus for an extreme version of this strategy. Aesthetically, the tendency to look

nostalgically on sporting events often takes less than 15 minutes, as in the *Sportscenter*

broadcast that follows directly on the heels of a game's end or even in the recap of highlights

from the first half of a game. A special old photo aesthetic is often used to key viewers in on

how they should have affectively related to what they have just seen. For example, when

Michael Phelps broke the record of most gold medals at a single Olympic games in 2008,

highlights immediately were rendered aesthetically nostalgic through image and music, while

Bob Costas introduced the world to a commemorative DVD moments later. With this

specific event, and all sporting highlight packages, NBC put together this DVD text and the

promotional package that went with it with a certain foresight. If Phelps had not completed

this feat, the expectation of nostalgia would have gone to waste. In another example, a 2008

college football game between Penn State University and Ohio State University featured a

video package at the beginning of the broadcast that chronicled Joe Paterno's vintage

accomplishments as a head football coach, set to nostalgic toned music and black and white

footage. Because Penn State won this game, the video package shown as a broadcast coda

was the same as at the beginning with the addition of footage from that night's game

interspersed amongst the vintage footage. Nostalgia for the very recent past – minutes prior –

was placed on an equal playing field with events occurring long ago. Sporting events are not

the only place this instant nostalgic commemoration takes place – though donning the

championship hats moments after winning it all is ubiquitous – as the 2011 royal wedding of

Prince William and Kate Middleton illustrates. Available mere hours after the event on QVC

was "The Royal Wedding: the Official Album" as well as the "Royal Wedding and Princess

Diana Commemorative Covers/Coin" bearing actual pictures taken at the ceremony. With the presses not even dry, and with the conflation of this event and the life of Princess Diana, the past is instantly venerable and equated with all that came before. Its value becomes a fetishized object in a consumer culture thereby validated by all the mechanisms of production and dissemination. Everything in media culture is open for nostalgia-fication, even what happened today. This praxis reveals a marketing strategy that appeals to a constructed desire for a meaningful past that is replaced with a misrecognized media-defined subject past that is devoid of any critical or radical difference.

Some of the nostalgic constructions are especially problematic for their attempts at integrating the self through outward display, such as wearing one's past on your sleeve by donning clothing with vintage media references on them. Shop at any Target, Wal-Mart, Hot Topic, or at websites like 80sTees.com and it quickly becomes evident that to connect with the mediated past includes brandishing texts on one's chest. This does set up an odd pairing of nostalgia and fashion trends, which seem paradoxically joined despite their incompatible goals. Maureen Molloy notes this incongruity in saying "Nostalgia manifests itself as a yearning for a 'simpler' or 'better' time" whereas fashion traditionally exists "only for the sake of change itself" (2004, p. 486). Molloy goes on to argue for New Zealand's nostalgia for instability, hence the connection to fashion, but the connection made with vintage t-shirts is somewhat more direct. The pseudo-vintage coloring, styling, and sometimes fraying, applied to most of these nostalgic t-shirts speaks less to this phenomenon's "fashion-forward" stance, and more to its fashion as a way of looking backwards. Here the mass-produced "vintage" look is reminiscent of what Angela Davis called "docufashion" or the ability to commodify and empty an event of its historical significance, "effectively erased by its use as a prop for

selling clothes and promoting seventies fashion nostalgia" (1994, p. 43). Many works deal

with this brand of revivalist fashion that attempts to recapture a lost nostalgia object (Hunt,

1998; Gregson, Brooks, & Crewe, 2001), helping to conceptualize nostalgic fashion as

ideologically charged.

Entire walls of stores advocate for this form of past engagement, through the pseudo-

choice of which nostalgic text or product defines your individual past (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Target t-shirt section from April 2011 in which disparate eras and texts are collided together, creating the pseudo-individualistic "choice" of which nostalgia defines you (author photograph).

There are certainly modern texts sold on t-shirts, even placed alongside of the nostalgic ones,

but it is through this collision of time periods and clear reliance on the past as a signifying

commodity that the individual nostalgic is constructed and a radical past is lost. It is also no

surprise that most of the texts or products on the t-shirts hail from the 1980s, as this is a rich

source of nostalgia for the current demographically targeted t-shirt wearing population.

Examples are numerous, from *Ghostbusters* (1984) to *Goonies* (1985) and *Back to the Future*

(1985) to *Beetlejuice* (1988), but particularly illustrative is that the t-shirts not only connect

to a past defined by media artifacts, but also, as clothing, partially define the individuals that

wear them. If the "clothes make the man" then these t-shirts define the past of the wearer.

Umberto Eco discussed a similar dynamic in regards to the multiple sites of meaning

embedded in the simple act of manufacturing specific polo shirts. Eco noted that when a "generation begins to wear the polo shirts" subsequently "[e]ach consumer of the polo shirt advertises, via the alligator on his chest, this brand of the polo shirt" (1986, p. 148). Eco describes this phenomenon as the multiplication of the media and encourages exploring the "implications" of what the "polo-shirt manufacturer wants to say, and what its wearer wants to say, and the person who talks about it" (1986, p. 149). Yet more than the patters of brand loyalty and consumer behavior, the consumer-qua-media now embodies a relationship to the past that he multiplies for everyone who receives this message.

So what, exactly, does my 1up t-shirt from *Super Mario Bros.* (1985) say about me? This practice can be connected to the broader nostalgic construction, but also holds a specific significance because of its overt display to the rest of the world that the wearer is caught up in the web of the mediated past even if the wearer was not alive when the "original" past occurred. This extends to the opaque nature of many of these symbols of the past, with many of the shirts not simply stating the cultural text they derive from, but instead depicting some obscure moment or quote. Instead of saying "Karate Kid," the t-shirt claims that the wearer is a member of the "Cobra Kai All Valley 1984 Karate Championship Team." The added level of deciphering that goes into understanding these t-shirts adds to the individualized status of those who are "in" on the reference and helps to strengthen bonds with the past. This specific brand of nostalgia designed to display fandom is further emptied of its historical engagement through a commodified and veiled mystery that replaces complexity. If other media are any indication, consumers are constructed as drawn to this type of nostalgia as media producers "capitalize on and mobilize demonstrable tastes" with proven properties (Gitlin, 1979, p. 77). The t-shirt points to the cultural pervasiveness of the construction of perpetual individual

nostalgics and speaks to the implications contained in the outward display of the past, namely the media-defined history that is uncritical and worn on one's chest.

Within this pervasive playlist past there are a great deal of media areas that could be examined, but before dealing in detail with what will be focused on in this analysis, DVDs, Video Games, Film, and Television, it is important to understand how best to tackle this specific brand of nostalgic construction. Nostalgia is equally multi-faceted and nearly every scholar that addressed it could do so from a different perspective. However, considering the narcissistic form – the construction of a subject who is compelled to recreate a lost past object and is transfixed on their individual past as opposed to a collective cultural one – it will be evident that to properly engage with this specific nostalgia is to take a critical stance.

Against the Grainge (and Bonnett)

Nostalgia is not inherently a bad thing, and during its long and varied history scholars have progressed from calling it a malady, to being automatically critical of it, and eventually noting the potential that exists in a longing for the past. The roots of nostalgia and the way it has changed provide those interested in the subject near limitless ways in which to engage the concept. Beginning as Johanna Hofer's description of physically located "homesickness" and a "pathology that decimated the ranks of the Swiss Army" (Kessous & Roux, 2008, p. 194), nostalgia was applied to a longing for a literal home, such as in Svetlana Boym's tour-de-force analysis of post-communist cities (2001). Nostalgia then progressed from pathology to a diverse tool for understanding "melancholia or depression" (Wildschut et. al., 2006, p. 975), which inspired critical works like Nietzsche's deconstruction of nostalgia as part of an obsessive focus on the past he called the "*malady of history*" (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 69). For Michael S. Roth, the changing perceptions and definitions of memory maladies are "crucial

for those trying to define how much of the past we need to be able to recapture, and when too much of the past captures us" (1989, p. 50). When describing doctors in 19th century France who dealt with memory maladies like amnesia, hypermnesia, and periodic amnesia, Roth says that they all agreed with Nietzsche in his suggestion that forgetting is integral to a normal life, only they disagreed on how much "forgetting made for a normal life, and when too much forgetting was a sign of disease" (1989, p. 51). Parameters, highs and lows, are laid out as a "cultural construction" (1989, p. 51), and similarly contemporary media set the bar for the "amount" of nostalgia that is normal. At stake for Roth is that aberrations like memory maladies help to construct a normal continuity and narrative of one's life by defining the edges and the abnormal. Remembering too much or too little is "thought to be a disease only when a unified personality with a continuous connection to the remembered past is taken as a criterion of health" (1989, p. 55). With contemporary nostalgic media, a unified personality defined by a mediated past is set up as the norm for yearning desire, much in line with nostalgia's shift to being conceived as the basis for all desire according to Freud (Boym, 2001, p. 54). The abnormal in this case is considered a yearning for the collective and comparative past. The debate about what a normal relationship to the past constitutes has been with us for years, with the stakes of what is considered proper or healthy tied to constructed conceptions of words like nostalgia. This dissertation will also make normative claims about what is considered a healthy relationship to the past, but will attempt to remember the constructed nature of such claims. Nostalgia has progressed from a disease to memory malady to the basis of psychoanalytic desire to an intertextual and postmodern definition of history (Figure 3).

Changes in the conception of nostalgia over time

| 1688 | 18th c. | 19th c. | 1870s | 1914 | 1950s | 1970s | 1973 | 1980s | Present |

Doctor Johannes Hofer coins the term as a new disease described as the pathological yearning for one's home country.

Nostalgia loses its disease connotation through separation from tuberculosis (Boym).

Malady of memory, used to differentiate the normal from the abnormal and the excess of history with a healthy amount (Roth).

Disappeared as a malady through a mixture of progress and the narrative that one matures past the longing (Roth).

Re-emerges for Freud as essential aspect of desire, linked to the death drive, and tied to re-finding (or not) a lost object (Boym).

Media content in this era laid the foundation for a yearning for the "good old days" that never truly existed (Coontz).

Described as an unprecedented era of 1950s nostalgia, in part, to avoid problems of the day (Kompare).

Postmodern nostalgia films usher in a new aesthetic discourse based on intertextual histories, beginning with *American Graffiti* (1973) (Jameson).

Era much nostalgic media derives. Coinciding with childhoods' of contemporary generations.

Significant explosion of nostalgic media, leading to a definition and conception of the past as mediated and media-defined.

Figure 3: A sample of nostalgic conceptions over time (derived from Roth, 1991; Jameson, 1991; Coontz, 1992; Boym, 2001; Kompare, 2004).

Today, the term is somewhat fractured and multiple in its applications, and recently

there has been a push to recover nostalgia for its adaptive and progressive potentials. This

contrasting conception of nostalgia, specifically the work of Paul Grainge and Alastair

Bonnett, paints a markedly different picture of a longing for a lost past object than the

version of nostalgia employed in this dissertation. Paul Grainge has written about the use and

abuse of the past in a variety of ways, from the intersection of memory and film to retro

styling. His work on nostalgia is helpful; especially to recognize that the individualized form

of nostalgia explored in this particular analysis is not what Grainge is talking about. Grainge

takes a decidedly optimistic approach to nostalgia and though he engages with the loss of a

radical past, he says that "Jameson and other critics who warn of a new viral amnesia fail to

see the particular negotiations of memory and meaning undertaken by the so-called 'nostalgia

mode'" (2000, p. 29). The key element of Grainge's optimistic view of nostalgia as a

dominant mode of relating to the world is that longing for the past helps develop a "more

acute sensitivity in the nostalgia mode to the fact that access to the past is never direct or

natural" (2000, p. 29). Nostalgia, for Grainge, can function in a comparative sense, revealing

the odd difference between then and now. Grainge has inspired some followers of this

optimistic nostalgia model, including Faye Woods in her treatment of the television show

American Dreams (2002-2005) and Kimberly K. Smith in her discussion of nostalgia as

progressive rhetoric. Heavily quoting Grainge, Woods argues that *American Dreams*' "use of

music performance bridges nostalgic reverence and provides political and social comment as

the show develops a complex web of reference, reproduction, and commentary" (2008, p.

28). In discussing Jameson's conception of the crisis of historicity, Woods suggests that

through music and television's "larger narrative space" these narratives are able to "move

beyond this conception of nostalgia texts as purely imagistic and conservative" (2008, p. 29).

Kimberly K. Smith concurs with Woods' and Grainge's thoughts on the critical potential of

nostalgic texts because they "express valid desires and concerns about the present" (2000, p.

523). This type of comparative and adaptive nostalgia most likely exists on some level, but it

is not the dominant mode in which the perpetual individual nostalgic operates and the

phenomenon studied here contrasts with this reading of nostalgia. Transfixing a compulsive

gaze on what will be defined as a "playlist past," one that defines history through familiar

and comfortable media texts, is a far cry from the development of an acute sensitivity to a

different past.

Like cultural historian Grainge, Alastair Bonnett engages with nostalgia in an

optimistic manner, as his book *Left in the Past: Radicalism and the Politics of Nostalgia*

(2010) argues for the progressive and radical potentials of nostalgia. Bonnett takes issue with

the de-facto assumption that nostalgia prevents progress and political growth. He says that

both the left and the right "remain addicted to the grand rhetoric of dismissing the past"

(2010, p. 3). Taking a cue perhaps from Nietzsche, Bonnett shows a variety of ways in which

nostalgia can be "useful" for progressive causes as "one can find the half-formed embryonic

signs of the mature radical consciousness of later years" within (2010, p. 40). By culling the

past for these signs, and by applying a "movement's past to the movement's present" (2010,

p. 40), Bonnet sees progressive nostalgia as possible and helpful. It is progressive because it

can galvanize a radical group through appeals to its history or its longing for a return to a

better time. Bonnett quotes Peter Glazer's work on radical nostalgia saying that "radical,

progressive nostalgia...can become available and advantageous under specific social,

historical, cultural, and performative circumstances" (2010, p. 42). At the risk of falling

under Bonnett's category of works that dismiss the past, the perpetual individual nostalgic does not meet the specific circumstances of galvanization through radical progressive nostalgia. Indeed both Bonnett and Grange presuppose a certain critical consciousness that rescues their nostalgics from a mirror of their own consumptive desires. Yet this is hardly what we see in the majority of media phenomena today, wherein instead of using knowledge gained from looking back at a collective cultural past to adapt for the future, the specific nostalgic construction that has exploded in recent media is myopic, individual, and uncritical.

Authors who speculate on nostalgia's progressive potentials should not be discouraged, as many have been successful in developing instances where a productive and critical nostalgia is possible. Grainge, Bonnett and the earlier discussed Boym all perform useful work in the examination of their specific nostalgic arenas, but they do not perfectly explain the media phenomena that follow. Though not all nostalgia should be viewed as "an excess of remembrance, as a smothering of creativity under the burden of history" (Roth, 1992, p. 271), in the case of contemporary media this description fits better than calling it progressive or radical. These specific normative criteria will be applied to nostalgic media, along with the adaptive criteria. Thus if a nostalgic media text is shown not to live up to these progressive tenets then its uncritical and therefore problematic nature should be examined.

How then to look back? Two Heuristics and Three Research Areas

To create a nuanced look at this nostalgic phenomenon, it will be important to incorporate multiple perspectives and tools, including at times those of the Grainge and Bonnett optimistic camp. Ten different researchers would use ten different constellations of perspectives on nostalgia, but for this specific brand of narcissistic longing for the past the way to examine needs to be multi-faceted and critical. To accomplish this task, this analysis

will utilize two interrelated heuristics, a postmodernism lens that identifies texts that lack a radical past as well as the construction of a compulsively driven subject that seeks to recreate and maintain melancholic holds on misrecognized and unrecoverable lost objects. These two reoccurring themes will be interwoven throughout this entire dissertation, as they represent the crux of many problematic issues with the narcissistic nostalgic. Complementing them will be three interdisciplinary perspectives vital to understanding this phenomenon: historical representations across media, nostalgia research, and the political economy of the past. Together, these heuristics and perspectives will enable a deeper understanding of what it means to define the past with one's individualized playlist of nostalgic media texts.

Postmodernism and Radical Past Heuristic

The first helpful heuristic for thinking about the implications of media constructing subjects who are primarily interested in their own recent pasts can be found in Fredric Jameson's discussions about the allegorical value of historical knowledge. In his thinking about postmodernity, which he views as not just "a style but rather as a cultural dominant" (1991, p. 4), Jameson laments the "disappearance of the American radical past" (1991, p. 24), or a loss of the ability – caused by the postmodern representation of historical objects without difference – to see the time periods that came before as different than one's own. With historical representations in media increasingly situating our experience of time, we need to account for the way in which contemporary media tends to depict histories that are too similar to today to be taken as a radical critical view of the past. The connection between a historical media text's lack of critical bite and the construction of an individually focused perpetual nostalgic is one that is crucial to explain. There is critical potential in a radical past, and losing this can lead to a parallel loss of discussion-provoking discourse. In Jameson's

discussion of this past/present conflation, the implication is that the goals and ideologies of which we as a culture strive to achieve appear as unchanging and stable. The past is utilized as a stagnating force, creating a form of nostalgia that self-perpetuates because of the way in which the longing for the past is folded onto itself, and the present, and in the process any kind of radical, adaptive past is lost. This loss of a radical past as a comparative referent validates the concerns of today, and therefore the ideologies of those currently benefiting from contemporary power structures, while making current goals seem "natural" and "unchanging." The status quo rules the day when the past loses its radical, comparative edge by tapping into the already constructed nostalgic sensibilities of contemporary audiences. This dissertation applies Jameson to illustrate how contemporary historical media texts lead perpetual nostalgics to long for an idealized time period that never really existed and simply reaffirms the dominant ideologies of today. The study will maintain sensitivity to the dangers of a surface level past depleted of difference that diverts attention away from critical comparisons capable through radical history and creates a present couched in a past that advocates for the uncritical status quo.

Taking into consideration the inherent explicit or implicit referentiality between the texts described here, utilization of a postmodernism heuristic lens may seem to be simply dealing with pastiche postmodernism or mere multiple textual references. Instead, this theoretical perspective and history will be used as a foundation for the significance of nostalgia. Jameson describes postmodernism as the "emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense" (1991, p. 9), which is important for the exploration of a construction of the past that refuses to utilize history to drive discourse. This is made more significant as the "transformation of older realities into

television images, does more than merely replicate the logic of late capitalism; it reinforces and intensifies it" (1991, p. 46). A past defined by surface media texts is a past commodified and uncritical, which refers to media that do not encourage a reflective stance towards its subject matter, thereby discouraging healthy critique that would lead to progression or adaption. The important foundation postmodernism literature has lain for examining those constructed as looking nostalgically to their pasts is crucial in understanding the stakes of this uncritical contemporary media trend. Nostalgia defined by contemporary media texts is not only heavily dependent on mimicking or referencing texts from the past, but also exploits the establishment of the postmodern aesthetic during contemporary generations' childhood. In other words, the media's current past preoccupation plays on contemporary viewers' nostalgia for the very postmodern referential characteristic that was developed in their childhood media texts. Even when past-centered media are employing a more implicit version of connections, the postmodern perspective is still an important concern, as the very retention of the past for referencing is a postmodern ideal. As such, the use of this postmodern heuristic will be vital in understanding the extent to which the texts and versions of the past being referenced have been rendered uncritical.

The way contemporary texts create sterilized versions of the past is a primary concern in this analysis, but so too will be the strategies through which media create presentist texts that appeal to contemporary structures of feeling contained within historical representations. For example, the television show *Glory Daze* (2010 - present) uses misé-en-scène elements like costuming and props to clearly denote the 1980s, but much of the subject matter and language carry more contemporary connotations. So despite being set in 1987, when cellular phones were anything but common, characters in one episode remark that "this is when you

really wish phones were mobile" speaking more to the contemporary uncritical desires of contemporary audiences than to a past that was different. In this example, *Glory Daze* contributes to a loss of a radical past in the same manner as Jameson describes in his treatment of the 1975 novel *Ragtime*. Jameson notes that this "nonrepresentational work" that blends historical and fictional characters makes it "impossible for us to receive their representation without the prior interception of already acquired knowledge or doxa" (1991, p. 24), meaning that the already known past stands as an intermediary that encourages a contemporized gaze. In *Glory Daze*'s cell phone example, the same issue of prior knowledge matches Jameson's concern and his position that *Ragtime* sheds light on the postmodern citizen who is condemned "to seek History by the way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history" (1991, p. 25). Similarly, a vintage television show brought into the present is stripped of its temporal location and collided with the present. Commentary tracks, atomized episode viewing, absence of advertisements, and what Marnie Hughes-Warrington describes as a re-reading of historical texts through contemporary eyes (2007, p. 190), all point to a diminishing of adaptive, critical historical discourse.

The Drive to Misrecognize Heuristic

Not only is the collective view of the past at stake in the dominance of this form of uncritical nostalgia; the lack of a critical gaze has contributed to our individual pasts being misrecognized in the form of these presentist historical media. This misrecognition, it will be argued, is the key factor in this dissertation's second heuristic lens, a dynamic that weighs heavily on the impact upon the subject. Indeed, the kind of misrecognition that is afforded by this nostalgic modus operandi is very similar to the kind of misrecognition focused on by one of the most influential theorists of the subject, Jacques Lacan. It is analogous to the dynamic

described in two important Lacanian concepts, the mirror stage and the notion of a never-satisfied drive. These two psychoanalytic conceptions work together to develop a dangerous facsimile of an individual past that is self-perpetuating because it is never attained. That media creates a mirror of "reality" through which the subject sees itself is an established scholarly trope. The mirror stage is already an important concept in film theory because of its implications for subject formation and the construction of identity. Scholars following Laura Mulvey have argued that the images consumed on screen provide the basis for the subject to misrecognize himself or herself. The identities and desires that are screened for us can thus have significant ideological and cultural implications, and are all mediated by nostalgic texts in a manner similar to René Girard's conception of mimetic, or "triangular," desire.[1] Much like how children form their identity through the recognition of a "more complete...more perfect" version of the self in the mirror because it appears to "outstrip his motor capacity" (Mulvey, 2006, p. 345), film spectators see themselves through the seemingly superior actors/actresses on the screen. "Recognition is thus overlaid with misrecognition" (Mulvey, 2006, p. 345) and points to an idealized version of history that is misrecognized as a familiar individual past. Indeed, this is a dynamic highlighted through the epigraph that kicked off this dissertation. When Harry Potter gazes in the mirror, he misrecognizes his "real" parents in the image presented by the mirror and is transfixed despite the obvious falsity. Comparatively, watching the television show *Glory Daze* and misrecognizing one's own 1980s past through this historical media text points to some of main concerns of this analysis if the version of the past presented is uncritical and designed to hold attention towards the

---

[1] For Girard, a mediator stands between and "above" the straight-line connecting subject and the object of their desire (295). Similarly, the past-oriented text is always standing in between the constructed contemporary nostalgic and their desired lost past.

past, not the present or the future. Yet in repeatedly going to the tube as the mirror of our desire, the desire transforms into something more problematic, fetishistic or obsessive. These individual past-centered nostalgics are perpetually constructed to face backwards through the second Lacanian concept, drive.

To understand how obsessional drive works differently than normal desire, let us continue with the example of Harry Potter standing before the Mirror of Erised. For the purposes of this analysis it would be more appropriate if it was called the Mirror of Evird, for it is precisely drive or compulsion that takes over young Harry and threatens his capacity to act in the present. According to Slavoj Zizek, in working through Lacan, the drive mechanism reproduces the fantasy and not the event itself (1991, p. 5), which is appropriate in describing the contemporary construction of past-focused subjects as obsessed with an unattainable individual past. This is different from desire as "the very reciprocity that is implied by desire is denied by drive" (Copjec, 1994, p. 190). Our past can never be recaptured despite the historical media texts' claims otherwise. Much like Harry Potter, who fixes his gaze obsessively on the mirror of his idealized past, media consumers today are situated facing backwards, driven to obsess upon their "individual" pasts, which they misrecognize through a cultivated dependence on nostalgic texts. A true focus on an individual past, where one adaptively examined their life and culture, would be critical, existential, and beneficial. Instead, the misrecognized ersatz pseudo-individual past cedes the desire to look critically at one's past and present, replacing it with the always mediated mimetic desire of the misrecognized drive to recreate the unattainable media-defined past of one's youth. This drive then encourages the narcissistic and melancholic attachment to one's

past, as the individualized playlist of one's youth is pumped up and idealized to the point that a connection cannot be broken in a healthy and mournful manner.

As such, the histories that are constructed for today's media consumers are neutered and without bite. The dominant mode of historical media representation constructs us as individual nostalgics who are caught in an eternal cycle of the drive, trained to avoid looking at the present as we look backward toward simpler times. This combines with the loss of a radicalized past that can be used allegorically to evaluate the present. Significantly, these two heuristic lenses can be used to help understand the impact of the perpetual gaze backwards in both explicit and implicitly nostalgic texts. Those that deal explicitly with the past, such as *That 70s Show* (1998-2006) for those Gen Xers who grew up during this time period, point directly to the unattainable time period, though a presentist and uncritical version. Texts that deal implicitly with the past, such as *How I Met Your Mother* (2005 - present) that is based entirely along the recollection of individual memories, validate an eternal concern with one's own past as a preoccupation and not an exercise of comparison or criticism. Combine the psychoanalytic heuristic lens with the postmodern, add in the research perspectives of historical representations, nostalgia, and political economy, and a rich picture of the perpetual individual nostalgic becomes possible.

Historical Representations Across Media

Nearly all research that surrounds historical representations in visual media deals with their content on some foundational level. Representational accuracy or fidelity to the past have dominated the concerns of film theorists like Pierre Sorlin, who views historical film as allegorical, and Marnie Hughes-Warrington, who views all historical media about both the past as well as the present in which it was created, as they look at historical films as a force

of societal commentary. Even theorists like Robert Rosenstone and Hayden White, who resist calls for accuracy standards in lieu of a more affective connection to the past, still rely on "what" the historical representation contains. In what follows, this dissertation will certainly not ignore factual accuracy, but will attempt to nuance this by arguing that the most significant element of the "what" is the historical subject that the form and content construct. In other words, a hypermediated past that perpetually situates and focuses viewers on a version of the past that has been stripped of its critical, comparative bite has profound impact on how we situate ourselves and act in the world as subjects of history. Content will still be important, vital even, as a way of determining the level of this neutering of the past, but it will be more significant that the media construct us a subjects of history who are, like Harry Potter, fixed obsessively before a mediating mirror.

The reasons for this concern are well fleshed out in the debates between many theorists who deal with historical representations in visual media. Often, the stakes have been framed in relation to the appropriateness of these texts as bearers of historical information. Historians like Ian Jarvie see the increasing reliance on visual historical accounts as a primary source of knowledge as problematic. According to Hayden White, Jarvie "complemented his critique of the necessarily impoverished 'information load' of the historical film with two other objections: first, the tendency of the historical film to favor 'narration'" and "second, the presumed incapacity of film to represent the true essence of historiography" (White, 1988, 1195). On the other side of the debate, historians like Rosenstone and White advocate for a heuristic that makes sense of the different conceptions of the past that filmic historical accounts can create. Rosenstone discusses the affective, or emotional, "information load" that accompanies historical films, and not only posits that the

visual account cannot be held to the same standards as the written work, but also remarks that this kind of past "fulfills the need for that larger History, that web of connections to the past that holds a culture together" (1995, p. 23). Throughout this examination, the need for a web of connections to fill the void left by a superficial post-modernity is linked to the problematic nature of individual nostalgic media. In fact, the increasing absence of these broader cultural connections is the very issue created through contemporary media texts' construction of the perpetual individual nostalgic. Despite their different views on visual media as historical texts, both Rosenstone and Jarvie are advocating for a brand of history that is adaptive, comparative, and serves to teach its consumers something about the shared cultural past. There is value in an adaptive and comparative history, as it contains critical and didactic potential. Unfortunately, the contemporary nostalgia trend is presentist and self-perpetuating, which has a profound impact on our capacity to understand history in an adaptive fashion.

Certainly many theorists have addressed the presentist nature of many contemporary historical media texts, but also tend to do so out of concern for the allegorical, adaptive value of history. Pierre Sorlin's work, for instance, is concerned with allegorical historical films that contain "a view of the present embedded within a picture of the past" (1980, p. 19). For Sorlin, these allegorical films address "periods of tension" (1980, p. 19), and have "been marked by the political variations of its time" (1980, p. 22). Here the allegory is serving a comparative, possibly even critical, function by confronting political issues even if the present is covered by a historical veneer. The work of Hughes-Warrington also interrogates the presentist nature of contemporary film. She sees every historical film, regardless of subject matter, as "never just about one time" (2007, p. 76). Instead, there are multiple presents from which to view the film, such as the time period the film was produced as well

as the heterogeneous time periods the film is viewed. This reception flexibility can serve to promote the frame of viewing constructed in individualized, presentist nostalgia films, a point that will be important in the chapter devoted to digital-archives and the multiple presents involved in watching a *Happy Days* (1974-1984) DVD. Still, Hughes-Warrington sees all of these texts as having a "location in a time bound network of discussions" (2007, p. 191), which speaks again to the adaptive discourse of these historical texts. A location-, time- and culture-bound derivation for historical representations points towards the importance of recognizing "who" controls connections to the past. Roth notes this constructed and presentist tendency of past connections in saying "the connection between past and present is never only a problem of memory, but also a problem of history and desire" (1991, p. 8). These works address the tendency of historical media texts to equate the issues of the present with those of the past, or at the very least allegorically link them, and this analysis can use these authors to compare the same tendencies in contemporary narcissistic nostalgia. Sorlin and Hughes-Warrington are examining the presentist discourse potentials, but it is the very critical bite or discussion-provoking tendency of the historical text that is missing today. In its place, there is the tendency to appeal, through affective connections, to contemporary structures of feeling, which is easier and more lucrative than catering to a critical edge.

Nostalgia and Generations

Obviously, one of the most important areas of focus when discussing an individual excess of history must be research that deals with the conception of nostalgia. The evolving and sanguine version of nostalgic research that valorizes contemporary cultural production has already been discussed, but there are some complex and important works not covered under this umbrella, such as those by Stephanie Coontz and the often-quoted Svetlana Boym.

These two works are foundational to this dissertation and also open up the question of the generational and societal implications that the narcissistic nostalgia trend influences.

Stephanie Coontz describes nostalgia as a powerful cultural force used in different historical periods to espouse a conservative ideology, because it shows how the past can be used to reaffirm an unachievable ideal applied to the reality of the present (1992). Not surprisingly, Coontz's primary object of study is the tendency for contemporary society to view the 1950s as an embodiment of a time when the family was wholesome and by implication ideal. A deep cultural nostalgia for this idealized past had formed regardless of whether this perfect existence was even achievable at any point in history. Susan Stewart describes this form of nostalgia as "a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience" wearing a "distinctly utopian face, a face that turns toward a future-past, a past which has only ideological reality" (Stewart, 1984, p. 23). The implication is that "if the 1950s family existed today...we would not have the contemporary social dilemmas that cause such debate" (Coontz, 1992, p. 24). A return to wholesome family values is proposed and is enacted through conservative hegemonic ideological thought. As Coontz states, "a seemingly gender-neutral indictment of family irresponsibility ends up being directed most forcefully against women" (1992, p. 41). Most significant for this dissertation is the idea that this kind of utopia never existed in the first place as "beneath the polished facade of many 'ideal' families, suburban as well as urban, was violence, terror, or simply grinding misery that only occasionally came to light" (Coontz, 1992, p. 35). To help reframe these concerns on an ideological level, Zizek discusses a similar dynamic whereby a desire to return to specific values and "ideological elements" is really a desire for values we wish we had and whose "meaning are fixed retroactively" (1991, p. 129). Expanding on these

works, the concept of nostalgia for a past that may never have existed demonstrates how contemporary historical media texts construct the past as presentist and artifice all the while claiming a connection to individual pasts that viewers and players strive for.

Similarly, Svetlana Boym's *The Future of Nostalgia* chronicles a growing epidemic of nostalgia, though filters it through stories and memories from post-communist cities like Moscow. The two most significant elements of this book for this dissertation are the way Boym lays out the definitional aspects of nostalgia and her rare, yet illustrative, treatment of American popular culture. First, Boym describes nostalgia as simultaneously "universal" and "divisive", and posits that once one is "possessed by nostalgia" they tend to forget their actual past (2001, p. xiii). Much like Dumbledore's warning to Harry about men who wasted their lives looking into the Mirror of Erised, those situated always looking backwards will be shown to have forgotten their "real" past in favor of an idealized mediated version. These notions are important both for any kind of normative judgment levied against the nostalgia obsessed, and also the importance of one's own past being replaced by a nostalgic drive, shown to be a common occurrence when the nostalgic preoccupation is one based on media. As the famous Goo Goo Dolls song "Name" once stated, "And reruns all become our history." Boym goes on to state that nostalgia is an attempt at creating "continuity in a fragmented world" despite the fact that ultimately its aim is "elusive" (2001, p. xiv). Boym's observations about nostalgia in American culture – for her a secondary concern – are incredibly important for the aims of this dissertation. Her main argument is that "Americans are supposed to be antihistorical, yet the souvenirization of the past and obsession with roots and identity here are ubiquitous" (2001, p. 38). Even more significant is that "unless you are a hopelessly nostalgic foreigner, you cannot even long for anything

outside of the popular culture" (2001, p. 39). Here, Boym establishes nostalgia as ready-made and a convenient compensation for our feeling of a lack of meaningful past. Boym also establishes a dichotomy between American nostalgia and her main subject of post-communist areas, and she hints at the predominant, if not primary, way American nostalgia manifests itself through media instead of a collective past.

A nostalgic American tendency based around media moves the concern of this dissertation to the implications of creating viewers and players who fiercely maintain connections to their individual mediated past. This notion is inextricably tied to earlier discussion of psychoanalytic theory, and the concepts of the mirror stage and drive. Like Harry, whose feeling of loss for his parents is both unmourned and unending, the contemporary viewer is denied a meaningful past, and constantly seeks an affective remedy in the consumption of a ready-made past. This dynamic creates compulsive, driven nostalgics who are less concerned with critically gazing into the past than with the superficial satisfaction of returning to their own narcissistic mirror. The implications of a lack of adequate past mourning in the construction of the individual perpetual nostalgic extend beyond the ontogenetic to the phylogenetic, where many scholars worry about the generational implications of this shared compulsion. There is a growing research focus in the field of sociology that specifically addresses the target age group of much of the nostalgic past-centered media, and their construction as driven to be stuck in these pre-adult times and obsessions. The picture this research paints suggests that the concerns are not just theoretical. This research is helpful in conceptually modeling and illuminating what is at stake when a culture's relationship to the past is constructed along the lines sketched above; when the subjects of a culture's ideology manifest a manufactured desire to continually revisit and

misrecognize their own past in the mirror provided by the media. Indeed, one of the recurring tropes in the sociological literature on the current generation is the concept of an "emerging adult" used to explain those caught in a time of self-exploration, instability, and most of all identity formation (Arnett, 2006, p. 7).

According to Jennifer Tanner, the two changing issues facing this group today are a "re-centering" of this transition from one's late teens to their early twenties, as well as the now highly deinstitutionalized and individualized nature of this transition (2006, p. 49). This new group is perpetually stuck in an unstable environment in which they are expected to form and consolidate their identities without the guidance of ritualized and institutionalized practices that helped previous generations. Here, contemporary consumer societies' communicative ritual forms involve superficial narcissistic compensation rather than institutional guidance. Carey's ritual model of communication, a "symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained" (2009, p. 23), helps in understanding how the vacuum left by a lack of institutional clarity is replaced by these superficial forms. A lack of clarity "provides confusion and stress for bright, intelligent, American youths who want to enter into the adult world" (Ziewacz, 2001, p. 211), and this absence of institutional guidance reduces the desire to use the past to critically evaluate present needs and opens the door for the media to construct them as perpetual nostalgics. The implication, and benefit for media in terms of consumer culture, is that those situated as eternally in a state of arrested development have more in common with an uncritical, particularly susceptible child-like mindset. Harry Potter sat transfixed before the Mirror of Erised because he had a feeling of loss that he wanted to compensate for by gazing into the mirror and, indeed, it was a sign of his development – of his ability to mourn the loss of his parents – that he was finally able to turn away. The

media's construction of perpetual nostalgia would have us remain in what some might call a "regressed" state, unable to turn away.

One could say that no matter what aim is behind constructing an audience comprised of perpetual nostalgics, the media are clearly unwilling to facilitate a transition to critical adult concerns as hegemony is maintained through this specific subject construction. Popular media culture is thus a contributing factor in the increasingly individualized nature of this transition. Even taking into consideration the post-WWII higher education boom, college is still far from a universal experience as the number of college graduates in this country hovers just under 30% (Bernstein, 2008). Society's laws advance the idea that once the age of eighteen is reached adulthood is magically achieved. But certain individuals at eighteen are full adults while others are still traveling, moving constantly, consolidating their identity, and acting in a very self-focused way. Those who are stuck at the level of emerging adults can never fully realize themselves and are never able to fully engage with their present. These current transitory adults, who are physically mature but psychological regressed, are sometimes dubbed the "boomerang generation" and a recent *USA Today* article estimated that about of a third of those age 20 through 34, around 18 million, now live with their parents (Niederhaus & Graham, 2007, p. A11). In a related study, Diana West states that with the amount college costs these days it is "little wonder Junior with his BA comes knocking on Mom and Dad's door, which seems to remain open to him indefinitely" (2007, p. 70). This points to the vastly individualized nature of this population as different people within the same age bracket are at different stages of development. Not being challenged with critical, complex, or collective media, those in this stage remain in a regressed state, or as Adorno noted of music listeners with simplified tastes, they become "arrested at the infantile stage"

(2001, p. 46) with contemporary media making "escape from the whole infantile milieu impossible" (2001, p. 47).

The absent institutional structures implied by the sociological research are reminiscent of Foucault's conception of "biopower" and societal regulation (1998, p. 140), but instead the consumer-driven media culture fills in as the new biopower. As the 18-34 demographic consumes more media per capita, they seem to be unable to evolve and self-realize. The media play a crucial role in creating a misrecognized "imago," or the idealized "pure mirror of an unruffled surface" (Lacan, 1977, p. 15), identity that is narcissistic and nostalgic like the one Harry Potter transfixes on, turning the gaze away from the future toward an idealized and individualized past. Searching for some guidance and finding no institutional criteria for how and when to make this transition to adulthood, this "recentering constitutes a shift in power, agency, responsibility, and dependence between emerging adults and their social contexts" (Tanner, 2006, p. 27), namely the media texts that push for perpetual individual nostalgia and answer the question of when to grow up with "never." There is a reason that this phenomenon is sometimes referred to as "Peter Pan syndrome" or "puer aeternus" for eternal boy (Kiley 1983), and it is clear that it benefits the contemporary power structure and economic logic of media to construct subjects in this way.

The Political Economy of the Past

Whereas the first analytic lens for understanding the importance of media nostalgia was epistemological, and the second was psychological, the final lens used to examine contemporary nostalgic media texts is economic. How might it benefit the current cultural power structure, economically, to construct nostalgic consumers who eschew growing up for gazing into their own pasts? First, and possibly most importantly, by constructing a past

defined by media artifacts as opposed to comparative historical discourse the drive is to

consume instead of contemplate. Second, it follows that presentist nostalgics driven by their

own "playlist past" will be more likely to compile, acquire, and archive media texts that have

most likely been paid for previously because they have been situated in an uncritical "buying

mood," a structure of feeling well discussed in research on the political economy of

advertising.[2] Through these interrelated dynamics, a tension is set up that will be explored

throughout this dissertation between a consumer of history, namely individualized and

idealized history, and one who engages with history.

Jerome de Groot fleshes out a set of problematics along these lines in *Consuming*

History (2009). He begins by advocating for scholarship that is able to "discern better what

'History' means: how it is sold, presented, transmitted and experienced" and he thinks this

should be done through a comparative study of the various media that deal with historical

matters (2009, p. 1). For de Groot, the two most important issues are the various ways in

which history in the media has become a pervasive multi-media cultural phenomenon and

what this means on the level of selling and consuming history. By "consuming history" de

Groot is referring to the ways in which certain contemporary media present a "version of the

past...illustrated through cultural products" (2009, p. 165). As analogous as de Groot's goals

seem to this dissertation, the similarities fade the moment the introduction ends, and are

replaced with discussions of the representations of certain kinds of history as well as

historians themselves, such as Civil War re-enactors and the main character in *The Da Vinci*

---

[2] Examples include Joseph Turow's deconstruction of consumer society's segmentation in
Breaking Up America (1998), Matthew McAllister's look at the effects of ad-based television
(2005), Sut Jhally's tour-de-force look at commodity fetishism in *The Codes of Advertising*
(1987), and McChesney's look at advertising ownership within his work *Making Media
Democratic* (1998).

Code. This does not make de Groot unhelpful for this work, but it will be the job of this analysis to extend these concerns by examining to what it means to sell a consumable version of one's past, and to highlight the dominance of a version of history that is media-based and "consumer friendly." The tension between consumer and critical history must comes into full relief, made evident in the conditioning of contemporary media consumers to want a "friction free" consumer culture version of the past as opposed to a critical past that might cause anxiety and lots of friction.

To help in this task, I will be following the lead of two authors whose works have tangentially dealt with some of the same issues involved in the archiving and selling of the past. Both Derek Kompare's *Rerun Nation* (2004) and Barbara Klinger's *Beyond the Multiplex* (2006) work through some of the tendencies and issues of collecting in a repetitious culture. Kompare's characterization of the over-arching tendency of television to reproduce itself is useful because it emphasizes the economic reasons for this repetitive compulsion and highlights the unforeseen audience expectations that arise from it. Yet despite its rigorous historical analysis of this television tendency, Kompare spends comparatively little time on contemporary issues of repetition. He does, in the end, devote his final chapter to the advent of the DVD and fully recognizes how the cultures of retro and nostalgia have "pervaded the last quarter of the century" (2004, p. 103). It is my intention to build on this coda and expand on its implications. Similarly, Klinger deals extensively with the DVD as part of her exploration of a film collector's mentality. Her conceptualization of an archive text as a "prize commodity" (2006, p. 86), and especially her position that these texts can "invite the viewer to reexperience the past" (2006, p. 86) are vital for what follows. Klinger assists in the recognition that media commodities contribute to a compulsive drive to

recapture a misrecognized media defined past, making her crucial for understanding how media producers benefit from the perpetual commodification of the past. The heuristic devices provided by these works will be important in the discussion of television's formal nostalgia and film's remaking nature. Moreover, they will also play a significant role in demonstrating what a media-defined history and playlist past advocate as an available past.

In short, I will argue that re-experiencing a cultural, collective past that is adaptive, comparative, and critical might have the tendency to problematize consumer subjectivity and complicate the desire to buy the next version of Apple's iPad or any other media commodity. A subject or audience that problematizes the manufactured desires of corporate hegemony is contrary to the profit motive underlying that hegemony. As such, this premise helps understand why it benefits the culture industries to focus instead on constructing a past that is friendly to its needs in developing a commodity audience and subjects who are uncritical of the past manufactured for them. This dynamic in contemporary historical media texts can be related to research on the advertising industry's similar tactics. According to Matthew McAllister, the television ad might just be the "most pervasive and consistent genre of television content" (2005, p. 217), and his work "Television Advertising as Textual and Economic Systems" examines ways advertising influences the structure of the medium itself. From not wanting to upset advertisers with "controversy" (2005, p. 226), to a desire to put consumers in a "buying mood" (2005, p. 227), the effects are shown to extend well past the thirty-second textual borders of the ads themselves. In the television chapter, an explicit connection will be made between this "buying mood" and the triggered orientation of the "presentist nostalgic" targeted market. For example, nostalgic media texts being rife with music tracks from childhood to fill up that new iPad with. Even the ads themselves have

taken a turn for the nostalgic, with many employing music and themes from the past designed to connect target demographics with their childhood, and maybe even get them to re-purchase songs on iTunes from albums long dusted in the attic. This presentist nostalgia strategy is synergistic, effective, and far from a critical or radical view of the past.

It would seem that the most important thing to take from this search for works that deal with the commodification of the past is that there is still a significant need for more research in this area. Books that carry titles like *Trash Culture* (Simon, 1999) and de Groot's *Consuming History* deliver on their promises to explain the nature of reusing media from the past, but do not fully attempt to critically explain the economic reasoning for doing so or the inherent benefits to those in positions of power in the media. Similarly, the title of Vera Dika's *Recycled Culture* (2003) implies the same critical economic engagement but deals more with a resistant nostalgic mode, though this work will provide an important contrast in the chapter on film to the narcissistic nostalgia mode. Considering these titles' linguistic choices, the opportunity still exists to extend these concerns to a media that is preoccupied with playlist pasts and all things nostalgic.

