Create, Reboot, Repeat: Franchise Management and Textual Evolution in the Cultural Industries

By

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If you get a group of graduate students together, it won't take long for the conversation to turn toward discussing the special kind of misery that comes along with pursuing a Ph.D. Often, the conversation revolves around how isolating the experience can be and how most people can't relate. While I have certainly taken part, and likely sometimes encouraged, such commiserating, as I look back at my time in graduate school I can't help but think about how, while at times it may have felt like a lonely pursuit, so many people shared in this experience with me.

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Abstract

This project considers the management of media proliferation across franchised texts and argues that textual proliferation often functions as a tool of industrial and creative control within a franchised environment. It is through texts that hierarchies are organized and reorganized. It is through discourse about those texts that cross-corporate creative and business partnerships are negotiated and ideas are disseminated legibly across conglomerate structures. I draw from Tim Havens' concept of "industry lore," as a way to understand the discursive power of storytelling within a given franchise. Throughout the chapters, I argue that creatives and managers draw creative authority and supervisory power from their ability to understand and communicate the imagined importance of the stories told within those franchises. I also consider the role of storytelling in terms of corporate management, especially considering the role of textual proliferation in the long-term management of brands and desired audiences. Ultimately, the project aims to contextualize the dominance of storytelling as a discourse within franchising through historical inquiry, textual, and contemporary industrial analysis. Throughout, I put an increased emphasis on the managerial functions of creative personnel and the storytelling contributions of managerial labors, drawing attention to the overlap between the two. This dissertation argues that we should pay attention to the ways media workers understand, discuss, and mobilize the stories of a franchise as discursive tools that facilitate the continued and coherent proliferation of texts across conglomerate structures. Ultimately, we should consider the rise of storytelling as a prominent managerial discourse through which franchises are organized.

Introduction

During a panel entitled "Lucasfilm: The Art of Storytelling," at *Star Wars Celebration Europe* in July of 2016, then Senior Vice President of Development Kiri Hart discussed the formation of what has become known as the Lucasfilm "story group." The group, which Hart leads, was formed by Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy in 2012 and is responsible for developing stories and maintaining continuity across all *Star Wars* related content.[1] Addressing the need for such a group, Hart stated:

> We make content on a lot of different platforms, and we wanted a group that sort of formed a hub that could support all those different types of storytelling and help coordinate them and bring them together and make them feel unified. [2]

Hart goes on to explain that the group aims to "support all the different storytellers," by giving them the "creative inspiration," "encouragement" and "information that they need to help make whatever individual projects that they're doing feel connected to the other things that are going on in the *Star Wars* universe."

Though the dynamic between creativity and management has always been at the heart of the media industries, Hart's justification of the Lucasfilm story group warrants further investigation into the impact media franchising, both as industry practice and as an abstract concept, has had on the shifting relationship between creative desires and industrial imperatives. Her comments ask us to consider how storytelling, commonly understood as a creative practice, can serve a managerial function insomuch as it informs and justifies industrial practice. While

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[1] Nathalia Holt, "The Women Who Run The Star Wars Universe," *The New York Times*, December 22, 2017, accessed October 10, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/22/movies/star-wars-last-jedi-women-run-universe.html.

[2] Star Wars, "Lucasfilm: The Art of Storytelling Panel | Star Wars Celebration Europe 2016," (video), July, 23, 2016, accessed November 15, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNkvAt5p4k0 .

perhaps always blurred, corporate management and cultural production are increasingly becoming more interchangeable. Bob Chapek, the Chairman of Parks, Experiences, and Products at The Walt Disney Company, has routinely justified his corporate agenda through the rhetoric of storytelling. When talking with *Theme Park Insider* about the *Galaxy's Edge* parks opening in both Disneyland Resort in Anaheim and Disney World Resort in Orlando, he said:

> Maybe the most important thing about what we're doing here is that we all live within the world of the canon of *Star Wars*. But we're not constrained by the stories that have been told only to date. [Galaxy's Edge] is another venue for storytelling. This is another blank canvas, and we've already created seven or eight different publishing products based on the back story of the Black Spire Outpost.[3]

He goes on to note that

> "This place itself is about to launch a whole bunch of fantastic content for the Walt Disney Company based on the mythologies that we're creating. So we're working with Lucas[film] very carefully to make sure that we stay within that mythology. But at the same time, we have many degrees of freedom to create our own story."

In just these brief statements, storytelling is both used to justify the existence of the parks and gestured to as a method of intra-corporate control. The parks are a new "venue for storytelling," and they can inspire new "mythologies." However, mythical expansion is constrained by Lucasfilm, presumably those in charge of the story group, which function to make sure Chapek and his team "stay within" the mythology of the *Star Wars* universe. The conversation is laced with industry-focused language. Chapek seems to shift between conversations about "stories" and "products" with relative ease, and though he considers the *Star Wars* mythology itself to be the main limiting factor in terms of the types of stories they tell, it wouldn't be a stretch to assume that only the most profitable ones are seriously considered. In essence, within the context of franchising, the pursuit of compelling stories is part of the

[3] Bob Chapek, interview, *Theme Park Insider*, May 29, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCEH3sPoJLU.

vernacular of executives and managers attempting to communicate the value of intellectual properties. Therefore, an exploration of franchising through the lens of narrative management might prove fruitful and reveal new insights into how franchises are managed.

Those in the story group ride a line between creative storytellers and media managers. For example, the Lucasfilm story group is comprised of members with titles such as, "Vice President of Animation and Live-Action Development," "Producer of