Achieving these results will require blending all three of these perspectives, and selecting texts that not only exemplify the broader trend to highlight the past as ultimately important but also show the pervasive nature of this dynamic across media. The examples chosen for critique are the tip of an iceberg, ones that exemplify all the characteristics important to explaining the rest of the iceberg, which is to say the emerging dominance of this nostalgic mode of representation in convergent media. The texts explored here, from *Call of Duty: World at War* (2008) to the *Karate Kid* remake (2010), will be shown to address the past through uncritical eyes and construct it this way for their consumers. The

method of this analysis will be a close reading of the texts with an emphasis on both the formal and structural elements of examples that speak to the importance of a predictable nostalgia defined by media texts. The implication of each text will be explored in relation to the three areas of scholarly debate: epistemological conversations about accuracy in historical representation, the psychoanalytic discourse about the nostalgia and identity construction, and the political economic analysis of both in relation to the media consumer. Multimodal and interdisciplinary textual analysis will be important for explaining stakes of this emerging representational trend. It will blend semiotics, psychoanalysis, film theory, rhetorical theory, and a cultural studies concern for the ideological in an attempt to fully explore the ways in which each text forges a consumable past that informs how viewers and players understand the present. First, by contemplating the various semiotic tendencies of these nostalgia-centered texts it will be possible to ascertain the way the literal and symbolic knowledge about the past, or how to look at the past, is created through the use of signifying practices. Second, by exploring the ways in which this past construction creates a drive for connections to individual pasts, it will be possible to understand what aspects of the subject this approach exploits. Third, through the use of a film rhetoric textual analysis strategy, the ways in which each text asks its viewers to understand their own histories as all-important will become more evident. Finally and related to the above perspectives, by interrogating texts for their ideological significances, the symbolic and literal, the appeals and the invitations, a nostalgic-driven past can be explored for its impact on the way we "render otherwise incomprehensible social situations meaningful" (Geertz, 1973, p. 220).

Connections between texts and groupings of similar kinds of media phenomena will also be an important step to understanding the broad trends within the media's construction

of perpetual nostalgics. This does not just refer to the explicit connections between texts, such as the *Scott Pilgrim* comic book series' references to specific Nintendo video games from the late 1980s like *Ninja Gaiden* (1988) or *Super Mario Bros. 2* (1988), but also when implicit connections can be made between texts even across media, such as when a film like *The Family Man* (2000) uses the same brand of fantastical yearning as the television show *Life on Mars* (2008 - 2009). This goes beyond the simple idea of intertextuality, and begins to become an interconnected web of the past aimed at the heart of a viewer's and player's constructed dependency on nostalgia. By establishing these tendencies, it will be easier to establish the ways in which uncritical nostalgia has become a dominant logic of the media.

Specific Focuses

Though uncritical presentist nostalgia that is opposed to Jameson's radical past has become common across contemporary media, this analysis will be broken up into separate mediums and the specific considerations that go along with each medium's historical representations. Contemporary nostalgic media are structured in such a way as to engender a perpetual melancholic form of individualized nostalgia as opposed to a comparative, collective or radical view of history. This is achieved through encouraging the formation of nostalgic subjectivities coalesced around and triggered by cross-media individualized playlist pasts. From remakes to top ten lists, an idealized and uncritical version of the past is presented to contemporary nostalgics rendering them unlikely to relinquish their misrecognized lost past object. Much like Roth's clarification that nostalgics tend to fiercely guard their longing – as soldiers denied their nostalgia to avoid treatment (1991, p. 13) – the pathologically nostalgic who maintains melancholic attachments appears to be "happy" perpetually consuming their individual pasts, but nevertheless remains regressed and unable

to grow and create new libidinal attachments. Each medium will be shown to engender this specific nostalgic subjectivity differently, with digital media encouraging a repetitive collector's mentality about the past, video games concentrating on behavioral nostalgic repetition, film relying on the epistemology of nostalgia, and television automatically triggering memories linked to nostalgia. Each medium will be shown to consistently present or provide nostalgic subjectivities that are perpetually caught in a feedback loop that is individual, narcissistic, and uncritical; each achieves this constructed drive through different means. The analytic focus for each matches the medium deemed most appropriate; however, this is not to say that these specific focuses are mutually exclusive, as one could, for instance, apply the epistemology of nostalgia to video games and behavioral nostalgic repetition to film. As such, there will certainly be overlap in chapters due to the inherent cross-media, self-referential, and intertextual nature of narcissistic nostalgia, but a general sectioning by medium should help simplify this complex phenomenon. Through this cross-media focus, it is hoped that a deeper understanding can be gained of the contemporary media tendency to construct perpetual individual nostalgics who look backwards as a way of recreating and recapturing a version of the past that is individual, presentist, and uncritical.

In the next chapter, *The Explosion of Digital Archiving Nostalgic Access*, the collector's mentality and tendency to define the past through media texts will be argued as paramount to understanding the broader stakes of a perpetual individual nostalgic past with melancholic ties to collected media. This chapter will lay the foundation for these concepts in subsequent chapters. The new digital archiving outlets one can access the texts of the past – namely DVDs, iTunes, Netflix, and Hulu – have enhanced what is described in this dissertation as a "playlist past." The works of Kompare and Klinger will be important for this

establishment, and Jeremy Packer will be key is showing this media phenomenon as part of an archive apparatus that enables a rerun mentality to transform into a repetitive collector's mentality. This chapter links the nostalgic drive of gaining access to one's media past and the overarching need to create and maintain these connections, with not only being nostalgic about a text, but creating and monitoring an archive-like access to these texts as a way of staying "up to date" with the past. Broader claims will be made about what this access has done to the overall drive to connect with an individual past defined by media texts and neutered of any temporally located critical bite, as well the overarching economic benefits of anchoring in the past. Nostalgia being the powerful emotion that it is – grounded in an impossible Lacanian drive loop that is never-ending and self-perpetuating – will be shown to be an easy target to commodify and exploit. As will be argued, this exploitation manifests in a variety of different ways, from the re-purchasing of texts in new formats, to self-referential media that simply point backwards nostalgically. The benefits of commodifying the past for predictably nostalgic commodity audiences are staggering, with much material either already produced, media that is repackaged or reformatted, or texts that are remade, and therefore reduce risk with an already established proven property.

Chapter three, *Downloading and Playing an Explicit and Implicit Past*, examines the video game industry's increasing reliance on constructing melancholic nostalgic connections, especially to contemporary generations' childhoods. It builds on and expands upon the idea of a past defined by media artifacts to examine how an entire industry of media production is increasingly defined by this particular strategy of nostalgia and attending subject formation. The specific construction of nostalgic subjectivities will center on narrative and ludic elements that have video game players enacting behavioral nostalgic triggers through

recycled storylines and repeated button configurations. The analysis will include the explicit

video game remake (sometimes known as "ports"), such as *Resident Evil* (Sony Playstation

1996, Nintendo Gamecube 2002), the implicit self-referential remake, the downloading of

vintage games, and the tendency to conflate the past with the present even in games not

considered to be remakes, such as in *Red Dead Redemption* (2010) with its thematically

modern Wild West. It is easy to make and maintain a melancholia-based nostalgic connection

when the texts themselves never really change, pointing to the construction of perpetual

nostalgics for texts that were very popular during the childhood of the industry's key

demographic. Imperative for this chapter is the recent ability of all three current-generation

gaming consoles to download vintage video games onto their hard drives. The most powerful

video game systems today are designed with the ability to play 1980s 8-bit games, which is a

key nod to the trend of constructing the past as based around media texts themselves. Each of

the areas of focus in the video game nostalgic-centered text will serve to explain the ways in

which individual connections to the past are increasingly being created through behavioral

repetition, resulting in a validation of anchoring oneself in a mediated past.

 Chapter four, *Re-Imagining Cinematic "Classics,"* is an exploration of the current

rash of remakes in the film industry. This chapter builds upon the previous chapter's

rehashing of the past through the remake, and examines this phenomenon from the standpoint

of the epistemology of nostalgia. Across genre lines, the remake, or as it is dubbed "re-

imagining," has become a staple of the movie theater experience, from the remake of *The

Karate Kid* (1984, 2010) to a new version of *Clash of the Titans* (1981, 2010), and this

chapter explores the motivations for this trend and their connections to what certain segments

of the remake audience "knows" about the original. While this "remake" strategy pervades

other media, such as the recent reboot of the *V* mini-series (1983, 1984, 2009-2011) and the

Hawaii Five-0 series remake (1968-1980, 2010-present), the focus of this chapter will remain

on the epistemology of nostalgia in the contemporary film remake. Even when the cultural

text is not remade, many sequels take on an implicit "recombination" or "re-imagining"

mentality. *Star Trek* (2009) and *Scre4m* (2011) may fit into their respective canons

chronologically as sequels, but the spirit behind these films is one of restarting a once-

thought dead franchise, evident even in their lexical choices that drop or incorporate

numbering. Certainly, a sequel on its own does not necessarily convey a contemporary state

of mind, but the current industry has shown a tendency to look backwards and remake

canonical texts while tailoring those remakes to current sensibilities, and importantly expand

on and exploit the previously held knowledge of its audiences. This is especially true of texts

that derive their popularity primarily from the 1980s, a key era as it represents the same

childhood for a primary video game demographic. Rooting this tendency to remake in the

1980s will be of the utmost importance to establish the nostalgic and epistemological link to

those who grew up in this era, and differentiate this from the secondary concern of garnering

new audiences unfamiliar with the text by creating retroactive nostalgia in them.

The final chapter, *The Nostalgic Revolution Will Be Televised*, examines an expanded

nostalgic construction on television, both in terms of the contents of its shows as well as its

relation to the advertisements that accompany them. Through this expanded nostalgic

construction it will be clear that the television medium engenders nostalgic subjectivities

through the automatic triggering of memories associated with nostalgia in a form similar to

Marcel Proust's discussion of madeleine cookies (2006). Research surrounding the television

medium has many times addressed it from a macro and formal standpoint, such as Postman's

work on how television as a medium has influenced our very ways of thinking and learning (1985), McAllister's work on the advertising system (2005), as well as Smythe's work on the understanding the industry's attempt to construct the audience itself as a commodity (2006). This macro research will continue to be important in this chapter as it is applied to contemporary television texts' construction of an uncritical, and non-radical past that focuses viewers attention on an individual nostalgic commodity flow through automatic nostalgic triggers. This chapter examines explicitly nostalgic show content for the triggered neutered version of the past that is present in the narratives, such as *Glory Daze, That 70s Show,* and even television channels like The Hub that plays *Transformers* and *G.I. Joe* vintage cartoons alongside their remake counterparts. This chapter also looks at implicitly nostalgic programming like *How I Met Your Mother*, *Lost* (2004-2010), and *Fringe* (2008-present) with perpetual individual nostalgia validated through characters' triggered recalling of the past as all-important. Most significantly, the advertising system is explored for its creation of a consistent nostalgic commodity flow that extends into and between programming. Through these focuses, this final chapter will demonstrate how the television medium situates its viewers as perpetually facing backwards through the employment of explicit and implicit historical narratives, and the advertisements that accompany them, that trigger narcissistic historical ties, as opposed to a past that might stimulate adaptive, didactic, critical discourses discussed earlier by historians like White.

Throughout this entire dissertation, the goal will be to demonstrate that the contemporary media's construction and validation of an individual playlist past is at odds with centuries of discourse about the importance of maintaining a relationship to a shared cultural past that is critical and spurs us to face the challenges of the present. This does not

mean we all need to subscribe to Simon Reynolds' self-diagnosed future "addiction," holding

onto the belief that the "future is out there" despite much media evidence to the contrary

(2011, p. 428). Instead, a particular conception of the past is needed that is more

comparative. The past recognized by the mediated and presentist nostalgic, when compared

to this normative ethic, is problematic and dangerous to our collective conception of history.

Many cultural theorists of hegemony have noted that oppositional material is recuperated and

made safe by contemporary media (Gitlin, 1979; Hebdige, 1979), and so too are potential

sites for critical historical discourse absorbed in clear avoidance of an adaptive, engaged

mindset. To use one's individual past to learn and grow is respectable and important, and the

media can assist in this endeavor as noted in Anne-Marie Kramer's look at the television

show *Who Do You Think You Are?* (2004 - present) that promoted the "emotional resonance of

the past in the present... facilitating an emotional, experiential and individualized mode of

engagement with the past" (Kramer, 2011, p. 430). But this is not the norm, as the individualized

past constructed in the media is defined by the texts themselves. In the end, this is a study of the

implications of the media's "thoughtless obstructionism" to comparative, critical discourse

about the past and a "willful resistance" of using the past adaptively to engage the present

and the future (White, 1985, p. 41). Or put more simply by Albus Dumbledore, "It does not

do to dwell on dreams Harry, and forget to live."

Chapter 2: The Explosion of Digital Archiving Nostalgic Access

Nostalgia coalesces, many times, around the collection of artifacts that evoke longed-for specific pasts. Umberto Eco said, today "the mad taste for collecting, lists, assemblage, amassing of disparate things is due to the need to dismantle and reconsider the flotsam of a previous world" (1986, p. 83), and this chapter will explore the tendency of the contemporary nostalgic to construct a previous world made up entirely of cultural flotsam from the past. From t-shirts with vintage media references, to the rebroadcasts of Casey Kasem's *American Top 40*, and even to websites dedicated to cataloging and reminiscing over 1980s cereals, the nostalgic propensity of contemporary media has created a convenient, media-driven version of the past to fill the void left by a superficial postmodernity. This proliferation can be attributed to many factors, such as the establishment of a "rerun mentality" (Kompare, 2004), but much of this myopic gaze backwards comes down to the explosion of access to nostalgic media that reduces the likelihood of critical, collective, or healthy pluralistic historical discourses. This chapter will discuss access and affordances in today's mediascape that set the stage for the proliferation of what I am calling a "playlist past." That is, the archiving or compiling technologies, and the ways in which they are used to manage media consumption and set the stage for a past that emphasizes individually selected media texts and personal connections. Within the overall normative framework of contemporary media's construction of nostalgic subjectivities established in the first chapter, digital-access media work specifically to encourage a repetitive collector's mentality towards history that is crucial in the construction of individualized playlist pasts.

The previous chapter discussed Jeremy Packer's archive apparatus theory, and it will be rehearsed again to help our discussion of the digital-archive in this chapter. Packer

highlights the capabilities of any archive to be "invoked as a mechanism for providing proof, for legitimating arguments" (2010, p. 91), which is important for establishing certain viewpoints and stances as more valid than others, such as a perpetual focusing on the past. Packer is also helpful in understanding how this past constructed around the use of an archive is individualized, as he states the new technologies of the mobile privatization apparatus create a "demassing" or "unmaking forms of social movement and organization whose shared spatial and temporal, not to mention class, experience was deemed dangerous" (2010, p. 94). For Packer, those who take part in this new form of archive apparatus seek "solace in a private domestic sphere that maintained ties to the nation" (2010, p. 95), and for this analysis it is the ties to the past that are maintained, only individualized ties at the expense of the collective. This analysis will focus both on Packer's advocating for archive apparatus exploration of "organizations, institutions, or credentialized experts" (2010, p. 100), as well as his look at the "processes of subjectification that are coconstitutive of the apparatus" (2010, p. 102). This will be accomplished by examining "paratextual" marketing materials and authoritative voices in digital media (Gray, 2010), and the ways an individualized nostalgic subjectivity is engendered through the creation of the digital-archive apparatus.

These technological archive affordances make possible a mode of relating to a past that is constructed around individualized affective relations. In many ways, this new moment is possible only because of digitalized media, as many of the relatively recent accessible outlets for media nostalgia are digital in format: DVDs, iTunes, Hulu, and Netflix.[3] The new avenues of digital consumption exemplify the way in which one can both easily access the

---

[3] This does not preclude the importance of analog versions of media nostalgia; with VHS self-made television archives and mix tapes of songs constituting significant practices in the attempts at past recreation that were labor intensive and many times extensive.

texts of the past, and increasingly control the archived past along highly personal lines. Many times, the nostalgic playlist is organized around childhood texts, with Simon Reynolds describing studies suggesting "the impulse to collect is at its strongest between the ages of seven and twelve, the prepubescent phase when the child is seeking to individuate himself" (2011, p. 88). For Reynolds, technologies like the iPod launched contemporary generations into a "second adolescence as they avidly checked out new music and ventured into unexplored corners of the past" (2011, p. 95). In this chapter, media forms like the iPod and Netflix queue will be focused on, not only because of their sudden proliferation, but because they establish the media consumer as one who can only focus on his or her perpetual individual nostalgia at the expense of a significant engagement with the present or an adaptive, collective past. Indeed the mnemonic function of these different media forms is significant for the ways in which they construct their own form of nostalgia. Each of these outlets will be shown to model a different form of nostalgic archiving construction, with some functioning more in a library fashion, like DVDs and iTunes, and others in an instantaneous recollection and reminiscing fashion, like Hulu, iTunes, and Netflix. Establishing this entrenchment of a collector's mentality and the tendency to define the past through compiling media texts will be shown to be paramount in understanding the broader stakes of a perpetual individual nostalgic past.

At stake is how the construction of perpetual individual nostalgics goes beyond getting media consumers to simply focus on the past, which could possibly result in a healthy form of comparative memory depending on the direction of the focus, and instead encourages a futile attempt at recreation. The version of the past that is "recaptured" through this process is a misrecognized and idealized form of past reality that refuses to question and discuss the

past as an adaptive tool for the present, and instead is content with exploring history as "'as an end in itself" that should be seen "as willful resistance to the attempt to close with the present world in all its strangeness and mystery" (White, 1985, 41). The version of the individual past contained within an archived collection of *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992), for example, compiled because it defined a significant time in a viewer's life, manifests itself as uncritical compared to engaging with a collective history that can teach us something about today. The nostalgic texts come to define the collector and are used, like Deneen Gilmour said of household items, as a "materialistic mask in which people use personal possessions...to signal their substance to others" (2006, p. 58). Here the mask is the collection of beloved nostalgic texts in DVD and download form, and what is disabused is any form of collective or critical view of history. Defining the past through media texts is especially problematic when considering the selective and exclusionary process that goes along with taking these works out of their original context, making them "better," and placing them on a shelf or in a Netflix queue.

Nostalgic consumption creates media objects that are pumped up with psychic investment to a level of unreality by idealizing and distorting their historical significance for the individual. Stephanie Coontz explores the creation of nostalgia for an idealized 1950s through the taking of television shows from that period out of their historical context (1992), and the same relationship to the past is constructed when individuals engage in their own narcissistic playlist pasts. Coontz's work, along with Kompare's discussion of a rerun mentality and Klinger's explanation of how collecting media functions, will serve as the foundation to exploring the attempt to connect with one's past through media texts. This

chapter will attempt to link the nostalgic drive of gaining access to one's media past and the overarching need to create and maintain these connections.

The nostalgic drive is not only constructed around a relation to a particular text, but by creating and monitoring an archive-like access to these texts as a way of staying "up to date" with the past. This technological apparatus serves as a memory machine that determines our mode of and approach to accessing the past. To explain how prolific digital access has become it is helpful to look at the many ways in which a single media text that is nostalgic both in form and content can be digitally obtained. A good example through which to examine this is *The Wonder Years* (1988-1993), which was a self-consciously nostalgic show structured around a first-person narrator examining his childhood through his coming of age. Those who have analyzed this show note its affirmation of Reagan-era "nostalgia for the Fifties" (Marcus, 2004, p. 61), which will also be important in this chapter's later deconstruction of the *Back to the Future* trilogy (1985, 1989, 1990). Yet the mode of accessing this nostalgic text goes beyond the content of *The Wonder Years* to the way in which such shows are accessed in today's digitalized archive, where the options for obtaining this text are near limitless. The nostalgic collector can purchase the "Best of the *Wonder Years*" DVD of this show, beginning their own *Wonder Years* library. Those who are feely more comprehensively nostalgic can watch full seasons and specific episodes on Netflix, though these deals are many times ephemeral and unpredictable. If cable television is your only nostalgia collector's bin, then *Wonder Years* plays nightly at 9pm on the new HUB channel, which will be discussed in more detail in the chapter dedicated to television for its juxtaposition of vintage shows alongside their contemporary iterations contributing to a loss of a radical past. Even those yearning for their particular experience of *The Wonder Years*

can relive their favorite moments through sites like YouTube and Hulu. This helps foster what one could think of as micro-nostalgia that in this case would refer to the longing to relive very specific moments from a media text, individually chosen for its effects. This highly subjective desire goes beyond longing for an entire series or even an entire episode. Access at this level, an access made possible by the growing affordances of the digital-archive, caters to a constructed nostalgia that begins to approach the pathological by perpetually placing the viewer in a situation where it is easier to relive *The Wonder Years* as a response to anxiety in the present than it is to engage with complex histories that might help explain the present. This access is available for countless shows, pointing to the ubiquitous and idiosyncratic nature of digital nostalgia, which must be explored for its construction of how viewers engage with their memories of the past.

An analysis of the nostalgic potential of a popular media culture that is digitally archived requires us to look at both the ways in which the gaze is directed backwards into the past by the media, as well as the way in which the choice of what media are consumed constructs this mediated past as one defined by individual choices, or "playlists." Both facets contribute to a systematic disengagement from any form of critical discussion-provoking past by displacing such activity onto the action of making pseudo-choices about media consumption as compensation for anxiety or feelings of boredom engendered by the present. First, outlets for compiling media texts from the past will be examined for their commonalities as well as differences in the way they convey a certain kind of past experience. Within this section, it will be important to explain the playlist past's ability to filter out unwanted "noise" or dissonant material, thereby validating the status quo and already held beliefs about history and one's own past. Missing in this conception of media

nostalgia is a healthy version of pluralist thought that could serve to break up the convenient historical narrative advanced by the playlist past. Second, this access-nurtured playlist past will be exposed as a full-blown narcissistic cultural mentality, far transcending simple repetition. Finally, an extensive look at the paratexts surrounding these digital archival texts will be performed from various sources, including television, nostalgic films, and recent films. These paratexts will be analyzed both for the ways in which the original meaning of the text is altered as well as how the perpetual individual nostalgic is encouraged to continue gazing backwards at a media-defined past.

Access Makes the Heart Grow Fonder

The phrase "absence makes the heart grow fonder" may seem to be relevant to this analysis of compiling nostalgic materials to recreate past experiences only in the form of a pun for the title of this section, but the connection goes deeper. Thomas Haynes Bayly popularized this phrase in his 1827 poem "Isle of Beauty, Fair Thee Well" and instead of the accepted contemporary meaning of a growing love for someone at a distance that will eventually be requited, this poem takes a decidedly self-reflexive nostalgic stance. The poem contains this famous line, but uses it in conjunction with the idea of friends lost and the repeated line "fair thee well." This implies an inability to recapture the object of longing from the past, and an acceptance of this fact through wishing well to the island that produced these memories. In the mourning/melancholia Freudian dichotomy described in chapter one, Freud describes mourning as the working through and releasing of a past loved object and melancholia being an inability to relinquish and the "loss of capacity to adopt a new object of love" (as quoted in Jordan, 2002, p. 89); "fair thee well" and "absence makes the heart grow fonder" fall squarely in the mourning category. This is contrasted to the nostalgic compiling

tendency made possible by the explosion of access to texts that defined viewers' past. Instead of accepting and engaging the difference between then and now, embracing the fruitful tensions between the present and what Jameson calls a "radical past" (1991, p. 24), contemporary media viewers reify themselves as subjects who are transfixed by a version of the past of their own "choice," one that is individual, uncritical and cannot be recreated no matter how diligent and faithful the collector. When this myopic gaze is returned, the rest of the world is tuned out to make room for an individualized narcissistic past.

More and more avenues for nostalgic archiving are created each day, making the media producers' concealment of the inability to actually reproduce the past that much easier. Paul Grainge recognizes the "new technological innovations and their ability to rescue, recycle, and reconfigure the past" (2000, p. 32), but it is not simply a matter of technology determining the past-centered explosion. Instead, it is a combination of the pervasive access and the culturally constructed subjects reliant on nostalgia. This access is possible because of a wide variety of media and methods of acquiring or re-acquiring these texts. For example, the DVD box set, the successor to the VHS, has established itself as the heretofore-preeminent way in which the past is archived. Many television shows made their first home video appearances through the DVD format, such as *Perfect Strangers* (1986-1993), which released its first two complete seasons in 2008. Although there are those who accomplished the labor-intensive practice of manually recording every episode of a series on a VCR, the most significant word in most DVD releases is "complete." DVD box sets, and their newer eventual replacement the Blu-Ray disc, offer the opportunity to compile one's own personal nostalgic library of past texts. Newer to the market, iTunes and other digital downloading sites offer similar opportunities of "complete" nostalgic reproduction of textual experiences,

just in downloadable format. For roughly the same price as the DVDs and Blu-Rays, iTunes users can download vintage nostalgic texts by the episode or by the season and can amass a library on a hard drive. All of these formats provide access to remembered texts that are formed into individualized playlist pasts with which the viewer is constructed as compulsively drawn to as a version of the past that is far from critical or collective.

The contemporary mentality of the digital collector shares some commonality with collectors of older media forms, but there are important differences to note. Collectors of vintage media are said to "resist technology or progress and determinedly cling to the artifact, collecting or preserving a part of it because of the meaning and experience contained within" (Plasketes, 1992, p. 109). In discussing vinyl records, Yochim and Biddinger argue that "some collectors discuss their records in terms of a connection to the past" and "they suggest that in both listening to and holding records they feel linked to people, places and times of the past" (2008, p. 188). What Yochim and Biddinger argue is that "records allow one to touch the past" in a tactile manner because of their concrete qualities (2008, p. 189). Yet, this analysis is not about collecting vinyl records as tactile connections to the past, but about the digital-archive apparatus. Authors have asked the question of "[w]hat are the consequences of leaving our collection constantly packed away on a hard-drive" (Beer, 2008, p. 77)? This analysis argues that the answer is an internalizing and individualizing of the previously outward and collective display of a nostalgic collection.

Examples of the DVD, Blu-Ray and iTunes downloadable nostalgic digital-archive apparatus are plentiful and speak to the ubiquity of this phenomenon in contemporary media. Fittingly, the decision to put a television show or vintage film onto a nostalgia-preserving medium is largely based on economic considerations, proving the desire on the part of the

media producers to exploit constructed nostalgic compulsion for maximum monetary gain. The two major considerations are the popularity of the original text and, in the case of television shows, original music that must clear separate rights to be distributed on home video. For instance, nearly every television show that topped Neilsen's ratings system over the years has been released on DVD or iTunes (McNeil, 1991, p. 1046-1065), from *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957) to *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992) and every *Marcus Welby, M.D.* (1969-1976) in between, whereas game shows like *The $64,000 Question* (1955-1958) or talent shows like *Arthur Godfrey's Talent Scouts* (1946-1956) are absent because they historically do not do well in repeats or recommodifications (Deery, 2004, p. 10). Complete nostalgic penetration does not stop at television, as every single film on the AFI Top 100 list is available on DVD or Blu-Ray (American Film Institute, 2007). The omission of less popular or harder to sell texts from memory and digital-archive access, such as the narratively challenging *The Last Movie* (1971), creates a past that is idealized and based on the notion that what is saved and reproduced depends on what is marketable and cheap to acquire the rights to. All seem to be "classics" in the eyes of the nostalgic collector, but classic in this case refers to what can be sold as a commodity and not necessarily based on quality.

The digital-archive is not solely comprised of the consumption of vintage media. Clearly, contemporary texts are released on DVD, Blu-Ray and iTunes; in fact, nearly every film released today will eventually have a home video version, but these media are more about the past then they are about the future even with contemporary content. This would include the "instant" nostalgia involved in the collector's edition DVD of a film that was just released in theaters three months ago, as well the collision of older texts and newer texts on store shelves and discussions about new DVD releases. For instance, *Entertainment Weekly*

has a section dedicated to DVD and download releases, where most issues present new releases and vintage films side-by-side. This further enables the archive apparatus' privatized ties discussed by Packer, and in a four-issue stretch from March to April of 2011 featured as this section's main content: "*Stand By Me* Turns 25 - But Hasn't Aged a Day," "*Scream* if You like Horror" about the original *Scream* (1996), "Tracy and Hepburn: The Definitive Collection," and "The Original *Tron* is Finally on Disc Again" (Nashawaty, 2011a, p. 66; Nashawaty, 2011b, p. 60; Nashawaty, 2011c, p. 46; Nashawaty, 2011d, p. 72). These articles take up space that in theory would normally go entirely to the vast amount of contemporary films released every week, and when the space is devoted to new releases they collide side-by-side with nostalgic titles and further obliterate a radical past.

Furthering a brand of "a la carte" nostalgia are access points that offer texts in more atomized formats. Netflix, through its DVD mail delivery system or through its online instant streaming option, gives viewers the opportunity to slowly, though temporarily, piece together their beloved past shows. Hulu and YouTube create more micro forms of archived nostalgia by offering individual favorite scenes to be relived, and things like Facebook pages and fan sites with their embedded videos extend the reach of their influence. These sites also often cater to the nostalgic because of complex streaming rights deals still being worked out. Many film and television distribution houses are so concerned with what the release of "free" material on sites like Hulu, Netflix, and YouTube will do to other more heavily monetized distribution outlets that much of the content available is of the vintage variety. On Netflix's website, users who searched for newer titles that only exist in disc form are prompted on the right side of the screen to consider "similar titles available to watch instantly," which mostly

consists of older titles.[4] These smart technologies, similar to Amazon website

recommendations, become part of the archive apparatus that Packer describes as enabling

certain conceptions of culture and the past while discouraging others. Searching for the disc-

only 2010 title *Due Date*, viewers are offered *Stripes* (1981) as an instant alternative. Here

the past is equated with the present, and even raised above it by the sheer convenience of

being able to watch the older title immediately. If Gitlin was concerned about the hegemony

of media producers eternally trying to "capitalize on and mobilize demonstrable tastes"

(1979, p. 77), then this specific archive apparatus phenomenon problematically engenders a

demonstrable and predictable commodified nostalgia audience being led to desire easy

choices over the possibly critical or complex. YouTube has recently announced the creation

of a Video-On-Demand streaming rental service to compete with iTunes, but of course will

follow a similar economic model (Waxman, 2011). What is significant about the

technological affordances of services like Netflix, Hulu, and YouTube is their lack of a

permanent library, in disc or digital format, as users must eventually return the discs from

Netflix and would have to return to websites to view the same content over and over again.

Streaming rights also frequently expire due to complex studio deals with Netflix, so the past

available on this site is continuously being adjusted along commodification lines. If nostalgia

bends toward pathological melancholia as it forever fixates on a lost object, this

technological potentiality further extends the impossibility of recreating a lost object from an

individual past through digital collecting, while feeding the constructed compulsive drive to

---

[4] In 2011, Netflix attempted to re-name and re-brand their disc mailing service as "Qwikster," reserving the Netflix brand for streaming only. If this had been implemented they would have split their website into two as well, thereby eliminating the "similar titles available to watch instantly" side-by-side dynamic, but public backlash led to a squashing of this idea.

try. Collecting DVDs and Blu-Rays or setting up a nostalgic Netflix queue then come to represent two sides of the same nostalgic coin.

On the collector's side, a library is created in a more comprehensive fashion when it pertains to television box sets. Bibliophiles have been described by Benjamin as "[p]eople with a tactical instinct" as they revolve their obsession around the possession and handling of their treasures (1968, p. 63), and a direct analog can be drawn to the manner in which the digital and disc collector of the media past attempts to touch and possess their history. Barbara Klinger's work *Beyond the Multiplex* may be about film, but her observations on the cinephile's collector mentality with the advent of DVD can be immensely helpful for this chapter in terms of the recent flourish of vintage television show box sets. Klinger notes that with the reissue of texts on DVD "the historical context in which a film initially appeared can be partially resurrected" and that this dynamic is part of what makes the DVD a "prize commodity" (2006, p. 86). This speaks directly to viewers' relationship to a playlist past that can be partially resurrected through compiling old television shows, as the perpetual individual nostalgic construction is strengthened through the quest to recapture. Klinger goes on to discuss the tendency of DVD reissues to romanticize the past as these texts become "tinged with an aura of nostalgia" (2006, p. 86). Most significant, however, is Klinger's statement that these archive titles use certain techniques that "invite the viewer to reexperience the past" (2006, p. 86). Klinger speaks to the visceral nature of watching a remembered text that one loves, but the past that is re-experienced here is individual and defined by the consumable media artifacts of yesterday, as opposed to critical versions that promote specific temporal discourses. The re-experience then becomes part of the misrecognized past that unsatisfactorily and temporarily satisfies the constructed compulsive

and tactical drive of the individual nostalgic subjectivity. These collectible products are specifically marketed to this nostalgic subject position – discussed later with labeling, release timing, and special features – in an attempt to exploit the misrecognition.

Klinger's discussion of the re-experience and the partially resurrected nostalgic past is connected to Stephanie Coontz's work on the temporally displaced narratives of the past. Though Klinger is examining more of a generalized DVD collection, and therefore not necessarily nostalgic, she does recognize the individualized nature of the collector's mentality by noting, "[s]olipsism is central to the pleasures and the paradoxes of collecting" (2006, p. 89). This individual playlist collection is inherently selective and exclusionary, leading to a lack of historical context from which the texts derived. Coontz warns of this lack of context, and Klinger goes on to say that collecting tends "toward apolitical modes of evaluation" (2006, p. 89), with both speaking to the way a selective filter tends to reinforce already held, status quo beliefs and ideologies. This is tantamount to setting up a DVR recording list that only includes the shows one enjoys and never watching anything else. It paints a distorted and individualized picture of content and viewpoints and, in the case of nostalgic texts, memories of the past. Cass Sunstein's book *Republic.com* delves critically into this idea by describing recent technological advances and media benefiting from a "communication universe" of our own individual choosing (2002, p. 5). Obvious links can be made to the classic "cognitive dissonance theory" in which information that does not agree with one's already held views "produces discomfort and, correspondingly, there will arise pressures to reduce or eliminate the dissonance" (Festinger, Riecken, Schachter, & Aronson, 1956, p. 26). Avoiding dissonance is a goal viewers and producers share, as those watching reaffirm already held beliefs and producers maintain a buying mood by avoiding upsetting and

challenging content. Perpetual individualized nostalgia is manifested through a contemporary media explosion of access to selectable and selective texts from a lost past, placed on a playlist or a library shelf and re-experienced to define the distorted vision of history for the viewer. The economic numbers back up this explosion of access, as the last decade saw a rise to an average of about 20 billion dollars a year spent on DVDs, Blu-Rays, and digital delivery of content (Digital Entertainment Group, 2011). Specifically, DVD sales are waning but are being replaced stride-for-stride by newer formats - with 2010 Blu-Ray sales up 62 percent and digital distribution up 19 percent. All of this growth points to the archive apparatus firmly in place to support a repetitive collector's mentality as an increasingly dominant mode of cultural consumption.

The "Rerun Mentality" Becomes the "Collector's Mentality"

It is not the simple act of repeating media content or the availability of texts one grew up with that is especially problematic. It is the cultivation and validation of the refracted myopic gaze backwards as a cultural mentality. The prevailing mentality of a culture can be influenced through the media, especially as it comes to the formation of an individual's conception of the world, and in this case the past. Dominique LaCapra wrote of a recent trend towards a silo-like, insulated, and therefore uncritical, cultural mentality and narcissism, saying, "[i]t involves the impossible, imaginary attempt totally to integrate the self" (1984, p. 296). A similar relationship is developed when contemporary media viewers are constructed as subjects whose prevailing cultural mentality is to be perpetually concerned with the replication of a lost individual past that is to be made coherent through collecting an individualized playlist past. No one can truly recapture the past; all that can be done is to use the memories of the past for their didactic function. Instead, the focus is placed on a playlist

past of narcissistic repetition that is enabled by an archive apparatus, which makes for an easy omission of anything critical or discussion provoking.

Derek Kompare's *Rerun Nation* provides a helpful frame for thinking about the concerns about a past defined by media artifacts that leads to a "collector's mentality." Kompare posits that diverse factors such as economic constraints of television, early technological concerns, and the unexpected desires of viewers created an overarching mentality of repetition culture. Kompare describes television as engendering a rerun mentality and "fostering the subsequent development of the cultures of retro and nostalgia that pervaded the last quarter of the century" (2004, p. 103). According to Kompare, the seventies were a time of "political struggle, stagnant economies, and the proverbial 'malaise'" that led to an "unprecedented" nostalgia directed towards the 1950s (2004, p. 103). This categorization of the 1970s can be seen as contributing to the current generation's reliance on nostalgic media as their primary connection to their past both because Kompare's description of the 1970s sounds a lot like contemporary society and the era of "unprecedented" nostalgia laid the foundation for baby boomers' children's future longing. For those born and growing up during the time period, roughly the mid-1970s on, it only stands to reason that a nostalgic frame of mind would become important to this generation. The psychological dynamic of the rerun mentality is that when times become politically, economically, or culturally difficult, there is a tendency to rely on the comforts of a romanticized past to ease the anxiety through the consumption of the familiar regardless of era.

The foundation of the rerun mentality, however, happened well before the 1970s, and paved the way for a contemporary time period in which nostalgic repetition has become a defining characteristic of media. Kompare outlines the history of how "repeat programs were

also consistently drawing repeat viewers, to an extent that had not been foreseen, but would soon be relied upon" (2004, p. 52). Subsequently, television shifted towards a syndication model of the "exploitation of established, previously aired film and television properties" (Kompare, 2004, p. 52). Kompare compares television to film and says that "[i]n its ostensibly 'pure,' live form, a television broadcast is transmitted once and gone forever, existing only in that moment" (2004, p. 59), much like the past exists for a moment and can never truly be recaptured. For Kompare, film was comparably preservable until the rerun mentality was established. For this dissertation, it is the predictable access to past texts that makes the "collector's mentality" different from the rerun mentality and provides the material basis for the emergence of this new form of perpetual individualized nostalgia that is rapidly becoming dominant. Therefore, it is not enough to be able to know that every once in a while, unpredictably so, one's favorite episode of a show will appear in reruns; instead it is through the explosion of digital access that this narcissistic instant nostalgic mentality is truly constructed. Being happy a random rerun of a favorite show is on is not the same as being selective, and idiosyncratic, about one's individualized playlist.

Kompare does a masterful job explaining that with the economic success of films and reruns on early television "the foundation was set for 20 years of industrial consolidation centered on the rerun, and the eventual cultural legitimation of past television" which had been considered as going against the "liveness principle" that television was founded on (2004, p. 60). Kompare later discusses the attributes of "acquisitive repetition" (2004, p. 197), but falls short of positing what this change in televisual repetition means for contemporary cultural praxis. Kompare calls the DVD box set the "ultimate form of televisual repetition under capitalism" (2004, p. 214), but he also leaves a great deal of room

for these notions to be expanded upon, especially in regards to nostalgia as a driving force in the compilation and archiving of a media-defined past. The illusion of a "complete" recreated past, one that Kompare recognizes as "better" than the original in both content and quality (2004, p. 214), perpetuates the compulsive drive to acquire and collect the texts that defined viewers' individual pasts, stripped of all their historical context or discourses.

The "better" and "complete" idealized past established through the repeated consumption of these texts furthers the validation of the myopic gaze backwards, as well as an out of context selectivity that reaffirms already held contemporary beliefs and values. For example, in the *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial* (1982) 20th Anniversary Ultimate Gift Set there is a scene in which guns pointed at children are digitally replaced seamlessly with flashlights, putting this nostalgic text more in line with contemporary mores and the cultivated "feel good" E.T. brand. M. Keith Booker notes these changes as "slight" with only a "small amount of added material" (2006, p. 168), but the implications of these changes and additions are impactful in the way they idealize and distort original conceptions of the film. In a book that accompanies this gift set, Kathleen Kennedy remarks that Spielberg "didn't want any change that would call attention to itself" and "wanted the changes to really assimilate into what people remember about this movie" (2002, p. 175). The past has been updated and made better, scrubbed of its contextual reality and conflated with the values and technology of today, with the goal of no one knowing it has been done. Seamlessly working on the nostalgic memories of its viewers, not only is the melancholic attachment to this text made stronger through the encouragement of maintaining a connection to the past through collection but also the memory is updated or at the very least muddied and contemporized in the service of protecting a brand that had retroactively become too friendly for guns.

The capacity of the nostalgic to create and continually reify an idealized past is a much discussed subject amongst theorists. Some, like Stephanie Coontz, are deeply concerned about the ideological implications of idealizing the past, while Paul Grainge is less critical using Kaja Silverman to discuss nostalgia as an increased "semiotic awareness of the textuality of the past" that is "not a mark of cultural amnesia or creative bankruptcy" (Grainge, 2000, p. 29). Grainge's use of Silverman is somewhat simplistic, as her thoughts on *Blade Runner* and the ontology of memory creates a more complex understanding of memory as "neither 'authentic' nor our own, but imaginary inscriptions of the psychic structures into which we have been culturally inserted" (Silverman, 1991, p. 118). Silverman, in fact, can be used to help nuance the understanding of the *E.T.* flashlight for guns example, as she posits that photographs, or films in this case, are "often believed to be ontologically connected to what it ostensibly depicts" (1991, p. 117), but many times represent "pure simulation, copies without an original" (1991, p. 118). Watching *E.T.*'s 20th Anniversary edition, an assumption might be made that the film would be ontologically connected to its original version, but with the seamless replacement of the guns it aligns closer to the "pure simulation" that Silverman suggests. The defining characteristics of this after-the-fact nostalgic reconstruction are selectivity, individuality, and idealism. In fact, the Ultimate Gift Set so privileges the idealized after-the-fact version, that when opening the box to actually watch the film one must uncover the DVD itself by first removing the aforementioned book, a certificate of authenticity, and a senitype film frame. The film is literally buried by its nostalgic materials. Speaking to an idealized version of the past, Karen Lury and Rachel Moseley discuss how the term "TV classic" is "nothing more than a discursive construct" (2009, p. 111). The constructed nature of these distinctions of canon, especially the term classic, many times

extend past the parameters of their original consumption, as those who view them nostalgically do so under different circumstances.

To demonstrate the difference in viewing texts in their original historically placed context, it is actually helpful to establish that a certain kind of nostalgia does not exist, at least not to the level that might be assumed. Succinctly described, for most viewers the nostalgia experienced watching the DVD box set of *Happy Days* (1974-1984) is the same as *Welcome Back Kotter* (1975-1979). Both texts were popular in the 1970s, and deal in some ways with high school – a place many of the most nostalgic shows take place being that it commonly signifies a transition from an age of innocence and earnest affect into more adult concerns – connecting these two texts to a larger similar network of high school-based media. However at first glance, the difference would be that *Welcome Back Kotter* was set in the present in which it aired, while *Happy Days* was set in the 1950s. While this may have been a defining distinction during the original airing, with *Happy Days* already even more imbued with nostalgia, the relationship to the text changes when it is relived through the DVD box set. Thus the periodization is incidental once it is taken out of its original reception context, insofar as the 50s issues are really 70s issues and these shows were always about relating to audiences' pre-existing sensibilities, a dynamic amplified in the contemporary DVD reception. Watching *Happy Days* on DVD today is much more strongly tied to nostalgia for the 1970s, thereby connecting more to an individual remembrance of watching the show, than it is nostalgia for the 1950s.

When the show first aired, there were at least two different types of viewers, those who remembered the 1950s and experienced nostalgia for that era and the golden age of television while watching the show, and those that did not and experienced the text on a more

straightforward level.[5] Thomas Benson and Carolyn Anderson make explicit the distinctions between different "spectatorial roles" made available through certain texts, such as the "naïve or first time viewer" or the "ideal spectator" (2002, p. xvi), which is a key notion in understanding the difference between those coming to these nostalgic texts having either grown up in the narrative's era or those not born yet. In their original context, the two different audiences in question are asked different things from narratives like *Happy Days* or *The Wonder Years*. Today, the nostalgia for the 1950s and 1960s in these respective texts is stripped away through a displaced context and the already historical second-hand nature of the representation. If one wanted to wax nostalgic about the 1950s, their source would most likely not be *Happy Days*, but one of the countless shows from that era available through the explosion of digital access. If those watching *Happy Days* today did so to understand not only the differences between the 1950s and 1970s but also the difference between then and now that would be more of a cultural reflective form of nostalgia, one that might provide information or comparative answers about the past in relation to the present. Instead, the focus is on the individual remembrance of the show temporally placed at the time of the original reception.

Illustrative of this dynamic of the loss of a certain kind of nostalgia, a contextually anchored version, are the comments made about what the release of *Happy Days* on DVD meant to those purchasing the box sets. They provide a rich source of data about this emerging phenomena and media subject. Whereas the promotional copy and the back of the DVD box itself emphasize the reliving of the 1950s, with words like "poodle skirts" and

---

[5] The multiple spectatorial roles would also include those who were not born in the 1950s, and so were susceptible to being indoctrinated with the idealized version that Coontz describes.

"jukeboxes," the comments focus mostly on the individualized original reception of the show from the 1970s. On Amazon there are quite a few reviews posted by those who purchased these sets, and though the results might not be able to be generalized across all nostalgic texts, they are helpful in understanding the temporally specific ways in which this text is conceived. Despite the explicit 1950s setting of this show, the reviews favored the 1970s as the site of remembrance for this text. Of the 104 reviews for the first season, there were twenty-four that eschewed actually reviewing the show and box-set version to opine and pine for a specific time period. Twenty of the twenty-four focused on the 1970s, and of the four that mentioned remembering the 1950s only one did so in more than just a passing manner. The twenty reviews discussed mostly what this text meant to the viewer in the 1970s and how this box set would help to recapture that experience. Reviews commonly contained phrases like "a great show fondly remembered from childhood" and "we can relive the 80's" – as the show ended in 1984 – and many also spoke of the "timeless" nature of *Happy Days*, a seemingly odd word choice for a show so temporally situated (Amazon, 2004). Whereas Adorno looked to timeless or "evergreen" media artifacts, in his case pop music hits, for the ways certain songs contained "traits that set them apart for certain periods, at least, from ephemeral products" (1976, p. 35), nostalgic DVDs locate themselves as timeless not because they stand outside of time but because they are without progression. Adorno insisted that evergreens stood outside of time and faked "a longing for past, irrevocably lost experiences, dedicated to all those consumers who fancy that in memories of a fictitious past they will gain the life denied them" (1976, p. 36), but the *Happy Days* reviewers are not commenting on gaining a "life denied," they are longing to regain a part of their life already lived. Media producers cultivate these sentiments, benefiting from the construction of artificial evergreens.

What these comments and reviews speak to is the nostalgic commonality that television digital access, as well as their filmic counterparts, has afforded to the viewer/collector. The very mentality of reliving the individual past has been validated, and with the explosion of access it has moved well past the borders of the unpredictable rerun, or the work intensive VHS collection. Kompare saw the creation of a rerun mentality, and even began the discussion about the DVD as the "ultimate form of televisual repetition" (2004, p. 214), but this notion needed expansion in the face of the narcissistic nostalgic mentality explosion through digital archival access. What good is it to be constructed as a perpetual individual nostalgic if one cannot collect an individually tailored playlist past based around melancholic connections? The issue is that the collection is more than just a compilation of the texts that one fondly remembers. It is also a validation of the myopic gaze backwards that performs a pursuit of the past for its own sake, or as Hayden White calls "thoughtless obstructionism" (1985, p. 41). White's notion can be taken to understand contemporary nostalgic media's obstruction to a healthy form of adaptive historical discourse through an individualized excess of history. Obstructionism that is then made stronger by the texts themselves through paratextual elements like commentaries, "supertexts" (DeRose, Fürsich, & Haskins, 2003), and box artwork that focus viewers' attention even deeper into their personal Mirror of Erised, rendering them incapable of dealing with the present.

"Supertext" and Commentary Interpretations: Perpetual Nostalgia Validated

The producers of nostalgic digital-archive apparatus material, who Packer would describe as part of the digital-archive apparatus' network of "credentialized experts" (2010, p. 100), parlay this collector's mentality into a full-blown compulsive drive by validating not only the mode of accessing and collecting these texts but the lingering in the past it entails.

Specifically what is validated is the selection of the convenient historical narrative of media-borne nostalgia that fills a legitimate need for affective connections; these connections occurring through new paratextual attachments to the nostalgic texts in the form of DVD commentaries or special features. Jonathan Gray, in his book *Show Sold Separately,* discusses Gérard Genette's definition of a paratext as "texts that prepare us for other texts" where "we can only approach texts *through* paratexts" (2010, p. 25), maintaining the distinction between "entryway paratexts" that control meaning beforehand, and "in media res paratexts" that "police certain reading strategies" (2010, p. 23). When discussing paratextual elements like DVD commentaries and special features, it is mostly the in media res version that becomes important for the ways in which a specific kind of nostalgic meaning is encouraged and validated. In digital access nostalgia, meaning is shaped by paratexts that proffer "proper interpretations" (Gray, 2010, p. 81), even down to hidden elements like "Easter Eggs," which "can seem like shreds of evidence" as they were specifically hidden there by their creators to be found by the discerning and diligent viewer (2010, p. 89).

Many other scholars have discussed these paratextual tendencies in DVDs and television, noting both their influential nature on the meaning of the text as well as the cultural and ideological implications possible through sanctioned interpretations. Though not speaking specifically about DVDs, Stuart Hall's preferred or "dominant" meaning encoded in cultural texts could be seen as functioning in a similar manner (2006, p. 171), where in this case the preferred encoded interpretation is the validation of nostalgic remembrance of media texts. Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus, in a work heavily cited by Gray, address *Fight Club* (1999) and "how the extra text can be employed to discourage and discount some interpretations while encouraging others" (2002, 39). Brookey and

Westerfelhaus posit that the theatrical release of *Fight Club* contained homoerotic elements that are subsequently stripped away through the "'proper' (i.e. sanctioned) interpretation" of the DVD (2002, p. 23). The authors use commentaries, special features, and even the DVD box itself to explore paratextual influence, saying that "[i]ndividuals involved in the film's production are presented in the extra text as having privileged insights regarding a film's meaning and purpose" (2002, p. 23). Brookey and Westerfelhaus also note in another article that the organization of special features, specifically Pixar's temporary denial of Disney on the *Monsters, Inc.* (2001) DVD, was integral in the establishment of their distinctive and separate brand (2005, 125). Related, DeRose, Fürsich, and Haskins deal with what they call a show's "supertext" or the way an overriding interpretation can add a form of commentary that does not exist in the first place (2003). These authors examine the reality television show *Blind Date* (1999-2006) for its technique of using "pop-up" commentary during dates to impose this supertext, or master interpretation, that resembles the dynamic Brookey and Westerfelhaus were discussing in DVD paratexts. Importantly, the human hosts never espouse these pop-up beliefs and so the authors argue that the show "feigns openness only to restrict interpretation through the supertext" (DeRose, Fürsich, & Haskins, 2003, p. 185). Ideologically, the authors point to the "policing of difference" the supertext performs as it focuses in and validates certain cultural tendencies over others (2003, p. 186).

The similarities are clear between Gray and Genette with their paratexts, Brookey and Westerfelhaus with their extra-textual elements, and DeRose, Fürsich, and Haskins with their supertexts. If the concern is the overall development of an individualized nostalgic conception of a beloved media-defined past, then an authorial paratext influence is of particular concern as it represents an opportunity for creators to maintain interpretation

control. No matter the language, each is describing the way an organizing interpretation can be placed on top of other interpretations to produce new sites of meaning for the text, or preclude others. The significance for the analysis of perpetual individual nostalgics and the explosion of digital archiving access will be shown to be the way paratexts like DVD commentaries, special features, or even Netflix/Hulu streaming rights espouse a nostalgic perspective in their respective media texts, which then become the object of mimetic desire.

In the DVD commentary format, directors, producers, and actors are asked to remember, describe, and opine about their experiences in making the media text in question. The result of this process tends to concretize the concern over the past above all else, and the ways in which decisions made and experiences had during the text's production are important to archive and celebrate. Even when the conversation turns to a commentator's life and career at the time of production, as it quite often does, it does not serve to encourage reflection on the part of the viewer, but instead validates the "path to the text" as the only approved site of remembrance. A step-by-step recanting of production experiences, common to most DVD commentaries and complete with many "script" shots, tend to create a text that is already inherently looking back, regardless of the content of the narrative. Obviously, this points to a vastly different experience of the text for those who viewed these films and television shows in their original context without these paratextual influences to point them perpetually in the direction of the past. Here, any text can take on a backwards gaze, creating a medium that speaks about recalling and preserving a media-defined past more than any form of historical critique in the narrative. Effects-heavy films will often discuss how "revolutionary" their effects were at the time, and how many would now be considered "quaint," such as in the paratexts for *Jurassic Park* (1994) in which the emphasis is on both the evolution of special

effects from stop-motion to computer generated images as well as the relative quaintness of this early attempt at digital filmmaking. Implicit in this effects evolution discussion is Umberto Eco's assertion that America is a "country obsessed with realism" and for something like a special effect to be credible it must contain the qualities of holography and be "absolutely iconic" (1986, p. 4). This common theme of DVD commentaries/extras speaks to a linear continuity of goals; in this case the goal of better effects moving towards the holograph. The combination of these commonalities add up to a medium that is much more concerned with the past in an archiving form than any sort of present issue.

The relationship between the past and the paratexts that accompany nostalgic digital media will be established through the exploration of a few exemplary examples from various textual sources. Television DVD box sets will be explored through the *Freaks and Geeks* series (1999-2000), the nostalgic film will be represented by the *Back to the Future* trilogy, and the recent film's attempt at nostalgia will be addressed through *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001, 2002, 2003) and its relationship to its predecessor/successor *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (2012). These diverse sources represent good examples of how media consumption in this new mode establishes the nature of nostalgia typical of the digital archival access explosion.

Freaks and Geeks

Freaks and Geeks was a television show about high school nostalgia and social cliques, and the DVD box set represents the very kind of series that speaks to an out-of-context media-defined past, as it only lasted one season and was seen by so few in its original broadcast. If the series comes to define the past, it primarily does so through its secondary life on DVD. The series in the box set is not the same one that was aired; it has now been

made "better" by fans who had ardently awaited its home video release. Through commentary tracks, special features, and even the word "complete" on the box cover, this show, whose creators were not even sure was over when it ended, is made into something it originally was not.

In the booklet that accompanies the *Freaks and Geeks* box set, there is mention of why there are so many commentaries for a show that lasted only one season, and the reason given is simple and speaks to many of the perpetual individual nostalgic concerns. Judd Apatow says, "We miss each other" and "[r]ecording commentary tracks was a great way to see each other and pretend the show wasn't cancelled many years ago." Missing the past, and attempting to recapture it through pretending it never ended, goes right to the heart of the narcissistic nostalgic and validates the myopic gaze backwards with the parasocial connection between the characters and the personae who play them being used to foster the feeling of absence at the basis of the nostalgia. Examining these commentary tracks can serve as a window into the master interpretation proffered by these producers with "privileged" insights, most notably the validation of the text as a site for nostalgic lingering. Brookey and Westerfelhaus argue that the use of "creatively powerful artistic personalities" such as Apatow in this case invests the commentary track with the "authoritative personae of auteurs" (2005, 115). Through this commentary track *Freaks and Geeks*, a text that was doomed to flash in the pan ephemera, declares itself a classic in league with Adorno's evergreens. Of the eighteen episode commentaries, many follow the same thematic trajectories, heavily relying on the standard mixture of production memories and anecdotal set experiences. Two episodes, episode eight "Carded and Discarded" (Apatow, 2004) and the final episode "Discos and Dragons" (Feig, 2004), stand out as exemplary for these thematics.

During the opening credits of the episode "Carded and Discarded" there is a discussion of its original reception as the "second pilot," as the producers and writers attempted to reintroduce characters for a new time slot. Instead of discussing the possible nostalgia felt for the 1980s during the original reception, all nostalgic construction invariably lands on the time of production, which would also relatively parallel the original time of reception. In fact, there is much less discussion about the era of the show's setting than one would expect considering the period nature of the show. The dynamic present here is exactly like the commonality between *Happy Days* and *Welcome Back Kotter* in terms of nostalgic construction. There are a few times when the subject turns to individual childhoods and high school experiences of the commentators, some of which may have occurred in the 1980s, but this only proves to further validate an individual past or the trajectory of the text's creation as opposed to any form of collective, comparative view. Illustrative of this dynamic is that this sequence ends by asking one of the actors, Johanna Garcia, what her "memories of the show" were and trying to get her to recollect how her career led her to *Freaks and Geeks*. The past is there to serve the text, and to comment on its creation, enabling the text to define the past for the viewer. During this episode's commentary, actor Dave Allen actually stays in his character, Jeff Russo, the entire time furthering the illusion that one can recapture a media-defined past. When director Paul Feig says "Dave, you can break character, we're doing the commentary where we're, like, ourselves," Allen responds by asking "Who's he talking to?" This psychic regression that is encouraged in the audience means that the show itself constitutes the longed-for lived memory trying to be recaptured. This specific nostalgic audience is served in their desire to tie into characters more than the actors and their lack of desire to think of him as an actor who has moved on without them. In this case, the character,

the show, and the comments are completely displaced from the historical context of the airing and the setting, colliding and equating the present with the past. The "Carded and Discarded" commentary paratext (Apatow, 2004) validates a specific brand of nostalgia that stays safely within a known and very media-defined view toward the past, providing the basis for a misrecognition that benefits the commodity being offered for sale.

Of all the episodes that demonstrate these specifically focused nostalgic elements, the most potent is the series finale "Discos and Dragons" (Feig, 2004). Again, the discussion turns to the production memories as they lead to the creation of the past-defining text, one that aids in the attempt to recreate a lost object that appears in an out-of-context version. The series ending episode commentators spend a great deal of time being nostalgic about filming the last scenes. In that moment they are reliving or attempting a form of past recreation by collaborating on the commentary itself, all the while the drive to recapture a lost past object through forming their playlist pasts is intensified for viewers. Significantly, the show had not actually been cancelled at the time of the final episode's filming; yet the entire cast "remembers" the production as if everyone already knew it was the last time they would work together. Feig asks Linda Cardilleni about the final scene if she felt "like it was the end of the series when you shot this?" Not only does she immediately respond "yeah," but goes on to compare the moment to "growing up" and having to "say goodbye to your parents." It is certainly possible, given the ratings, that many working on the show suspected its impending cancellation, but the level of longing and remembrance the actors and creators read into these final scenes rises to the level of the idealization of the past and a revisionist narrative typical of a postmodern mode of remembering. The past remembered is "better" than its original reality, or at the very least distorted and exaggerated. Appropriately, Paul Feig, the creator of

the series, ends the final commentary by calling that time "the greatest experience of my life" (2004); only this lived experience is solely a part of the media text for viewers and its definition of the past. So when Feig relives his actual lived experience of production on the commentary track, it only furthers the media text as the "relived" experience for nostalgic collectors/viewers.

Back to the Future

Another set of archivable texts that function in a similar way is the *Back to the Future* trilogy and its 25th Anniversary Blu-Ray Edition. This box set provides another clear example of how the digital archival access and its paratexts function to encourage a focused nostalgic gaze defined strictly by media. Part of every DVD/Blu-Ray "special edition" functions with a nostalgic form of advertising hyperbole as it must justify itself as worthy of preservation and longing, with Craig Hight noting that the "most common frame constructed by cinematic DVD releases is invariably a promotional one" (13). The content of the film, of course, is already an interesting commentary on how the past and the present are always in dynamic interaction, and the paratextual archive makes this dynamic all the more complex.

From the producers on the commentary tracks to the special features and even to the menus of the DVDs themselves, this text exudes nostalgia on a complete level and asks the viewer to do the same. Director Robert Zemeckis states that one of the goals of a time travel film is to "examine the truth about something that happened in the past because you have been able to look at it through the prism of time" (Bouzereau, 2010). This is exactly the goal of the adaptive view of history, and maybe this goal was accomplished for those watching this film in its original reception, but *Back to the Future*'s 25th Anniversary Blu-Ray Edition functions quite differently when examined amongst the nostalgic explosion that caters to an

individual past consideration. If *Back to the Future* offered a vision of the present, which was intricately linked to the chains of causality established by the past, the 25th anniversary archive establishes a past whose meaning is intricately linked to the lenses and frames that are used to access it. Instead of a comparative look at 1955 or 1885, the archive edition of the trilogy works on the constructed perpetual nostalgic to attempt to recreate an individual 1985 in which these films were loved by the viewer. For this analysis, the focus will be on a special feature series entitled "Making the Trilogy" (Bouzereau, 2010) for the way it coalesces these themes into one neat package. This special feature series furthers this notion of a past-centered text that strips the original comparative context of the series and replaces it with a misrecognized narcissistic view of history where consumers believe they are choosing a past that conforms to their mirror of desire, but which is in fact an authoritative past constructed for them. As Biff says in the second film, and featured in the corresponding DVD opening menu, "There's something very familiar about all this."

The first thing viewers see in the first edition of this series is a title card asking, "What if you could travel through time?" (Bouzereau, 2010). Appropriate language for a film series about a time-traveling Delorean, but it also speaks to the nature of nostalgia present in this text, specifically nostalgia in the service of recapturing a lost past object. The lost object is not, however, the various time periods in which the protagonists travel, much like the *Happy Days* and *Freaks and Geeks* dual-time period phenomenon. Fans of the *Back to the Future* franchise are not nostalgic for the most traveled in time period, the 1950s, but instead for the 1980s in which it was produced. Series producer Bob Gale discusses this audience split stating, "Some people say, well that movie is really about nostalgia. Well, it depends on how old you are" (Bouzereau, 2010). Gale makes it clear that the 1950s was chosen because

it would be an "odd" place for a 1980s teenager to visit, not because it was a concrete site of 1950s nostalgia for viewers at the time. Instead, this trilogy is "fixated on presenting us with a relentlessly sugar-coated, unproblematic and decidedly conservative vision of the 1950s which in fact fits in very well with Reagan-era notions of domesticity and family" (Murphy, 2010, p. 50). Andrew Gordon extends this family-first, era-specific critique by comparing the films to *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) and *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) in their recapturing of family unity with *Back to the Future* representing a "new form of American family togetherness, a postmodern family not splintered but united by technology" (1992, p. 8).

These examinations of the trilogy rely on a presentist analysis of an era that was defined by a smug and condescending attitude designed to appeal to the narcissism of 80s audiences. Jay Ruud even goes as far as to say the ultimate message of the film is that "teenagers of the 80s know more than anybody else who has ever lived" (1991, p. 129). In regards to the third film set against the backdrop of the Western myth, Fred Erisman speaks to this presentist ideal in this trilogy by highlighting director "Zemeckis' quiet modifying of the myth to fit current needs" (1992, p. 30). If this is true, then in its original theatrical release *Back to the Future* did not contain a revealing function for those in 1984 who were not presented with a radically different past from their present. Even if there was some form of comparative and radical element within the trilogy, it is filtered and lost through the constructed nostalgic subject of today and what is left is a collision or conflation of many time periods with the present. The trilogy becomes another vehicle to take the past out of its original context and make it "better" to serve the uncritical, individualized playlist of media-defined memory, pertinent for a narrative that caters to a yearning for the 1980s mentality of Reagan-era brash righteousness.

Helping to create this "better" version of the past, the first words of this same special feature in part two are, "The time continuum has been disrupted, creating an alternate 1985" spoken by Doc Brown (Bouzereau, 2010). The DVD or Blu-Ray box set has also disrupted the time continuum and created an alternate 1985, one that is defined by the *Back to the Future* trilogy and its uncritical gaze backwards. In the same feature, Robert Zemeckis discusses how a time travel sequel offered the "unique opportunity" to "go into the first movie in the second movie from a different angle" (Bouzereau, 2010). He is inadvertently describing the revisionist dynamic at work when a nostalgic text from the past is pulled from its original context and idealized. Whereas the series was originally pitched to a consumer of that time, this new one is pitched to a consumer nostalgic for that time. The text itself changes. The *Back to the Future* fan is not performing a comparative critique of the 1985 versus 1955 or 1885, but instead is playing into a hyper-individualized brand of nostalgia that locks the focus onto a collected narcissistic past. Highlighted in this special feature is that these films epitomize the concerns of the perpetual individual nostalgic despite what comparative cultural critique the director sees in the text. In *Back to the Future*, the individual decisions of one's past have a direct effect on your future and if one could relive these events a change could be made. The text encourages a literal revisiting of the past by the characters, and a perpetual figurative revisiting/idealizing by the viewers.

One way in which the revisiting of the past is encouraged in this special feature series, quite common to all DVDs and Blu-Rays, is the emphasis on the path to production as it pertains to the creation of the text. Michael J. Fox's detailed description of his days shooting *Back to the Future* being "22, 23 years old" with a "dream to be in the film and television business" helps set the scene for this text and paratext's orientation towards the

past (Bouzereau, 2010). If all roads lead to Rome, then for digital media archives all histories are defined by how the text came to be complete with the happenstance, the chance, and the hard work. The wealth of information about production stands as an attempt at a von Rankean universal historical representation of the past "wie es eigentlich gewesen" (as it really was), where the more minutiae available to the viewer the more the DVD or Blu-Ray appears as complete. Walter Benjamin called this kind of 19th century objective idealism the "strongest narcotic of the century" (1999, p. 463), and Nietzsche described this von Rankean philosophy of history as a "malady of history" that takes "everything objectively" making "one gentle and pliable" (1957, p. 53). Celebratory and meticulously culled production details lead to a similar excess of uncritical attention towards the text. Yet this kind of naive historicism has become part and parcel of the nostalgic DVD boxing promotional discourse. For example, in part three Michael J. Fox describes shooting the sequels saying, "People have lives, babies are born, things go on...within the course of that year my son was born and my father passed away" (Bouzereau, 2010). He is certainly encouraging viewers to take a reflective stance towards these films, but in the end what the box set encourages is not a reflection of one's own life events or shared collective experiences, but instead the reflection on *Back to the Future* itself. The individual past is refracted through the text. Michael J. Fox ends this sentiment saying, "It's all tied to that movie" (Bouzereau, 2010), and so is the cultural conception of the past.

Lord of the Rings and *The Hobbit*

To tie the past to a film is not solely the purview of time travel movies, nor of films that were released long enough ago to have 25th Anniversary versions. In fact, some films will perform chronological gymnastics in pursuit of creating a more past-centered object of

longing, such as in the case of *The Lord of the Rings* and its constructed nostalgic

relationship to its soon to be adapted literary predecessor, *The Hobbit* (1937). J.R.R.

Tolkien's works are already past-oriented both in terms of their clear Medieval influences as

well as their mid-20th century publishing dates. Carl E. Schorske discusses how nostalgia for

medieval values and mindset has a powerful and rich history, with William Morris idealizing

the "Middle Ages as a romantic refuge for the starved modern imagination" (1999, p. 92),

and Richard Wagner using a "grail-knight" to rail against the "puritanical hypocrisy" of his

day (1999, p. 94). Schorske is speaking to the many uses of nostalgia, in this case nostalgia

for the medieval era that is first utilized by Tolkien and then extended in the new iterations of

his works. In book form, *The Hobbit* was published first, but the reverse will be true in the

film versions as a release for the first part is planned for 2012 (*The Hobbit: An Unexpected

Journey*) and the second in 2013 (*The Hobbit: There and Back Again*). Through the

establishment of an ironic nostalgic approach to the "original" trilogy, in that it applies a

nostalgic tone and label to a set of films that actually occur in the future of the Tolkien

narrative timeline, the paratexts surrounding this series of films further entrench the

definition of the past through media texts as opposed to shared cultural reality. A bridge will

be built between the very last paratext special feature of *The Lord of the Rings* and the very

first one for *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey*.

On *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003) Special Extended Edition

DVD the final premiere and last acts on set are immortalized in the special feature "The

Passing of an Age" (Pellerin, 2004). This short film is, not surprisingly, rife with nostalgia

and a yearning to hang onto the experience of creating this film trilogy. The actors express

sentiments like "part of us never wanted it to end" from Elijah Wood, and "I am in no hurry

to forget" from Viggo Mortensen, all accompanied by footage of their experiences on set. Craig Hight notes that even with the vast amount of paratexts on *Lord of the Rings* DVDs, whatever order the extras are chosen in the pathway is "one that is clearly constructing a specific and limited set of perspectives on the film trilogy" (2005, p. 13). Though Hight does not specifically mention nostalgia as one of the interpretive frames inherent in the "pathway," it is clearly present when examining *Lord of the Rings*' paratexts that culminate in "The Passing of an Age" and extend into the production of *The Hobbit*. Jonathan Gray takes these sentiments about *Lord of the Rings*' paratexts a step further, explicitly noting how the bonus material layers enrich the "quest narrative" (2006, p. 239), and that Tolkien's "nostalgic simple English countryside ethos" is valorized as a primary feature of his content in these extras (2006, p. 247). Director Peter Jackson extends this tone of longing in "The Passing of an Age" by saying that he does not think something like *Lord of the Rings* is "repeatable," but prophetically leaves the door open when saying that he had a "realization, too, that the friendships don't have to end." The films may have come out in the previous decade and the next one not until 2012, but "The Passing of an Age" on *Return of the King* lays the nostalgic foundation for *The Hobbit*'s first video blog entitled "THE HOBBIT Start of Production" (Jackson, 2011) in which the past is designed around the previous texts' reality, and in this case their film release chronology.

It is fitting that the full title for the original literary source for the upcoming films is *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*, because the beginning paratexts like this video blog validate an attempt recapture the past through exploiting fan nostalgic drive to go "back" to Middle-earth. Jackson has been lauded, in contrast to his contemporaries like George Lucas, for carrying a "connotation of popular sovereignty and representative decision-making"

allowing the consumer to feel as if they have a stake in the adaptation of the literary narrative they loved (Shefrin, 2004, p. 268). *The Hobbit* video blogs continue that feeling of investment thereby further individualizing the specific nostalgia for this text. Peter Jackson begins the first video blog by saying "it's amazing to be back here again" setting the nostalgic tone for a film that takes place around sixty years before the first three films according to Tolkien's chronology. Promotional paratexts like this video blog imbues an already nostalgic literary adaptation text with another level of remembrance of the "original" film trilogy, ironic considering *The Hobbit* was written decades before *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955). In a series where everything from the props to the casting is claimed to be in service of remaining "true to the 'spirit' of the books" (Gray, 2006, p. 248), the dynamics present in this ironic nostalgia seem misplaced and odd. Jackson even playfully puts glasses on, looks directly into the camera and says "oh, you're in 3D," implying that *The Hobbit* will be shot and projected in this format and speaking to the creation of a past that is idealized and made better than its original state. Similarly, the *Star Wars* "prequel" trilogy (1999, 2002, 2005) contained a world that looked far more technologically advanced than the one that supposedly came after it in the narrative's chronology. In the film version of *The Hobbit*, the producers had no issue putting the "Back Again" on screens long before the "There."

Jackson walks around sets rebuilt for the filming of *The Hobbit*, such as "Bag End" that is described as "exactly as it was in *The Lord of The Rings*" down to the stage on which it was built, appealing directly to viewers' nostalgia for their reception and awe of the original series. Recapturing the past is the de facto order of business in this paratext, and no matter the intense fidelity and attention to detail it is still a futile effort. For instance, when Jackson stands on the "exact copy" set of Elrond's chambers from the *Lord of the Rings* he

calls it a "familiar set" and remarks that "over here on the balcony is where the Council of Elrond took place," while shots from this famous scene that any fan of the trilogy would recognize are overlaid right on top of the blog footage. But of course since the set was destroyed and rebuilt it is a copy not literally where the council took place. Admittedly, every version of this set was already a copy, being part of a literary adaptation construction, but it is this kind of language that validates the false ability and drive to recreate lost past objects through collecting and strengthening the melancholic individual nostalgic construction. Jackson remarks that it is a "weird experience" walking onto a set that he has grown accustomed to seeing on film for over a decade, and he states that it is "almost like you've stepped inside a movie," extending this blog's definition of the past through the previous texts, cementing the conflation the past and the present through chronological gymnastics.

Paratexts of *Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit, Freaks and Geeks,* and *Back to the Future* highlight the ability of digital-archive versions of media texts to further engender a mimetic desire to recapture a media-defined past. The texts' original comparative contexts are gone, from the Reagan-infused pseudo-1950s of *Back to the Future* to the actual chronology of Tolkien's works, and left is a misrecognized narcissistic view of history where consumers believe they are reflecting on a past that conforms to their mirror of desire, but in fact are constructed by the DVD and Blu-Ray paratexts that ask them to concentrate solely on the historical reality of the texts themselves.

Conclusion

The contemporary nostalgic consumer is a collector, not a collectivist, as the past acquired through the digital-archive apparatus based on the individual playlist past. In terms of a cultural "mentality," the tendency towards a rerun mentality and the expansion of this

mindset through the digital-archive apparatus contains within it the potential to be a healthy comparative and adaptive stance towards the past by embracing a focus on the critical or collective. Dominic LaCapra even states that a narcissistic mentality, which the constructed individual nostalgia is part of, is normally "one-sided," but can engender a perspective that does not "blindly replicate debilitating aspects of the past" (1984, p. 297). However, LaCapra admits that this elusive frame of mind has been replaced with individual silos of thought, much the same as the contemporary media nostalgia in the digital-archive has replaced any form of healthy aesthetic pluralism that might break up the playlist past's narcissistic nostalgic subjectivities. This collector's mentality is made possible through the digital-archive apparatus reliant on technological advancements that, according to Packer's reading of Raymond Williams, privatizes, domesticates, and "demasses" any form of critique. The digital-archive apparatus constructs nostalgic subjectivities by providing access to and interpretations of past texts that validate a myopic gaze backwards.

Beloved vintage texts end up on the nostalgic collector's shelf, hard drive, and Netflix queue, alongside more contemporary titles, and through this past/present conflation it becomes clear that the mode of interacting with the archive has become just as important as the content. This is not to say that it is not possible to use these texts as a comparative window onto previous time periods/events, or that all nostalgia is inherently bad à la LaCapra's elusive narcissistic potential, but it is this particular brand of nostalgia that is self-perpetuating, uncritical, and individual. When viewers take a nostalgic DVD off the shelf or pull up a clip on YouTube, are they doing so to learn something about the past so as to adapt or provoke discussions in the present, or are they reifying something they already "know" by trying to recapture and relive a time period that is lost to them? After all, watching *The*

Wonder Years on The Hub channel or on YouTube does not function as nostalgia for the late 1960s – its first run most likely contained more of that nostalgic function. Instead, it is part of a repetition compulsion that attempts to construct a need to replicate the conditions under which it was previously viewed, much like Proust's repeated attempts to recapture childhood memories through the consumption of cookies that trigger sensory memories (2006, p. 61). The content of the nostalgia becomes less important in the case of *The Wonder Years*, despite the show's already nostalgically imbued nature, than the fact of the myopic gaze backwards. As viewers selectively create their playlist pasts, it does not matter whether they put *The Cosby Show* or *Charlie's Angels* (1976-1981) on their playlist, just that they take part in the digital-archive apparatus that constructs them as perpetual individual nostalgics who are engaging with a media-defined history instead of a critical or collective one.

The mode of apperceiving the playlist past is then strengthened and reified through the tone and thematics of the accompanying paratexts. The cultural mentality of nostalgia derives its sites of meaning making not only from the texts themselves but also the surrounding materials, and the result is the further destruction of the significance of the individual text's original content context. "Proper interpretations" are given from authoritative voices and Packer's "credentialized experts," and the policing of meaning focuses the viewer's gaze in a way that creates a mimetic desire in the individual nostalgics yearning for the recreation of a media-driven version of their past. This phenomenon manifests itself in many forms, even appearing in the "super ultra director's cut collector's edition" DVD or Blu-Ray of a film that was released three months ago in theaters. Here nostalgia is not only individual and à la carte, but also instant and irrespective of whether the

original text presented itself as nostalgic. If all films, vintage and recent, are worthy of a "collector's edition" then the past/present conflation is intensified and de-radicalized.

The reasoning for using marketing, DVD special features, and even the physical box sets themselves to espouse this perpetual gaze into the past has clear economic foundations. By exploiting the constructed nostalgic subject's longing for a lost object, the past can be commodified in ways that the present cannot. The texts of the past are already produced, contain proven audiences, and focus viewers' attention away from a critical point of view. This crucial point will become all the more important as narcissistic nostalgia is extended to all forms of media, as the retention of a "buying mood" is shown to be incompatible with a critical mindset. The foundation of the playlist past and history defined by media texts has been laid with the explosion of nostalgic digital access, but must now be exposed for the ubiquitous nature of this phenomenon. If much of the nostalgic material released today, though certainly not all, derives from contemporary generations' childhoods, then it is fitting that an exploration be performed on a medium that grew up alongside them, the video game. The video game will be examined in the next chapter as employing behavioral nostalgic repetition from narratives to the buttons on the controllers.

Chapter 3: Downloading and Playing an Explicit and Implicit Past

Media have recently provided an explosion of nostalgic archiving opportunities through DVD box sets, YouTube, iTunes, and Netflix, thereby contributing to a past defined by media texts, but it is important to develop how far-reaching this trend is in other contemporary media. Derek Kompare was essential in establishing the "rerun mentality" that led to last chapter's argument about the collector's mentality encouraged by DVDs and Netflix, but his work also proves prophetic towards the future reaches of this trend. Kompare posits that the "regime of repetition, already proven economically successful, was now applied across a broader cultural terrain" (2004, p. 125), which for this analysis will now focus on the video game. This chapter will transition from DVD box sets and iTunes downloads of *21 Jump Street* (1987-1991) to the vintage video game download of *Super Mario Bros.* (1985), demonstrating a similar brand of nostalgia and the ubiquitous and cross-media nature of this phenomenon. Throughout this analysis of how the perpetual individual nostalgic is constructed by the technological form and content of today's media it will be shown that many contemporary media participate in this particular brand of nostalgic construction, but none as devotedly as the video game. And considering that the video game industry has grown by some estimates into a $25 billion a year industry with "nearly three-quarters of all American households" playing games (Entertainment Software Association, 2011), any broad cultural trend that this medium embodies, including repetitious behavioral nostalgia, is vital to examine deeply. Within the overall normative framework of contemporary media's construction of nostalgic subjectivities established in the first chapter, the video game medium works specifically to engender individualistic nostalgia through explicit and implicit remakes that concentrate on behavioral nostalgic repetition.

Theodor Adorno posited that in the face of repetition men as subjects "represent the ultimate limit of reification" and have the potential to render in vain mass culture's attempts to "take hold of them again and again" (2001, p. 93). Adorno called repetition a "hopeless effort" because humans inherently resist against it (2001, p. 93), though this chapter will examine the video game medium's attempts to test this limit and present itself as the epitome of the ubiquitous media phenomenon that constructs narcissistic nostalgics as myopically focused on their own playlist past. The video game industry, a medium comparatively in its infancy, will be shown to contain the purest form of nostalgic proliferation; an individual nostalgic exemplar aimed at the heart of a generation that grew up playing Atari and Nintendo. Video games use nostalgia to take hold of their consumers through multiple forms, such as the remake and downloadable content, with most relying heavily on a "pseudo cyclical" conception of time that Guy Debord defines as the spectacle "displaying and reproducing itself" to which we are "supposed to look forward to" (1983, p. 89). Sounding a lot like the description of vintage games turned into contemporary downloadable content, Debord quotes Marx saying pseudo-cyclical commodities are products that "already exists in a form suitable for consumption" but "nevertheless serve as raw material for some other product" (1983, p. 88). In this way, repetition presents itself as a reification of a media pleasure "ruthlessly reorganized...into a commodity a thing" (Jameson, 1979, p. 131). Here, repeated activity contributes to consumptive ideology, as playing these video games over and over again affords consumers of the past the illusion that one has mastery over the depicted historical periods including their own pasts, which are continuously re-fed to them.

Important, and related to the pseudo-cyclical recurrence of nostalgic video game texts, is that the perpetual individual nostalgic "does not mourn the loss of the past; it seeks

to recreate the past, to deny that it is lost" (Dickinson & Erben, 2006, p. 255). Here, this specific kind of engagement with the past is directly connected to Freud's distinction between Mourning and Melancholia, which has proven important in every chapter of this dissertation. Mourning, in the Freudian sense, would be to show a healthy relation to the past because it allows the individual to eventually release the object being mourned. Freud says that melancholics, on the other hand, are those that attempt to recreate the past demonstrating the "loss of capacity to adopt a new object of love" (as quoted in Jordan, 2002, p. 89). Matthew Jordan advocates for a healthy nostalgia where the "mourner" works through the past as an avenue for improving the present or future (2002, p. 89), whereas the video games' explicit and implicit constructions of nostalgia engendered through repeated behaviors and narrative material tends towards what Jordan calls a melancholic obsession that transfixes players and turn their attention "away from any activity that is not connected with the loved object" (Jordan, 2002, p. 89). In this case, the loved object could be a *Super Mario Bros.* game that defined a player's childhood and is now digitally recreated to fuel a compulsive drive to recapture an individual, uncritical past.

To understand the way in which a healthy nostalgia for the games of one's childhood can become a melancholic obsession that forecloses the ability to create new libidinal attachments through the increasingly easier action of constant repetition and reinforcement, it will be necessary to explore both the more obvious explicit forms of nostalgia, such as the video game remake or port, the vintage game download, and historical representations in games, as well as the implicit forms, such as the "implicit remake" and the conflation of the past/present through universal gameplay configurations. Together, these two constructions of the perpetual individual nostalgic subject serve to expand on the previous chapter's assertion

that when a past is defined by media texts more than shared cultural experiences, then the subject who embodies that relation to the past is more likely to have an uncritical historical view and be in danger of lacking the capacity for using it to reflect critically on their present.

In the reigning majority of video game research, this form of historical and textual analysis has been uncommon, though certainly growing. Historically, most works were dedicated to violence (Sherry, 2001), and the impact of games on children (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). Though this research is important and more recent research trends have resisted these dominant paradigms, its effects-based models focused on violence and children perpetuates the unfounded notion of video games "as being a children's medium...readily denigrated as trivial...and demanding no investigation" (J. Newman, 2004, p. 5). Despite the dominant tendencies of video game research, or perhaps because of them, this chapter's examination is of the utmost importance in the face of this particular nostalgic construction.

Another important research distinction to note is between ludology and narratology given the prominence of this issue in scholarly debates about video games. Many video game researchers were concerned about the straight adoption of "aesthetic linkages to prior media forms" such as film (Apperley, 2006, p. 7), and a "'war' between ludology and narratology" broke out (Nielsen, Smith, & Tosca, 2008, p.195). Though certainly exaggerated, as Gonzalo Frasca states that no such "war" took place (2003a), it is important to note the differences in perspectives as this analysis finds value in both for the development of nostalgic subjectivities. Ludology refers to a concentration on the "specific attribute of the video game medium" or the treating of a game as a rule-based situation instead of relying "overmuch on games representational characteristics" (Apperley, 2006, p. 7). Narratology refers to seeing narrative as the "primary way in which we make sense of and structure the world" (Juul,

2005, p. 15). Ludology, aside from being a general term to describe all game studies, refers to the study of the gameplay elements of a video game, including rules, structure, environments, and controls. Narratology, applied to the video game, refers to mapping literary theory onto narrative elements of a game, such as cut scenes, in-game character dialogue and interactions, and representations. The issue with a hard-line ludology stance is that representational characteristics make just as much of a difference in how players experience a video game, especially as the narratives have progressed a long way from the occasional "cut scene" of plot in between the ludic action. Even previously staunch ludologists like Jesper Juul, who classified the war as alternating "between being a superficial battle of words and an earnest exploration of meaningful issues" (2005, p. 15), has since softened a bit and recognized the need for both perspectives in saying that "video games are rules *and* fiction" (2005, p. 12). Still, ludology tends to be the main focus from which most scholarly video game research derives, which fits well into this chapter's argument that the ludic praxis of nostalgic games tend to reinforce nostalgic behavior. Many ludologists advance that the "primary virtue of this 'movement' has been the problematization of the smooth application of narrative theory to new media" (Crogan as quoted in Apperley, 2006, p. 19), which makes it even more important to continue Juul's balanced approach. This is especially true when considering the implications excluding either of these perspectives would have on the examination of explicit and implicit nostalgic games.

Explicitly Nostalgic Video Games

Explicit nostalgia is not hard to spot. For instance, a video game remake like *Punch-Out!!* (1987, 2009) calls attention to the fact that it is pointing towards the past in a longing manner. Even other media formats recognize the video game's nostalgic tendency, with a

regular segment on the G4 television show *Attack of the Show!* (2005-present) called "Tales From the Console Graveyard" and a regular column on the website *Gamepro.com* called "Arcade Games that Time Forgot" ensuring that even the most obscure titles are worth remembering. That does not mean that the influence of this nostalgic construction on how consumers of this media view the past is nearly as obvious. Through their patterns of use and consumption, players are constructed as compilers of vintage games much like the collector's mentality in the digital-archive apparatus, obsessed with references to and remakes of older titles and all too willing to adopt a simplified and individualized viewpoint of historical events and people. Video games are one of the most popular forms of entertainment for contemporary generations, with the average player listed at 37 years old (Entertainment Software Association, 2011), and as such represent an important site of nostalgia as the industry itself grew up alongside these same players. It stands to reason that just as other forms of entertainment have recently adopted a business plan in which remaking or releasing content to capture the melancholy nostalgic urges of consumers is central, the video game industry has also taken to remaking its "classics." If we examine how the video game has become consciously self-referential through its remakes, ports, vintage downloads, and historical representations, we can see that this medium contributes heavily to the generation of an uncritical playlist past defined by texts players are doomed to repeat.

To start with, the remake and "port" must be explored for the pervasive and explicitly nostalgic role they help foster in the contemporary video game industry, a dynamic that contributes to the pervasiveness of an uncritical playlist past. Remakes are such a big part of our contemporary culture, from sampling in music to the heavy reliance on the reboot in film that will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters, and video games are no different. For

such a relatively young medium, compared to film or even television, the idea that games

from the past would be steadily resurrected is significant to examine because of its

chronologically condensed nature. Despite the relatively short time period to cull from,

remakes and ports fit perfectly within the video game industry and the overall media trend to

construct consumers as perpetually fixated on their own narcissistic past, which they long for

and try to recapture a connection to through nostalgic texts. Playing *Ninja Gaiden* (2003), a

remake of the NES 1988 version, or *Resident Evil: Deadly Silence* (2006), a port of the

Playstation 1996 version to the handheld Nintendo DS, evoke a playlist past by compelling

players to try to recreate their pasts through a misrecognized, media-text defined, version.

The difference between a video game "remake" and a "port" is important to delineate.

A video game remake is when the old text is redone and recreated while borrowing some

elements and adding new ones, and a "port" is when an older game is made available to be

played on a newer or mobile console, possibly with some graphical improvement. An

example of a remake would be *Doom 3* (2004), a remake of the original *Doom* (1993) despite

its numerical discrepancy, and an example of a port would be *Dead Rising: Chop Til You

Drop* (2009), a Wii port of an Xbox 360 game made three years prior with little to no

changes made in plot or structure. The distinction is not always clear, however, as ported

versions sometimes contain new levels and gameplay elements not found in the original, and

a remake sometimes resembles the original so much that it should be called a port instead.

There will be an attempt to be as clear as possible with this distinction, but there is still the

possibility of subjective interpretations of what constitutes a port versus a remake. However,

the point, in the end, will be that both the remake and the port occupy a similar relationship

between these nostalgic games and the construction of players perpetually focusing

backwards, so the finer points of this distinction will be somewhat inconsequential. Both will be shown, through graphic and content improvements, to replace the older with the newer in memory, therefore functioning to reinforce the melancholic stance towards the past where the lost object is not worked through in a healthy manner and released, but instead lingered on in a newer idealized form.

Examples of the video game remake and port are prevalent enough to consider them a genre onto itself, complete with characteristics, techniques and form of any other genre. For instance, the video game series *Resident Evil* (1996-present) is no stranger to sequels, but is also one where games are commonly remade, and these games follow a similar structure and form. The Nintendo Gamecube remake of *Resident Evil* (2002), a game that went on to be ported to the Wii in June 2009 under the title *Resident Evil Archives: Resident Evil,* exemplifies the video game remake pattern of keeping much of the same levels, puzzles, characters, gameplay elements, and plotlines from the original. Richard Hand notes that this game pioneered a gameplay element of choosing between two protagonists where the choice actually presented differences in the narrative that "guaranteed that players would play the full game *twice*" [emphasis original] (2004, p. 118). Significant in nearly all video game remakes, including *Resident Evil*, is the tendency to highlight and enhance aspects of the original that proved popular, while deleting those deemed unworthy of re-creation. Not only is this an example of "proper interpretations" of the original created through a paratextual new version (Gray, 2010, p. 81), but it also reminiscent of Coontz's romanticized sitcom remembrance of the 1950s that highlighted only the idyllic and pleasurable (Coontz, 1992, p. 30), or the chapter two example of *E.T.*'s guns being swapped for flashlights. These re-made games contribute to misrecognition of a past that never existed in the original text

accomplished through the shined up new version. In the Gamecube *Resident Evil*, elements

from later iterations of the series are incorporated into the remake, including more

photorealistic graphics, character movements that express pain, and rewriting/translating of

the original's stilted dialogue, which while creating a better gameplay experience serves to

shade players' memories of the original game.

Like Coontz's discussion of television's idealized 1950s, these games contribute to a

glossing over of "the actual complexity of our history" as even of our own experience "gets

buried under the weight of an idealized image" (1992, p. 1). With games, the history that is

glossed over is not the same as watching *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963) and not recognizing

that "[c]ontrary to popular opinion" this show "was not a documentary" (Coontz, 1992, p.

29), but instead is the glossing over of the contextual history of the game itself where the

individual loses a realistic and comparative version of the historical text. The contrast would

be to consider a port video game text that presented the original version in all its pixilated

glory with the express purpose of highlighting the past as different, "radical" (Jameson,

1991), or "alien" (Strasser, 2003). However, most remakes and ports emphasize idealizing

characteristics, from *Ninja Gaiden II* (2008) and its retention of demon plotlines and intense

gameplay from the original to *Super Mario 64 DS*'s (2004) near perfect copy with the

addition of new playable characters. The original version of *Super Mario 64* (1996) has been

called revolutionary in terms of 3D gaming development and an unsurprising "smash hit"

(Loguidice & Barton, 2009, p. 260), so it is no wonder it continues to be nostalgically remade

and ported into newer video game consoles. Wilson Koh discusses a similar brand of textual

nostalgia in examining *Spider-Man* (2002), and its relationship to past versions of the

character. Koh posits that the film version eschews expanding on what consumers knew of

the character, encouraging them to create "repisodic memories" the result of which is "a text which provides its audiences with a comforting and celebratory confirmation of their existing extra-textual knowledge regarding the Spider-Man character" (2009, p. 740). For video game remakes, the result is a nostalgic harkening back to versions of games and the past that never existed in their current form, made reference to by their updated brethren, and the further construction of a compulsive drive to recreate an idealized individual playlist past. The video game remake and port becomes just another easy draw, moving a normal nostalgia for experiences from childhood towards a repetition compulsion that veers toward the melancholic. It fixes contemporary media consumers before their own Mirror of Erised, transfixing them into a subject that is always looking backwards to a past that never existed at the expense of their engagement with today or tomorrow.

Another related phenomenon in video game packaging and re-packaging is the replication of an older original game housed within a new game. This odd trend has the tendency to trigger players' memories and make attachments to vintage games even stronger. Though this phenomenon is not as prevalent as the straight remake or the stand-alone port, these retro games-within-a-game do have a history. Many times, players conduct complex searching before actually finding these hidden retro games, and their hunt is reminiscent of a search for DVD Easter Eggs, which Jonathan Gray said "can seem like shreds of evidence" to draw us further in (2010, p. 89). A non-console video game example can help explain the hidden game process. On May 22, 2010, Google's homepage logo, an ever-changing homage to various date-specific events and people they call "doodles," appeared to be a configuration of its letters in the form of a *Pac-Man* (1980) level to commemorate its 30th anniversary (Figure 4), but when moused over turned out to be a playable mini-version of the game itself.
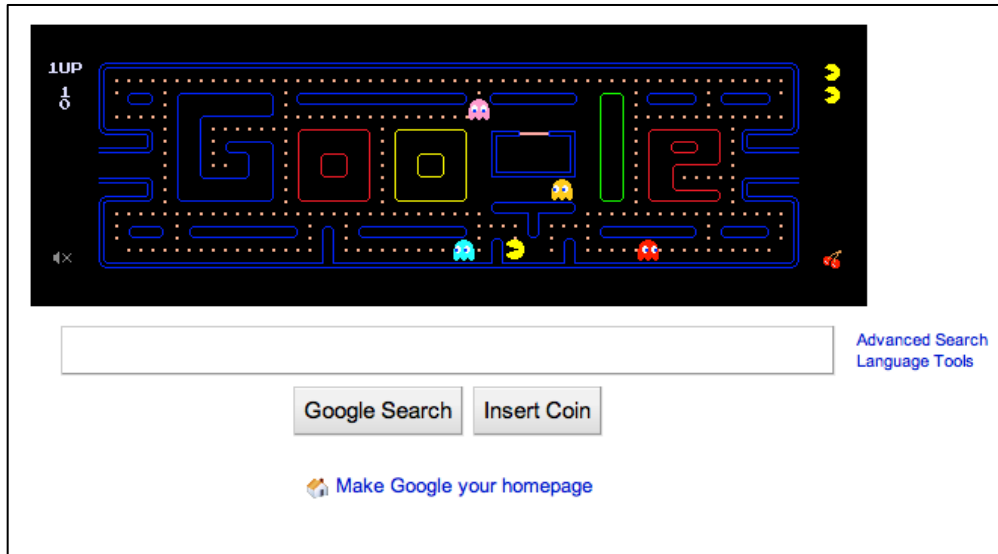
Figure 4: Google's playable homepage on May 22, 2010 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of *Pac-Man* (2010).

This retrofitting of the classic "maze chase game" that relies on a gaming term known as an "overlay" or a "mostly transparent screen placed over the television screen" (Loguidice & Barton, 2009, p. 182), is a form of postmodern homage that Jameson would certainly consider "playful" and not brought forth for the purposes of a critical comparison of past gaming and contemporary technology. In terms of tapping into a ludological experience, it flattens the differentiation between past and present.

In actual video games, players usually must hunt a little more extensively to recapture these in-game retro texts. This complex hunting enhances the constructed compulsive drive in players to recreate, literally in this case, a part of their playlist past by reinvesting time and attention towards nostalgic endeavors. *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure* (1994) popularized this technique, with players having to find a retro scorpion as part of a nine-step process to gain access to the entire original *Pitfall!* (1982). More recently, *Call of Duty: Black Ops* (2010) featured both the vintage text-based game *Zork* (1980) as well as a retro-style top-down view game called *Dead Ops Arcade*. Knowing how to manipulate an interactive title screen by

"breaking out" of your protagonist's restraints and walking around the title screen room is the only way to access either game, representing a willful and voluntary choice to be nostalgic. The original *Mario Bros.* (1983) game makes its way into many contemporary games, such as *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* (2009) where a multiplayer "coin battle" version exists, in *Super Mario Bros. 3* (1988) as an Easter Egg, and in *Animal Crossing* (2002) through a complex "e-reader card" system which had to be purchased separately from the game and scanned in. The in-game retro text is almost never required to play the primary game, and so indexes a further construction of the individual nostalgic as one who will willfully work, and sometimes pay, to uncover and attempt to recreate the misrecognized past that is shaded by its appearance within a new text. Not all nostalgic pleasure engendered by the video game text is based on an intertextual harkening back to first experiences of a game. Sometimes the vintage text exists on its own, discussed in detail below with the DLC, but when the individual nostalgic is made to put in symbolic work to uncover the memory-laden past object within the present text the rewarding nostalgic connection is made that much stronger.

The in-game retro text certainly is not the only way in which players can gain access to or re-experience vintage texts that explicitly create and validate a playlist past, heavily contributing to the construction of a perpetual individual nostalgic media consumer. The contemporary video game industry's construction and reification of nostalgic texts can be considered perpetual, like motion, in that it works within positive feedback cycles that contribute to players experiencing a "eternal recurrence," which Nietzsche called "*the heaviest weight* [emphasis original]" (2001, p. 194). The most common method is through the vintage video game download. These downloads of retro or remade games are available on all current video game consoles that are capable of producing the highest quality graphics

and processing power, yet many times are used to play 8-bit games from the 1980s. Players

acquire these games through built-in e-stores that transfer the downloadable content, or DLC,

to users' hard drives. Nintendo Wii, Sony Playstation 3, and Microsoft Xbox 360 allow for

the downloading of vintage video games that for many consumers derive from eras and

systems popular during their childhood. Sure, some children today might be into playing

vintage games, but with the average gamer age 37 and rising every year (Entertainment

Software Association, 2011), the market for older games appears squarely aimed at the

individual nostalgic. Similar to the previous chapter's discussion of Barbara Klinger's

thoughts on how DVDs "invite the viewer to reexperience the past" (2006, p. 86), the vintage

game download exploits players' constructed compulsive drive to relive the *Zelda* text that

"defined" them as children. Not only are nostalgic gamers clamoring to play the same games

they grew up with, but they are also paying for these texts again. The vintage game download

is a kind of "à la carte nostalgia," with an important connection to the kind of playlist past

that constructs an individualized historical focus, as opposed to a more collective form.

When Nintendo's website claims that their "Virtual Console is making the greatest

video game archive in history available for the Wii console" it is not just a marketing

hyperbole but also a commentary on the competition within this field of commodities related

to this vast industry trend. Between all three major consoles, they boast a digital archiving

capacity to cover almost all major video games ever created. The sales figures for DLC

content is robust and reached $5.9 billion dollars in 2010, which is twenty-four percent of

overall game sales (Entertainment Software Association, 2011). These numbers point to the

increasing importance of digital download gaming, of which vintage games are a major part.

Not surprisingly, Sony and Microsoft tend to release games from their own respective

corporate libraries, while Nintendo adds multiple Sega systems, NEOGEO, Commodore 64, and classic arcade games to its own proprietary systems list. The result really is the ability to reformulate most of the individual video game collections of the past, without the need to retain broken-down vintage consoles.

Whether it is recapturing one's youth through the experiential process of replaying the original *Metroid* (1986) or through compiling all three *Castlevania* games (1986, 1988, 1989) from the original NES and beyond, the potential for the construction of a past based around an individualized media playlist increases. This does not mean that every single game each player treasured is available, but the most popular games have almost all been released with more appearing each week in most cases. What was once an underground practice of gaming – facilitated by a vast network of enthusiasts who created "emulators" on computers so users could download and relive their childhood games – has now become a lucrative way for game producers to capitalize on the fervor behind this previously free nostalgic practice. Users now purchase these games that have many times been paid for before during earlier console iterations, and train their focus deeper into their personal Mirror of Erised, with the drive to recapture and recreate the past temporarily satiated. Nintendo's claim of the greatest video game archive is not much of an exaggeration, meaning their archive apparatus provides extensive access to vintage texts, which in turn heavily contributes to a definition of the past through individualized media texts at the expense of an adaptive view of history for the benefit of the present or future.

All of the gaming console makers release vintage game downloads on a weekly basis, with Nintendo adhering to this schedule in the most regimented fashion. At last count, the Nintendo Wii's "Virtual Console" provided access to nearly four hundred vintage video

games in DLC format, slowly trickled out to consumers weekly since November of 2006.

Much like Debord's thoughts on pseudo-cyclical time in which leisure is increasingly defined

as "time spent consuming images" where an objects' "cyclical return we are supposed to look

forward to" (1983, 88), nostalgic DLC is released to consumers on a pseudo-cyclical

timeline. Nostalgic video gamers then anticipate new (old) content, leading to an escalation

of longing in a medium already known for delayed releases and cultivated anticipation

(Deesing, 2011). Obviously, this is an artificial construction as the content being released

was produced long ago, and as such the console makers could distribute entire back catalogs

en masse. Instead, by creating this pseudo-cyclical timeline of release the nostalgia and

anticipation for more nostalgia can be prolonged, thereby intensifying the hunt for the

perceived connection to the past through the media texts of one's childhood. False scarcity in

the form of a withheld playlist past serves to increase the compulsive drive to compile and

recreate an uncritical, individual version of history. Withholding these texts that are clustered

around nostalgic remembrances engenders emotionally charged consumptive behavior. In an

extreme example, Nintendo answered the years-long call by fans for the Virtual Console

release of the Nintendo 64 title *GoldenEye* (1995), one of the most popular games of all time

and precursor to modern first-person shooter games, by bypassing the relatively cheaper

download option and repackaging/remaking the title in disc form. Instead of immediately

releasing the game as a download for approximately ten dollars, the constructed compulsive

drive was prolonged and exploited to benefit the fifty-dollar disc Wii version, *GoldenEye 007*

(2010), and the sixty-dollar disc version, *GoldenEye 007: Reloaded* (2011), which

subsequently benefited competitors, Xbox 360 and Playstation 3.

The process of getting a version of *GoldenEye* to serve and reify the subjectivity of the perpetual individual nostalgic helps in understanding many of the economic benefits of constructing this particular kind of past-centered individual. First, by relying on already established properties, in this case the James Bond franchise, and many times already produced commodities, such as in the case of vintage game downloads, the costs and risks are reduced through this use of the past. Second, by constructing consumers as always looking backwards, especially towards their childhoods for their pleasure, current media encourage the playlist past mentality that begets collecting, re-purchasing, and archiving media texts beloved from one's own past like the Nintendo 64 *GoldenEye*. Third and related, by focusing consumer's attention on their individual past as opposed to a comparative, critical past the status quo and buying mentality is preserved. Consumer construction that is radically subjectivized and atomized, yet part of a commodity audience, ensures that perpetual nostalgics are a collective of individual consumers. That the most powerful video game systems in the industry today are designed with the ability to play vintage games from consoles past is a key nod to the trend of constructing the past as defined completely by the media texts themselves, as opposed to significantly engaging with the present or an adaptive past. In the case of *GoldenEye*, nostalgia may already contain an integrated relationship to the past, as it is based on James Bond, but also serves the broader trend to commodify the nostalgic subject's affective desire.

It is not just in the video game format or the ways in which they are offered to players and consumed that aids in the construction of the nostalgic subject, there are also video games with problematic content. There are majors issues involved in a culture that does not engage with an adaptive, critical past, and instead relies on a dwelling in a flat past which

jettisons the notion that those who came before were "radically different in their ways of thinking and behaving" (Jameson, 1991, p. 389). Unfortunately, when it comes to the majority of historical representations in video games, the flat postmodern past is the one nurtured, not what Jameson would consider a healthy comparative modernist version. Most games tend to deal with simple, casual histories that revolve around wars and the shared, "universal" goals of the present that eschew any of the salutary interaction with Jameson's definition of a radical past whose difference invites comparisons that allow us in the present to better understand our own times.

Thinking about this problem in film can help clarify how it works in the video game medium as well. In discussing the tendency toward flattening out the past in films, Robert Rosenstone views Hollywood's simplification and individualization of the complex causation of historical events and eras as an inherently problematic tendency of visual histories, though he says that "does not differentiate it from much written history" (1995, p. 30). These individualized historical narratives follow Nietzsche's thoughts on the "monumental history" and the great man, which is "extreme admiration of the past" (1957, p. 17) that reaffirms the status quo of the present through the "knowledge that the great thing existed and was therefore possible, and so may be possible again" (1957, p. 14). For example, the complex historical events of World War II are simplified down to the rescue of an individual soldier in *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). Quoting Thomas Doherty's critical review, Marouf Hasian, Jr. speaks to the connection between Nietzsche's monumental history, the great man, and films like *Saving Private Ryan* (1999) by saying baby boomer' sons and daughters would kneel before "their WWII fathers in a final, fin-de siècle act of generational genuflection" (2001, p. 339). On the other side of Rosenstone's dichotomy is the critical, discussion provoking

historical film, "which uses the medium to revision, even reinvent History" (1995, p. 12). In other words, critical history can be served by new media, so long as it represents the past in such a way as to foster an ongoing discussion about its meaning.

This set of criteria can be used to understand and evaluate how video games represent and make the past available to the player in either a critical manner, or the problematic, simplified way. For example, the *Medal of Honor* series (1999-present) began as typical in terms of video historical representations, leaning heavily on the WWII era as an accepted and safe series of events. *Medal of Honor: Frontline* (2002), in fact, mostly served to recreate the already perceived importance and experience of the Normandy D-Day invasion, partially because Steven Spielberg was heavily involved in the creation of the series. This series derives its look from various filmic referents, such as *Frontline*'s mimicking of the washed-out, sand flying, shaky, subjective cam look of *Saving Private Ryan* even down to the vomiting soldiers in the approaching boats, relying on this indexical relationship to enhance its verisimilar look. Whereas *Saving Private Ryan* "uses subjective camera to draw the viewing audience into" the main character's "nightmare" (Owen, 2002, p. 263), games like *Frontline* utilize filmic indexing alongside the control of characters in historical situations to subjectivize the narratives. Like most WWII First Person Shooters, or FPS, a subgenre that represents a large portion of all historical video games, the *Medal of Honor* series reduces one of the most complex sets of events in the history of mankind down to the plight of individual gamer-controlled soldiers. Contemporary video game players exemplify Rosenstone's concern about the media's tendency of boiling complex history down to a "personal confrontation" (1995, p. 30), and individually win wars with their "RT" controller button. In other words, the repetition of the same historical dynamic, over and over again,

shuts down any moving beyond the confined ideological space provided by the series. It traps

our understanding of the past into a facile easy to understand version of things, a POV

experience that subjectivizes this flat misunderstanding.

Not all games follow this model of historical representation, one that relies on films

or series to provide them with a version of the past they can unproblematically occupy. Yet

most of the time games do present the accepted, casual, and whiggish version of history, one

driven by the acts of a first-person great man that advances an uncomplicated and linear

narrative where the present is the "inevitable outcome of a triumphant historical process"

(Butterfield as quoted in Mayr, 1990, p. 305). For instance, the *Assassin's Creed* series

(2007-present), in which historical periods are relived through tapping into a character's

ancestral memories in a virtual reality environment, contains the potential to engage with the

past in a complex, multi-casual manner by colliding radical time periods, but ultimately fails.

Instead, this series relies on the idea that an individual assassin has the ability to affect the

course of history in his time and in subsequent generations through the recovery of his

memories by his bloodline descendants. The *Assassin's Creed* player is controlling a

character that is the inevitable progression and evolution of a genetic line of skilled assassins,

and all he needs to do to learn the skills and "creed" is to relive this predetermined

progression. If Nietzsche worried that the dominant narrative understanding of history in his

time was the great man theory, in that it created a monumental past that our present is always

in the shadow of, then *Assassin's Creed* puts us in control of the great an, allowing the

conceit that not only is the past dominated by these great warriors, but that their subjectivity

is no different than our own. The great man theory is thus reinforced and reified as a

dominant way of understanding historical change by tapping into an individualized

consumptive experience of enacting ludic violence within the space of a flat costume drama

that advances the "natural" progression from one assassin to another and from one time

period to another.

Call of Duty: Black Ops (2010) offers another version of the same whiggish first

person qua great man dynamic. In this case, though the subject matter is the more complex

and multi-faceted Cold War, there is a distinct avoidance of discussion-provoking material

and a reliance on contemporary status quo confirming caricatures. In many ways, these stable

versions of the past, unproblematically fixed in memory, proffer a nostalgia for a fixed vision

of the Cold War that could even lean towards the melancholic insofar as the fantasy object,

not subjected to any radical reconsideration, becomes a force that looms on the

consciousness. The protagonist of this game encounters the propagandistic version of heroic

US action during the Cold War: Communist espionage, assassination attempts on Castro, and

standard individual acts of heroism that swing the balance of global war. Already knowing

the outcome of the Cold War, a war that entrenched the American liberal consensus ideology

as the inevitable outcome of history, the player is invited to psychically invest in this vision

of the past again and again, until it is reified into something fixed. Cubadebate, a state-run

website dedicated to fighting terroristic media, recognized how problematic this game was by

saying, "it glorifies the illegal assassination attempts the United States government planned

against the Cuban leader" and "it stimulates sociopathic attitudes in North American children

and adolescents" (Haven, 2010). This website clearly has a stake in the depiction of

assassination attempts on Castro, but the point is well taken. *Call of Duty: Black Ops* does

nothing to call into question any of the contemporary interpretations of these events or

political ideologies, reaffirming the status quo as stable and unchanging in the past and

present. Completing this uncritical view of the past, the game ends with Castro, Nixon, Kennedy, and McNamara getting ready to take on a new world threat, zombies. Rosenstone showed in his discussion of the film *Walker* (1987) how the purposeful inclusion of anachronistic elements could serve to call into question historical and as well as contemporary practices in a critical manner, but in this case the zombie postmodern plotline serves only to further alienate the player from any form of historical critique. The past becomes a fictional game, its radical complexity flattened into a background and ludic conceit that is no different than most other first person shooter experiences.

Yet, not all video games fall into the trap of using a fixed past as a historical backdrop for a generic first-person interaction. Some function in an analogous way to *Walker*, and use the anachronisms of this elision to provoke interesting problematics. One of the most nuanced, critical, and discussion-provoking historical representations in contemporary video games is found in the *Bioshock* series, a game that claims to be a completely fantastical alternate historical construction. Rosenstone looks for a critical historical representation to "render the world as multiple, complex, and indeterminate" (1995, p. 37), a feature lacking in so many historical video game representations. *Bioshock,* and its sequels, take place in an underwater alternate history dystopia of the 1950s and 60s where a nuanced, complex battle of philosophies is waged between Andrew Ryan the objectivist founder of the underwater city of Rapture, and Frank Fontaine his nihilist competitor. *Bioshock*'s challenge to Coontz's version of the dominant lens through which the 50s are most often seen puts it in league with Rosenstone's *Walker* as it provides a "past that is at once serious, complex, challenging, and 'true' in its ability to render the meanings rather than the literal reality of past events" (1995, p. 133). The ideological implications for the player who must take control and gain mastery

over this postmodern narrative is a destabilization of the standard version of the 50s and 60s and a challenge to any easy and uncritical view of history.

Players of *Bioshock* are given a "history as experiment" narrative (Rosenstone, 1995, p. 50), not so that they will necessarily go on to question the specificities of these particular historical events, but so they will leave this game with a sense of the value of collective critical historical reflection reinforced by ludic praxis. *Bioshock*'s narrative renders the world multiple in terms of its historical representation of a 1950s that was inhospitable to those without the prevailing capitalist ideology, asking the question early on "In what country is there a place for people like me?" Players are also given the ludic gameplay option to follow Ryan's self-interest thinking or not through the decision to "harvest" the "Little Sister" characters or save them. Grant Tavinor calls this an "emotionally provocative moral choice" that plays out across the entire game (2009, p. 92), which fits within *Bioshock*'s overall reliance on consequences through "very concrete experiences" (Sicart, 2009, p. 156).

Far from a passive story that unfolds in front of a player's eyes, *Bioshock* allows players to decide how these alternative historical events should develop. Players are punished or rewarded for hurting or helping the "Little Sisters," who are genetically altered little girls that players encounter through their dealings with the "bosses" of the game, the "Big Daddies," and they are encouraged to play through multiple times choosing differently with the reward of different endings. When players choose to hurt, or "harvest," the "Little Sisters" they are given an ending that highlights the dominance and "brutality" levied against those of lower stature in society. By saving the "Little Sisters" players are given an ending where those who have been dominated now have a "chance to learn, to find love" and "to live." Because the narrative happens in an alternate historical past, and with each ending having a

different effect on the alternate future, the game opens up room for *Bioshock* to highlight a comparative and adaptive engagement with history akin to Rosenstone's criteria of an historical representation that shows "why history should be meaningful to people in the present" (1995, p. 63). The true importance of this comparative narrative lies in gameplay that involves players on an agentive, interactive level with the questioning and destabilization of accepted historical events. This nuance continues in *Bioshock 2* (2010) with the destabilization of the accepted past through the questioning of any form of extremist politics, regardless of which "side" one is on, and will be given the opportunity to do so in the upcoming *Bioshock Infinite* (2012), which appears to be a critique of American exceptionalism and manifest destiny.

It is significant that one of the best examples of a video game historical representation, one that lives up to Rosenstone's complexity ideal, is a fantastical alternate history. The many games that claim historical fidelity through various von Rankean conceits tend to force a single interpretation through a reliance on "physical action, personal confrontation" and a "movement towards a climax" (Rosenstone, 1995, p. 30). There is an utter lack of video games "made in opposition to the mainstream" understanding of the past (Rosenstone, 1995, p. 46). Of all of the explicitly nostalgic video games – ones whose subject matter indexes a nostalgic past through its background and subject matter – *Bioshock* is the most exemplary in that it holds up a mirror to the past that is radical and critical, despite its fantastical undersea story about gene experiments gone awry. With *Bioshock* a critical history is created not through accurate visual representations or indexical relations to known historical events, but rather in the problematization of what is known or generally accepted about the past.

Implicitly Nostalgic Video Games

While it is obvious that explicit nostalgia, both as a form of representation and as an subject effect engendered by the ludic experience of playing within such representations, is extremely important to the media industry in its effort to construct consumers as individual perpetual nostalgics, there is more to contemporary video game nostalgia than just the remake or vintage game download. Existing concurrently is another form of nostalgia that can only be described as implicit. Though the content may be less overtly historical, the subject effect of playing these games serves the same modus operandi. The implicit nature of this nostalgia is that players participate in the behavior of playing the same narratives and button configurations over and over, tapping into their previous actions or game experiences, leading to an implied or implicit nostalgia. This could almost be considered "unconscious," though the obvious and recognized nature of the repetition rises to the level of player consciousness. One cannot very well play twelve Mario games with the same plot and not recognize similarities, and as such this nostalgia acts implicitly through medium-specific repeated activities that link this repetition to a corresponding longing for the past. There are two varieties of implicit nostalgia in video games. The first is the brand of nostalgic narrative that copies its predecessors, iteration after iteration. The second involves games that try to create a universal "experience" through controller button configurations, and in doing so contribute to an experience that, as Jameson feared postmodern media histories would, conflates the past with the present. Each of these implicit nostalgic constructions will be explored for the ways they work alongside the more obvious kinds of video game nostalgia to complete the definition of the past through media texts and the privileging of an uncritical view of history. Though each seem completely unrelated to the past, both will be shown to

play a part in helping to reify the user's nostalgia, compromising their capacity to learn from the past in order to confront the problems of the present.

The implicit remake, one that feigns to be a completely new experience while unabashedly following the same story and structure, is relatively unique to the video game industry. This is not simply the same narrative and genre-based formula utilized in countless films, or the same melodic/thematic song structure employed over and over by pop artists. This phenomenon rises above standardized repetition and reveals itself as a near perfect copy of previous versions within the same game series. Theodor Adorno noted that a key dynamic of marketing and branding in consumer society is the "perpetual sameness of manufactured goods" and that the culture industry "transforms everything freshly encountered into a reiteration of what is always already present" referring to this phenomenon as the eternal return of the same (Schweppenhäuser & Rolleston, 2009, p. 148). A similar dynamic presents itself in the implicit video game remake, as the "ultimate limit of reification" is tested with video game producers trying to "take hold" of players again and again with the same material (Adorno, 2001, p. 93). Instead of the music Adorno was addressing, we have commodified historical content. One filmic example that can aid in understanding this phenomenon is *Evil Dead 2* (1987), which is essentially a remake of the first film with higher production values, despite what the numbered title would suggest. The same plot and characters exist in *Evil Dead 2* as in the first film, and importantly the events of the first film are ignored as if they never happened. This form of implicit remake may be rare in film, as at least some emphasis is placed on continuity in long-running series, but is an oddity that is common to the video game. Many video game examples can be given, but no video game producer is more responsible for the implicit remake than Nintendo, a fitting company to exemplify this trend

as they represent the explosion of home video gaming better than any other company, especially as it pertains to the key game buying demographic who grew up during Nintendo's first reign as king of gaming.

As Nintendo stormed onto the home video gaming landscape in the early 1980s with their Nintendo Entertainment System, or NES, the foundation was laid for some of the most popular video game series of all time. The much cited work by Jeffrey Church and Neil Gandal about Nintendo's early video game dominance notes that the creators of the NES controlled an "eighty percent market share" by 1992 despite the fact that "Nintendo's 8 bit consoles" were "considered inferior to the 16 bit consoles provides [sic] by Sega and NEC" at the time (Church & Gandal, 1992, p. 86). Within a year of the 1985 NES North America launch, the industry-defining games *Super Mario Bros.* and *The Legend of Zelda* (1986) were released. The *Mario Bros.* series has been called the "greatest video games the world has ever seen, directly influencing at least two generations of games and gamers" (Loguidice & Barton, 2009, p. 290), and *The Legend of Zelda* has been similarly called a "foundational game, one of only a handful of titles that can truly be said to have helped define the industry" (Loguidice & Barton, 2009, p. 303). These perennially popular series are both in the top fifteen best-selling video game series of all time, with the *Mario* series easily outpacing all others with over 240 million copies of various games sold in its 25 year span (Leach, 2010). These two series are notable for their staying power and continued popularity, made even more significant when considering that each game in these series tells the exact same story and utilizes the exact same structure along the way. Sure there are a few anomalies along the way, such as *Super Mario Bros. 2* (1988), *Mario is Missing!* (1992), *Zelda's Adventure* (1994) and *Luigi's Mansion* (2001), but the vast majority of the games in these respective

series do not even try to hide their similarities. Scant attention has been paid to this phenomenon outside of the popular press and gaming discussion forums (Davidson, 2011; Sterling, 2011; Impulse, 2011), with the closest academic works that address it being those that admonish the simplistic and skeletal nature of video game narratives that the ludologists claim exist, which is not helpful in examining this clear implicit remake tendency. This severe inexplicable lack needs rectified, and this analysis will attempt to start the dialogue about Mario's eternal return to the same story.

A quick description of the standard plotlines and structures of these two series can serve as illustrative of the video game implicit remake. In a typical *Super Mario Bros.* game, Princess Peach has been captured by the evil Bowser and Mario the plumber must rescue her. Mario encounters a series of areas, such as grass, sand, water, sky, ice, and finally ends up in Bowser's castle lair full of fire and brimstone. Eventually, Mario will encounter Bowser, defeating him most times by using his own size against him, and will rescue the princess in the process. This same exact plotline occurs so often in this game series, from *Super Mario Bros. 3* (1988) to *Mario 64* (1996), that one would think Princess Peach should invest in better security, and that players would be able to resist this compulsive narrative reverberation. In addition, upgrades and levels themselves are shared throughout the series to the point of severe repetition. In *Super Mario Galaxy 2* (2010), when an exact copy of the first level of *Mario 64* appears, it is so commonplace that it goes by almost unnoticed. *The Legend of Zelda* series is an even more blatant embodiment of this implicit remake trend. In this series, a young Link will be informed that he is a hero destined to save the kingdom of Hyrule and Princess Zelda along the way by recapturing pieces of the legendary "Triforce." The evil Ganon, or Ganondorf in many versions, will stand in the way and it will take Link's

growing up, conquering a series of dungeons, and acquiring the proper tools for him to

accomplish his quest. Not only does nearly every *Zelda* game follow this plotline and

structure, from the original *The Legend of Zelda*, to the more recent *The Legend of Zelda:*

Twilight Princess (2006), but even the order of item acquisition is the same in all of these

games. Link will always need to acquire a bow and arrow to accomplish his goals, but never

before he obtains a boomerang-like object, just like he will never encounter the Goron Mines

dungeon before the Forest Temple dungeon. This specific series' implicit remake tendency

has not gone unnoticed by the members of the popular press, with Gamepro writer Pete

Davison noting that "The Legend of Zelda series has consistently proven to be one of

Nintendo's flagship franchises despite, for the most part, maintaining almost exactly the same

story and game structure for many of its instalments [sic]" (2011).

The economic motivation behind the implicit remake is clear, with the implication

being that this video game phenomenon that is based around the exploitation of implied

nostalgic longing will not go away any time soon. The producers of these games are relying

on a formulaic production of these series aimed at Gitlin's predictable and "demonstrable

tastes" through imitating and recycling ideas (1979, p. 77). Evidence of producers' desire for

predictable audiences, even audiences tailoring their experience to their own particular

proclivities, as well as evidence that this implicit nostalgic remake is desired amongst

gamers, is that almost every video game series that employs this technique has at one time or

another unsuccessfully tried to divert from their established formula. Examples would

include *Super Mario Bros. 2* (1988), which adopted a different style and manner of play, sold

only 25 percent of its original (Goss, 2009), and is considered by some to be the "black

sheep" of the series (Loguidice & Barton, 2009, p. 281), as well as *Zelda II: The Adventure*

of Link (1987), which changed nearly everything about the successful original causing some fans to consider it "the worst game of the series on a Nintendo system" (Loguidice & Barton, 2009, p. 306), and dipping over two million in copies sold (Parton, 2004). After each deviation, the result has been the same; a quick switch back to the same formula in the next iteration because of a lack of predictability. The implications of this switch back and subsequent commitment to the implicit remake is that a successful video game franchise will tend to rely on this narrative structural replicating, leading to an industry-wide copying of this formulaic approach that implicitly exploits the nostalgic drive to recapture a lost object the melancholic refuses to give up.

Mario and Zelda may exemplify the implicit remake, but the trend is quite widespread. Extreme examples even include the use of retro controls and level structuring, such as in *Super Paper Mario* (2007), *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* (2009), and *Donkey Kong Country Returns* (2010), which forego contemporary three-dimensional gaming trends to reference and replicate traditional two-dimensional gaming. Other examples of the implicit remake include the *Mario Kart* series (1992-present), which literally repeats racing tracks throughout iterations, and even rhythm game series *Guitar Hero* (2005-present) and *Rock Band* (2007-present), which repeat the upstart band narrative each time. All of these series contribute to the construction of individualized nostalgic subjectivity by defining the past through beloved and "repeated" media texts, because players end up functioning within the comfort of playing the same game over and over without having to adapt. These texts are used to obtain an easy mastery over the past, which is presented to players through the familiar and comfortable. Video games are inherently prone to this kind of implicit remake phenomenon because of the need to "rebuild" the game, and many times the protagonist's

abilities, from scratch in each iteration. The player is allowed to enjoy his mastery of the

space and situation, while being simultaneously linked to an old and comfortable experience

the player had with the original text. They experience the past again – uncanny doppelganger

nostalgia mapped over the old and recommodified – through the collection of the same 1ups,

powers, and experience points, but it is contained within a misrecognized and idealized new

version. For instance, in the *God of War* series (2005-2010) the narrative contrives a plotline

in each new game to strip the protagonist Kratos of the abilities he accumulated in the

previous game, only to have him reacquire the same or similar abilities. New players of a

series who are not familiar with earlier iterations are given the opportunity to learn through

this tendency, but faithful players of the entire series are made to repeat the same collecting

function and narrative contrivances each time, creating an implicit remake and a text imbued

with nostalgia for the games that came before. This continued reliance on the games' past,

and the players' experience of that game, is the sine qua non of contemporary games culture,

and this dynamic forecloses the potential for the creation of a critical distance between the

present and the past. In this sense, it is part of the trend of defining the past through

individual media texts. As players reminisce about their favorite *Mario Kart* track growing

up, evident in user comments on message boards and websites that rank tracks and discuss

which ones are conveniently packaged in the current iteration (Blankshore, 2009; Snow,

2008), what is lost is any form of critical historical engagement. Players are left further

transfixed, like Harry, gazing into their own personal Mirror of Erised and not at the present.

The implicit storyline remake, with its built-in nostalgia for the narratives of its target

demographics' childhood and clear narratology focus, is not the only form of implicit

nostalgia prevalent in the contemporary video game industry. Important to consider are the

ways in which the video game can contain elements of nostalgia in its ludic structure, or gameplay. The above section may have advocated heavily for a concentration on the narratology of games in the "war" that Juul spoke of, but it is obviously important not to lose sight of the equally significant ludology in the "duality of the formal and the experiential perspectives" (Juul, 2005, p. 199). Bringing in ludology to examine the way in which the praxis of playing aids the construction of nostalgic subjectivities is vital as it helps in the understanding of behaviorally driven melancholic longing created through repetitious game play. It may seem difficult to assign nostalgia to ludology elements, which usually consist of game rules, structure, and environments, but these aspects of a video game contain heavy significance in the construction of perpetual individual nostalgics, especially as they pertain to the loss of a radical past or the assumption of universal ideals and goals of all pasts. Repeated ludic praxis leads to a "déjà jouer" (play) experience. Illustrative is the way video games share similar button configurations and gaming "engines" regardless of the time period in which they are set, as this serves to equate the "experience" of these disparate narratives and time periods, thereby conflating the past and the present.

Many video games share button configurations and engines, with this trend becoming more significant as the controllers have become more complex, but no genre has displayed this trait more than the first-person shooter, or FPS. Button configuration refers to what game commands are executed by pushing specific buttons on the system's controller, and as so many FPS games contain similar objectives they also utilize similar button configurations. This analysis is not arguing for an explicitly technological determinism where the controllers themselves come to directly shape players' conceptions of the past. Instead, the button configuration similarities offer to players a haptic and behavioral connection between games

that deal with divergent time periods.[6] WWII shooters like the *Brothers in Arms* series (2005-present) or the *Medal of Honor* series (1999-present) tend to use the same standard button configurations as contemporary-set FPS games like the *Counter-Strike* series (2000-present) or even future-set titles like *Crysis* (2007). With so many FPS video games employing relatively the same button configuration, as well as shared gaming engines like the Unreal Engine used in countless games, the result is an incredibly similar experience that flattens any difference between contemporary and historical settings.

The video game differs slightly from other media technology, such as with similarities in remote control configurations for televisions, as this phenomenon is connected to the player's control and seeming mastery over these historical situations, which is missing from tuning to a television channel and subsequently losing control over the narrative. Playing through the *Call of Duty* series (2003-present) often means playing in many different time periods and in different wars, but the button configuration used to solve these conflicts are all the same. The first six *Call of Duty* games take place in World War II, the *Call of Duty: Modern Warfar*e offshoots (2007-present) take place in contemporary time, and *Black Ops* in Vietnam, but in all versions players shoot with a button on the right shoulder of the controller. There are certainly minor differences between game button configurations, but it is the striking similarities that are important for this examination of implicit nostalgia, especially in a video game subgenre that personalizes and subjectivizes identification through POV control over its protagonists. This is not to say that random button configurations would solve this problematic issue, nor would that be practical, but the described "visceral joy" of

---

[6] Haptic refers to tactile feedback technology that interacts on a physical level with the video game player. A common example would be controller vibrations when injured in a FPS shooter.

the FPS which is "strongly related to the experience of agency" is rendered universal no matter when the story takes place (Rusch, 2008, p.29). An understanding of the gamer's feelings of agency, of mastery, is important when thinking about historical epistemology. Rather than the unknowable and complex past, we have a past that is mediated via a technology that can be mastered through similar and repetitious controls; giving the illusion that one has mastery over the period.

For players of these games, there are important connections that can be made to the broader concerns over the construction of perpetual individual nostalgics, especially as it relates to the shared-goals commonality of Coontz's and Jameson's works. Both of these authors problematize the nostalgic subject because the goals of the present are made to seem stable and unchanged throughout time. As a result, subjects are prey to a hegemony that is accomplished through the creation of an "abstract nostalgia" that serves dominant ideologies of today (Coontz, 1992, p. 22). Jameson admonishes the flattening of distinction between the past and the present and warns that the loss of a radical past referent is destructive to our ability to learn from those that came before. The actual past is reified to serve the status quo where, as Jameson notes, "older traditional forms of human activity are instrumentally reorganized and 'taylorized'" as a means to fit the ends of the day (1979, p. 130). Here, along the lines of Jameson's conception of reification, nostalgia has been "ruthlessly reorganized" and "rigorously quantified" to the point that its "transformation into a commodity a thing, of whatever type, has been reduced to a means for its own consumption" (1979, p. 131). By "reorganizing" and reifying nostalgia along the lines of the commodity, the past becomes a means to exploit a desire to return to Coontz's fictional time in which our affect had not yet waned to the extent Jameson notes is characteristic of the postmodern condition. Both of

126

these works highlight the idea that assuming universal goals between contemporary time and all pasts is dangerous in the way it reaffirms the status quo and lacks the benefits of critical and adaptive historical reflection.

One of the other effects of the emergence of the nostalgic as a dominant subject position is inertia in relation to engagement with the world. Herbert Schiller discussed "inertia" as a subjective stance that helps stabilize and reify the status quo in his famous work *The Mind Managers* (1974). For Schiller, this form of inertia works in a similar manner to the physics definition where an object resists movement; only in this case the specific resistance engendered is to broad structural change. Inertia works, then, much like universal goals in its validation of presentist concerns. Schiller argues for its existence in his critique of the "Myth of Unchanging Human Nature" where "human nature doesn't change and neither does the world" serving to "prevent social action" (1974, p. 15). Schiller describes this myth as a passive "inertia" that results in the "maintenance of the status quo" (1974, p. 29). One result of a constant consumption of media that fosters nostalgic subjectivity is precisely this kind of inertia, here a kind of "past inertia." Contemporary FPS video games, for example, cause players to experience a universality of goals, inertia, and the loss of a radical past at a formal level through repeated button behaviors and configurations. The conflict players face in these games, whether WWII, Vietnam, the Wild West, or present day, can conveniently be solved through the status-quo affirming utilization of the same basic controller button configuration. Channeling Stanley Kubrick, this phenomena could be titled "Historical Representations in Video Games or: How I Learned to Solve Every Historical Crisis with My RT Button," speaking to a mediated past that provides the illusion of mastery over historical

periods through a technology that requires only simple and repeated button manipulation and leaves the present unproblematized and whiggishly inevitable.

Red Dead Redemption and *Grand Theft Auto*: Bringing it all together

The formal ludological concerns of the RT button in the historical video game are matched by the uncritical narratological issues of basing all conflicts of the past around wars and the individualistic great man, but it is important to understand that these two concerns work together in the construction of how contemporary players address the past. To demonstrate how concurrent ludological and narratological tendencies help to reify the nostalgic subject, historical representations from producer RockStar's *Grand Theft Auto* series (1997-present) will be explored for the ways in which they create uncritical versions of the past and destroy any distinction between it and the present. Not surprisingly, most of the scholarly and popular press focus on the *Grand Theft Auto* games center on the more controversial elements like violence and representation, addressing the violence's alienating effects (Farman, 2010), the effects of race and violence (DeVane & Squire, 2008), and even the socioeconomic connections between the fast food eating habits of the players and the games' protagonists (Bogost, 2006). Some research has celebrated these games as important advancements, pointing to its "almost universal critical acclaim along with nearly unprecedented commercial success" (Loguidice & Barton, 2009, p. 112), and reprimanded those who would critique without bothering to "pay close attention to the subject of their fears" (Frasca, 2003b). The following textual analysis does not take sides on these controversial subjects, and these games should not be seen as representative of the entire nostalgic trend across all games, but instead takes the form and content of this series and presents it as an illustrative example of the individualized nostalgia phenomenon at work.

Emphasis will be placed on the Wild West-set *Red Dead Redemption* (2010) for its

seemingly divergent historical engagement compared to the rest of the series, though it will

be established that this divergence falls short of a comparative adaptive look at the past and

instead reaffirms contemporary concerns and goals. A near identical argument could be made

for RockStar's *L.A. Noire* (2011), which brought the ludological gameplay and narrative

contemporary ideologies of the *Grand Theft Auto* series to 1947 Los Angeles.

Starting with ludological elements, playing *Red Dead Redemption* is not like playing

and re-enacting some radical past that makes players discuss and take a critical stance

towards history, but instead operates like a myriad of other contemporary games; it is a new

game costumed in a historical skin. Anyone who has played *Grand Theft Auto* games would

not have to be told that *Red Dead Redemption* was a RockStar game. Everything from the

game engine to the perspective of characters is exactly the same as in the *GTA* series. It is a

plug and play way of experiencing any number of spaces and times. Even the targeting

system used for the game's many gunplay sequences is taken straight from the contemporary-

set *Grand Theft Auto* iterations. As briefly mentioned in regards to the Unreal Engine, it is

not uncommon for games made from the same company, and even sometimes those not made

by the same company, to borrow or completely copy a lot of elements from the game engine

of a different series. This is a structural fact of production that makes the eternal return of the

same almost inevitable. The difference in the case of *Red Dead Redemption* is that the

gameplay and interface elements are so close to *Grand Theft Auto* that it more resembles a

sequel than a game with the same engine (Figures 5a and 5b).

Figure 5a and 5b: Gameplay screenshots from *Red Dead Redemption* (2010) and *Grand Theft Auto IV* (2008), showing the conflation of the past and present through nostalgic gaming.

However, in this case the "sequel" is set nearly one hundred years before the most recent *Grand Theft Auto* game. Riding on your horse in *Red Dead Redemption* uses the exact same button mappings as driving a car in the series' other games, and increases behavioral repetition that implicitly links this game to those that came before it. Later in the game, when lead character John Marston begins to drive cars, the button manipulation remains the same, now identical to *Grand Theft Auto* titles. Horses are conflated with cars, and early nineteenth-century modernist concerns are conflated with contemporary ones. Even the movements and "weight" of John Marston in *Red Dead Redemption* feel exactly the same as the main character of *Grand Theft Auto IV* (2009), Niko Bellic. Pandering to the "friction free" sensibilities of the commodity audience, these similarities assure the easy transition for consumers between one product and another.

This implicitly nostalgic construction has again not gone unnoticed in the popular press, as the gaming news website Gamepro.com recently put out an article aptly titled "A history of GTA and how it helped shape Red Dead Redemption" (Cabral, 2010). The article contains a comprehensive list of all of the games in the *Grand Theft Auto* series and how each of them share significant elements with *Red Dead Redemption* saying, "Anyone who's walked a Liberty City mile in Niko Bellic's shoes will recognize that RDR is brimming with

GTAIV features" even down to the "core shooting elements" (Cabral, 2010). Those who note these similarities are not admonishing these mimetic choices, but are instead celebrating the genealogical progression to the current game, and further lubricating the "friction free" consumptive practices. From the first game in the series in 1997, *Grand Theft Auto*, to the latest iteration in 2009, the handheld game *Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars*, each game is shown to culminate ironically in a version set nearly one hundred years in the past. If you strip away all the narrative elements from *Red Dead Redemption*, including things like characters' appearances, settings, and dialogue, a player would be hard pressed to find many differences between it and *Grand Theft Auto IV*. This argument would then fall under the ludologists' claims that narrative content is less important with its relationship to the form of the game considered "in a word, *arbitrary*" (Juul as quoted in Juul, 2005, p. 13), and would speak to Hayden White's position that historical content is less important than identifying latent ideological "structural components of these accounts" (1988, p. 4).

But it is certainly not necessary to strip all of the narratological elements away from *Red Dead Redemption* to have it work within this argument, as these important elements also index contemporary issues and dynamics despite their Wild West past pretext. In fact, the narrative elements work in perfect concert with *Red Dead Redemption*'s ludic gameplay elements to create a game that is anything but a radical or critical of the past. Instead, the past-centered Western narrative is simply used as a convenient framework upon which to hang contemporary goals, values, and ideologies. Many scholars have noted that the literary and subsequent filmic versions of the "Wild West" were exaggerated and that the real western frontier was "not the wild and woolly place depicted by some historians and in western novels and movies" (Anderson & Hill, 2000, p. 5). Will Wright calls the Wild West

an exaggeration, as "actual events could not possibly have included the many stories of glory and suffering" present in the filmic representations (1977, p. 4). Michael Wallis blames the "frontier romance story" for convincing others that the "American West was a wild place populated by savages and beasts" (1999, p. 47), fostering a simplified version of historical events that narratives like *Red Dead Redemption* latch onto for its superficial reification. The Western setting may be generic already, imbued with a simplistic past drawn from the dime store fiction from the era of the closing frontier, and it may frame its action as such as already nostalgic, but the plotlines, characters, missions, and even the money transactions seem anachronistically out of place in *Red Dead Redemption*'s version of the West. As mentioned earlier, Rosenstone sees similar anachronistic moments in films like *Walker* as exemplifying "history as experiment" (1995, p. 50), which has the postmodern potential to work "in opposition to the mainstream" (1995, p. 53), but in the case of *Red Dead Redemption*'s anachronistic elements they are in place to reinforce the mainstream and the already held assumptions about the West and present day. Its anachronisms do nothing to explode the ideology of the present; they use the whiggish pre-suppositions to make the past instantly recognizable to its commodity audience.

 Red Dead Redemption is set in 1911 as the Western frontier was already dying, which contributes to the overtly contemporary feel of the game as players progress to eventually drive cars instead of ride horses. This 1911 setting also affords discussions about politics that are more at home on 24-hour cable news channels than in Wild West saloons. Missions are marked with lengthy travelling, and John Marston many times does not travel alone. In these transit scenes, characters debate issues like laissez-faire government, proto-feminism, and cultural diversity. In these anachronistic discussions, the main character John Marston is

many times on the "right" side of the discussion, as defined by contemporary mores, despite hailing from an era that would not necessarily espouse these beliefs. For example, despite the fact that Marston is a vicious killer bent on revenge he still seems to advocate for some form of gun control by saying, "As long as there are guns and money, there won't be no [sic] peace." He even states some decidedly anti-capitalistic rhetoric at times, admonishing greed and saying, "It's wanting that gets so many folks in trouble." This is not to say that everything John Marston says is a beacon of progressive thought, with his views on some subjects like women being quite contradictory, but it is simply his tone and viewpoint that sound more like they derive from twenty-first century thought. The result is a narrative that validates the goals and values of the present while simultaneously conflating them with the past.

Related to this conflation of the past with the present is the idea that all complex historical events and processes can be explained with a simplified individualized narrative. Much like the way Rosenstone views Hollywood's simplification and individualization of the complex causation of historical events and eras, *Red Dead Redemption* takes the multi-faceted and multi-causal issues of the frontier, civilization, and modernization and turns them into a story about one man's revenge and attempt to get his loved ones back alive. John Marston is the typical lone gunman who will tame the West and all its wilderness, through the capture and punishment of those outside of the law. Marston resembles the gunmen of the silver screen as they single-handedly solve the historical crisis of the frontier. This technique creates a connection to the past that eschews a critical viewpoint and discussion provocation for a monolithic interpretation of the past based on individual achievement. Just like the standard filmic depictions of the past that Rosenstone believes are so problematic, *Red Dead*

Redemption is heavily reliant on "love interest, physical action, personal confrontation" and "movement towards a climax" (Rosenstone, 1995, p. 30).

The movement towards a climax, which entails Marston's near achievement of total revenge finished years later by his son aligning the game with the standard Western "revenge" cycle format where the hero operates outside of society (Wright, 1977, p. 69), is not without its sidetracking in the "sandbox" style of gaming that is widely popular today. Just like all *Grand Theft Auto* games, *Red Dead Redemption* involves a heavy amount of side missions and mini-games that attempt to imbue the game with the feel of the time period and geography. The issue is that even these elements of the narrative in *Red Dead Redemption* are cut from a more contemporary cloth. For instance, one of the more pervasive mini-games is the gambling saloon containing the requisite poker game. But the poker played at these tables is Texas Hold 'Em and is "no limit" with only one player winning all of the chips in play, a format that has "dramatically increased in popularity" and evolved from a "back-room activity into a multibillion-dollar industry" with "broadcasts of the World Series of Poker on ESPN" (Bradley & Schroeder, 2009, p. 402). It is not that this game had not been invented by 1911, but it just barely makes that chronological cut. The history of this game was laid out in a Texas State Legislature resolution, and stated that the game was invented in the early 1900s in a town called Robstown before it eventually made its way north (Herroro, 2007). It would not be anachronistic for Texas Hold 'Em to make an appearance in *Red Dead Redemption*, but to be the only poker option available in every saloon in Texas is more in line with contemporary practices.

Money won at these poker games and spent at the adjoining saloon gives players another clue that they are not playing in 1911, despite the past pretext. Ordering a drink, the

bartender will take two dollars from Marston, making it one of the most expensive drinks ever, being that this game is set in the same time period as five-cent Coca-Colas. So much of the money that changes hands in *Red Dead Redemption* is closer to the scale that contemporary players are used to and speaks again to the lack of radical past present in this game. At the end of the game it is not uncommon for players to have thousands of dollars to spend, since John Marston has simply "picked up" such amounts along the way through card playing, hunting, as well as mission completion. There is no indication that Marston is even close to a wealthy man compared to those around him, despite the anachronistic amount of cash that he can apparently generate in such a short amount of time. Does RockStar believe that players would simply not accept a monetary system more in line with the early twentieth century? Would gamers revolt against selling their hard earned hawk feathers for pennies instead of the nine dollars offered to Marston at the General Store? (Those nine dollars would buy a lot of five-cent Coca-Colas.) These transactions and this game belong to the increasing trend of the video game industry to simply recreate the present with a past veneer, which producers seems to believe is essential for easy identification with the characters lest you make them too different or radical and risk losing your perceived simplistic audience.

Whether it is the money of *Red Dead Redemption*, the 1980s radio stations in the *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* (2002) cars, or the referential neo-noir plotline of *L.A.* Noire, a problematic past is created to serve the present through fixing players' gaze backwards at an uncritical, presentist history. Instead of using nostalgia as a springboard for radical, adaptive thought, or as Alastair Bonnett posits in advocating for a leftist "radical nostalgia," a "useful past" that tends to "apply the movement's past to the movement's present" (2010, p. 40), the

gaze is turned inward through the misrecognition of one's cultural past in a text that espouses the universal experience of time in the conflation of past and present.

Conclusion

RockStar games are just one of the ways the contemporary video game player is presented with the illusion of interactive control and mastery over divergent historical events. Through universal button configurations, downloads of vintage games, and explicit/implicit remakes the past is constructed as something circularly repeated in the form of narratives and behaviors. When players visit MarioCrossover.com, they are treated with a meticulously recreated version of *Super Mario Bros.*, only now containing the ability to play through the game with the stars of other vintage video game series including Link, Mega Man, and Ryu from *Ninja Gaiden*. Postmodern examples like this one open the door further for a past defined by vintage downloadable games and idealized remakes that complement a playlist past coalescing around media from one's own individual nostalgia. Here, the text that originally existed is gone, along with its cultural context, only to be replaced with an amalgamation of the familiar plotlines, player experiences, and behavioral cues from the past cobbled together. The reselling and repackaging of these texts represents an "eternal recurrence" or a perpetual return to the same material again and again (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 194), which manifests itself through repeated playing of past games that appear on a pseudo-cyclical timetable, repeated behaviors that ask the melancholic player to foreclose the chance for new libidinal attachments, and repeated simplistic historical interpretations that reduce the chance at a comparative past. When events from a collective cultural past, such as the formation of a country through the Wild West frontier, is constructed as uncritical and unworthy of complex interrogation, then the focus of constructed melancholic consumers is

shifted to recapturing a lost past defined wholly by narcissistic nostalgic texts. This form of nostalgia is a welcome phenomenon for those reselling the DLC version of *Super Mario* or repackaging the new version of *GoldenEye*.

A narcissistic nostalgia with tendencies toward a melancholic fixation on a reliably static past will continue to be of the utmost importance as the focus of this analysis shifts to film and television, where an uncritical and melancholic version of the past extends further. These two mediums, film through its remake/re-imagine cycles and television with its content/advertising nostalgic triggers, help expand on the ideas brought forth here by texts like *Red Dead Redemption*, *Call of Duty*, and the digital download of *Metroid*. Film, the focus of the next chapter, will be shown to employ a targeted version of the remake tendency wrapped up in the issue of epistemology, as well as contain the same problematic construction of the perpetual individual nostalgic subject concerned only with recapturing an uncritical playlist past.

Chapter 4: Re-Imagining Cinematic "Classics"

The technologies, techniques, and tendencies that lead to the construction of nostalgic subjectivities translate well from one medium to the next, showing the extent to which this is truly a convergent media phenomenon. From the ways current films tend to represent the past in an uncritical way, to the ways in which such content is digitally consumed, one sees consistency between the world of cinema and the nostalgic concerns of the video game or the DVD. The 2011 film *Take Me Home Tonight* provides a shorthand example of how film has come to present a version of history that is defined by cross-media individualized nostalgic texts and in league with the contemporary melancholic viewer trained not to relinquish a lost media text. A music video made for this film's end credits song, a remake of Human League's 1981 hit "Don't You Want Me," contains an incredible amount of 1980s film references and asks viewers to maintain connections to the past solely through the remembrance and celebration of the lost media object (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Topher Grace in the music video for *Take Me Home Tonight*'s (2011) "Don't You Want Me" by Atomic Tom. Texts like *Alf* (1986-1990) and *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial* (1982) are conflated much like the past/present is in contemporary remakes.

In the matter of four minutes, the video references or parodies *Alien* (1979), *Say Anything* (1989)*, Dirty Dancing* (1987)*, Ghostbusters* (1984)*, Weird Science* (1984)*, Ghost* (1990),

Sixteen Candles (1984)*, Pee Wee's Big Adventure* (1985)*, Karate Kid* (1984)*, E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982)*, Fatal Attraction* (1987)*, Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)*, When Harry Met Sally* (1989)*, Poltergeist* (1982)*, Top Gun* (1986)*, Splash* (1984)*, Teen Wolf* (1985)*, Back To The Future* (1985)*, Risky Business* (1983)*, Raiders Of The Lost Ark* (1981)*, Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986)*, The Shining* (1980)*, Weekend at Bernie's* (1989)*, Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982)*, First Blood* (1982)*, Big* (1988)*, Cocktail* (1988)*, Flashdance* (1983)*, A Nightmare On Elm Street* (1984)*, Friday The 13th* (1980)*, Can't Buy Me Love* (1987)*, Twins* (1988)*, Caddyshack* (1980)*, Terminator* (1984)*, Norma Rae* (1979)*, Little Shop of Horrors* (1986)*, The Blues Brothers* (1980)*,* and *The Breakfast Club* (1985). Not only does this video create and maintain individualized media connections to the past by defining the parameters of history with the postmodern homage, but it also collides the present with the past by refashioning and "re-making" these divergent texts together in a manner that avoids the radical or the comparative.

Indeed, one of the most dominant past-centered trends in mainstream production in recent times is the seemingly ubiquitous emphasis on the remake. Certainly there are films that engage directly with historical representations instead of remaking texts from the past, many of which continue the contemporary media trend to eschew a complex position towards considering the past in favor of a simplified excess of history. However, in film there is a unique opportunity within this larger exploration of the individual nostalgic construction to examine a medium that quite literally defines the past through media texts by continually remaking popular films from the past. Within the overall normative framework of contemporary media's construction of nostalgic subjectivities established in the first chapter, the film medium works specifically to exploit two sides of what I am calling the

epistemology of the remake. The epistemology of the remake is related to the dual motivations for this filmic trend, those being to both appeal to viewers who knew and loved the original texts and will pay to see the newest "re-imagining," as well as to inculcate an interest in these older texts for new audiences who are possibly too young to know the original. The key goal of this chapter will be to analyze the implications of these dual motivations, linked to this epistemological concern, and to determine their cultural impact. Both will be shown to aid in the construction of media subjects who are perpetually conditioned to develop a melancholic connection and unhealthy object attachment to past media that commits libidinal energy towards maintenance as opposed to separation. Remakes' targeting dual demographic has not gone unnoticed by those in the popular press as it is common to hear how reverence toward source material and simultaneous awareness of the moment is a "great strategy for capturing two demographics at once" (Longworth, 2011). Concretely determining the targeted demographics of these remakes through data is not feasible, beyond after-the-fact ticket sales, but by deconstructing epistemological standpoints of the remake it can be ascertained that remakes appeal largely to those who fit within the age group of people who would have already experienced them at an earlier point in their life. Indeed, a huge market for Hollywood remakes has emerged to fill this group's constructed drive to recapture past media objects. Films that play to this market are largely remakes of films from the late 1970s through the 1980s. They maintain and amplify nostalgic connections for viewers who grew up in these eras. As such they will be read as texts that aid in the cultural work of engendering a temporal fixation in viewing subjects that, like the other texts analyzed in the previous chapters, has reverberations influencing cultural conceptions and misconceptions of history for specific generations.

Though the contemporary film remake is the focus of this chapter, it will be shown that these media products fit well into a larger cultural trend aimed at constructing a past-centered entertainment experience through content and technology. Choosing to see a film today in the local multiplex or at home often means choosing between a film based around nostalgic historical representations, a sequel, a remake, or a 3-D film, all of which have their own particular relationship to the past. As I have argued in previous chapters, historical representations, whether docudramatic or documentary, have the opportunity to depict a complex, multi-casual, and discussion-provoking past that can be beneficial to a shared cultural knowledge. Sequels and remakes, the specific focus of this chapter, often squander this opportunity and contribute to the mediated way that we situate ourselves in relation to the past. Since each contains within them a part of the text from which they derive, both share an intertextual and epistemological relationship with the past. Finally, the new technologies of today, the affordances which impact the way we access the past in these films, also determines the way in which we experience it, and can exacerbate the nostalgic tendencies of the contemporary cinematic content.

One of the logical symptoms of Jameson's characterization of nostalgia as a symptom of postmodernity is that even the cutting edge theatrical technologies that mark the dominant modality of our present carry a nostalgic referent. Take for instance the recent emergence of 3-D film production and exhibition, which is reminiscent of the 1950s in both motivation and execution. The 1950s 3-D experimentation derived mostly from a need to compete with television and to bring moviegoers back to the theaters (Young & Young, 2004, p. 182), and the same can be said for its recent resurgence. Barbara Klinger's work *Beyond the Multiplex* posits that technological advancements claim a "superior stay-at-home alternative to

theatrical moviegoing" (2004, p. 21). It should be noted that scholars have debated whether the theatrical release today solely "functions as an important advertisement for the film in other windows such as DVD and television sales" (Drake, 2008, p. 72), but when presented with the opportunity to raise theatrical revenues and theater attendance studios reacted quickly in the affirmative. Much like it was in the 1950s, the most recent 3-D craze is part of a reaction to television as a competitor to theatrical release box-office revenue as the experience afforded by today's home digital theater technology "compares favorably with" and has the potential to "actually surpass the conditions of watching films in motion picture theaters" (Klinger, 2004, p. 23). When *Chicken Little* was released in 3-D in 2005, the focus was on the "attendance bump" and "per-screen box office averages two to three times that of the two-dimensional version" (Reuters, 2007). The film industry played the role of the nostalgic in this case, by mining past strategies to increase ticket sales and attendance. *Avatar* (2009) was released with a mix of fanfare and trepidation, but doubts did not last long as the film's ticket sales surpassed all expectations and became the highest grossing film of all time at 2.7 billion dollars (Box Office Mojo, 2010b). The rush to duplicate this economic feat resulted in films not originally shot with 3-D in mind hastily converted to take advantage of the zeitgeist and 3-D ticket surcharge. Motivation is not the only feature of the current 3-D trend that it has in common with the 1950s iteration, as the exhibition implementation still includes the requisite glasses. These glasses have advanced technologically, replacing the red and blue flimsy glasses with clear, sturdy, and sometimes battery-powered versions, but the theatrical experience takes on a nostalgic tint regardless of the color of the lens. All of this is not to say that 3-D is inherently nostalgic for the nine-year-old *Avatar* fan or that contemporary viewers are thinking of the 1950s when donning 3-D glasses, but it does point

to a shared film industry strategy from the past as they look to history to find a way to recapture contemporary market share. Utilizing older technology to compensate for an analogous threat to box-office ticket sales in the world of the home digital theater is another way in which the contemporary film industry looks to the past, such as in the case with their reliance on the remake, and desires the analogous construction of perpetual nostalgics to economically boost their industry today.

3-D, historical representations, and sequels are significant, as they all contribute to film's hyper-emphasis on the past, but concentrating on the contemporary remake will help address the complex nostalgic subjectivity issues that surround this problematic film form. The question of what demographic the contemporary Hollywood remake is aimed at moves from an economic concern to an epistemological one, and finally to a cultural one, with each intertwined together to form the motivations and implications of this nostalgic phenomenon. The economic concern derives from a desire on the part of a film remake producer to construct a maximum audience base by speaking to both those who are already familiar with the original text and those that are not. By becoming a postmodern text with split subjectivity, these films delineate a specific epistemological distinction between different viewers. Though not inherently problematic, the different subjectivities highlight differences in nostalgic positioning, or lack thereof. The epistemological concern is rooted in the question of whether or not the audience "knows" the original that the remake is based on; an epistemology of nostalgia in that it would be more difficult to be unknowingly nostalgic for something. Analyzing the text can be a source of some knowledge in this respect, at least as far as it concerns whether the producers of the remake text assume that the audience "knows" the original in the remake.

Of course, the texts themselves reveal that whether the audience knows the original or not, the remakes are certainly saturated with homages to the original. What emerges is that one of the great pleasures in experiencing these texts is nostalgia. The remakes are designed to speak to those already familiar with the original. The answer to the epistemology of nostalgia question can then be used to address the related cultural concern over how this form of past engagement influences how certain age groups are differently constructed as nostalgic. Those that know the original text enjoy the remake because it is designed to provoke recognition and expansion on that knowledge. At the same time, the remake is designed with enough unintelligible referents and homages to inculcate the uninitiated viewer with a retroactive desire to see the original. To understand these interrelated concerns, it will be necessary to interrogate both research that addresses the political economy of contemporary Hollywood as well as works that deal in the particularities of the remake. However, previous research tends not to specifically address how the remake functions for viewers as a site for gaining historical knowledge or shaping their conceptions of the past, and so this must be the focus of this chapter. Terms like "recombinant," advanced by scholars like Gitlin (2000) and McAllister (1992), and "remediation," made famous by Bolter and Grusin (2000), will be explored for their relevance to remake media that has undergone combinations and transformations.

The Political Economy of the Remake

When thinking about the political economy of film, Janet Wasko warns that we need to expand our thinking about the medium to include all of the convergent forms of distribution and media synergies. "The focus on one medium or industry, such as film, may be seen as antithetical to political economy's attempt to go beyond merely describing the

economic organization of the media industries" and that it is important to develop the "synergistic nature of this commodified art form" (1999, p. 228). Wasko, however, does note in her later work the importance of examining the remake when she posits the film industry's "ongoing reliance on recycled ideas, already proven stories, and movie remakes and sequels" (2008, p. 44). Following these two suggested paths, this analysis of the political economy of the remake will not only address the motivations behind focusing on the past, but will also examine how nostalgia is commodified in a convergent manner. Moreover, it will show how this translates into the broader tendency of media industries to focus on the past as a way of making its consumer base more docile and receptive. A docile consumer base is a predictable consumer base, and brings to mind Dallas Smythe's idea of selling the "commodity audience" to advertisers by providing "predictable numbers" (2006, p. 234). To do so, the first goal of this section will be to establish the remake as ubiquitous and develop how the characteristics of the remake work within possible economic motivations. The second goal will be to show how aiming this kind of film at nostalgic audiences creates cross-media commodification opportunities.

If the current cinematic landscape is filled with remade products, then those producing them must feel that they represent a significant commodification opportunity. The ubiquitous nature of this phenomenon certainly represents an economically impactful trend, and this commodification opportunity is targeted at two specific demographics. If a remake was constructed to exploit the burgeoning tastes of a new audience unfamiliar with the likes of Freddy Krueger and Mr. Myagi's protégé then these films would be primarily addressing the present, as the unknowing audience would not need to furnish the already-present desire for cultivating nostalgic connections. Whereas, if the remake was designed to exploit these

nostalgic connections viewers have with the media texts of their own past, then there would be a significant contribution to the entrenchment of the perpetual individual nostalgics constructed mentality. This distinction will demonstrate the simultaneous, yet divided and unequal, nostalgic goals of contemporary remake texts. Establishing this distinction means exploring the statistical economic basis of this trend, the likely motivations of producing this material, and the surrounding extra-theatrical economic exploitation of nostalgia, such as cleverly timed anniversary Blu-Ray editions.

Empirical proof of this contemporary remake phenomenon is not hard to come by, with the numbers of remakes as percentage of total production being quite high. For instance, 2009 box office results contained ten remakes in the top one hundred grossing films and in 2010 that number doubled, with six remakes in the top twenty-five alone (Box Office Mojo, 2010a; Box Office Mojo, 2011a). It is also important to note in regards to a past-oriented theater experience that 2009 and 2010 additionally contained the same percentage of film sequels in the top one hundred and twenty-five lists (Box Office Mojo, 2010a; Box Office Mojo, 2011a). Popularity at the theater is not the only factor that counts in the assessment of cultural impact of these film remakes on their audiences, but it is a good indication of what is readily available for content consumption. This means that moviegoers were faced with well over twenty percent of film content referencing material from the past. This trend does not appear to be abating; in fact it seems to be picking up steam with 2011's remakes of *Footloose*, *Fright Night*, *Arthur,* and *Conan the Barbarian*. As to these cultural products being exported to the global film market, it is significant that an uncritical and myopically individualized culture is being exported to global markets with all of the remakes noted here in 2009 and 2010 making at least fifty-percent of their box office grosses from foreign ticket

sales (Box Office Mojo, 2010a; Box Office Mojo, 2011a). This means that the remake also has the capital advantage of being relatively risk free as a profitable investment.

Many who study film remakes take a derisive view of this explosion, with some using language like "needless" to describe them and saying that studios are "threatening" to make more (K. Newman 406), though not all see these films as universally problematic. Scholars tend to be torn between two poles of thinking regarding the aesthetics of film remakes. Some concentrate on the economic exploitative motivations and others laud the potential for the remake to effectively address contemporary cultural issues. Constantine Verevis notes "remakes are often thought of as commercial products that repeat successful formulas in order to minimize risk and secure profits in the marketplace" (2005, p. 37). Similarly, Scott Lukas and John Marmysz discuss the prevailing thought that remakes "cheapen filmic discourse" and tend to be "derivative" and "formulaic" compared to original storytelling (2009, p. 1). However, Lukas and Marmysz also describe the remake as an "attempt dialectically to work through and linger with our collective experiences" (2009, p. 15). This sentiment refers to the difference between the original and the remake containing the "potential to reveal something to us about our recurrent fears, anxieties, and hopes for the future" (Lukas & Marmysz, 2009, p. 2). If the common denominator, the shared story being remade, is removed from the equation, then the difference that remains can be used to understand the difference in the culture at the time of the remake's production. Though these scholars are right to note the potentials of comparative content, the problem lies in the lack of economic motivation for producing remake media with the goal of creating a comparative critique of the past and the present, as opposed to recycled content that simply reaffirms a view of the past that is familiar and comforting to consumers.

Rather than using the term "remakes," Todd Gitlin describes these media products as recombinant, and recognizes their economic benefits for media producers because these films "capitalize on and mobilize demonstrable tastes" (1979, p. 77). Gitlin is referring to the tendency of recycled content to exploit its pre-existing relationship with media texts that is the cornerstone of situating nostalgics with their individualized and cherished playlist pasts. Agreeing with Gitlin, and those that would deride the remake for its derivative qualities, Jonathan Burston discusses a similar trend in contemporary Broadway productions to remake "megamusicals" (2009). Burston notes the tendency of producers to employ "theatrical Fordism" by "choosing bankable titles more and more regularly in order to reduce risk, and that this strategy often has predictably disappointing results" in terms of aesthetic quality (Burston, 2009, p. 166). Burston asks whether "recombinant Broadway" has produced "mounting conditions of affective meaninglessness on stages all over the world" (2009, p. 167). Much like the contemporary remake explosion, this construction of the past is part of media's widespread "efforts to fully exploit content" (2009, p. 164).

The key technique in recombinant media's exploitation of content is embedding in these texts' "signposts for rapid recognition" (Gitlin, 1979, p. 77), or what Adorno similarly discussed as "the moment of recognition of an established hit" in music where the listener surmises that they "like this particular hit (because I know it)" (2002, p. 456). Recombinant media utilizes this strategy to combat the increased "competition for audience awareness" which "invariably now requires a blanket push in terms of both release strategy and marketing spend to avoid being forced out of the cinema by other films" (Drake, 2008, p. 67). In the case of the contemporary remake, rapidly recognizable nostalgia announces itself to its constructed nostalgic who then has the longing for the original text re-activated. As has

been important in this dissertation, the formation of psychological subjectivities plays a role in nostalgia's influence in this matter of recognition and re-activation. Adorno goes on to state that when the pleasure of recognition is achieved there is a strong "tendency to transfer the gratification of ownership to the object itself" (2002, p. 456), which is significant for an analysis of creating an individualized and melancholic version of nostalgia where there is an inability to relinquish the misrecognized lost object. When the viewer of a contemporary remake is alerted to Gitlin's recombinant media signposts, there is an element of "self-congratulation" that leads to a feeling of ownership (Adorno, 2002, p. 456). Feeling this ownership, the ideological implication is that the text has asked the viewer to build an ownership and recognition bridge between the old text and the new, thereby confirming and desiring the erasure of any form of a radical past with the equation of the past and present through the continual remaking and rehashing of titles. For example, when the remake of *The Longest Yard* (2005), the highest grossing English-language comedy remake since 1980 (Box Office Mojo, 2011b), introduces a character played by Burt Reynolds in the second half of the film it is a clear signpost for rapid recognition and an ownership moment of those positioned as subjects melancholic and perpetually nostalgic for the original film.

The primary motive for leaning on recombinant media through the contemporary film remake is to exploit the nostalgic connection derived from interpellated subjects. Moreover, the recombinant media economic push is posited to speak to "consumer society's tribute to our hunger for a stable world" (Gitlin, 1979, p. 77). Matthew McAllister further explains Gitlin's recombinant "biological metaphor" as "splices of two or more previously existing, and successful, types" (1992, p. 61). In the case of this analysis of contemporary film remakes, the splice is between the version of the film or character that audience members are

already familiar with, and the new version partially engineered to attract new, previously uninitiated, fans. This is not, as McAllister notes, simply adding the two splices together, but combining them to create something new (1992, p. 66). Ultimately for McAllister, and for this analysis of contemporary film remakes, it is that recombinant media "reassures the audience" about its preconceived notions and already held beliefs. By addressing the past through one of these recombinant forms, the contemporary remake collides the past and the present; in doing so, it erases a radical past and reaffirms a simplified version of history.

Contributing to this past/present collision is the tendency of the contemporary remake to be paired with concurrent releases of "new" home video versions of the original films. Bringing back Wasko's idea that the political economy of any one medium is slightly myopic in terms of the overall goals of the discipline, examining the cross-medium implications of the remake helps illuminate the synergistic motivations of re-imagining the past. The advent of the DVD has also seen the rise of the "anniversary edition," and some of these repackaged versions even came with their own theatrical re-releases, such as with *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial*'s theatrical re-release in 2002 coupled with an "Ultimate Gift Set" edition on DVD. M. Keith Booker notes this film's reliance on "sentimentalism" and describes how some critics "accused the film of 'infantilizing' its audiences" (2006, p. 165). If the film already targeted child audiences who would then have nostalgic connections to the childhood text, then the 2002 gift set edition, which was important in establishing the tendency to create idealized versions of past texts in chapter two, makes the relinquishing of this melancholic nostalgic text that much less likely. DVD features like "The Reunion" with its aged cast waxing nostalgic about the experience of making the film create a nostalgic synergy with the theatrically re-released version. A link is forged backwards to the original "infantilizing"

childhood experience, and flattens distinctions between all versions along the way.

The contemporary remake has truly embraced this model of cross-media nostalgic exploitation, with idealized new versions of films shot and released at specifically planned times to concur with a contrived anniversary of the original. The synergistic construction of nostalgia is one that exploits the constructed drive to maintain connections to an individual past that are forged through misrecognition and encouraging a melancholic grip on these texts as opposed to a healthy mourning that works through and releases the object. A prime example would be the 2010 release of the "Two-Disc Special Un-Anniversary Edition" of *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) a mere twenty-five days after the theatrical release of the new version, *Alice in Wonderland* (2010). The old version is linked to the new version, thereby engendering the perpetual, circular nostalgia that equates the new, idealized version with the longed for past media object. This is not a difficult process, as any year anniversary divisible by five presents media producers with this commodification opportunity, but many times there is not even an anniversary pretense employed. In the case of *The Karate Kid* remake, a Blu-Ray "collector's edition" box set of the original first two films in the series was released exactly one month before the release of the remake to simply capitalize on the topical awareness of a nostalgic property, complete with the nostalgic retrospective documentary "The Way of the Karate Kid, Parts 1 and 2" (Gillis, 2004). Similarly, the remake of *Friday the 13th* presented home video releasers with the opportunity to re-commodify every film in the series with DVD "deluxe editions," eight in total, and staggering their release between ten days before and a few months after the release of the remake.

Obviously, the reasoning behind these perfectly timed home video releases is to renew nostalgic viewers' interest in the original property concurrent with the release of the

new version, reducing the chance viewers will relinquish either version as a beloved lost object. It is no coincidence that many of the remakes in film and television appeal to those that grew up in the era of the original text. Considering the specific time period from which many remakes derive their source material, constructing those whose childhoods occurred in the 1970s and 1980s as perpetual nostalgics means economically targeting consumers who are currently somewhere between twenty and forty years old. This will have important ratings implications in the next chapter on television nostalgia and helps establish the generational implications of nostalgic subjectivities, but also speaks to the contemporary remake's nostalgic targeting of a dominant theater-going demographic. An MPAA 2010 analysis of theater attendance noted that consumers "age 18-39 make up the bulk of frequent moviegoers, 43% percent" (Movie Guide, 2011). This exploitative commodification process dovetails with the overall logic of the remake. Todd Gitlin sums up the reasoning behind the explosion of remakes in contemporary media, saying that those in power "think they are being eminently practical when they order up recombinants and imitations" (1979, p. 77), and this extends beyond the borders of the theatrical screen and into the home video releases. It economically benefits those who control this content to construct nostalgic subjectivities where tastes remain the same, therefore predictable. The same products are yearned for over and over again, and remain locked into an "[u]nending sameness" where the "machine is rotating on the spot" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 106). This answers the question of which sector of the potential remake audience the home video releases are primarily aimed at, as they represent an opportunity to get nostalgic viewers to perpetually repay for proven properties, but it does not address whether the remake itself is primarily aimed at these same nostalgic viewers. The goal of the next section will be to interrogate the remake texts

themselves to answer this epistemological question, as it will ultimately demonstrate that the remake is a divided, but again unequal, nostalgic enterprise focused perpetually on a media-defined past for multiple audiences.

The Epistemology of the Remake

Obviously, there are economic advantages to attracting the broadest possible audience for a film, but determining whom the remake is primarily directed at is important for understanding how this contemporary filmic trend contributes to the construction of two distinctly nostalgic subjectivities; one group is asked to maintain nostalgic connections, and one group is enticed to develop a retroactive desire for nostalgic texts. If the contemporary remake constructs specific versions of the nostalgic subject, then we can employ Richard Allen's conception that "psychoanalysis can illuminate the epistemology of film spectatorship" (1995, p. 5). Understanding what kind of viewer is constructed through these films leads to understanding at whom the remake is aimed; a question intertwined with the epistemological question of whether or not the viewer is familiar with, or "knows," the original text. The text is a rich source of information when it comes to exploring this epistemological question, because the filmmakers reveal their audience focus through the inclusion and exclusion of particular elements. From plotlines to characters, from themes to ideologies, it is the form the remake takes that determines its relationship to its original.

Remakes and adaptations are as old as Hollywood, with many iterations seeking to obscure their own genealogy, but the contemporary remake oppositely highlights its own history, thereby obscuring our own collective history. This analysis will be based on the proposition that if the text were speaking primarily to audiences that know the original, then the language and elements used would have to reflect that prior knowledge. The films would

necessarily contain homages to the original, fitting closely with the postmodern playful

"intertextuality" that contains "multiple surfaces" (Jameson, 1991, p. 12). This means that the

remake would function almost like a sequel as opposed to a single stand-alone "surface," in

that prior knowledge of previous surfaces is necessary to fully understand the remake text.

As a comparative example, there is a big difference between the *Halloween* remake (2007)

and the *Psycho* remake (1998) in the way these films address their respective audiences. The

Halloween remake knows that audiences have experienced a deep history with characters like

Michael Myers and Laurie Strode through the original iterations, and the remake expands,

embellishes, and focuses on elements those who knew the original would recognize and

remember. In the case of the *Psycho*, a "shot-for-shot" remake of the 1960 film, a naive

audience member is not held accountable for the knowledge they do not possess.

Shannon Donaldson-McHugh and Don Moore note that director Gus Van Sant's

attempt to "historically transfer the 'essences' of Hitchcock's film" was already doomed to

failure because of its "epistemological limitations" (2006, p. 228). These authors posit that

someone watching this reshot version with prior knowledge of the original are "haunted" and

are rendered unable, or at a disadvantage, to enjoy Van Sant's version. If this is true then the

flip side is true as well. If a film were truly "remade," starting from scratch as if the original

did not exist and with no prior knowledge needed, then the filmmakers would be said to be

primarily focusing their attention on garnering new uninitiated audiences. *Psycho* (1998)

technically falls under this category, as the film was a "performative resurrection" that did

not ask the viewer to remember the original (Donaldson-McHugh & Moore, 2006, p. 228),

even though most inevitably did. However, in the case of most contemporary "re-

imaginings," viewers are never allowed to forget the original as it is continually expanded

upon and idealized, therefore showing different epistemological standpoints each audience segment occupies. This includes those asked to maintain melancholic and narcissistic nostalgic connections and those who are encouraged to desire after-the-fact nostalgic connections. The language describing the newest iteration of *The Muppets* (2011), more of a reboot than a remake, exemplifies each of these specific nostalgic subjectivities. The main target of this film is said to be "Gen-Xers weaned on the classic prime-time variety series *The Muppet Show*" who have Jim Henson's creations "hardwired" into their "childhood memory banks," and, as stated by executive producer Martin Baker, a secondary target of "a whole generation of kids who don't know the Muppets" (Rottenberg, 2011, p. 39).

Through a detailed look at the contemporary remake texts, it will be evident that the primary target of this particular nostalgic past construction is the consumer who knows and loves the original media texts. Films from multiple genres need to be explored to demonstrate the ubiquitous nature of this trend and its characteristics, but special attention must first be paid to the horror genre for its complete embrace of the re-imagining. Earlier work on this genre's remakes unearthed the tendency for a particular subgenre of horror, the slasher, to contain a "hyper-emphasis of the originals' ideologies" including their hegemonic and misogynistic characteristics (Lizardi, 2010, p. 114). The idea of a remake furthering an embellished version of the original can be important to retain in this exploration of nostalgic past constructions, because embellishment is not possible without a melancholic retention of and focus on the original. For the contemporary horror remake, slashers included, it is in the expansion of the main villain's backstory that this embellishment is most evident.

In the original *Halloween* (1978), for instance, audiences spend about five minutes total in Michael Myers' past, whereas in the 2007 remake, the sequence is drawn out to

twenty-five. In the original, most of this exploration of Michael's past consists of a tricky first-person shot from his perspective as he wears a clown mask and murders his sister. This shot ends with the removal of the mask, which confirms for audiences that the murder was committed by a child perpetrator. The remake features a similar clown mask removal scene, but it does not occur until twenty-five minutes into the film, after an extensive look into Michael's formative past. The simplicity of the original story, a young boy is inherently evil and kills for seemingly no particular reason, is gone and replaced with a detailed pop psychology take on Michael's socially troubled and fatherly abusive youth. This sequence is not in place to catch up audience members who were previously unaware of Michael Myers, as this information is different/missing from the first version of this film, but instead represent a expansion payoff for those viewers who are longtime fans of the original. Michael's doctor originally offered that he is pure evil and his actions logically unexplainable, but the remake presents viewers with a nurture-laden explanation that relies on a human being made evil by systematic abuse. Andrew Patrick Nelson calls this change a shift from the "fantastic" of the original to an "uncanny," tangible, and "pop psychology" explanation (2010, p. 106). The film's sensibilities are modernized and updated to include contemporary audiences' familiarity with pop psychology explanations. The unimaginable and complex is rendered knowable, common, individual, and explainable, a feature of contemporary nostalgic media that Rosenstone and this analysis regard as uncritical. Critics have called this remake "polarizing" because it did not succeed in balancing "reverence for the original with updates and innovation" (Nelson, 2010, p. 104), however, this film is not simply aberrantly imbalanced in this respect but part of the tendency of slasher remakes to expand villains' backstories.

Facts are learned not previously known and are lingered on because of their revelatory function for previous fans. There is a prolonged swirling skyward first-person shot from the perspective of a young boy who is revealed to "actually" be Michael's first murder victim, not his sister. Michael even acquires his signature "Shatner" mask in this sequence, as opposed to fifteen years later in the original, pointing towards this remakes tendency towards the earlier mentioned "signposts for rapid recognition" (Gitlin, 1979, p. 77). The sheer amount of time spent "with" Michael, thirty-eight minutes in total, exploring the killer's past is uncommon for this subgenre, despite what the first-person perspective shots might suggest, and places the focus of this remake firmly on this nostalgia-infused character. The film posits that to know Michael is to want to know more about his past – an uncomplicated version – and this relationship of audience to remake points towards the primary epistemology of this contemporary nostalgic film trend.

The original *Friday the 13th* (1980) is perhaps most famous for what it is not: a film about the slasher killer Jason Voorhees. As is explained in an intertextual moment during the genre spoof parody *Scream* (1996), the killer in the original *Friday the 13th* is Jason Voorhees' mother seeking revenge for negligent camp counselors who were the cause of her son's death. Carol Clover calls this film a "notable anomaly" that creates possibly progressive "gender confusion," which is unfortunately "not sustained in the sequels" (1992, p. 29). To remake such a film as it was would be a way to literally reboot this series for those who may be unfamiliar with the series' finer details, but it might not be necessary to devote an entire remake to for those who are versed in the original film and its eleven sequels. Instead, the *Friday the 13th* (2009) remake chose to pay homage to the original film's focus, but ultimately transcend these beginnings to provide an expansion on fans' previously held

knowledge about Jason Voorhees, and as such is recombinant because it both uses and expands on the original. The remake effectively and retroactively instates Jason as the "rightful" lead of the original film, creating a distorted, and idealized version of the longed for past object. In fact, the "remake" part of the 2009 *Friday the 13th*, as in the part of the film that covers what the original film did, consists of a two minute, black and white, and disjointed opening credits sequence that would most likely only serve to confuse uninitiated audience members.

The compression, or complete omission, of material important to the original is a prevalent tendency in the contemporary remake as it places emphasis on a particular nostalgic epistemological standpoint. Much like *Friday the 13th*, the 2011 remake of *Fright Night* (1985) speeds up the beginning narrative to a point that a viewer who already knows the narrative would feel more comfortable. Within the first three and a half minutes of the 2011 *Fright Night* remake, iconic references to the popular Peter Vincent character from the original are made and the suburban vampire murders four people. Much like the nostalgic audiences whose interests are appealed to at the beginning of the *Friday the 13th* remake, there just is not time to waste when it comes to presenting signs for recognition, for they must be rapidly raised to ensure melancholic connections are made. Whereas the original teased whether the next-door neighbor was indeed a vampire, the remake presents this information immediately as if the audience already knows, because for the most part they do. Similarly, once the two-minute-long pesky material from the original *Friday the 13th* is out of the way, its remake gets to the business of providing new material for nostalgic fans under the guise of the re-imagining tag. Most significant in this film is the revelation that Jason employs a series of elaborate tunnels underneath Camp Crystal Lake, rigged with bells and

pulleys to alert him of when and where intruders arrive above ground. The Jason Voorhees of the original series always proved to be supernaturally elusive and cunning in his ability to know where all of his victims were, and the remake takes this opportunity to expand on this character's lore by provided simplistic explanatory information never before available to nostalgic fans. Jason's well-known hockey mask does not appear in the original series until *Friday the 13th Part III* (1982), but for the benefit of those that know this series the remake chooses to introduce this iconic element in the forty-third minute of this film, clearly declaring its primary nostalgic epistemological target. The signs for rapid recognition and ownership self congratulation that Gitlin and Adorno see as maintaining connections to media work here to extend nostalgic media's grip on those melancholic's inability to give up Jason Voorhees, as well as alert those who are retroactively made nostalgic that they must have missed something important.

Not all original slasher films were guarded, or uninterested, about their killers' pasts, but even the remakes of these films show their demographic target through similar expansive techniques designed to exploit character nostalgia. The original 1984 *A Nightmare on Elm Street* does not shy away from discussing the past of its antagonist killer Freddy Krueger, even going so far as to show scenes of him being burned alive. Sequels of this film also delved further into Krueger's past, including the 1991 film *Freddy's Dead: The Final Nightmare* that contained scenes from Freddy's abusive past. Considering this much-discussed character, it becomes more difficult to then find elements of the 2010 remake that utilize previously unknown character exposition to call to, or interpolate, long time nostalgic fans of the series. However, this remake provides the perfect example in the form of a red herring plotline that makes audiences believe that Freddy was framed for the original crimes

he was burned alive for, molesting small children. It is eventually revealed that he actually

did commit these crimes not only providing the audience their ownership pleasure without

complicity in a seemingly unjust revenge killing, but also creating the "possible innocence"

plotline explicitly to speak to those who are already extremely familiar with Freddy

Krueger's background and filmic exploits. The ambiguity is taken out of the original, which

paints the parents as somewhat culpable for the revenge murder, and presents an

uncomplicated and idealized version of the *Elm Street* narrative. With the original *A*

Nightmare on Elm Street already dealing with Krueger's back-story and guilt of horrendous

crimes, to feign his wrongful accusation as the reason for his vengeful teenager killings is not

only one of the last ways to surprise well-versed fans but is also a ridiculous and near-useless

distraction for newcomers. Fans of the original *A Nightmare on Elm Street* will certainly

rapidly recognize signposts like Freddy stretching out the wall above main character Nancy's

bed or the bloodbath that ensues after Glen is pulled into his bed, but the real key to

understanding that this remake is aimed at those who know the original is the new, though

ultimately false, information designed to get fans to think of Freddy in a whole new way.

 Horror films, especially the slasher, may seem to have the "nostalgia bred through

character expository remakes" market cornered, but this tendency is common amongst all

contemporary remakes regardless of genre. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005), a

remake of *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* (1971) and adaptation of the 1964 Roald

Dohl classic children's book, through this same technique shows that its intended audience is

those who already know Willy Wonka. Neither the book nor the original film delve into

detail in regards to the famed chocolatier's history or childhood, but the 2005 remake devotes

a great deal of screen time to exploring Wonka's rise to fame and his relationship to his

father, which June Pulliam describes as making Wonka "subsequently uncomfortable with everyone" (2007, p. 110). Another big change that is pertinent to developing nostalgia through character expansion is the difference in the reveal of Wonka in each film. While the 1971 version simply makes mention of Wonka and his mysteriously guarded nature before his eventual reveal at the gates of his factory, the 2005 remake teases the audience with snippets of his voice and veiled shots of the man they already "know." The cat and mouse game of revealing and concealing Wonka's face is played through shot selection, lighting, and props throughout this flashback sequence in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,* and function to speak directly to those that have already experienced the tumbling reveal of Gene Wilder's Willy Wonka in the original film. Hiding Wonka behind a face distorting giant lollipop or shrouding him in backlit shadows only serves those who are already in on Wonka lore, not those that are experiencing this story for the first time (Figures 7a and 7b).

Figures 7a and 7b: Obscuring Wonka's face in the 2005 remake *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* speaks directly to audiences who already know the famed chocolatier.

Everything in this film remake comes from a "knowing" standpoint, from an omniscient narrator to plotlines aimed at reversing elements from the original, all serving to make the newly revealed knowledge of Wonka's past a more satisfying payoff for nostalgics.

Nostalgic links to the past in these remake films are ubiquitous and important in distinguishing this trend as contributing to the construction of perpetual individual nostalgics,

even in instances when the links are as simple as the title itself. The 2010 remake of *The Karate Kid* (1984) was very nearly entitled *The Kung Fu Kid* because it was set in China and actually contained the Kung Fu martial arts system, but retained the original's title so as to preserve brand recognition (Napolitano, 2010). The original film depicted a Japanese karate master teaching a teenager this martial arts form, and the sequel *The Karate Kid, Part II* (1986) is even set in Okinawa, but though the main character in the new version states that he knows about "karate" this is a film thoroughly about Kung Fu. Like the other contemporary film remakes discussed here, the signposts are present in this film to rapidly recognize its origins, including this title and subsequent scenes that reference iconic moments like the wax on/wax off technique, the chopstick fly catch, and the crane kick. The wax on/wax off technique is replaced with the putting on and hanging up of a coat and becomes an entire system where "everything is Kung Fu." The chopstick fly catch is comically used to develop Mr. Myagi's replacement, Mr. Han, as a more practical and no nonsense character. Though technically Mr. Han is not actually Mr. Myagi, the similarities are impossible to ignore. As with slasher horror film remakes, *The Karate Kid* expands on fans' previous knowledge of this central character by providing an extended back-story of Mr. Han's deceased family. While providing a point of continuity with the original, this back-story is different in that it is presented in flashback form, and is given more emphasis and screen time. But of all the pointed expansions, the crane kick is the most significant. Though the remake's final battle resembles the original's setup, it is much more elaborate in this version, complete with giant video screen replay (Figures 8a and 8b), and is designed to shock viewers who thought they knew what was coming.

Figures 8a and 8b: The newest version of *The Karate Kid* (2010) relives his expanded "crane kick" alongside his nostalgic viewers.

In each case, these scenes ask those in the audience who know the original to remember, revel, and derive pleasure from an expansion on their already held knowledge that Adorno posits made them "like" the text in the first place (2002, p. 456), and ask those who are unfamiliar to stand on the outside looking in, developing a retroactive nostalgic subjectivity.

These re-imaginings prove time and time again that they are not only aimed at establishing a new audience base for rebooted properties, but are speaking primarily to the already established nostalgic base. Exegesis is less necessary, as the contours of the original are expected and the film does not have to work as hard to establish characters. A targeted mode of spectatorship is engendered, which matters because it not only builds an attitude of reflexivity into the contemporary film remake, but also exacerbates the contemporary trend by further focusing contemporary cultural consumers attentions towards their media-defined pasts. In this case, epistemology influences conceptions of reality and the past, or as Richard Allen describes how exploring the epistemology of film can illuminate a "benign disavowal where spectators entertain in thought that what they see is real in a manner akin to the experience of a conscious fantasy" (1995, p. 5). When the new Karate, or Kung Fu, kid performs his expanded and extreme crane kick the viewer is asked to remember 1984 as the year in which Daniel-San entered their lives, and to perpetually save a place for him as the

years go by, at least until the inevitable 30th anniversary Blu-Ray edition. In the next section, the goal will be to explore the cultural implications of this epistemological determination in the contemporary remake's intended audience, and relate this way of knowing the past to the melancholic pleasure derived from forever maintaining these nostalgic connections.

The Cultural Concerns of the Remake

Using contemporary remakes to fully exploit nostalgic content for profit is problematic enough, as those who know the product are constructed as compelled to follow the newest version of the property. When this consumer behavior is combined with remakes' contribution to a culture's conception of the past, the implications are especially regressive and destructive. This cultural transaction, exchanging complicating work for expedient production and consumption, hampers the consumers ability to see history as something more than a collection of beloved texts that continually resurface in varying states of refresh. When Janet Wasko discusses the increase of recycled content she also notes that "[r]epetition of stories and characters may also have cultural significance" (2008, p. 44), which in this case would refer to the repetition of the past itself. Wasko, along with other scholars like Herbert Schiller and Robert Rosenstone, is concerned with the way in which our conceptions about issues like culture and history are managed through media representations. Utilizing this research, the goals of this section will be to first develop the consequences of the contemporary remake tendency's past construction, and second to link these issues to the tendency of these remakes to exhume source material from a specific time period, resulting in a very pointed version of nostalgic demographic exploitation.

Wasko is not the only scholar who concerns herself with the issue of a repetition of specific content, as many view this continual recycling as an indication of a cultural

preoccupation. Herbert Schiller's work *The Mind Managers* (1974) looks at the repetition of certain cultural myths as the basis for shaping, or managing, the ways in which conceptions about society are refracted through media. Important for Schiller and this analysis is his recognition that the myth of "[p]ersonal choice has been emphasized as highly desirable and attainable in significant measure" (1974, p. 8). It is not that constructed individual nostalgics can actually go out and choose the texts they want to be remade based on their childhood preferences, but the way studios present these texts as the "one" everyone has been waiting for speaks to this illusion of personal choice. The remakes become a nostalgic version of Adorno's pseudo-individualism concept or the "halo of free choice" that hides its compliance and "basis of standardization" (2002, p. 445).

In addition to the neoliberal illusion of consumer choice, the remake also contributes to the mythical conception that the "world, except for some glamorous surface redecorations, will remain as it is" (Schiller, 1974, p. 16). Freddy Krueger was, is, and will always be an important cultural icon according to the remake. Not only is this a direct nod to the way in which certain constructions of the past, including a perpetual nostalgic construction, can "result is individual passivity, a state of inertia that precludes action" and "assures the maintenance of the *status quo* [emphasis original]" (Schiller, 1974, p. 29), but also speaks to Jameson's concerns over the loss of a radical past. Schiller is also agreeing with many historians' concerns over media historical representations that do not engage with history in a complex and multi-faceted manner, saying that certain "communication technologies transmit ahistorical and, therefore, antiinformational messages" (1974, p. 29).

If Schiller believes that media have a tendency towards the anti-historical, then a connection can be made to the remake and Svetlana Boym's argument that "Americans are

supposed to be antihistorical, yet the souvenirization of the past and obsession with roots and identity here are ubiquitous" (2001, p. 38). The ubiquitous obsession with roots and identity in this case is constructed as an obsession with media that individually "defined" one's past, a decidedly myopic, solipsistic, and provincial way to view history. Focusing backwards on media that defines one's past as an American ideal appears as a contrast to the historical belief that those such as Alexis de Tocqueville held about a nation consistently focused on the future where "the image of an ideal but always fugitive perfection presents itself to the human mind" (2005, p. 170). This notion about democracies was in opposition to aristocratic torpor that imagines "the future condition of society may be better, but not essentially different" (Tocqueville, 2005, p. 170). Instead of following this long-held belief that Tocqueville is espousing and Boym is referencing, the contemporary remake phenomenon turns the attention of the constructed nostalgic not towards the past as some comparative referent used to "perfect" the future, but ever-towards a past defined by the expansion of and connection to beloved media texts. Shannan Heath Butler highlights this dynamic when discussing the distinction between an American media stance towards repetition and that of other global sources, such as in Japan and Italy. Butler examines the remakes of Akira Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* (1961) to get a sense of the rhetorical stance they take towards their audiences. He posits that the American remake, *Last Man Standing* (1996), not only relies on allusion to previous versions more than its international counterparts but also copies scenes directly from all versions of the film (2002, p. 35). Butler goes as far as to say "*Last Man Standing* emerges as a film of obvious and questionable filmic allusions - all with no discernable purpose aside from mere quotation itself" (2002, p. 36). Here the American remake, noted as a larger trend, separates itself by being overtly concerned with referencing

166

and maintaining connections to a media-defined past. When coupled with Boym's notation of the anti-historical American perception, this becomes doubly problematic.

Claims of ahistorical and antiinformational media bring to mind the work of Robert Rosenstone, who has been invaluable throughout this dissertation in understanding the difference between a complex historical representation and one that unproblematically reproduces already held conceptions about historical events and persons. As these contemporary remakes refuse to critique the past, and reinforce a media-defined version of history, we are left with what Rosenstone would view as a simplified version of history reduced to the individual and the monolithic. This is not to say that Rosenstone is against historical representations in media, far from it, as he has argued that the "very nature of the visual media forces us to reconceptualize and or broaden what we mean by the word, history" (1995, p. 6). But the past that Rosenstone advocates for, historical media representations that "render the world as multiple, complex, and indeterminate" (1995, p. 37), is something that a status quo reaffirming trend like the contemporary remake is incapable of doing. Instead, the remakes make the past even less complex, by wiping out whatever original ambiguities were there and presenting much more easy to digest narratives, such as in the case of the derivation of Michael Myers' murderous nature. By reducing the past to this simplified version and giving consumers the pseudo-individualized "choice" between nostalgic texts currently being offered, there is little impetus and even less room for a complex critique of history by a culture conditioned by these texts.

It is not alone in the area of content that the texts themselves offer instances of a less than complex version of history. There are important formal distinctions between contemporary remakes that engage with historical comparative complexities and ones that

flatten the difference between past and present. A remake that encouraged a comparative stance would ask viewers to understand the difference between the time period the original was released and the present, while an uncritical remake would feign forced similarities and universalities. The most important formal element to highlight when distinguishing between the two is whether a temporal "shift" exists between the original and the remake. For instance, the *Friday the 13th* remake shifts the time period that Jason began his killing sprees forward to present day, even nodding towards nostalgic fans in the audience by marking the only flashback scene as occurring on the very same day as the original version was set, June 13th 1980. Remakes that follow this settings shift model, such as *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *The Bad News Bears,* and *The Karate Kid,* present a collision of the past and the present that destroys the radical difference between them as these characters continue reliving their origins, now updated and idealized, regardless of the calendar year. There are remakes that do not shift their narratives in time, such as *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake (2003) or *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, though the majority of film remakes contemporize the story, and erase a radical past along the way. This important remake tendency contributes directly to a myopic version of history that idealizes the past while discouraging a collective, nuanced, and adaptive view.

Not all who encounter this temporal displacement view it through Jameson's critical focus on the erasure of the radical past. Some scholars, like Vera Dika, see the shift in temporality as a site of resistance rather than a loss. By bringing images, themes, and settings into a time they do not belong Dika sees the opportunity for viewers to recognize this displacement and become more aware of its calcified existence, such as when she posits that *Grease* (1978) does not actively confront history but creates recognizable friction through its

reuse of the past (2003, p. 123). Dika sees the displacement of the past into the present as a "resistant practice that can be seen to counter the waning of historicity" (2003, p. 224). For Dika, the displaced past in the remake films mentioned above would represent an opportunity for filmgoers to recognize this historical shift and use this knowledge to confront radical differences. The problem with applying this formulation of reused images from the past that appear in the contemporary remake is that it does not take into account the way the remake directly brings the media texts and their characters along with the revival of the anachronistic source material. The contemporary remake does not collide the past with the present to encourage a comparative mindset, but instead relies on the maintaining of nostalgic connections by presenting the constructed melancholic viewers with an idealized and misrecognized history refracted through the media text. Freddy Krueger's displaced origin story does not serve to encourage a resistant spectator pose, but instead works to focus constructed nostalgics attentions ever backward at a history that is defined by his antics. This means that where Dika sees confrontational potential in texts like *Grease*, the remakes do not follow this model or utilize the potential of postmodern anachronism contained in Rosenstone's discussion of complex historical representations. Rather, what one sees is a past based largely on a relation to the remade text where the concerns about representation are largely intertextual rather than historically contextual. Krueger becomes the historical object longed for, leading to an individual, uncritical and non-comparative view of the past in which the historical context largely falls away.

With the contemporary remake trumpeting a past that is anything but complex and critical, that is intertextually microscopic rather than contextually macroscopic, it is important to explore the curious tendency of these renewed properties to be predominantly

culled from the 1980s and late 1970s. Discovering such a pointed demographic nostalgic target speaks not only to the deeper economic motivations of the re-imagining trend, but also problematically contributes to a growing generational concern over the inability of this specific generation to grow up and face adult challenges. It is no simple coincidence that of the earlier mentioned remakes of 2009 and 2010, over half of these films revisited texts from the 1980s. 2011 saw the release of even more "classics" from the 1980s with the release of remakes of films like *Footloose* (1984)*, Fright Night* (1985)*, Arthur* (1981)*, Conan the Barbarian* (1982) to name just a few. Yet nowhere in any of these films is there an attempt to think about a past that exists outside the original referent.

The cultural concern follows from the ontological problem related to refusing to grow beyond the libidinal attachments of early life. One theory that can provide some perspective on the potential problems is that of a cultural form of psychic regression, in which it is posited that it has become increasing difficult for those in this age group to make a complete transition into adulthood. Referring to this group as "emerging adults," researchers Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Jennifer Lynn Tanner consider the ways in which those coming of age in this era have an increasingly difficult time making a smooth transition to adult concerns because of a lack of institutional clarity and support (Arnett, 2006; Tanner, 2006). Even before this work, Andrew Calcutt looked directly at the connection between media consumption and this generational refusal to grow up in his book *Pop Culture and the Erosion of Adulthood* (1998). Calcutt posits that a culture's reliance on "images of safety and metaphors for risk avoidance" contribute to an extension of child-like concerns (1998, p. 5-6). The remake fits well with this conception of the contemporary adult, especially those in the matching targeted demographic, because it reassures constructed nostalgics that nothing

has changed since their longed-for childhood. It follows from this that the combination of the remake dynamics and the emerging adult encourages a safe, individual understanding of history, one that leans toward a fierce melancholic retention of a dearly held pop culture. Even if these movies give you bad dreams, it is, ironically, comforting that Freddy Krueger is still haunting these dreams. Here, the ambiguity of an uncertain future is displaced onto the knowable fears of a comfortingly conforming past. This conception of the emerging adult will be equally important in the next chapter's exploration of television advertisers' reasoning for keeping consumers anchored in their past, but also helps in understanding how the remake perpetuates nostalgia by answering "never" to the question of when consumers are supposed to "put away childish things."

Conclusion

With so many of these films being remade from a relatively short time ago, it might be tempting to call them "classics." Yet the term classic, meaning timeless and enduring, hardly applies or adequately describes the reasons for their appeal. If this trend continues and the window between when a text is originally released and when it is "eligible" to be remade shrinks, then the emphasis on nostalgia, even for the recent past will become pronounced. Shrinking this gap makes sense from an economic standpoint as it caters to the motivation to perpetually keep properties in the minds of their consumers, but this shrinking stunts consumers' ability to mourn and separate libidinal attachments to even the recent media past. An extreme example of what the future could hold if this window continues to shrink is the 2012 reboot of the *Spider-Man* film franchise. When a film like *Spider-Man* (2002) is remade and back in theaters only ten years later, and a mere five years after the most recent sequel, the nostalgic window is clearly shrinking. Not only would this indicate a false

scarcity and perceived lack of material, a point discussed more fully in the next chapter with

shows like *Best Week Ever* (2004-2009) that celebrate last week's triumphs, but also

demonstrates that nostalgia is valid for all texts, even if they just happened. With the specific

films that tend to be chosen for the remake treatment, what is demonstrated is the

construction of "nostalgia for 'classics'" and "consumer society's tribute to our hunger for a

stable world" (Gitlin, 1979, p. 77). Only in this case the "classics" tend to be comprised of a

specific set of films from a specific, demographically motivated, time period, and the "stable

world" that viewers are constructed as hungering for is a transfixing, media-defined past.

Those primarily targeted by these "classics" are viewers who know and would consider them

classical and canonical, especially as it pertains to their childhood media connections. It is

not so much that these texts are classic, instead it is the time period itself that is classic for

those constructed nostalgics. Those who know these films are rewarded with a catering to

their nostalgic epistemological standpoint through expansion on this knowledge, which

serves to strengthen already held melancholic connections and create retroactive nostalgia in

those who feel excluded and enticed by their lack of prior textual knowledge.

  The remake is, however, not the only form of nostalgic construction that exists at the

theaters, as there is room for future research of media-defined nostalgia's role in filmic

historical representations. The next chapter on television will focus in detail on the nostalgic

memory triggers present in explicit historical representations, as well as implicitly nostalgic

narratives. To bridge the gap between chapters, a quick exploration of the earlier mentioned

film *Take Me Home Tonight* (2011) will be helpful for its commonalities with the television

show *Glory Daze* (2010-present), a large focus for the television chapter, and its common

triggers for nostalgic memories. The beginning of this film starts in a video store, where the

main character Matt works having sacrificed a promising grown up future after graduating MIT to be literally surrounded by past media references in the form of VHS tapes. Matt is the perfect stand-in for emerging adult subjects who are constructed as perpetual nostalgics unwilling to grow up in light of a media saturated definition of the past. The title sequence of this film is exactly like the one found in the television series *Glory Daze* in that is it comprised completely of pop culture 1980s references, which serve to trigger playlist past tendencies. The main setting of the film, a high school reunion party complete with dance-offs, sing-alongs, and cocaine is the perfect place to not only continuously trigger nostalgia through hits from the 1980s but also a way to constantly validate nostalgia through its reunited, and therefore reminiscing, characters. Whether in film or in television, nostalgic connections are sustained both through the consistent triggering of beloved nostalgic memories that are attached to media texts as well as understanding and knowing these references and iconic styles of the period being remade or represented.

Chapter 5: The Nostalgic Revolution Will Be Televised

By this point, it is clear that contemporary media trends have the capacity and tendency to construct a nostalgic subject who is subjectively fixed on their own affectively charged media past. This viewing subject is not an engaged citizen who can compare the past to the present and gain knowledge from the juxtaposition of continuities and discontinuities. Rather, the typical consumer of convergent nostalgic media is one for whom the differences between past and present flatten out, yet despite the conflation, the already experienced mediated past is longed for more than ever. This theme carries over into the television medium at its grammatical and formal level, and the goals of this chapter will be to further elaborate on the contours of the narcissistic nostalgia for media déjà vu (already seen), and think about its implications for our mediated democracy. As defined in chapter one, narcissistic nostalgia is marked by an individual and solipsistic yearning that is fixated on and focused through a mediated history. The repetitive consumption of this type of media encourages a melancholic concentration of libidinal energy on the individual nostalgic text and takes focus away from a comparative view of history.

In what follows, I will demonstrate the occurrence of this kind of nostalgia in the televisual medium, in both the programming of content and in the advertising that is tied to that content. I will problematize this narcissistic nostalgia in television, arguing that it acts as a neutering force by limiting the potential for critical gazes into and uses of the past. I will show how television embodies and amplifies all the characteristics of the entire convergent media phenomenon discussed in the previous chapters. Finally, the logic and problematic tendencies of televisual nostalgia will be related and compared to several normative aims of modern enlightenment politics that aim to use history as a way to make social progress. I will

argue that the individual nostalgic mode, which has emerged as a cultural dominant, works contrary to these norms. As a force disciplining political subjects, the individual nostalgic mode constructs subjects who have aims that run counter to an ethic concerned with critiquing or problematizing power structures or contemporary society. The nostalgic ethos aims neither for revolutionary or progressive change; rather, it serves to pacify and distract, thereby reaffirming dominant ideologies and economic hegemony while preserving the all-important consumer buying mood of an advertising-based form of entertainment.

Following the overall model for how contemporary media constructs nostalgic subjectivities established in the first chapter, this chapter will show how the television medium works specifically to present automatic nostalgic memory triggers as one of the dominant televisual logics, which leads to a more powerful lure for contemporary narcissistic nostalgia. From *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-present) to the *I Love...* series (2002-2010) and in the advertisements that accompany these shows, a vivid picture is painted of television as a hyper-nostalgic medium whose very form is comprised of narcissistic nostalgia triggers. This is not to say that every show and every commercial is nostalgic, or that the sole mode of televisual representation is past-oriented, just that there is a growing nostalgic phenomenon that presents itself at every televisual level. Connections can be drawn here to Jameson's model of postmodernism as a dominant cultural modality, as he stated that though he is "very far from feeling that all cultural production today is 'postmodern'" it is still helpful to "project some conception of a new systemic cultural norm" to avoid falling into the trap of "random difference" (1991, p. 6). Though televisual nostalgia and what we will be described as automatic memory triggers are not present in all television content, conceiving of this

phenomenon as a dominant tendency of this medium will be helpful in understanding the implications of this narcissistic construction.

As an organizing heuristic for this chapter, Marcel Proust's description of automatic or involuntary memory will be used throughout to understand how contemporary television works on the memories of its constructed nostalgic viewers, despite his discussion being about eating "plump little cakes called 'petites madeleines'" (2006, p. 61), and not media. Proust describes a visit with his mother, an already potentially nostalgic moment, where upon eating these cakes and drinking tea the "vicissitudes of life became indifferent to me" replaced by an unidentified happy childhood memory (2006, p. 61). The narrator is emotionally transported to a different mental state and memory place through sensory perceptions that were "connected with the taste of tea and cake" but simultaneously "transcended those savours" (2006, p. 61). Proust notes the memory of "this old, dead moment" contains "magnetism" towards the contemporary identical moment before him, the repetition of which pulls harder at the emotional connection (2006, p. 63). Drawing a parallel to contemporary nostalgic media, with the repetitious television commercial or program that asks its viewers to remember in snippets and references, those subjected to its ploy are continuously offered memory triggers in the form of texts that they experienced in childhood. These texts are designed to force the identical media-defined memory that had been "embedded at a great depth" to leave its "resting place" and rise to the surface (Proust, 2006, p. 62). This is a form of automatic memory triggered by sensation that Proust calls "involuntary memory," which is described as a "recovery of reality" for the way it both recalls a time and creates a time as well (Wood, 2010, p. 110). For Proust, and relatedly for the contemporary nostalgic media consumer, the memory is recreated as it is recalled and the

"initially inexplicable happiness" that follows this automatic memory trigger, is then followed by a "delivery from time" to a place that can only now exist in the mind (Wood, 2010, p. 110). A place that is recalled, yet different from the actuality of events that occurred in the past, or, as this dissertation has been arguing, an idealized and exaggerated past.

This chapter will address all levels of televisual nostalgia that present themselves in the very fractured and polysemic world of today's convergent televisual medium. It will examine the tendency of this nostalgic televisual modality to trigger automatic memories in viewers so they are perpetually enticed to look backwards on their own individualized and media-defined past. Indeed, the world of television today is difficult to map. Jonathan Gray advances the idea of convergent television to account for its amorphousness, calling its multiple practices "overflow" where paratextual material and cross-media connections have risen to the point that "[t]elevision, in other words, 'is no longer limited to the television medium'" (2008, p. 73). Here, Gray reminds of a key dynamic necessary for analyzing contemporary television's multiple content sites of nostalgic triggers: convergent television is concentrated on filling "the playing field with yet more points of televisual contact" (2008, p. 74). The points of nostalgic contact that concern us here are the ones that trigger Proustian involuntary memories. These exist at multiple points, including programs, advertisements, and ancillary outlets of content access, discussed in detail in chapter two. Henry Jenkins refers to convergence as the process where "old media" is "forced to coexist with the emerging media" (2006, p. 14), and this is certainly the case with contemporary television as DVRs, DVDs, Hulu, Netflix, and even network websites themselves blur the lines of what one means when discussing "TV." In the analysis of narcissistic nostalgia, these new consuming options and the very definitional fracturing that comes with issues of time-

shifting, multiple screens, and advertiser's concerns with these technologies all contribute to an individualized form of televisual viewing, which was discussed briefly in the second chapter as enhancing the perpetual individual nostalgic construction. This argument will be addressed in an expanded manner in this chapter, tying together the disparate contemporary television viewing practices as integral to the web of nostalgia this medium weaves.

Despite the changing definitions and idiosyncratic nature of the televisual experience, much of the research surrounding the current state of this medium has looked at macro formal characteristics. This approach to televisual grammar through medium theory will be helpful in describing how the phenomenon of individualized playlist past nostalgia can be found in every area of television content. The range of authors who utilized this approach in a way that aids our understanding of televisual nostalgia will range from Neil Postman, for his development of television as engendering a certain mode of thinking regardless of the content of a particular show (1985), to Marshall McLuhan, whose canonical words about the formal nature of the medium set the stage for those that followed (2006), as well as Raymond Williams' concept of flow (1974), which will be used to develop a nostalgic commodity flow. Coming to terms with the advertising system will require its own specific tools, but many of the authors that deal with this system also contain elements of a macro and formal focus. These include Dallas Smythe's work on the audience commodity (2006), Matthew McAllister's work on the effects of ad-based entertainment (2005), and Joseph Turow's work on demographic segregation (2007). All of these authors establish formal and grammar characteristics of television that are significant as they pertain to nostalgia. A nostalgic commodity flow will be established as permeating all areas of the television medium from

programming to advertisements, and cannot properly be understood without a matching macro and formal research foundation.

Once again, taking into consideration how the construction of narcissistic subjectivity is made possible through the form and content of this sometimes nebulous medium, I will utilize many of the tools of textual analysis that were employed in the film chapter. While I recognize that television must be treated as its own separate medium, many of the codes for cinematic visual culture have carried over into television. I seek to unveil the symbolic representations of the past in nostalgic texts and explore the connotations of media that validates an eternal return to an individualized and media-defined history. Today's television consumers are interpolated into a hegemonic mode that engenders a subjective hyper-nostalgic worldview in which their pasts are nothing more than a compilation of affectively charged texts for which they yearn. They are led to believe that through the effective use of smart media affording a mode of consumption tailored to their particular tastes, they might return to this idealized and impossible past. Coming to terms with subjects who are the result of this kind of construction means having to understand how the texts themselves work to encourage and promote certain interpretations over others. It means having to understand how they call to the viewing subject and help engender the desire for the perpetual experience of a playlist past. The texts that will be explored in this chapter, much like in previous chapters, are exemplary of this phenomenon. While some are explicitly nostalgic in their historical representations, such as *Glory Daze* (2010-present), others, like *Lost* (2004-2010), contain a more implicit version of nostalgia that validates an all-important eternal desire to return to an individualized past. Before examining these nostalgic texts, the hegemonic practice of symptomatic nostalgia dominating the world of television

commercials will be interrogated, as the viewing subject is both appealed to and inculcated in their self-referential nostalgia through these ads. It is on display, for instance, in the 2011 Volkswagen commercial "The Force," a commercial that triggers involuntary memories and nostalgia by not only featuring a child dressed up as Darth Vader, complete with his theme music, who attempts to use the force on everyday household objects, but also by asking a specific generation to remember the time in their lives when they would have dressed as Vader. Exploring nostalgia as it manifests itself in these textual areas of television, while being mindful of the various other possible ways in which this nostalgia presents itself, will not only aide in developing a deep understanding of the scope of the narcissistic nostalgic "revolution" in television, but also help create further ties between this specific medium and the ones discussed in previous chapters.

Formal Research for Formal Nostalgia

When a research method matches up with a research focus, the results can be quite fruitful. From McLuhan to Postman, and from Gitlin to Williams, television today is subjected to a broader research perspective than it has ever been, but shares a commonality of looking at this medium from a macro perspective. McLuhan and Postman examine television from a medium theory perspective, Gitlin and McAllister explore the constraints that commercial culture place on the televisual medium, and Williams looks to the technology of television as a cultural form, but all of these authors look broadly at television as opposed to micro-analyzing only specific content. Possibly this stems from the inability to attack television in any other way, with its sprawling content that spans multiple years and hundreds of channels, or maybe it is simply a testament to the broad influence this medium is perceived to have on our culture. A macro perspective, one that deals with television as a

whole as opposed to concentrating solely on singular episodes or even shows, is necessary to examine the full scope of contemporary televisual nostalgia, which occupies hundreds of channels and spans decades in scope. The form and grammar of televisual nostalgia can also be found at every level of content and advertising, and as such must employ a similar macro research focus, such as those found in the authors described below.

The first perspective that helps us to see the contours of televisual nostalgia from a macro perspective is medium theory or media ecology. With his famous axiom "the medium is the message," Marshall McLuhan spoke to the way in which researchers could and should take a macro look at the formal rules of all media, including television, to ascertain their broad characteristics as they pertain to those consuming them. McLuhan felt that "the 'content' of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium" (McLuhan, 2006, p. 108), which means he felt that it was important to study the form of any medium, because there was a tendency to lose sight of this when focusing on the particulars of any specific content. Form is the constant that, over time, encourages certain behaviors and modes of praxis, enabling concerns such as nostalgia and conceptions of history that deal in the long-term and the generational to come to the forefront of importance. McLuhan discusses the way a medium like television can become a "fixed charge" in a society's existence; therefore erasing the ability to imagine what life would be like without it (2006, p. 116). This capacity to engender this kind of amnesia not only speaks to the much-discussed loss of Jameson's notion of a radical, and therefore critical, past, but is also recalls Benjamin's famous thesis that our mode of perceiving the world changes dialectically over time as media technology changes (2006). The "fixed charge" in this case is a nostalgic charge, triggered by the form and grammar of the televisual medium and reducing viewers' ability to imagine television

without longing and melancholia. Fittingly McLuhan goes on to say that this telescoping myopic mentality results in the development of a false "private point of view" as part of a "Narcissus fixation" (2006, p. 115), which points to critical role that narcissism plays in the development of a nostalgic subjectivity that refuses to engage with the collective or critical and remains fixed on a solipsistic history. Uncritical and narcissistic televisual nostalgia then, as read through McLuhan, presents itself as a blinding force that further narrows the scope with which viewers explore, critique, and contrast a collective cultural history as it compares to the present. Bringing McLuhan into this discussion does not mean that this chapter will not be concerned with television's content, as even with the pervasive nature of this medium's growing nostalgia it is vitally important to identify within this construction the specific manner in which the past is engaged. McLuhan simply opens the door for the recognizing that the grammar, form, and presentation of any medium must be a focus as well.

Neil Postman's theory of the formal experience and reification of televisual media sounds similar to McLuhan's and reminds us that television teaches much more than the information often considered its content. He posits that watching "Cheers' and 'The Tonight Show' are as effective as 'Sesame Street' in promoting what might be called the television style of learning" (1985, p. 144). For Postman, watching television over the course of time fosters certain kinds of learning and ways of looking at the world. This theory of the medium's pedagogical power is important for understanding how nostalgic triggers work at every content level, through music, clothing, misé-en-scene, and direct references to past texts, begin to teach viewers that a simplistic and individual past is all-important to engage with. As Postman says "'Sesame Street' encourages children to love school only if school is like 'Sesame Street'" (1985, p. 143), and similarly television encourages a repetitive and

constant engagement with the past, only if the past is uncritical and mediated/defined by media texts. Postman lays out television commandments such as "Thou shalt induce no perplexity" and proceeds to develop the ways in which the form of the television medium manifests itself into everyday expectations outside of media (1985, p. 147). Applying television's didactic potential to the problem of the perpetual individual nostalgic, it becomes evident that the reduction of complexity, comparison, the collective, and a search for adaptive knowledge in the media historical representation would subsequently reduce these urges in our everyday thinking about the past. The simplistic and individualized nostalgia engendered is analogous to a psychic regression and juvenile narcissism that Adorno warned would arrest those afflicted at the "infantile stage" (Adorno, 2001, p. 46). This "infantile stage" is connected to Matthew McAllister's later discussed examination of complexity and controversy being detrimental to the "buying mood" television viewers (McAllister, 2005, p. 226-27). It is highly beneficial for those looking to manipulate and construct a presentist and consumption based "buying mood" to cater to the arrested "infant" unwilling to critically question what is placed before them. This is easier to accomplish when the focus is on a neutered and uncomplicated history that leads to an equally uncomplicated present.

There have been other attempts to connect the formal concerns of medium theory to economic and culture explanations of the medium as a commercially driven enterprise. For instance, Matthew McAllister's work on influential dynamics at work within the television advertising system will be important to examine later in the chapter when dealing with nostalgic triggers in advertising content, and connects the form of television and its characteristics to its economic motivations and restrictions. In Eileen Meehan's canonical work *Why TV is Not Our Fault*, television as an advertisement-based medium is thought of

for its systematic characteristics, and how the historical development of ratings created an emphasis "on consumers, not audience members" (2005, p. 38). This emphasis goes a long way to explain why the construction of nostalgic viewers would appeal to an industry that tends to avoid controversial content in order to maintain a viewership willing to go out and spend. Meehan argues that demographics became more important than sheer numbers, and what better way to ensure a consistent desired age group than to appeal to that age group's childhood nostalgia for televisual content. Perhaps the all importance of demographic targeting is why *That '70s Show* (1998-2006), the quintessential televisual nostalgic show dramatizing the dynamics of the automatic memory trigger, aired for eight seasons, chronologically matching a childhood in the 1970s with those currently in their early 30s, and *That 80s Show* (2002) failed after thirteen episodes, aimed at the less desirable for primetime television early 20s demographic. The two shows formally came across in the same manner in regards to their respective time periods, including matching suburban settings, nearly identical casting choices, simplistic media-defined era catch phrases and ideologies, as well as similar inter-scene transitions that referenced their eras through color/fonts, but only one was a commercial success. This is not to say the shows were identical, just that their formal similarities point towards *That '80s Show*'s failure being a result of mimetic historical representation timing issues as it pertains to the targeted demographic.

Todd Gitlin, like Meehan, thinks that the rise and fall of television shows or styles can always be explained through the lens of commercial culture and economic determinism. He argues that the medium is structured this way because of its consistent hegemonic nature that "is systematically preferred by certain features of TV programs" such as a "repeatable

formula" and "a social world impervious to substantial change" (1979, p. 254). That the

industry's modus operandi would tend to produce an uncritical and simplified engagement

with history is perfectly in line with Gitlin's analysis of television's historical stance towards

the complex and oppositional. He says that early on in television's development programs

would "have simply *ignored* them" while in the time of this writing, the late 1970s, programs

end up "*domesticating* divisive issues" (1979, p. 256). This theory of the eventual

interpolation of countercultural elements into hegemonic culture is much like the argument

Dick Hebdige made when he discussed how one-time oppositional forces, like punk clothing,

are eventually absorbed into the mainstream culture, most times for profit, and that the

hegemonic reaction is to reduce the impact of the complex or different (1979).

    That '70s Show provides a quick example of opposition that becomes mainstream

through reduction of complexity, as this show began as a more critical program willing to

question accepted notions about historical events and issues, but quickly became a simplistic,

accepted, and media-defined version of the 1970s. What I am arguing here is that, as per

Meehan and Gitlin, it is in the interests of a capital-intensive industry to promote the status

quo and to domesticate and validate the perpetual individual nostalgic. Narcissistic nostalgia

defined by media texts then becomes ideological, and rises above the phenomenon level to

the status of the "common sense, the life-ways and everyday assumptions" (Gitlin, 1979, p.

251). The individual is trained to think that the perpetual pleasure they derive from

maintaining libidinal connections to the past is common sense that far exceeds the need to be

critically engaged. Along with becoming ideological, insofar as this pleasurable re-

experience of the past gets interpolated into the sense of self, the nostalgic medium's aversion

to the complex historical mindset then becomes widespread as this problematically uncritical

reaffirmation of a simplistic status quo is linked from program to program and commercial to commercial. Viewers are triggered to come back for more nostalgia. When coming to terms with how these automatically triggered nostalgic links work, it is helpful to turn to Raymond Williams' concept of "flow" for its description of a televisual dynamic that similarly asks viewers not to relinquish concentrated on objects.

In one of the most medium theory-friendly arguments about American television, Raymond Williams develops his concept of flow as he discusses the inability to tell the difference between three different films either broadcast as content or presented as trailers for upcoming content (1974, p. 91). Williams argues that there is "enough similarity" between planned programming that all television, especially when considering generic similarities, begins to resemble itself when one takes a step back (1974, p. 92). John Eldridge and Lizzie Eldridge describe this as Williams' claim that "earlier forms of communication were essentially differentiated" (1994, p. 27); the end of a book does not lead immediately to another book. But with television shows, it all blurs together in one viewing experience. Williams may be looking at the way individual programs and promos flow into each other and blur, but he is doing so from a macro stance that conceptualizes television in planned sequences. Flow then, speaks to the broad similarities planned into television programming, so that when taken as a whole repeated form and elements are recognized as being in place to keep the viewer tuned in. Williams was referring to a "flowing" in between programs and advertisements with supreme ease, and the connection to water is obvious when Will Brooker likens it to scuba diving and the "pleasurable sensation of losing oneself in an activity" that leads to a "sense of immersion" (2005). An analog can be drawn to the conception of narcissistic nostalgia immersing its subjects into a state of concern only for the melancholic

pleasure provided by the beloved lost object, and if the organizing logic of much of television today is one of triggering automatic nostalgic memories in both commercials and programming, then what is created is a form of Williams' flow through a planned nostalgia sequence that caters to these melancholic connections.

Flow, then, will be of the utmost importance in this chapter to establish how televisual nostalgic commodities flow into one another and reinforce the hegemonic nostalgic mode that is ubiquitous across the medium. Here the flow could be considered both between programs as well as "intra-show" flow, similar to what Williams described feeling when watching American television's "constant flash-forwards of promised shows to come and flashback reminders of stories gone before" (Brooker, 2005). Only in this case the feeling is nostalgic and is maintained by keeping a consistent nostalgic commodity flow through intra-show commercials and inter-show nostalgic programming sequences. The contemporary televisual nostalgic programming asks viewers to focus their attention on an uncritical past, and the advertisements are happy to extend this mindset, either through nostalgic themes of their own or simply a similar uncritical stance. To explain this nostalgic televisual commodity flow, the programming that consistently triggers longing memories will be important, but equally important will be to explore the advertising system's triggering as one of its organizing characteristics. As Williams notes, the "'interruptions' are in one way only the most visible characteristic of a process which at some levels has come to define the television experience" (1974, p. 93).

For the sake of making a claim that one of the televisual form's organizing logics is the triggering of nostalgia, what first needs to be explored is how anything can be an organizing logic of such a diverse medium. The crux of the criticism of the macro-focused

authors lies in their tendency to universalize the experience of watching "television," especially in an era of increased fracturing of what this term means. This is not a criticism of scholars like McLuhan or Postman, or of their macro and formalist approach, but rather recognition that contemporary convergent media theory, such as the concept of "overflow" discussed by Gray, represents a need on the part of this chapter to incorporate increasingly blurry medium definitions. For example, the boundaries between film and television have become increasingly blurred. Television scholar John Caldwell even discusses the ways in which the definitions of film and television have blended to the point "that it is almost impossible to study film today without also studying television" due to the changing visual nature of the medium (2005, p. 91). As the analysis in the previous chapters have indicated, both film and television and the convergent ground between them have been captured by the productive tendency toward nostalgia in form and content. What this convergent nostalgia hints at is the commodity flow of nostalgia where the medium lines blur in the face of universalizing perpetual nostalgia.

Part of the focus on convergent media and new forms of television viewing practices is the time-shifting and the differences in content, which helps transition into the concerns of the commodity flow of nostalgia. One sees a shift in temporality from a live present to a consumer controlled "post-live" medium where the temporality is always in flux. Elana Levine remarked that television originally placed an "emphasis on liveness as a marker of distinction" and signal of the "best" of the medium (2008, p. 394), but technological advancements have rendered some of this emphasis on the "live" as less important to its viewers. These technologies mostly enable the ability to time-shift their viewing habits away from the broadcaster's set schedule, which has been a topic of study as far back as the advent

of the VCR as it raised "serious concerns about the economic base of broadcasting and related industries" (Levy, 1983, p. 263), namely the advertisers. The DVR ignited these debates, as they did not rely on the cumbersome and physical space-draining VHS tape, and even included the ability to skip exactly thirty seconds forward with the touch of a button. A study conducted by Douglas Ferguson and Elizabeth Perse found that DVR users felt "more in control with their DVR" and reported "less channel surfing" (2004, p. 5). This was an important feature of nostalgia inducing viewing habits in its digital access manifestation as the filtering out of programming oppositional to ones own preconceived notions was an attempt to reduce cognitive dissonance. A "temporal filtering" is conducted where the viewer turns away from a live and unpredictable present to revel in a controllable and knowable past. This temporal, or oppositional, filtering is even more pronounced and individualized in the new forms of television program viewing that relies on the consumer to actively pursue these shows by visiting websites like Hulu or buying box sets. Here the content may differ, with no commercials or different commercials, pointing to the significance of the increasingly atomized and heterogeneous manner in which television programming is viewed. The individualized nature of the nostalgia constructed for consumers is enhanced as there is less of a shared viewing experience that leads to any form of a shared past, even if it was mediated. Attention in this chapter will turn first to nostalgic advertising and later to nostalgic televisual programming, which share automatic memory triggers, the encouragement of melancholic attachments, and the oppositional filters described above as being in the very bones of the "television" medium, despite the differing opinion of what that word means.

"After These Messages, We'll Be Right Back": Creating Nostalgic Commodity Flow

These words spoken in various bumpers between 1980s and 1990s ABC Saturday Morning Cartoons and their commercial breaks, could also be used to describe the ubiquitous nostalgic nature of television bleeding over into the ads themselves. The words could be tweaked to say, "After These Messages (that will provide the guiding televisual nostalgic logic), We'll Be Right Back (to continue making viewers gaze backwards)." Following closely in form to Raymond Williams' concept of flow, here one could define a kind of nostalgic commodity flow where the television viewer today is treated to many programs with nostalgic themes followed by commercials that contain the same tone. This nostalgic mimicry works as a feedback loop, continuing the uncritical content and problematic temporality of the shows themselves, a repetition that is beneficial for advertisers who wish to maintain a consistent buying mood. As Williams would argue, commercials and programming flow into one another, forming a seamless, self-referential and reifying communicative experience. As commercials represent the "most consistent and pervasive genre of television content" (McAllister, 2005, p. 217), they will be addressed before nostalgic programming because of their development of an organizing nostalgic logic. First, the characteristics of a nostalgic commercial will be explained as they relate to the research split between authors who address the utilization of a longing for the past from the advertisers perspective and those who are more critical of this practice. Second, the specific instances of broadcast will be examined for their nostalgic flow, concentrating on the commercials aired during the first season of *Glory Daze* because of its emblematic nature. Finally, it will be necessary to complicate this nostalgic commodity flow by providing instances where commercials explicitly reject the nostalgic mode of thinking, such as in most

electronics advertisements as well as the more atomized viewing practices that contain

different commercials or lack ads altogether.

Television commercials can be nostalgic in a few key ways: through specific

referencing of music and texts from the past, or through a temporal tone located in the past.

Whereas a Guinness commercial that features Etta James' "At Last" triggers nostalgia

through its connection between this product and a song that transports those in the

commercial to a more simple romantic time, complete with jukebox, an Enzyte commercial

campaign contains a whole 1960s nostalgic misé-en-scene (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Enzyte's "Bob" and those around him are typically shown in 1950s and 1960s style clothing and environment, connecting these eras to male prowess.

Some commercials are even nostalgic for other commercials, as is the case with the 2011

Motorola Xoom ad that aired during the Super Bowl and parodied the famous "1984" Apple

ad by making fun of the contemporary "cult of Apple." This critique is achieved through

images of uniform clad workers moving in lockstep, and wearing iconic Apple headphones,

alongside images of the lone "non-conformist" reading the very text the commercial is using

to critique what Apple had claimed to fight against (Figures 10a and 10b).

Figures 10a and 10b: Motorola's Xoom ad parodying Apple's iconic "1984" ad to claim itself as the new destroyer of conformity, complete with an overt reference to Orwell.

Each of these nostalgic commercial characteristics further the perpetual look towards the past through their multiple levels of time specific referencing. Images of historical eras, such as in the Enzyte commercial, the sounds of a vintage song, such as in the Guinness commercial, and the multiple layers of intertextuality often present, such as in the Motorola ad that is referencing a 1984 commercial and the book *1984* (1949), all trigger a focus on the past. Since both advertisements represent and reify the ideology of conspicuous consumption, they significantly contribute to the uncritical view of the past contained in much nostalgic programming. Their nostalgic memory triggers are being used to sell commodities and not to engage in a comparative and adaptive historical discourse.

Music is a key tool of the television commercial, as it sets the tone of what is to be sold. A Mountain Dew commercial will most likely have very different music from a Maalox ad. The tone set for a nostalgic commercial is many times determined by the choice of a vintage song to accompany a contemporary product, a practice Jameson would describe as anything but radical. Countless examples exist, such as the 2005 Diet Pepsi commercial where soda cans of this brand dance to The Ramones 1976 song "Blitzkrieg Bop" and the tone set is a mix of nostalgia and rebellion, but in the form of a commodity. The commodification of rebellion is a common marketing tactic as it serves to actually reaffirm

the dominant power structure through incorporation of opposition, or what Dick Hebdige

sees as a "continual process of recuperation" through which the "fractured order is repaired"

(1979, p. 94). Cotten Seiler describes this common dynamic prevalent from concerts to

records as those in power in the music industry have "always cohered around those images

and models of disaffiliation and rebellion, whose threat had been neutralized or subsumed"

from Elvis to Kurt Cobain (2000, p. 217). Karen Bettez Halnon describes the commodified

rebellion genre of music as one that speaks to suburban American youth and "satisfies their

politics 'lite'" through "music that gives a loud, hostile, vile, and alienated 'finger' to the

totality of officialdom" but pulls back before actual rebellion (2005, p. 441). In the described

commercial, the Diet Pepsi cans are shown to love The Ramones while the "unhip" Diet

Coke cans complain that the music is "so annoying." Music that claims to resist the

establishment is featured in a giant corporation's commercial asking the audience to both

focus on the past and simultaneously "rebel" by buying the "cooler" diet soda. The

commercial sends mixed messages of rebellion and mainstream corporate economics, neither

of which critically engages with the past in the form presented here. Practical research aimed

at aiding advertisers note that "[o]ld songs tend to arouse consumers' good mood and

generate positively valenced nostalgia-related thoughts, which lead to favorable ad attitude

and brand attitude" (Chou & Lien, 2010, p. 324). A more critical view by Dallas Smythe

might note that nostalgic music is used as "predictable specifications" to create "predictable

numbers" to better sell the audience to advertisers (2006, p. 234). Predictability leads to

consistency, in this case, and the past and the present are conflated by claiming the product as

a mark of continuity. In the Diet Pepsi/Ramones commercial, the triggered feeling of

nostalgia through music asks viewers to retain their connection to the beloved Ramones song

as well as the now associated Diet Pepsi, because despite all the rebellion and change in the world these things will remain consistent.

Music is not the only kind of referencing utilized to maintain a nostalgic flow, as other pop culture texts from the past consistently make their way into contemporary television commercials. Here, like in so many other examples of narcissistic nostalgia, the past is defined by the media texts themselves at the expense of a collective and adaptive history. Volkswagen often employs nostalgia in commercials for throwback-style Beetles and sound systems that can play oldies hits like "Rocket Man" with higher fidelity. VW serves as an exemplar in their "The Force" commercial that depicts a child attempting to use *Star Wars* "force" powers on household objects, complete with Darth Vader costume and music. The past is present in music, misé-en-scene, and tone, but most pertinent is the reference to the *Star Wars* series (1977-present) itself. The child asks the grown up audience to remember what it was like to love *Star Wars*, a point made stronger by the child imitating a version of a character that current children may not be as familiar with as newer iterations and animations.[7] The part of the audience in the market for Volkswagens is made to feel nostalgic for the original *Star Wars* text, and this is parlayed into a car commodity (Figure 11).

Figure 11: This 2011 Volkswagen commercial commodifies/triggers *Star Wars* nostalgia.

---

[7] Darth Vader being Anakin Skywalker, who has become more of a hero in versions of *Star Wars* that children would be more familiar with and never appears in his iconic black suit, such as the animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* (2008-present).

Speaking to the individualized nature of contemporary nostalgia, a study conducted by Sultan, Muehling, and Sprott noted that nostalgic commercials work "the best for current consumers who have personal attachments with the brand that they used during childhood" (2010, p. 3). Simon Reynolds describes the importance of beloved childhood television, which would include ads, saying "the memoradelic imprint left by vintage TV on the child's impressionable grey matter is central to hauntology" (2011, p. 339). Though Reynolds describes this hauntology as being "bound up with the shared cultural memory bank of a particular generation and nationality" (2011, p. 342), the nostalgic subject engendered through a past defined by media texts is individualistic in nature, or at the very least superficial in their shared pop culture foundation. In the case of the VW ad, the personal nostalgic attachment is to both a text from childhood and possibly a brand recognized and loved from childhood, which have now been linked together. VW was not always a part of *Star Wars*, such as would be the case if VWs had been product placements in the original films, but this commercial retroactively associates this brand with this nostalgic text that fans have strong personal emotions towards. These emotions and the past has been commodified on the basis of familiarity with the *Star Wars* text and the ability to want a VW, a concept dealt with masterfully by Joseph Turow describing how companies "split their customers into different categories" excluding certain viewers along the way (1997, p. 91). Though not many would be excluded in this case by not knowing *Star War*, there are certain associations and demographics that are highlighted by attaching this specific text's nostalgia to this specific brand, such as those old enough to prefer the 1970s Star Wars trilogy and VWs.

The referential nostalgic trigger does not have to be a text from a different medium, as commercials have demonstrated the ability to reference themselves in a nostalgic manner,

such as in the Motorola Xoom parody of Apple's 1984 ad. In a 2011 Wendy's commercial, the burger chain resurrected their 1984 slogan "Where's the Beef?" through two new commercials that acted as perfect automatic memory triggers for nostalgic television viewers. As explained by a Wendy's press release on September 26, 2011, the ad "campaign includes two national waves of creative: a pre-launch "teaser" effort using the memorable "Where's the Beef?" phrase and images, running September 25 through October 2; and a "'Here's the Beef!'-themed effort that rolls out October 2" (Wendy's Company, 2011). The "teaser" commercial briefly depicted the 1984 footage of the iconic old women standing over the tiny burger in a large bun, and told audiences that something big was coming soon. The obvious memory trigger is the actual 1984 footage that created a national catch phrase. In the second "Here's the Beef!" commercial, the automatic memory trigger becomes exponentially more salient. A young man sifts through a vintage t-shirt bin at a clothing store, and stumbles upon a shirt that simply says, "Where's the Beef?" He puts this shirt on and begins to stroll down the street, to which every single person he passes, young and old, throws the catchphrase back at him in a knowing manner. The t-shirt, which as discussed in chapter one carries in-group reference connotations, triggers the memories in the fellow passersby, much like it is triggering nostalgia in the viewers. Near the end of the commercial, the man stands at a street corner and proceeds to "point" himself and the shirt in different directions, each of which contains someone who verbally echo the lexical memory trigger. Placing this commercial in the broad nostalgic commodity televisual flow presents a powerful connection between the past and the present by indexing the nostalgia while reinvigorating the brand in the present, leaving viewers yearning for an era and possibly a burger. It becomes a sign of the in-group affiliation with an older generation for those who never experienced the original era or

commercial, and could give the illusion of a shared past, but one based on artificial mediated nostalgia that has been contemporized and idealized.

As a case study, the content of the TBS show *Glory Daze* will be shown later to present a version of the 1980s that is uncritical and defined by media texts, but the accompanying commercials are nostalgically no different. Explaining the flow of content and commercials for all the episodes of this show would be time-consuming and space prohibiting, so instead the focus will be on two episodes that stand in for the common nostalgic bridges occurring within this show: the pilot episode and the "Shamrock You Like a Hurricane" episode. The very first commercial break during original airing of the pilot episode of *Glory Daze* continued the nostalgic tone of the show perfectly. Beginning with a Best Buy commercial that is structured around popular holiday animations, such as *Frosty the Snowman* (1969) and *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* (1964), the triggers of beloved textual memories from holidays past maintained the show's established nostalgic commodity flow. The next commercial was for Yellow Pages and depicted a young man visiting a junkyard in an attempt to purchase and rebuild a car owned by his father; complete with a vintage looking photograph and the phrase "YP knows dreams only get stronger with time." Raymond Williams knows that television only gets stronger with this kind of planned flow. The nostalgia continued in future commercial breaks with HTC ads about the instant nostalgia of taking pictures and posting/preserving them instantly online, and an extended TBS promo for airings of *The Wizard of OZ* (1939), a program that once existed as a yearly televisual nostalgic trigger. In the fourth commercial break of the pilot episode, a Honda Accord ad appeared that used part of the 1970 Simon and Garfunkel song "The Only Living

Boy in New York, which though it had nothing to do with the car proved to link in the nostalgic flow of the show.

The episode entitled "Shamrock You Like a Hurricane," brilliantly extended the content-advertisement-content nostalgic flow of the pilot. The first commercial break set a nostalgic tone that continued throughout the entire episode, beginning with an Alka-Seltzer commercial that not only still contained the 1970s "Plop, plop, fizz, fizz" jingle but a CGI version of the 1950s corporate mascot "Speedy." This same commercial break contained two ads about older men dealing with their past, a TNT promo for *Men of a Certain Age* (2009-present) and the Visa "Never Miss a Super Bowl Club" about forty-four years of reminiscing. In the next commercial break, the nostalgic music theme came back strong with a Hershey's Bar ad featuring a child-sung version of Modern English's 1982 hit "Melt With You" and this musical nostalgia was continued in commercial break three, which promoted a TBS Wedding Movie Weekend with a snippet of Queen's 1985 song "I Was Born to Love You." The songs in these breaks were even from the same time period as the show is set, further solidifying viewers nostalgic frame of mind. The episode ended with an extended commercial for TCM's 31 Days of Oscar, which featured films from disparate times like *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and *All About Eve* (1950), and a Toyota commercial with two people singing the 1981 Juice Newton hit "Angel of the Morning." This is not to argue that all the commercials during this show present nostalgic triggers, as there are plenty of present and future oriented ads, or that these ads were created specifically for *Glory Daze*, as the same Hershey's "Melt With You" ad would have been shown on countless shows set in the present. But combining nostalgic programs with the increase of nostalgic television advertisements, the result is validation and perpetuation of looking to the past.

This hints at the first of a few caveats that must be laid out in the description of the nostalgic commercial, demonstrating that the presence of longing for a past object in television commercials is far from a universal occurrence. Like nostalgic programming, the past-centered advertisement is an increasing phenomenon, but is certainly not an all-encompassing norm. A content analysis was conducted in 1991 of over a thousand commercials with ten percent "assessed as nostalgic" (Unger, McConocha, & Faier, 1991, p. 350), and while this number appears to be much higher today it is far from one hundred percent. This analysis has attempted to argue that during nostalgic programming the frequency of nostalgic advertisements increases and creates a flow that constructs viewers as perpetually facing backwards, but even this relationship must be considered idiosyncratic and dependent on the situation. For example in the two *Glory Daze* episodes focused on for this analysis of nostalgic advertising, the pilot and "Shamrock You Like a Hurricane", a third of the commercials and promos could be considered nostalgic due to their content, music, thematics or references. Though a third cannot be considered total or universal, it is significantly larger than the ten percent noted in 1991.

As a second caveat, advertising could even be argued to have some friction inherent in the nostalgic mode, as so many ads are designed to introduce the "newest" products available. Ads for electronics appear to reject the nostalgic mode more often than not, as the celebration of the new is the crux of this industry. This was seen in the 2011 Hyundai ad that featured old style electronics as a call to not settle for the first of anything, especially cars (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Hyundai's 2011 ad that functioned as anti-nostalgic in regards to electronics.

What these caveats hint at is that the nostalgic commercial may contribute to the commodity flow of contemporary television's construction of nostalgia, but this must be understood as still determined by the constraints of the advertising medium whose goals are to sell the newest products. What can be said, however, is that the commercial mindset is one that thrives on uncritical viewing that preserves consumptive thinking (McAllister, 2005, p. 227). Even if a commercial is not nostalgic, the system of advertising in place in the television medium "asks" the content producers to avoid controversy as well as "ideas that are too complex" and promote "critical thinking" (2005, p. 229), all goals that are accomplished through narcissistic nostalgic programming. The symbiotic relationship between nostalgic programming and its commercials benefits from this avoidance of a radical, critical, and comparative past that would question the status quo and the buying of a new iPad.

Explicitly Nostalgic Television Shows

In the realm of television content, the most explicitly nostalgic programming is the remake. Film is not the only medium to take the business of remakes quite seriously, as television has recently caught the reboot bug. From new versions of *Hawaii Five-0* (2010-present), *Charlie's Angels* (2011), *V* (2009-2011), and *Battlestar Galactica* (2004-2009), to US adaptations of the UK's *The Office* (2005-present) and *Life on Mars* (2008-2009), the

contemporary television landscape looks very familiar. A show like *Nikita* (2010-present) is right at home on network television, as it is a remake of the television show *La Femme Nikita* (1997-2002), itself a remake of the French film *Nikita* (1990). All of these programs share a certain televisual grammar and indexical logic that is very similar to those described in to the previous film-focused chapter. Likewise, it will be argued that this televised rash of remakes works to define history through the re-experience of nostalgic media texts and focuses the viewing subject's attention on an uncritical past. Yet television remakes differ from cinema in the production of nostalgia because of the potential for instantaneous individual choice afforded by the technology. The perpetual individual nostalgic finds plenty of televisual nostalgic triggers in all areas of content in the medium, including the explicitly nostalgic text, which the remake would be a part of, that extends to shows containing historical representations and even channels dedicated to nostalgic programming. This type of nostalgic show, one that asks its subjects to take the same individualistic look at history as the show's cameras do, is more of a recent phenomenon that can roughly be placed in the 2000s, at the same time as VH1's *I Love...* series began.

As a transitory television program, *That '70s Show* can explain a lot about the difference between the specific nostalgic construction that is exists in contemporary, new millennium media, and the nostalgia for media that existed prior. *That '70s Show* debuted in 1998 on the heels of the success and enduring popularity of films like *Dazed and Confused* (1993), a film that shares the indexical recognizable features of 1970s culture. This show epitomizes the strategic use of automatic nostalgic memory triggers, with its bright clothing and set colors, its suburban setting filled with iconic 1970s kitsch and style, as well as its stock 70s characters like the disco loving couple next door and the aging stoner 1960s

leftover, of course played by Tommy Chong. Even the inter-scene bumpers indexed the 1970s by presenting its characters against swirling tie-dye colored backgrounds that resemble the sets of *Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In* (1967-1973). Viewers of *That '70s Show* are triggered with 1970s nostalgia from all of these elements, as well as recognizable subject matters, styling, cultural catch-phrases, including instantly recognizable guest stars like Mary Tyler Moore and Charo. Despite the simplistic and stereotypical formal elements that this show uses to engage with the past, the uncritical light-hearted nostalgic tone of contemporary media had not fully set in yet at the show's debut, and as such this series began with a more complex historical engagement. Episodes in the first season were devoted to 1970s issues such as feminism in "The Pill," the acceptance of homosexuality in "Eric's Buddy," and blue-collar reactions to the government during economic hardships in "Streaking." Not that there was no comedy involved, but the beginning of *That '70s Show* contained a markedly different tone than the rest of the series, as the show changed from plotlines about recession hardships and an auto parts plant closure to episodes based on *Star Wars* (1977) and named after songs from Led Zeppelin, The Who, The Rolling Stones, and Queen. The bell-bottoms and large collar shirts worn by the characters were consistent nostalgic triggers that ensured the viewers' memories "embedded at a great depth" would leave their "resting place" and rise to the surface (Proust, 2006, p. 62), but what changed was the tone of the show which began considerably more complex and shifted to an uncritical, media-defined history and paved the way for television programs that fully embrace the perpetual individual nostalgic model, such as in *Glory Daze*.

A show like TBS's *Glory Daze* is the perfect exemplar of a show that built off of the marketability of nostalgia proven by *That 70s Show*, but which never tried to work through

any of the problematic historical problems that *That '70s Show* began with. *Glory Daze* fully represents the different dynamics present in television's contemporary nostalgic phenomenon compared to even a few years before its debut. Even the title itself stands in for many of the thematic ways in which the past is addressed through this text. *Glory Daze* contains many referents and nostalgic triggers, including the longing for a better time and era-appropriate 1984 Bruce Springsteen song "Glory Days," which is also about a longing for a lost past as well as being linguistically linked to *Dazed and Confused*. Significantly, the title for *Glory Daze* is also just one example of the many lexical choices that refer to media texts that do not actually appear in the show itself. Through dynamics such as these, *Glory Daze* will be shown to define the past almost exclusively through pop culture media texts, validate a compulsive drive to recreate this misrecognized past, and cultivate a presentist and uncritical view of history that simply reaffirms contemporary held beliefs and ideologies.

Illustrative for these problematic engagements with the past is the opening credit sequence for *Glory Daze*, which may be short but contains a staggering amount of detail, all of which is designed to evoke the time depicted and to index individual viewers affective connections to it. The sequence lasts fifteen seconds, and in this brief time manages to reference *Space Invaders* (1978), the band Talking Heads, Ronald Reagan, Rubik's Cubes, and the ubiquitous 80s "mix tape," all with The Clash's version of "Police on My Back" (1980). All of 1980s indexes and triggers connect viewers with their own memories of this time period, but like the huge range of ideological positions offered in this pastiche of nostalgia, with the mismatch of Reagan conservatism and The Clash's notable leftist politics, this is an 80s continuously defined in *Glory Daze* by surface-level media artifacts. In this credits reference list, Ronald Reagan stands out for being the only politician, but this should

not be read as any form of commitment on the part of *Glory Daze* to engage in meaningful political debates. Instead, Reagan is included in the credits and the content of the show not only because he had been a part of the pop culture machine at one point in his life and attained a form of pop culture status by being president, but more importantly his inclusion speaks to the way that *Glory Daze* deals with history as a simplified and presentist version of the past that contains only the contemporarily accepted version of events. Reagan was a TV president, who became famous as a TV spokesman, and has grown into a shorthand figure to stand in for conservative 1980s, which makes him the perfect inclusion in a narrative that avoids the complex and critical.

Ronald Reagan exists as a mainstay in *Glory Daze* for one reason, and that is to quickly trigger for viewers what the 1980s was all about. The problem, however, is that this version of the 80s is too normalized, too clean to be taken seriously. It foretells a time in which Reaganomics and the "me generation" would become a joke to some people, or at the very least a simplified shorthand about the 1980s, and therefore only paints a caricature of this era that connects affectively to a surface level of shared collective history. This presentist version of Reagan is channeled through characters Jason and his girlfriend Julie, who speak in Reagan sound bites with his picture by their bed. They heavily resemble the version of young Republican dramatized by Alex P. Keaton in the 1980s sitcom *Family Ties*. *Glory Daze* has couched its simplified depiction of historical political figures within an already simplified postmodern reference. Reagan was certainly a big force in the 1980s, but *Glory Daze* would have you believe that this is the only way to connote being a part of this moment in time. A further psychic presentist mentality is exemplified in the episode "Fake Me Home Tonight" in which Julie quotes "Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole." The implication being

that in 2010 there are not many people who do not know who Bob Dole is, but in 1986 he was likely not the most quoted person. The analog being if in 2012 a character on a show quoted Harry Reid and expected everyone in the audience to know who he was. Setting up a prophetic past in a historical representation only serves to naturalize the course of events that led to today, as if they were the only choices that could have been made. This whiggish historical perspective of an uncomplicated and linear narrative where the present is the "inevitable outcome of a triumphant historical process" (Butterfield as quoted in Mayr, 1990, p. 305) was addressed in chapter three's discussion of the video game *Assassin's Creed* and proves time and time again to be an integral element in the construction of an uncritical nostalgic subjectivity that reaffirms the status quo. In *Glory Daze*, this ideologically charged form of past engagement is even present on the opposite side of Reagan's politics, as the character of Professor Aloysius Haines interjects discussions about the "shameless military-industrial complex," which seem like an oddly placed progressive voice in 1986. The political left and right of *Glory Daze* are exactly where they should be, and could not have possibly arrived to this point in any other manner, as long as the goal is to present a simplified and uncritical version of history that reaffirms the contemporary status quo. This uncritical stance is evident in the under-utilized potential of character-based dichotomies that could lead to discussion-provoking tensions between those representative of political poles, Jason and Professor Haines. Instead, this rift, very much a part of the time period, is never presented beyond its function to present each simplified political position as an object of nostalgic enjoyment. The two characters interact and coexist so amicably and tension-free that Professor Haines even becomes the faculty advisor for Jason's fraternity with nary a mention of their diametrically opposed viewpoints.

The contemporary nostalgic status quo in *Glory Daze* truly comes into focus if we explore the way that the historical content is defined by and through the pop culture media text. This extends well beyond the occasional music or film reference, and becomes the very organizing logic of the show itself. Remembering is recreating a media soaked past. Every episode of *Glory Daze* is titled with a song pun, such as "Papa Don't Pre-Game" or "Hit Me With Your Test Shot." But these songs exist as surface-level references only, functioning solely to trigger the audience's nostalgia, as none of these songs victim of the puns are actually in the episodes themselves. Much like the Adorno's recognition mechanism for the consumer of popular culture discussed in chapter four, this referential element of "self-congratulation" refuses deeper introspection in favor of momentary nostalgic triggering where viewers first surmise that they "like this particular hit (because I know it)" (2002, p. 456), and then retroactively apply this recognition to the *Glory Daze* episode. Such as is the case with the Springsteen's song that the show gets its moniker from, these songs label *Glory Daze*'s individual episodes but resist being anything more than uncritical fun. This does not mean that the content of individual episodes does not deal with music or other pop culture references, far from it. Entire episodes are dedicated to pop culture, such as in "I Ram So Far Away" in which the characters work towards getting tickets to a performance by General Public. In this episode, there are extended discussions about the origins of the band, with The English Beat splitting into General Public "who rule" and Fine Young Cannibals "who do not." All of this talk about General Public and the title of the episode are culled from the band A Flock of Seagulls. In line to get tickets, characters discuss *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) and try to solve a Rubik's Cube, further defining the 1980s by and through the pop culture media text or object creating an in-group fan dynamic by having them be in on the

joke that perhaps the younger generation is not privy to, pointing towards the dynamic discussed in chapter four where those who do not understand a reference are made retroactively nostalgic.

Defining the past through the music texts of one's youth is not exactly a novel narrative device or mnemonic trigger, and to be sure many people fondly remember their past favorite bands, but the extent to which *Glory Daze* constructs nostalgia as founded on this individualized notion points to the trend of cultivating perpetual narcissistic longing on television. To relate this in terms of the organizing heuristic of this chapter, Michael Wood describes how Proust viewed melody as "a missing memory; and memory itself, in Proust, repeatedly appears as a melody" (2010, p. 109). Corman Newark and Ingrid Wassenaar look to the way Proust describes "music's quicksilver quality" as a primary way in which "memory works on music" as a means of recognizing and re-creating (1997, p. 169), pointing to the way melodies prove elusive to know until one is given the opportunity to revisit them. *Glory Daze*, like much nostalgia triggering content, exploits the drive to recreate music driven memories through repetitious melancholic connections. On the TBS website dedicated to *Glory Daze* a section on music claims that "The '80s has a wide array of sounds ranging from Hair Metal to Post-Punk, and *Glory Daze* is making sure it includes every genre in each episode" (Turner Broadcasting Systems, 2012), implying that the producers of this show understand the alchemy necessary to engender narcissistic nostalgic subjectivities. Despite the impossibility of this all-inclusive claim, as even with the 56 songs featured in the first season's ten episodes it cannot be done, its spirit speaks to the desire to cater to the individual nostalgic who can find something to long for and try to recreate in each episode. *Glory Daze* defines the 80s through its music and asks its audience to do the same.

Characters even participate in the credit sequence featured mix tape creation, a

practice that attempts to trigger emotions through the selection of music texts, was featured

in the book/film *High Fidelity* (1995, 2000), and has been called "perhaps the most widely

practiced American art form" (O'Brien, 2001, p. 108). In the episode "Fake Me Home

Tonight", Jason tries to make up with Julie by giving her a mix tape but is rejected when she

says, "Is this how you're going to tell me how you feel, by giving me a rehash tape?" Julie

sees through the hollow nature of the mix tape's surrogate emotions, and seems to echo Paul

Stock's sentiment that when "decontextualizing the music from its original context of time or

album, we risk losing much of the inherent cultural meaning embedded in the music" (2010,

p. 285). Jason responds by making what he thinks is a better mix tape with great "cross fades,

the perfect pauses between songs" and Phil Collins' "One More Night." The mix tape version

described here is what Stock refers to as a "letter" tape, which allows "the maker to share his

or her identity safely" to a romantic partner (2010, p. 283). When he loses his car with the

tape in it he loses the ability to express himself and laments, "cars are insured, that tape was

my masterpiece." Jason uses the mix tape to define his emotions towards Julie, much in the

same way that the playlist past defines the past for nostalgics with *Glory Daze* asking

television viewers to create and maintain the same relationship between pop culture texts and

a combination of identity/history. This specific brand of triggered nostalgia as an organizing

logic of a television show, from the credits to the content, ends up manifesting itself as

misrecognition of a precious individualized past that cannot be mourned and released.

Shows like *Glory Daze* can be refuges for those constructed as perpetual individual

nostalgics, but there is also a channel that provides a veritable nightly haven of media-

defined history called The Hub. This channel consists of children's programming during the

day and at 8pm changes into nostalgic content, much in the same way Nickelodeon becomes Nick at Nite in the evening. The ratings for these nostalgic programming blocks "experienced sequential gains each month" (Szalai, 2011), culminating in "record audience deliveries" when they previewed summer nostalgic programs like *Jem and the Holograms* (1985-1988) and *Pound Puppies* (1986-1988) (Discovery Communications, 2011). Similar ratings records have been noted for other channels' nostalgic programming, such as the TeenNick's "The 90s Are All That" programming block that garnered the "highest late-night viewership levels ever" for the network and propelled it into number six among 12-34 year olds for its time slot (Seidman, 2011).

The Hub's nightly line-up of shows like *Batman* (1966-1968), *Happy Days* (1974-1984), *Laverne and Shirley* (1976-1983), *Doogie Howser, M.D.* (1989-1993), and *The Wonder Years* (1988-1993) create an evening of nostalgic flow that does not end until early the next morning. This kind of programming not only mimics other networks like Cartoon Network's "Adult Swim" line-up in their marketing to specific generations who might be awake at three in the morning, but also extends the discussion of Raymond Williams' concept of flow as it pertains to a flow of nostalgic baseline pleasures that are sequentially triggered during these programming blocks. Williams felt that television no longer offered "a programme of discrete units" but instead a "planned flow" (1974, p. 90), which could encompass an entire "evening's viewing" (1974, p. 93). But whereas Williams thought that flow had to do with getting viewers to accept a transition between different programs, sometimes not even noticing when one ended or began, flow here means creating a seamlessly nostalgic programming where viewers do not notice their continuous melancholic emotional state. There have been quite a few critiques of flow as a television studies theory,

including the notion that it lacks "clarity of definition" and has the "problem of essentialism" (Corner, 1999, p. 68), but it is still a helpful theory for thinking about how flow is carried throughout a television program, or in case of The Hub channel a set of programs.

The Hub channel's nightly programming focuses all of their viewers attention eternally backwards and asks them to consider the past as all important and melancholic in its refusal to relinquish past objects, and as such uncritically defined by the longed-for media texts. Constructing this nostalgic subjectivity means adhering to automatic nostalgic triggers, including the voice of the announcers on this channel that seem to speak to the child in all of us with their Saturday Morning Cartoon tone. These triggers appear to be working, at least from a ratings position, with the earlier mentioned "sequential gains each month" in viewers since its inception (Szalai, 2011a) as the network begins to establish itself through nostalgic shows like *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992-1995). For instance, this show enjoyed "strong year-to-year delivery gains among" key demographics that included a 500 percent increase in adult viewers 18-49 in January 2012 compared to 2011 (Kern, 2012). One key nostalgic trigger that derives from the very grammar and televisual form is The Hub brand bumpers that occur before and after commercials, making them reminiscent of children's shows where "bumpers between programs and commercials are required" (McAllister & Giglio, 2005, p. 31). But just as the children's programming bumpers have been shown to "leave much room for the cultivation of commodity flow" (McAllister & Giglio, 2005, p. 31), The Hub channel programming cultivates an enhanced nostalgic flow by harkening back to a time in viewers' lives when all their programs needed these bumpers. The audience for a *Laverne and Shirley* episode at 11pm at night is not aimed at a child demographic, but the bumpers sure make it seem that way. In between these bumpers, there exists many of the

same nostalgic intra-show commodity flow issues present in the earlier discussed *Glory Daze*

commercials, such as referential nostalgic music and themes and capturing the past, but

during The Hub's nighttime programming block there is the added element of a more focused

demographic. In knowing that those watching *Laverne and Shirley*, or *Happy Days* and

Batman, are most likely in a specific age bracket corresponding to a childhood filled with

these shows, the commercials tend to focus on either adult domestic concerns or the needs of

this generation's probable children. For example, flowing from *Laverne and Shirley* to the

Saturday Morning Cartoon style bumper to a commercial for Clorox, a commercial for a

child-friendly fruit snack Cuties, a commercial that claims Xbox's Kinect will bring the

family together, a commercial for Toys R Us, back to a mirror bumper, back into the show is

a common style of nostalgic commodity flow. The mix of grown up domesticity and

childhood toys, both staples of actual Saturday Morning Cartoon programming because of

the two main demographics watching, trigger a very familiar nostalgic televisual experience

that is reminiscent of childhood beloved texts for a demographic that may have children

themselves and are in the market for these toys for their kids. Bumpers, commercials that

mimic childhood commodity flows, and the ability to watch shows that intermingle from

different time periods contributes to an overall loss of a radical past as viewers are

transported back to multiple times in the course of an evening's flow. Monday's line-up for

The Hub during the summer of 2011 is the most explicit conflation of the past and the

present, as the more contemporary *Batman Beyond* (1999-2002) marathon from the day

flowed directly into the 1960s *Batman* marathon at night. This shift from contemporary to

vintage occurs every night on The Hub channel, but because of the character continuity this

specific programming block's loss of Jameson's radical past is more distinct.

This dynamic becomes all the more pronounced when considering The Hub's late night programming called "Huboom!" consisting of *Batman* (1966-1968), *Transformers* (1984-1988), and *G.I. Joe* (1985-1986) episodes every weekday night at 11:30pm. This consistent nostalgic programming not only contains the aforementioned Hub bumpers, but also the original bumpers from the shows themselves (Figure 13a and 13b).

Figures 13a and 13b: Huboom! bumpers conflating past and present and flowing nostalgia.

Flowing one into another, and each show progressing in their original sequential order, the attempt to construct nostalgia as concerning the perpetual recreation of a lost object is well executed here. This is especially true considering the heavily serialized nature of all three programs, and their tendency to leave on audience grabbing cliffhangers. To see what happens next to Batman or Optimus Prime, viewers must continually revisit their pasts nightly and further reify their nostalgia. The conflation of multiple time periods also continues during the Huboom! portion of The Hub's nightly line-up as *Batman* and the two animated series originally aired two decades apart. Multiple pasts conflated with each other and with the present in this recreated nostalgic media-defined history.

Implicitly Nostalgic Television Shows

Being explicit about being nostalgic does not come close to explaining the pervasive nature of longing for the past within the television medium. In fact, if viewers were only

dealing with clearly demarcated times of triggered past-focus, there would be less of a concern for the perpetual and melancholic nature of the constructed compulsive drive to recreate and retain an individual lost object. This is because the implicitly nostalgic televisual text triggers nostalgic memories on a level much closer to what Proust had in mind when he described the involuntary remembering associated with the eating of those madeleine cookies. One cannot know what will trigger the memory, which presents a paradox and misrecognition that a memory can fully be recovered, for the more one chases the memory the more it recedes. The implicitly nostalgic television text does not come right out and say "now is the time for you to long for your lost childhood objects," but instead reinforces the actual act of remembering through formal elements like character traits and narrative flashbacks despite the impossibility of recovery. For the implicitly nostalgic television text, the focus is less on vintage clothing, retro coloring, and referential music – though these elements surface often in flashbacks – and more on the validation of the remembering act itself, which is dramatized by the narratives and, subsequently, triggered in viewers. The characters may be shown continuously to be reliant on their pasts, but this triggers a sympathetic nostalgic reaction among the same viewers who were made susceptible through the more explicitly nostalgic commercials and content. To fully inundate the television consumer with nostalgia on a formal and grammar level, the object of content must be to validate a consistent past-focus in shows that do not overtly espouse this mindset. The implicitly nostalgic show attempts to raise the focus on the individual past to a status of extreme importance, even in shows that may seem on the surface to be far from nostalgic.

As an example, the ABC show *Lost* (2004-2010) appears in description to be a show overtly concerned with the future, or at the very least the present. Though some scholars

argued that *Lost* did not meet the full qualifications of the science fiction genre (Lavery, 2008), it was clear to viewers of this show that it shared many of the same tropes and characteristics of this future-facing genre, most important of which might be its inclusion of what Darko Suvin called a "novum" or new thing (as quoted in Lavery, 2008, p. 289). In describing the show as survivors of Oceanic flight 815 stranded on an unknown tropical island where they have to survive the mysterious nature of all that surrounded them, there is nothing that explicitly denotes the past as important to the show's plot. *Lost* centered around issues of geography, fertility, binaries of good and evil, which are not inherently science fiction, but when adding elements such as electromagnetism, mechanically moving islands, smoke monsters that can read your mind, the scales tip towards sci-fi. However, it would take a viewer one episode to know that this show has a perpetual focus on the importance of the personal past, implicitly validating narcissistic nostalgia by modeling such fixation in its main characters.

What was triggered was not nostalgia for a particular lost text, but rather nostalgia for individualized nostalgia in general. For much of the series, each episode focuses on one character's present on the island and past experiences off of it, shown through a flashback narrative mechanism. Early in the series, every episode is a love letter to the remembrance of a lost past object, asking the audience to nostalgically and eternally yearn for their own melancholic past. This would not be inherently problematic, as appealing to our basic human nostalgia can be natural and potentially comparative in an adaptive manner, but coupling this with contemporary media's encouragement of a media-defined narcissistic nostalgia validates a problematic individualized version of remembrance. To extend this implicit nostalgia, the series shifts its focus to time-travel during season five and never loses its concern with the

214

past events of one's life as being important to revisit. The series ends the way it started, with the consideration of one's personal history as vital to moving on. This might even be considered an adaptive look at history, even if it is personal rather than collective or cultural, but when considered as a part of the larger televisual nostalgia *Lost* predominantly serves to validate the perpetual drive to recapture an unattainable lost past.

The Fox show *Fringe* (2008-present) also presents a similar nostalgic relationship to its audience as a mirror through which to view their own relationship to their own past. In this case, Fringe is a thinly veiled future-concerned science-fiction show that hides a deep concern with personal longing for the past. The show began as weekly exploration of atomized pseudo-scientific phenomenon purported to be linked together with something called "The Pattern." It was not until the season one finale that the show revealed these seemingly unconnected occurrences as the result of an impending war between two parallel universes. Not only did the show demonstrate renewed focus with this revelation, but it also began to show signs of its true nostalgic nature, one eternally concerned with the lamentation over a lost past.

The main characters of the show, Olivia Dunham, Peter Bishop, and father Walter Bishop become examples of the personal past validated, as the consequences of their historical actions are continually revisited and ruminated. In essence we are made to care about characters that live in a world dominated by their own pasts. As a transition between the first and second seasons, it is revealed that Walter crossed into the "other" parallel universe to kidnap their version of his son Peter because Walter's actual son had died. During the second season, and explicitly in the episode "Peter", the kidnapping is shown to have been the cause of all the show's parallel universe friction. The reliance on a validation of and

constant revisiting of the past was furthered in this episode with the title sequence changed to resemble 1980s scientific concerns and graphics, this being the time period of the other universe Peter abduction (Figures 14a and 14b).

Figures 14a and 14b: A change in the font, graphics, and "fringe" science terms reflects certain episodes of *Fringe*'s concern with a nostalgic mindset.

This flashback sequence matches the "retro" title sequence in its ability to trigger its nostalgia through technological advancements, or lack thereof. Where the title sequence uses contemporary commonplace words like "personal computing" to highlight a time when they were considered futuristic, the flashback episode "Peter" consistently alerts the audience that they are in the 1980s by highlighting the technology of that era, or a lack of contemporary technology. For instance, the episode opens with an exterior shot of a city filled with blocky cars from the 1980s, then cuts inside a nondescript office building to a tracking shot across multiple period-appropriate computer work stations, complete with rotary telephones. In the subsequent scene, Walter describes cell phones to a group of awestruck high-ranking government officials, connecting this scene to the one described in *Glory Daze* that conflates the past with the present, further highlighting to the *Fringe* audience through technology that this episode will be about longing for the past. Flashbacks, 1980s graphics, and retro technology are not reserved for Peter-centric storylines alone, as Olivia gets the same retro-

importance placed on her memories in the season three episode "Subject 13" where it is revealed that a slip of the tongue in the 1980s caused the war-like stance the "other" universe takes towards ours. A show that relies so much on futuristic scientific processes and progress, even going so far as to jump forward fifteen years into the future in the season three finale, inversely creates an over-reliance on the persistent exploration of the past and in doing so implicitly triggers and validates television's contemporary concern with the nostalgic.

One of the most clearly observable examples of a perpetual nostalgia validating television show could be argued to occupy both an explicit and implicit relationship towards longing for a lost past object. Technically set in the year 2030 – a time that looks blandly like our present – *How I Met Your Mother* chronicles the retelling of a parental meeting by a father to his children. The children in 2030 are seen in the beginning of some of the episodes accompanied by an offscreen father's voice, but the primary setting of the show is present day. The show debuted in 2005 with the memories of the same year being told to the children. Viewers of this show occupy an odd relationship to the past on the screen, as it is their present. The narrative structure of this show proves to not only create nostalgia about a time that has not even passed yet, but also validates all forms of individualized nostalgia as one of the most important activities in one's life. There is not even the seemingly obligatory contrived catalyst in the characters' 2030 present that spurs this focus on the nostalgic past; it is simply presented as an ever-important characteristic to have regardless of the situation. There are some complicated dynamics that will be dealt with, most notably the faulty nature of a personal memory, but in the end *How I Met Your Mother* is the perfect text for dramatizing the way in which the media constructs and validates subjects who are perpetual individual nostalgic subjects, even if it is technically an implicit nostalgia for the present.

The past, and significantly an individual's past, is of the utmost importance to the characters of *How I Met Your Mother*, sometimes referred to as *HIMYM*. The main character Ted Mosby, the one in search of the eventual mate who will be the 2030 children's mother, recounts a tale that is anything but brief. When the producers of the show decided on a title, they ensured that continued success would mean continually adding more tangents and plotlines before the introduction of the mother. Like many serialized shows today, producers claim to "have an idea of where [the series] will end up" asking only for audiences' continued trust (Gelman, 2010). Here the very point of the show, the introduction of the mother figure, is infinitely delayed in a manner that suggests that once the reveal is made the show will be over. Analogs can be drawn to the figure of Scheherazade who, knowing that she is to be killed each morning, creates an exciting cliffhanger at the end of each night to ensure her survival for one more day, or in the case of *How I Met Your Mother* one more episode. This extended arc affords the show the ability to explore the minute details of the late 20s and early 30s of not only Ted, but also his friends Marshall, Lily, Barney, and Robin. Nostalgically, this functions to validate an eternal concern with every single detail from the past. The 2030 children often remark that their father has been telling the story "forever," and in the season two episode "Brunch" Ted's parents tell him the story of how they met by simply saying "Oh, great story, at a bar." Despite this gentle ribbing about the length of the show's overarching "story," individual nostalgia is ultimately validated as all-important.

The past is so important to the characters of *HIMYM*, that many episodes are based around stories being told within the main 2030 story. Episodes like season two "The Scorpion and the Toad," season three "How I Met Everyone Else," and season five "Perfect Week" all revolve around nesting stories that evolve into multi-layered retellings. The most

over the top example being the season three episode "The Platinum Rule" where Ted is recalling a story to his children about Barney telling him a story about when Lily and Marshall told Robin a story about when Barney told her a story. It is quite the complex episode. This common show dynamic ups the nostalgic impact of this show even more, as the main character is basically waxing nostalgic about being nostalgic to his kids. As noted in some of these examples, the teller of the story within a story is not always Ted, which leads to a further validation of the personal account as important with future Ted relaying second-hand information to his children as historical fact.

How I Met Your Mother does, however, complicate some of these issues along the way, especially as they relate to the inherently faulty nature of human memory. Ted Mosby is talking to his children in 2030, representing a couple of mitigating factors when considering the relative "accuracy" of this fictional oral history. In many episodes, future Ted is either wrong about how something happened, unwilling to present the entire story to his children because of adult themes and incriminating information, or Ted did not get the whole truth from one of his friends, especially Barney. Series co-creator and show runner Craig Thomas describes this somewhat unreliable narrator as "a guy who is telling the story so many years in the future, and he jumbles it up in his memory a little bit" (Ghosh, 2008). Though accuracy of narrator's remembrances is less important as a model when dealing with the validation of an implicit nostalgia ingrained by repeatedly dramatizing longing as a positive contemporary trait, it does point to the potential contained in addressing the past as more complex and unable to be fully understood/remembered.

There are quite a few examples of this potentially nuanced look at the past occurring and as the series has progressed it has embraced this dynamic more fully. A great example of

this occurs in the season three episode "The Goat" in which future Ted stops his story about a goat let loose in his apartment because he realizes he has mixed up the year it happened. Sometimes the information about the past is unavailable, such as in the season five episode "Zoo or False" where Marshall has been mugged and after multiple versions of the story it is unclear whether he had his wallet stolen by an armed assailant or a monkey. Because of Marshall's unwillingness to reveal the truth in 2010, Ted is unable to say with confidence what happened when telling the story in 2030. Barney is the most common offender of distorting the truth, as many times his female conquests are revealed to have not happened as he originally stated, such as in season six episode "Oh Honey" where it is revealed that Barney spent the night crying on a woman's shoulder instead of sleeping with her like he had previously said. Barney's distorted reality stems from his mother's unwillingness to tell him the truth about his father, highlighted in season six's "Cleaning House." Similarly, there are moments when future Ted purposefully withholds information from his children, such as in the season five episode "Last Cigarette Ever," when he accidently reveals to his children that all of the group of friends, including himself, smoked at one time or another. Through the unreliable narrator and memory questioning *How I Met Your Mother* borders on a more nuanced look at history as something that needs to be explored for contradictory and complicated progressions, however, the overpowering effect of personal nostalgia as supremely validated creates a text that is more uncritical than comparative. In the season six finale, Robin tells Ted that "the future is scary, but you can't just run back to the past because it's familiar." This is advice that Ted never really follows. Ted still continues to tell his story, regardless of the clear memory missteps, and the only thing more validated than the perpetual individual nostalgic is the commodification of the past during the commercial breaks.

Conclusion

Looking at the television line-up for the 2011-2012 season, it quickly becomes evident that the industry believes shows that trigger or reify a nostalgic view of the past are a safe bet for programming. Adding to the already nostalgic line-up of shows like *Hawaii Five-0, How I Met Your Mother*, and *Nikita*, the five major networks recently premiered at least six shows that exemplified this phenomenon. ABC brought back the 1970s with a *Charlie's Angels* remake (2011). NBC and ABC brought back the 1960s with their respective series *The Playboy Club* (2011) and *Pan Am* (2011-present). There was not one but two shows founded on fairy tales called *Once Upon a Time* (2011-present) on ABC and *Grimm* (2011-present) on NBC. With remakes of *Napoleon Dynamite* as a Fox animated series, which debuted in 2012, and a planned 2013 reboot of *The Flintstones*, there is no shortage of future nostalgia on television.

However, it is not enough to simply look at the line-up and point out the obvious remakes and shows centered on historical representations. Television nostalgia, instead, burrows itself much deeper into every content area of this medium in a way that matches the pervasive and cross-media manner with which this dissertation has been so concerned. A kind of "nostalgic flow" is created that maintains the momentum of past-oriented programming in a significant way throughout advertising and scheduling. Television may be a fractured medium with countless idiosyncratic ways to consume its content, some that are important to the development of nostalgia in digital access outlets, but narcissistic nostalgia holds because a dominant aesthetic/mode of this medium is one that constructs nostalgia no matter what the content or viewing situation. The common denominator for the commodity audience is a predictable nostalgia for a commercial medium that can be reified and evoked,

whether viewers are watching The Hub's Saturday Morning Cartoon nostalgic commodity flow or are being triggered automatically to remember *Star Wars* through *That '70s Show*'s references followed by Volkswagen's *Star Wars*-defined 2011 ad. Nostalgia flows through all levels of the television medium, and the result is a construction of viewers who are asked to examine the past only on a cursory and shallow level at the expense of any form of significant engagement. The 1980s means your favorite Flock of Seagulls hit or your favorite line from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and the 1970s means an obsession over *Star Wars* or watching *Hawaii Five-0* conveniently remade to encourage longing, not an exploration of the complex, multi-faceted decades that they were.

Concluding Remarks

<div align="right">

"And reruns all become our history"
- Goo Goo Dolls, "Name"

</div>

As media texts from our past come to replace our shared, collective history with a narcissistic version that is only concerned with mediated definitions and understandings, the result is a problematic, myopic, and solipsistic formulation of thought and contemplation. When reruns are all we know of our history, what is lost is the common ground that binds us together as a society, a culture, and humanity. By perpetually gazing backwards only at the individual media texts with which we grew up loving, the constructed definition of ourselves becomes based on an uncritical perspective. This loss of critique, of comparison, of adaption, is not due to simply looking backwards in time nostalgically, as this is not an inherently problematic action. When one gazes into their past, free from mediation, this is not something to be automatically derided even if it takes a nostalgic and yearning tone. In the Barenaked Ladies song "The Old Apartment," from the same era as the above quoted "Name," the singer laments the passing of a simpler time by breaking into one of his previous dwellings and reminiscing about "crooked landings" and "mousetraps." This offender of breaking and entering laws does not fall into the melancholic and narcissistic media nostalgic, as he is simply comparing his new life, where he claims to be happy, to his old apartment in a healthy, albeit illegal, comparative manner. In fact, this is precisely what is lost when the definition of the past is based on our connections to past media that we are constructed to maintain melancholic attachments to. Whereas the reflection on an individual unmediated past falls under a category of potential comparative consideration for the benefit of the present or future, allowing reruns and other nostalgic media to constitute the reflected upon history leads to a stunting of any form of critical past.

Conceptions of nostalgia are normatively stratified in terms of its perceived levels of cultural benefit or detriment, with many authors displaying complex and contradictory thoughts. Some feel strongly that nostalgia still carries the "dangers of stasis, the failure to change" (Bonnett, 2010, p. 3), and technological advancements have led to Viktor Mayer-Schönberger's admonishment of the monumental societal shift to a "default of remembering" (2009, p. 11), which is a digitized version of Borges' story of a character with perfect memory. Mayer-Schönberger describes a situation where "Google knows more about us then we can remember ourselves" to the point that we cannot, and will not ever, escape these digital pasts (2009, p. 7). It is as if a version of Plato's critique of writing in "The Phaedrus" has come to fruition in an embellished and somewhat opposite manner. Whereas Plato feared writing would stunt our ability, or desire, to commit complex matters to memory, Mayer-Schönberger describes digital culture as destroying the need, or ability, to forget. Mayer-Schönberger predicts, much in same way that Borges' character Funes the memorius is debilitated in everyday life, "through perfect memory we may lose a fundamental human capacity - to live and act firmly in the present" (2009, p. 12). Mayer-Schönberger is not describing hyper-nostalgia, or a perpetual focus on an individual and myopic past, but his Nietzsche-like concerns over an excess of history that will "prompt us to become caught up in our memories, unable to leave our past behind" (2009, p. 13), do echo some of the concerns of this dissertation.

However, many of these same authors found that certain forms of nostalgia contain potentials not found in others. Consensus seems to be that the highest and healthiest level would be considered a broad collective stance where "radical, progressive nostalgia...can become available and advantageous under specific social, historical, cultural, and

performative circumstances" (Bonnett, 2010, p. 42), a view shared by this dissertation. Here, nostalgia is used to look back on one's culture and while yearning for the past we are spurred to some future action or thought. The next level would be similar to the collective and adaptive nostalgia, but simply applied to one's own individual past. The apartment example listed above would fall into this category as the comparison is drawn between now and then, adhering to Jameson's radical past ideal, and utilizing nostalgia adaptively. Dickinson and Erben posit that to be this type of nostalgic is "not simply to be interested in the past" but is closer to having "the opinion that some past events or objects are (in some respects at least) better than their replacements" (2006, p. 224). Though Dickinson and Erben describe this as not the commonly held definition of nostalgia, they do note that "[s]uch a view sees the past in an analytic, historical perspective" (2006, p. 224). What these two levels of nostalgia have, that the constructed narcissistic media nostalgic does not is the ability to employ their yearning in an adaptive reflection. The narcissistic nostalgic instead is placed before a mediated past similar to the one Harry Potter experienced in front of the Mirror of Erised. Harry was given a vision of whatever his heart desired most, which became for him an idealized and transfixing version of history where he grew up with loving and living parents. For the perpetual individual nostalgic, this idealized vision is presented not through a mirror, but through media that continually exploits a constructed drive to recapture lost media objects that have been altered, remade, and made "better" through the passage of time.

By continually presenting the same past content in newer and idealized versions, contemporary media encourages an attachment to these objects that is strong, unwavering, and perpetual. Instead of allowing the past to be considered for what is was, in its original context, there is an eternal return that Adorno says "transforms everything freshly

encountered into a reiteration of what is always already present" (Schweppenhäuser &
Rolleston, 2009, p. 148), and leads to a melancholic relationship to these media objects that
have come to define consumers history. Without the eternal return to these beloved past
media objects, a healthy longing and eventual release could be achieved more in line with an
adaptive addressing of history. Freud described this as mourning, where "[i]n ordinary grief,
gradually and painfully, libido is withdrawn from the lost object, so that when the mourning
process is completed 'the ego becomes free and uninhibited again'" (Dickinson & Erben,
2006, p. 229). Instead, contemporary media's construction of the nostalgic encourages
melancholia where "the libido continues to be attached to a lost object, and the pain of loss
does not lessen in the normal way" (Dickinson & Erben, 2006, p. 229). The narcissistic
nostalgic is invited to psychically invest in this mediated vision of the past again and again,
until it is reified into something fixed and eternal.

The fixed and eternal reification of nostalgic and mediated pasts is not simply a
matter of film remakes or DVD box sets, as it represents a convergent and cross-media
contemporary tendency that has broad reaching implications. As an organizing logic, it may
be helpful to bring back Williams' concept of "flow" and the nostalgic commodity flow
posited in the previous chapter. If we consider nostalgia, and the specific manner in which
contemporary media construct melancholic longing, as a yearning that has been engineered
to traverse all forms of media then nostalgic commodity flow is an appropriate label. The
past has been commodified and positioned as a fixed point of libidinal energy that consumers
are asked to eternally and perpetually return to in an attempt to recapture a lost past object.
Consumers are made to "chase" their memories from medium to medium, from film remake

to collector's DVDs of the original, all the while pursuing an impossible nostalgic drive to re-experience a media-defined past that has been idealized and modernized.

As an example, we can follow one nostalgic brand or set of texts associated with one nostalgic brand through the convergent media described in this dissertation to both explain the flow of nostalgia as well as pull together the main claims of this dissertation. Other examples could certainly be used for this purpose, but we will look at the brand that is Spider-Man and the various cross-media nostalgic attachments that have been formed as of late. Newly available digital downloads of vintage Spider-Man television series, a multitude of Spider-Man video games that contain implicitly nostalgic button configurations, the 2012 *The Amazing Spider-Man* reboot, and the reruns of various Spider-Man series airing concurrently on television channels like Disney XD all contribute to a nostalgic flow that encourages consumers to devote time and energy to maintaining connections to their individualized beloved web slinger.

After laying out the broad concerns in chapter one, the second chapter of this dissertation worked through the related arguments that contemporary digital media and its archive apparatus had provided unparalleled access to nostalgic texts and had grown to the point that a myopic collector's mentality was engendered. A repetitive collector's mentality towards history is crucial in the construction of individualized playlist pasts, and we can use the example of Spider-Man to show how access, many times, starts the nostalgic cross-media flow by reminding consumers what they had lost. Visiting Netflix's current instant streaming archive, those who loved Spider-Man are treated to unlimited access to nearly every single animated television series derived from this brand. Users can watch *Spider-Man* (1967-1970), *Spider-Man* (1981-1982), *Spider-Man* (1994-1998), *Spider-Man: Unlimited* (1999-

2001), and as such multiple time periods are conflated and no generations are left out of the nostalgic flow. In case the nostalgic wants something more tactile to collect, they have access to all of these series available in DVD box sets. The individual playlist past begins with the collection of nostalgic texts and the reminder/maintenance of melancholic attachments to beloved media.

Being reminded of beloved texts is not the whole story, as it becomes important to reinforce nostalgia through repetitive behaviors connected to the experience of the nostalgic text. The video game medium provided for an illustrative example of this behavioral reinforcement of perpetual nostalgia, through the playing of explicitly and implicitly past-oriented games. The obvious repeated behaviors would come from literally replaying the same games from years past, which is certainly the case with the glut of game remakes, ports, and digital downloads of actual vintage games. But there is also the massively popular historical representation game that tends to center around World War II and the Wild West as well as the implicit video game remake that has players performing similar tasks with similar characters and similar button configurations iteration after iteration. Oddly enough, Spider-Man video games fall into each of these three categories at one time or another. Spider-Man has appeared on no less than a dozen major consoles over the years, and the availability of many of these games for digital download today takes care of the literal replaying of past Spider-Man texts. A more contemporary series that began with *Spider-Man: Web of Shadows* (2008) illustrates the implicit remake tendency in terms of its button configuration. This game along with *Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions* (2010) and *Spider-Man: Edge of Time* (2011) share the exact same button mapping and move execution, and represent the tendency of contemporary games to implicitly reach backwards through behavioral repetition and

validate an eternal return to the past. These games also have Spider-Man travelling through time and dimensions so that this series can lead players through familiar mediated pasts. For example, one of the playable characters/dimensions is simply called "Noir Spider-Man," and carries all the appropriate tropes and characteristics of this temporally located film genre. All this repeated past at the fingertips, and thumbs, of video game players keeps the past close and reinforces a focus on an easily mastered and simplistic mediated history.

Examining nostalgia's flow from one medium to the next, it becomes evident quickly that this is an economically fruitful and exploitative construction of the past as all-important and defined by beloved media texts. Economic benefits answer the broad motivation to repeat on the part of media producers. The next question would be whether the sole intent of those in the business of replicating, idealizing, and reimagining the past was to appeal to those who previously knew and loved the original texts to which they were melancholically attached. The fourth chapter served as an epistemological exploration of these economic motivations, because it is one thing to highlight the growing narcissistic nostalgia present in contemporary media, but it is another thing entirely to examine why this phenomenon persists. Instead of looking at hard data to determine whether nostalgic films, specifically remakes, sold more tickets to those who grew up during the original film's release, this chapter concentrated on the barrier of knowledge needed to fully understand the remake's references and expansions on character back story. What audience segment was the remake "talking to" through its exposition, changes, or time-shifts? It was determined that the tendency of the contemporary remake was to primarily target those who knew and loved the original films in an attempt to garner built-in, or as close to guaranteed audiences as possible. Simultaneously, though certainly unequally, content producers looked to create retroactive

nostalgia in the uninitiated by purposefully withholding key information necessary to fully understand all the remake's references, thereby forging a nostalgic in-group and out-group where the out-group would desire to fill in the gaps later through DVDs or Netflix. Our organizing example, the Spider-Man brand, fits into this flow through its upcoming film series reboot that is being released only five years after the last film in the previous series. It is yet to be seen whether the barrier of knowledge will be the same for this remake of recent past, but if this film follows the tendencies of most contemporary remakes then it will be a mixture of audience demographic targeting that serves to both encourage the maintenance of previously held melancholic attachments as well as encourage retroactive nostalgia.

In the final full chapter of this dissertation, the idea of the commodity flow of nostalgia came fully into focus as the cross-media characteristics of the perpetual individual nostalgic's construction were displayed in every aspect of the diverse and fractured medium of television. Describing how a nostalgic "mood," and in this case an uncritical and "buying" mood, is maintained through programming and advertisements highlighted how the feeling of nostalgia could flow through programs and whole channels. When a show that is explicitly or implicitly nostalgic flows into commercials with nostalgic music, themes, or even characters the result is a powerful encouragement to "stay" in the past as opposed to engaging with the present or preparing for the future. When viewers tune in to Disney XD to watch reruns of *Spider-Man and his Amazing Friends* (1981-1983) right next to reruns of the 1990s *Spider-Man* animated series not only are the two time periods conflated at the expense of a radical past, but they also contribute to the de-contextualizing, idealizing, and universalizing of nostalgic mediated history. It is not hard to define one's past through Spider-Man when

contemporary media tells its consumers that he will always be accessible and the recovery of the past he influenced is always attainable.

Watching how nostalgia can flow from medium to medium, whether through the lens of Spider-Man or any other individually selected text, the stakes of this contemporary media phenomenon begin to come into relief. The cultural implications of an eternal return to nostalgia is an arresting of individuals in an uncritical mindset that has increasingly defined who we are as people and societies by what media we consumed as children. Whether it is wearing a t-shirt with a favorite *Karate Kid* reference or rearranging a DVD shelf full of television box sets, the unblinking gaze towards the past knows no progress or at the very least does not employ the past as a comparative tableau to adaptively engage with the present or future. It is not that one still loves any of the specific texts mentioned in this dissertation, from *Back to the Future* to *Zelda*. Instead, it is that media doggedly encourages a devotion of libidinal energy towards one's own specific and myopic playlist that feigns a shared cultural base but really points to an insular and postmodern surface understanding of history. The 2011 novel *Ready Player One* by Ernest Cline takes readers to a future where everyone has become retroactively obsessed with the media texts of the 1980s because a deceased benevolent billionaire has set up a contest where solving virtual world puzzles constructed around 1980s media texts that he loved net a single player unlimited riches and fame. By knowing and reveling in the individually selected playlist of nostalgic texts, now altered and idealized by virtue of being in this digitized and interactive world, the past is myopic and solipsistic, and fully defined by one person's melancholic attachments.

What the contemporary media consumer is left with is the drive to recreate a version of history that is comprised of their playlist past, a collection of altered, contemporized, and

idealized texts that have come to define them and their individual history. Gone is the collective conception of eras and times lost, and replacing it is the idea that to truly understand whom I am as a person and how I got here, all you have to do is look at my constellation of cross-media texts I loved as a child. These highly tuned playlists contain movies, music, television shows, video games, and even t-shirts, creating a collage or mix-tape of the person's past. The issue becomes that these beloved past texts are not used to reflect on how much one has changed since you wore *Karate Kid* (1984) pajamas and practiced your best crane kick – something this author most certainly did – as the newest version of *Karate Kid* (2011) has come along to encourage the psychic reinvestment of melancholic nostalgia. In the book *Your Playlist Can Change Your Life*, authors Mindlin, DuRousseau, and Cardillo discuss how "you can use your self-prescribed personal playlist to achieve a higher level of mental functioning and to enhance your well-being in all that you do" (2012, p. 3). In the case of the narcissistic nostalgic's playlist past, what has been trained through repeated use of self-prescribed playlists is a fiercely guarded melancholic attachment to texts that now define a lost past and have taken on contemporary characteristics and qualities not present in their original context. Mindlin, DuRousseau, and Cardillo note you can use "music to set your brain into its best remembering mode, to help you better commit anything to memory, deepen its storage, and recall it faster" (2012, p. 5), only in the case of the perpetual nostalgic what is recalled faster is a mediated and shallow history.

Even considering the above musings about the Barenaked Ladies, the Goo Goo Dolls, and playlists that can change your life, music has not been a primary focus of this analysis. Music, however, is inextricably tied to our individual pasts and our subsequent nostalgia for them. Simon Reynolds, in his book *Retromania*, tackles many issues of contemporary

media's addiction to its own past, but turns most of his focus to music's unending use and re-use of the vintage. This music insider perspective examines "[b]and reformations and reunion tours, tribute albums and box sets, anniversary festivals and live performances of classic albums" (2011, p. ix). He posits that "each new year is better than the last one for music from yesteryear" (2011, p. ix). Calling himself a "futurist," Reynolds derides the tendency of contemporary music to recycle, saying that the "strangeness" of sampling and mash-ups "has worn away after all these years" and have become a kind of "futures past" (2011, p. 311), putting this practice in league with the much discussed in this dissertation idealized version of a historical text that flattens the distinction between the past and the present.

When Reynolds calls himself a "futurist," it is difficult to not think about the future path of nostalgia and to think about how this contemporary media trend will progress. This dissertation has advocated for a form of critical reflection that sees the past as containing rich adaptive potential for the present or future, but is this a foreseeable possibility considering the economic benefits of media's present mode of presenting the past? Is there a possible future in which the critical past, and not the simplistic and recombined past, is a viable or salesworthy commodity? The answer comes down to technologies and the possibilities they hold, much like Robert Ray's and Jeremy Packer's positions that certain technologies open up specific modes of consumption versus others. Narcissistic nostalgia is highly marketable right now, but will this continue to be the case if eventually all content is available to be instantly streamed? Certain characteristics will suffer, such as the selectivity of only marketable texts, but others might be emboldened, such as the defining of the past through individual media texts now that everyone's "favorite" is accessible. These questions and possible answers point towards a possible and eventual "end" to the particular mode of media

nostalgia that is presented in this dissertation, though what comes after could be equally or more problematic depending on factors that range from cultural, economical, and certainly technological.

With the future in question, the focus must be on the critical intervention at hand within this dissertation, as the contemporary construction of history as increasingly defined by beloved past media texts that have been altered to reflect contemporary technology, mores, and ideologies, is not only a dangerous presentist approach but is also highly beneficial for those involved in repackaging and selling the past. By cultivating these melancholic attachments, everything from anniversary editions to glossy new remakes have a much better chance of succeeding. Coupling this nostalgic exploitation with the uncritical definition of history as playlist past, contributes to a problematic presentist mentality that simply reaffirms the contemporary status quo. We must resist or at least recognize the playlist past as a commodified version of history that asks us consumers to actively maintain a connection to our beloved childhood media objects by reinvesting our energy and, of course, our money over and over again. Mourning a past media text and releasing it would mean that content producers would need to continually replace creative content with innovative fresh media, whereas encouraging melancholia leads to money-saving and demographic-tested continual recycling and repackaging of the same content. A playlist past is an individual and uncritical familiar past, and an uncritical familiar past is a bankable past.

References:

Adorno, T. W. (1976). *Introduction to the sociology of music*. New York: The Seabury Press.

Adorno, T. W. (2001). *The culture industry: Selected essays on mass culture*. Ed. J.M. Bernstein. New York: Routledge.

Adorno, T. W. (2002). *Essays on music: Theodor W. Adorno*. R. Leppert, (Ed.). Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Allen, R. (1995). *Projecting illusion: Film spectatorship and the impression of reality.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Althusser, L. (2006). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses. In M. G. Durham & D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and cultural studies: Keyworks* (pp. 79-87). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Amazon. (2004). Customer reviews: *Happy Days - the complete first season. Amazon.* Retrieved 27 April 2011, from http://www.amazon.com/Happy-Days-Complete-First-Season/product-reviews/B000291Q3Y/ref=dp_top_cm_cr_acr_txt?ie=UTF8&showViewpoints=1

American Film Institute. (2007). AFI's 100 years...100 movies: 10th anniversary edition. *AFI*. Retrieved 30 January 2012, from http://www.afi.com/100Years/movies10.aspx

Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2001). Effects of violent video games on aggressive behavior, aggressive cognition, aggressive affect, physiological arousal, and prosocial behavior: A meta-analytic review of the scientific literature. *Psychological Science*, *12*(5), 353-359.

Anderson, T. L., & Hill, P. J. (2000). *The not so wild, Wild West: Property rights on the frontier*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Apatow, J. (Director). (2004). Carded and discarded - Audio commentary. In J. Apatow & P. Feig (Producers), *Freaks and Geeks: The Complete Series* [DVD]. United States: Shout! Factory.

Apperley, T. H. (2006). Genre and game studies: Towards a critical approach to video game genres. *Simulation Gaming*, 37(1), 6-23.

Arnett, J. J. (2006). Emerging adulthood. In J. J. Arnett & J. L. Tanner (Eds.), *Emerging adults in America: Coming of age in the 21st century* (pp. 3-19). Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Bayly, T. H. (Composer). (1827). Isle of beauty, fare thee well! [Sheet music]. In T. H. Bayly (Composer), *First Volume of Songs to Rosa*. New York: Bourne.

Beer, D. (2008). The iconic interface and the veneer of simplicity. *Information, Communication & Society, 11*(1), 71-88.

Benjamin, W. (1968). *Illuminations: Essays and reflections*. H. Arendt, (Ed.). (H. Zohn, Trans.). New York: Schocken Books.

Benjamin, W. (1999). *The arcades project.* R. Tiedemann, (Ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Benjamin, W. (2006). The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. In M. G. Durham & D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and cultural studies: Keyworks* (pp. 18-40). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Benson, T. W., & Anderson, C. (2002). *Reality fictions: The films of Frederick Wiseman* (second edition). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Bernstein, R. (10 January 2008). One-third of young women have bachelor's degrees. *U.S. Census Bureau News*. Retrieved 30 January 2012, from http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/education/cb08-10.html

Blankshore. (17 February 2009). Re: Best Mario Kart track ever - final poll. *Gamespot*. Retrieved 27 October 2011, from http://www.gamespot.com/forums/topic/26783362

Bogost, I. (2006). Videogames and ideological frames. *Popular Communication*, *4*(3), 165-183.

Bolter, J. D., & Grusin, R. (1999). *Remediation: Understanding new media.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Booker, M. K. (2006). *Alternate Americas: Science fiction film and American culture*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Bonnett, A. (2010). *Left in the past: Radicalism and the politics of nostalgia*. London: Continuum.

Borges, J. L. (1962). *Ficciones*. New York: Grove Press.

Bouzereau, L. (Director). (2010). Making the trilogy. In N. Canton & B. Gale (Producer), *Back to the Future: 25th Anniversary Trilogy* [Blu-Ray]. United States: Universal Studios Home Entertainment.

Box Office Mojo. (2010a). 2009 domestic grosses. *Box Office Mojo*. Retrieved 15 September 2011, from http://boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=2009&p=.htm

Box Office Mojo. (2010b). Avatar. *Box Office Mojo*. Retrieved 15 September 2011, from http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=avatar.htm

Box Office Mojo. (2011a). 2010 domestic grosses. *Box Office Mojo*. Retrieved 15 September 2011, from http://boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=2010&p=.htm

Box Office Mojo. (2011b). Comedy remakes. *Box Office Mojo*. Retrieved 15 September 2011, from http://boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=comedyremake.htm

Boym, S. (2001). *The future of nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.

Bradley, C., & Schroeder, R. D. (2009). Because it's free poker! A qualitative analysis of free Texas Hold'Em poker tournaments. *Sociological Spectrum*, *29*(3), 401-430.

Brooker, W. (18 March 2005). Everything will flow. *FlowTV*. Retrieved 15 December 2011, from http://flowtv.org/2005/03/everything-will-flow/

Brookey, R. A., & Westerfelhaus, R. (2002). Hiding homoeroticism in plain view: The *Fight Club* DVD as digital closet. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *19*(1), 21-43.

Brookey, R. A., & Westerfelhaus, R. (2005). The digital auteur: Branding identity on the *Monsters, Inc.* DVD. *Western Journal of Communication*, *69*(2), 109-128.

Buckholtz, H. (2 March 2011). 54 cereals we loved and lost - A tribute. *Urlesque*. Retrieved 18 May 2011, from http://www.urlesque.com/2011/03/02/54-vintage-cereals/

Burston, J. (2009). Recombinant Broadway. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, 23*(2), 159-169.

Butler, S. H. (2002). *Retelling a tale of the West: Akira Kurosawa's* Yojimbo *and its remakes* (Unpublished master's thesis). Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA.

Cabral, M. (6 July 2010). A history of GTA and how it helped shape Red Dead Redemption. *Gamepro*. Retrieved 27 October 2011, from http://www.gamepro.com/article/features/215738/a-history-of-gta-and-how-it-helped-shape-red-dead-redemption/

Calcutt, A. (1998). *Arrested development: Pop culture and the erosion of adulthood.* Washington D.C.: Cassell Publishing.

Caldwell, J. T. (2005). Welcome to the viral future of cinema (television). *Cinema Journal, 45*(1), 90-117.

Carey, J. (2009). *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society*. New York: Routledge.

Church, J., & Gandal, N. (1992). Network effects, software provision, and standardization. *The Journal of Industrial Economics, 40*(1), 85-103.

Chou, H., & Lien, N. (2010). Advertising effects of songs' nostalgia and lyrics' relevance. *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics, 22*(3), 314-329.

Cline, E. (2011). *Ready player one*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Clover, C. (1992). *Men, women, and chainsaws: Gender in the modern horror film*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Coontz, S. (1992). *The way we never were: American families and the nostalgia trap*. New York: Basic Books.

Copjec, J. (1994). *Read my desire*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Corner, J. (1999). *Critical ideas in television studies*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Davis, A. Y. (1994). Afro images: Politics, fashion, and nostalgia. *Critical Inquiry, 21*(1), 37-45.

Davison, P. (21 February 2011). Happy 25th birthday, Zelda. *Gamepro*. 21 Retrieved 22 March 2011, from http://www.gamepro.com/article/news/218265/top-story-happy-25th-birthday-zelda/

Discovery Communications. (1 June 2011). The Hub TV network generates 'truly outrageous' record ratings with holiday weekend sneak peek preview of summer programming. *Discovery Press Web*. Retrieved 7 December 2011, from http://press.discovery.com/us/hub/press-releases/2011/hub-tv-network-generates-truly-outrageous-rec-1344/

de Groot, J. (2009). *Consuming history*. New York: Routledge.

Debord, G. (1983). *Society of the spectacle*. London: Rebel Press.

Deery, J. (2004). Reality TV as advertainment. *Popular Communication*, *2*(1), 1-20.

Deesing, J. (6 September 2011). Video game delays: The longer we wait, the worse they get. *G4Tv*. Retrieved 25 January 2011, from http://www.g4tv.com/thefeed/blog/post/716104/video-game-delays-the-longer-we-wait-the-worse-they-get/

DeRose, J., Fürsich, E., & Haskins, E. (2003). Pop (up) goes the Blind Date: Supertextual constraints on 'reality' television. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, *27*(2), 171-189.

DeVane, B., & Squire, K. D. (2008). The meaning of race and violence in Grand Theft Auto. *Games and Culture*, *3*(3-4), 264-285.

Dickinson, H., & Erben, M. (2006). Nostalgia and autobiography: The past in the present. *Autobiography*, *14*(3), 223-244.

Digital Entertainment Group. (2011). Industry data. *Degonline*. Retrieved 15 September 2011, from http://www.degonline.org/

Dika, V. (2003). *Recycled culture in contemporary art and film: The uses of nostalgia*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Donaldson-McHugh, S., & Moore, D. (2006). Film adaptation, co-authorship, and hauntology: Gus Van Sant's *Psycho* (1998). *The Journal of Popular Culture, 39*(2), 225-233.

Drake, P. (2008). Distribution and marketing in contemporary Hollywood. In P. McDonald & J. Wasko (Eds.), *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry* (pp. 63-82). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Durkee, R. (1999). *American Top 40: the countdown of the century*. New York: Schirmer Books.

Eco, U. (1986). *Travels in hyperreality: Essays.* (W. Weaver, Trans.). San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers.

Eldridge, J., & Eldridge, L. (1994). *Raymond Williams: Making connections*. London: Routledge.

Erisman, F. (1992). The night Christopher Lloyd danced with Mary Steenburgen. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, *20*(1), 29-33.

Entertainment Software Association. (2011). Gameplayer data. *TheESA*. Retrieved April 2011, from http://www.theesa.com/facts/gameplayer.asp

Farman, J. (2010). Hypermediating the game interface: The alienation effect in violent videogames and the problem of serious play. *Communication Quarterly*, *58*(1), 96-109.

Feig, P. (Director). (2004). Discos and Dragons - Audio commentary. In J. Apatow & P. Feig (Producers), *Freaks and Geeks: The Complete Series* [DVD]. United States: Shout! Factory.

Ferguson, D. A., & Perse, E. M. (2004). Audience satisfaction among TiVo and ReplayTV users. *Journal of Interactive Advertising, 4*(2), 1-8.

Festinger, L, Riecken, H. W., Schachter, S., & Aronson, E. (1956). *When prophecy fails.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Foucault, M. (1998). *The history of sexuality vol.1: The will to knowledge.* London: Penguin.

Frasca, G. (2003a). Ludologists love stories, too: Notes from a debate that never took place. *International DiGRA Conference*, Utrecht University, Netherlands.

Frasca, G. (2003b). Sim sin city: some thoughts about Grand Theft Auto 3. *Game Studies*, *3*(2). Retrieved 27 October 2011, from http://www.gamestudies.org/0302/frasca/

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gelman, V. (29 July 2010). 'How I Met Your Mother' shocker: Season 6 kicks off with 'game-changing moment'. *Entertainment Weekly*. Retrieved 2 June 2011, from http://insidetv.ew.com/2010/07/29/how-i-met-your-mother-scoop-2/

Ghosh, K. (18 May 2008). 'How I Met Your Mother's' Craig Thomas on Ted & Barney's breakup, Eriksen babies and the future of Robarn. *Zap 2 It*. Retrieved 2 June 2011, from http://blog.zap2it.com/frominsidethebox/2008/05/how-i-met-your-mothers-craig-thomas-on-ted-barneys-breakup-eriksen-babies-and-the-future-of-robarn.html

Gillis, M. (Director). (2004). The way of the Karate Kid, Parts 1 and 2. In J. Weintraub (Producer), *The Karate Kid I & II (Collector's Edition)* [Blu-Ray]. United State: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.

Gilmour, D. (2006). Nostalgia for sale: Extending Burke's theory of substance to idealized images of home. *Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research, 5*, 57-72.

Girard, R. (1965). Deceit, desire, and the novel. In D. J. Hale (Ed.), *The novel: An anthology of criticism and theory 1900-2000* (pp. 294-314). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Gitlin, T. (1979). Prime time ideology: The hegemonic process in television entertainment. *Social Problems*, *26*(3), 252-266.

Gomery, D. (1994). Failed opportunities: The integration of the US motion picture and television industries. In N. Browne (Ed.), *American television: New directions in history and theory* (pp. 23-36). Langhorne, PA: Harwood Academic Publishers.

Gordon, A. (1992). You'll never get out of Bedford Falls: The inescapable family in American science fiction and fantasy films. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, *20*(2), 2-8.

Goss, P. (18 September 2009). The games that sold consoles. *MSN*. Retrieved 1 November 2011, from http://tech.uk.msn.com/features/articles.aspx?cp-documentid=149693201

Grainge, P. (2000). Nostalgia and style in retro America: Moods, and modes, and media recycling. *The Journal of American Culture, 23*(1), 27-34.

Gray, J. (2006). Bonus material: The DVD layering of *The Lord of the Rings*. In E. Mathijs (Ed.), *The Lord of the Rings: Popular Culture in Global Context* (pp. 283-253). London: Wallflower Press.

Gray, J. (2008). *Television entertaiment*. New York: Routledge.

Gray, J. (2010). *Show sold separately: Promos, spoilers, and other media paratexts*. New York: New York University Press.

Gregson, N., Brooks, K., & Crewe, L. (2001). Bjorn again? Rethinking 70s revivalism through the reappropriation of 70s clothing. *Fashion Theory, 5*(1), 3-27.

Hakanen, E. A. (1998). Counting down to number one: The evolution of the meaning of popular music charts. *Popular Music, 17*(1), 95-111.

Hall, S. (2006). Encoding/Decoding. In M. G. Durham & D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and cultural studies: Keyworks* (pp. 163-173). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Halnon, K. B. (2005). Alienation incorporated: 'F*** the mainstream music' in the mainstream. *Current Sociology, 53*(3), 441-464.

Hand, R. J. (2004). Proliferating horrors: Survival horror and the *Resident Evil* franchise. In. S. Hantke (Ed.), *Horror Film: Creating and Marketing Fear* (pp. 117-134). Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.

Hasian, Jr., M. (2001). Nostalgic longings, memories of the 'good war,' and cinematic representations in *Saving Private Ryan*. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *18*(3), 338-358.

Haven, P. (10 November 2010). Cuba denounces 'virtual' Castro plot in new game. *Yahoo! Finance*. Retrieved 30 March 2010, from http://finance.yahoo.com/news/Cuba-denounces-virtual-Castro-apf-2373678391.html?x=0&.v=4

Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: the meaning of style.* New York: Routledge.

Herroro. (11 May 2007). H.C.R. No. 109. *Texas State Legislature*. Retrieved 7 April 2011, from http://www.legis.state.tx.us/tlodocs/80R/billtext/html/HC00109H.htm

Hight, C. (2005). Making-of documentaries on DVD: The Lord of the Rings trilogy and special editions. *The Velvet Light Trap*, *56*, 4-17.

Horkheimer, M., & Adorno, T. W. (2002). *Dialectic of enlightenment: Philosophical fragments.* G. S. Noerr. (Ed.). Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Hughes-Warrington, M. (2007). *History goes to the movies*. New York: Routledge.

Hunt, L. (1998). *British low culture: From safari suits to sexploitation*. London: Routledge.

Impulse. (28 February 2011). Anybody getting tired of the same story? *Nintendoforums*. Retrieved 24 October 2011, from http://www.nintendoforums.net/forums/mario/1468-anybody-getting-tired-same-story.html

Jackson, P. (14 April 2011). THE HOBBIT start of production [HD]. *Facebook*. Retrieved 27 April 2011, from https://www.facebook.com/pages/Peter-Jackson/141884481557

Jameson, F. (1979). Reification and utopia in mass culture. *Social Text, 1*, 130-148.

Jameson, F. (1991). *Postmodernism, or, The cultural logic of late capitalism.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergent culture: Where old and new media collide.* New York: NYU Press.

Jordan, M. F. (2002). Mourning, nostalgia, melancholia. In S. Griffin (Ed.), *Henry James goes to the movies* (pp. 76-98). Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.

Justice, C. (2010). Ronald Reagan and the rhetoric of traveling *Back to the Future*: The Zemeckis aesthetic as revisionist history and conservative fantasy. In S. N. Fhlainn (Ed.), *The worlds of* Back to the Future*: Critical essays on the films* (pp. 174-194). Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company.

Juul, J. (2005). *Half-real*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Keightley, E. (2002). From *Dynasty* to *Songs of Praise*: Television as cultural resource for gendered remembering. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *5*(2), 395-410.

Kennedy, K. (2002). An E.T. for 2002. In L. Sunshine (Ed.), *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial: From Concept to Classic* (pp. 175-176). New York: Newmarket Press.

Kern, M. (24 January 2012). Strength of The Hub's special event programming continues to drive audience gains. *Hub World*. Retrieved 30 January 2012, from http://www.hubworld.com/hub-headlines-special-programming-gains

Kessous, A., & Roux, E. (2008). A semiotic analysis of nostalgia as a connection to the past. *Qualitative Market Research, 11*(2), 192-212.

Kiley, D. (1983). *The Peter Pan syndrome: Men who have never grown up*. New York: Dodd, Mead.

Klinger, B. (2006). *Beyond the multiplex: Cinema, new technologies, and the home*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Koh, W. (2009). Everything old is good again: Myth and nostalgia in Spider-Man. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies, 23*(5), 735-747.

Kompare, D. (2005). *Rerun nation*. New York: Routledge.

Kramer, A. (2011). Mediatizing memory: History, affect and identity in *Who Do You Think You Are? European Journal of Cultural Studies, 14*(4), 428-445.

Lacan, J. (1977). *Écrites: A selection*. (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

LaCapra, D. (1984). Is everyone a mentalité case? Transference and the 'culture' concept. *History and Theory, 23*(1), 296-311.

Lavery, D. (2008). The island's greatest mystery: Is *Lost* science fiction? In J. P. Telotte (Ed.), *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader* (pp. 283-298). Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky.

Leach, B. (13 September 2010). Super Mario celebrates 25th birthday. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved 22 March 2011, from http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/video-games/7999054/Super-Mario-celebrates-25th-birthday.html

Levine, E. (2008). Distinguishing television: The changing meanings of television liveness. *Media, Culture & Society, 30*(3), 393-409.

Levy, M. (1983). The time-shifting use of home video recorders. *Journal of Broadcasting, 27*(3), 263-268.

Lizardi, R. (2010). 'Re-imagining' hegemony and misogyny in the contemporary slasher remake. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, *38*(3), 113-121.

Loguidice, B., & Barton, M. (2009). *Vintage games: An insider look at the history of* Grand Theft Auto, Super Mario*, and the most influential games of all time*. Burlington, MA: Focal Press.

Longworth, K. (13 October 2011). 'Footloose' 2011 has the moves to bridge generations and capture two generations. *Broward Palm Beach New Times*. Retrieved 30 January 2012, from http://www.browardpalmbeach.com/2011-10-13/film/footloose-2011-has-the-moves-to-bridge-generations-and-capture-two-demographics/

Lukas, S. A., & Marmysz, L. (2009). *Fear, cultural anxiety, and transformation: Horror, science fiction and fantasy films remade.* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Lury, K., & Moseley, R. (2009). Reflecting on 'classic television': Making and remaking television classics. *Critical Studies in Television, 4*(2), 108-119.

Marcus, D. (2004). *Happy days and wonder years: The fifties and the sixties in contemporary cultural politics*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Mayer-Schönberger, V. (2009). *Delete: The virtue of forgetting in the digital age.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mayr, E. (1990). When is historiography whiggish? *Journal of the History of Ideas, 51*(2), 301-309.

McAllister, M. P. (1992). Recombinant television genres and Doogie Howser, M.D. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, *20*(3), 61-69.

McAllister, M. P. (2005). Television advertising as textual and economic systems. In J. Wasko (Ed.), *A Companion to Television* (pp. 217-237). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

McAllister, M. P., & Giglio, J. M. (2005). The commodity flow of U.S. children's television. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 22*(1), 26-44.

McCarthy, E. (25 August 2010). James Cameron discusses the 3D backlash. *Popular Mechanics*. Retrieved 30 January 2012, from http://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/digital/3d/james-cameron-3d-backlash-defense-1960503

McChesney, R. W. (1998). Making media democratic. *Boston Review.* Retrieved 11 September 2011, from http://bostonreview.net/BR23.3/mcchesney.html

McLuhan, M. (2006). The medium is the message. In M. G. Durham & D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and cultural studies: Keyworks* (pp. 107-116). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

McNeil, A. (1991). *Total television: The comprehensive guide to programming from 1948 to the present.* New York: Penguin Books.

Meehan, E. (2005). *Why TV is not our fault?* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Mindlin, G., DuRousseau, D., & Cardillo, J. (2012). *Your playlist can change your life: 10 proven ways your favorite music can revolutionize your health, memory, organization, alertness and more*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc.

Molloy, M. (2004). Cutting-edge nostalgia: New Zealand fasion design at the new millennium. *Fashion Theory, 8*(4), 477-490.

Moran, J. (2002). Childhood and nostalgia in contemporary culture. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, *5*(2), 155-175.

Movie Guide. (14 July 2011). Who goes to the movies? *Movie Guide*. Retrieved 29 July 2011, from http://www.movieguide.org/articles/main/who-goes-to-the-movies.html

Mulvey, L. (2006). Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. In M. G. Durham & D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and cultural studies: Keyworks* (pp. 342-352). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Murphy, B. M. (2010). 'You space bastard! You killed my pines!': *Back to the Future*, nostalgia, and the suburban dream." In S. N. Fhlainn (Ed.), *The worlds of* Back to the Future*: Critical essays on the films* (pp. 49-61). Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company.

Napolitano, D. (2 April 2010). 'The Karate Kid' or 'The Kung Fu Kid'? *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved 29 July 2011, from http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2010/04/02/the-karate-kid-or-the-kung-fu-kid-fans-debate-the-title-of-new-jackie-chanjaden-smith-movie/

Nashawaty, C. (25 March 2011a). *Stand By Me* turns 25 - But hasn't aged a day. *Entertainment Weekly, 1147,* 66.

Nashawaty, C. (1 April 2011b). *Scream* if you like horror. *Entertainment Weekly, 1148,* 60.

Nashawaty, C (8 April 2011c). Tracy and Hepburn: The definitive collection. *Entertainment Weekly, 1149,* 46.

Nashawaty, C. (15 April 2011d). The original *Tron* is finally on disc again. *Entertainment Weekly, 1150,* 72.

Neiderhaus, S. G., & Graham, J. L. (7 Febrary 2007). Back to the nest. *U.S.A. Today,* A.11.

Nelson, A. P. (2010). Traumatic childhood now included. In S. Hantke (Ed.), *American horror film: The genre at the turn of the millennium* (pp. 103-118). Ed. Steffen Hantke. Jackson, MS: The University Press of Mississippi.

Newark, C., & Wassenaar, I. (1997). Proust and music: the Anxiety of competence. *Cambridge Opera Journal, 9*(2), 163-183.

Newman, J. (2004). *Videogames*. London: Routledge.

Newman, K. (2011). *Nightmare movies: Horror on screen since the 1960s*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Nielsen, S. E., Smith, J. H., & Tosca, S. P. (2008). *Understanding video games*. New York: Routledge.

Nietzsche, F. (1957). *The use and abuse of history*. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc.

Nietzsche, F. (2001). *The gay science*. Bernard Williams, (Ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Nintendo. (2011). Virtual console. *Nintendo*. Retrieved 31 March 2011, from http://www.nintendo.com/wii/online/virtualconsole

O'Brien, G. (2001). *Sonata for jukebox*. New York: Counterpoint Publishing.

Owen, A. S. (2002). Memory, war and American identity: *Saving Private Ryan* as cinematic jeremiad. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *19*(3), 249-282.

Packer, J. (2010). What is an archive?: An apparatus model for communications and media history. *The Communication Review, 13*, 88-104.

Parton, R. (31 March 2004). Xenogears vs. Tetris. *RPGamer*. Retrieved 1 November 2011, from http://www.rpgamer.com/news/japan/rp033104.html

Pellerin, M. (Director). (2004). The passing of an age. In P. Jackson (Producer), *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (Special Extended Edition)* [DVD]. United States: New Line Home Video.

Plasketes, G. (1992). Romancing the record: The vinyl de-evolution and subcultural evolution. *Journal of Popular Culture*, *26*(1), 109–122.

Plato. (1997). The Phaedrus. In J. M. Cooper (Ed.), *Plato: Complete Works* (pp. 506-556). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company.

Postman, N. (1985). *Amusing ourselves to death*. New York: Penguin Books.

Proust, M. (2006). *Remembrance of things past, volume 1*. (C. K. S. Moncrieff, Trans.). Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions.

Pulliam, J. (2007). Charlie's evolving moral universe: Filmic interpretations of Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.In L. Stratyner & J. R. Keller (Eds.), *Fantasy Fiction Into Film: Essays* (pp. 103-115). Jefferson, NC: Macfarland Press.

Ray, R. (1985). *A certain tendency of the Hollywood cinema, 1930-1980*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Reuters. (10 May 2007). New wave of 3-D movies on track for 2009. *Foxnews*. Retrieved 14 November 2011, from http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,271316,00.html

Reynolds, S. (2011). *Retromania: Pop culture's addiction to its own past*. New York: Faber and Faber, Inc.

Rosenstone, R. A. (1995). *Visions of the past: The challenge of film to our idea of history*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Roth, M. S. (1989). Remembering forgetting: Maladies de la mémoire in nineteenth-century France. *Representations, 26,* 49-68.

Roth, M. S. (1991). Dying of the past: Medical studies of nostalgia in nineteenth century France. *History and Memory, 3*(1), 5-29.

Roth, M. S. (1992). The time of nostalgia : Medicine, history and normality in 19th-century France. *Time Society, 1*(2), 271-286.

Rottenberg, J. (11 November 2011). The gang's all here! *Entertainment Weekly, 1180*, 36-43.

Rowling, J. K. (1997). *Harry Potter and the sorcerer's stone*. New York: Scholastic, Inc.

Ruud, J. (1991). *Back to the Future* as quintessential comedy. *Literature and Film Quarterly*, *19*(2), 127-133.

Rusch, D. (2008). Emotional design of computer games and fiction films. In A. Jahn-Sudmann (Ed.), *Computer games as a sociocultural phenomenon: Games without frontiers, war without tears* (pp. 22-31). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schiller, H. I. (1974). *The mind managers*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Schorske, C. E. (1999). *Thinking with history: Explorations in the passage to modernism.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Schweppenhäuser, G., & Rolleston, J. (2009). *Theodor W. Adorno: An introduction*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Seidman, R. (27 July 2011). TeenNick proves the '90s are 'All That' as new late-night retro Block reaches record ratings. *TV by the Numbers*. Retrieved 7 December 2011, from http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/2011/07/27/teennick-proves-the-90s-are-all-that-as-new-late-night-retro-block-reaches-record-ratings/99022/

Seiler, C. (2000). The commodification of rebellion: Rock culture and consumer capitalism. In M. Gottdiener (Ed.), *New forms of consumption: Consumers, culture, and commodification* (pp. 203-226). Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.

Shefrin, E. (2004). *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and participatory fandom: Mapping new congruencies between the Internet and media entertainment culture. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 21*(3), 261-281.

Sherry, J. L. (2001). The effects of violent video games on aggression: A meta-analysis. *Human Communication Research*, *27*(3), 409-431.

Sicart, M. (2009). *The ethics of computer games*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Silverman, K. (1991). Back to the future. *Camera Obscura, 9*(3 27), 109-132.

Simon, R. K. (1999). *Trash culture: Pop culture and the great tradition*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Smythe, D. W. (2006). On the Audience Commodity and its Work. In M. G. Durham & D. M. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and cultural studies: Keyworks* (pp. 230-256). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Smith, K. K. (2000). Mere nostalgia: Notes on a progressive paratheory. *Rhetoric and Public Affairs, 3*(4), 505-527.

Snow, B. (6 February 2008). Mario Kart Wii to feature 32 courses, 12 person online. *Gamepro*. Retrieved 27 October 2011, from http://www.gamepro.com/article/news/160068/mario-kart-wii-to-feature-32-courses-12-person-online/

Sorlin, P. (1980). *The film in history.* Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books.

Sterling, J. (7 March 2011). If every Legend of Zelda is the same, why do they feel so different?" *Gamesradar.* Retrieved 24 October 2011, from http://www.gamesradar.com/if-every-legend-of-zelda-is-the-same-why-do-they-feel-so-different/

Stewart, S. (1984). *On longing: Narratives of the miniature, the gigantic, the souvenir, the collection.* Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press.

Stock, P. V. (2010). Sociology and the mix tape: A metaphor of creativity. *The American Sociologist, 41*(3), 277-291.

Strasser, S. (2003). The alien past: Consumer culture in historical perspective. *Journal of Consumer Policy, 26*(4), 375-393.

Sultan, A. J., Muehling, D., & Sprott, D. E. (2010). The effect of personal attachment and usage on consumer response to nostalgia. *Allied Academics International Conference, 15*(2), 1-3.

Sunstein, C. (2002). *Republic.com*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Szalai, G. (13 January 2011). Analysts defend early ratings for the Hub as 'decent.' *The Hollywood Reporter*. Retrieved 7 December 2011, from http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/blogs/live-feed/analyst-defends-early-ratings-hub-71543

Tanner, J. L. (2006). Recentering during emerging adulthood. In J. J. Arnett & J. L. Tanner (Eds.), *Emerging adults in America: Coming of age in the 21ˢᵗ century* (pp. 21-55). Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.

Tavinor, G. (2009). *Bioshock* and the art of Rapture. *Philosophy and Literature 33*(1), 91-106.

Tocqueville, A. (2005). Democracy in America, 1835-40. In A. Sica (Ed.), *Social Thought: From the Enlightenment to the Present* (p. 170). Boston, MA: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

Turner Broadcasting Systems. (2012). The music of *Glory Daze*. *TBS*. Retrieved 30 January 2012, from http://www.tbs.com/stories/story/0,,235225,00.html

Turow, J. (1997). *Breaking up America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Unger, L. S., McConocha, D. M., & Faier, J. A. (1991). The use of nostalgia in television advertising: A content analysis. *Journalism Quarterly, 68*(3), 345-353.

Verevis, C. (2005). *Film remakes*. New York: Palmgrave Macmillan.

Wallis, M. (1999). *The real Wild West: The 101 Ranch and the creation of the American West*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Wasko, J. (1999). The political economy of film. In T. Miller & R. Stam (Ed.), *A companion to film theory* (pp. 221-233). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Wasko, J. (2008). Financing and Production: Creating the Hollywood Film Commodity. In P. McDonald & J. Wasko (Ed.), *The Contemporary Hollywood Film Industry* (pp. 43-62). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Waxman, S. (25 April 2011). FINALLY: YouTube launching streaming movies." *Business Insider*. Retrieved 28 April 2011, from http://www.businessinsider.com/finally-youtube-launching-streaming-movies-2011-4

Wendy's Company. (26 September 2011). Here's the Beef! *AboutWendys*. Retrieved 21 December 2011, from http://www.aboutwendys.com/News/Here's-the-Beef!/

West, D. (2007). *The Death of the Grown Up*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

White, H. (1973). *Metahistory: The historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.

White, H. (1985). *Tropics of discourse: Essays in cultural criticism*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

White, H. (1988). Historiography and historiophoty. *The American Historical Review, 93*(5), 1193-1199.

Wildschut, T., Sedikides, C., Ardnt, J., & Routledge, C. (2006). Nostalgia: Content, triggers, functions. *Journal of personality and social psychology, 91*(5), 975-993.

Williams, R. (1974). *Television: Technology and cultural form*. London: Fontana.

Woods, F. (2008). Nostalgia, music and the television past revisited in American dreams. *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image, 2*(1), 27-50.

Wood, M. (2010). Proust: The music of memory. In S. Radstone (Ed.), *Memory: Histories, theories, debates* (pp. 109-122). Bronx, NY: Fordham University Press.

Wright, W. (1977). *Sixguns and society: A structural study of the Western*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Yochim, E. C., & Biddinger, M. (2008). 'It kind of gives you that vintage feel': Vinyl records and the trope of death. *Media, Culture & Society, 30*(2), 183-195.

Young, W. H., & Young, N. K. (2004). *The 1950s*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Ziewacz, L. E. (2001). Holden Caulfield, Alex Portnoy, and Good Will Hunting: Coming of age in American films and novels. *Journal of Popular Culture, 35*(1), 211-218.

Zizek, S. (1991). *Looking awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Ryan Lizardi
Curriculum Vitae

The Pennsylvania State University
The College of Communications
Carnegie Building, University Park, PA, 16802
Phone: 814-308-3110
E-mail: REL140@psu.edu

Education:

Ph.D.   Pennsylvania State University, Mass Communications, May 2012
             Research Interest Areas: Representations of the past in media, Film Studies,
             Television Studies, Critical Cultural Studies
             Dissertation Chair: Matthew F. Jordan

Teaching Experience:

Comm 150: The Art of the Cinema (Summer '09, Summer '11)
   • General Education introductory course (100 students)
Comm 150WC: The Art of the Cinema (Spring '11)
   • Online multi-media course (50 students)
Comm 242: Basic Video/Filmmaking (Fall '09, Spring '10, Spring '12)
   • Pre-major production course (18 students)
Comm 250: Film History and Theory (Fall '08, Spring '09, Fall '10)
   • General Education intermediate-film course (50 students)
Comm 411: Cultural Aspects of Mass Media (Fall '11)
   • Advanced Major cultural studies course (50 students)

Selected Publications:

Lizardi, R. (2012). Repelling the invasion of the 'other': Post-apocalyptic alien shooter
        videogames addressing contemporary cultural attitudes. In G. Voorhees, J. Call, & K.
        Whitlock (Eds.), *Guns, Grenades and Grunts: The First-person Shooter*. New York:
        Continuum Publishing Group.
Lizardi, R. (2012). DLC: Perpetual commodification of the video game. *Democratic
        Communiqué, 25*(1).
Lizardi, R. (2010). 'Re-Imagining' Hegemony and Misogyny in the Contemporary 'Slasher'
        Remake. *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, *38*(3), 113-121.

Awards/Certificates:
Harold F. Martin Graduate Assistant Outstanding Teaching Award 2011
   • 1 of 10 Penn State University-wide awards given that assessed evaluations, student
     testimonies, recommendation letters, and a teaching philosophy.
   • Recipients selected from those nominated by their respective Colleges.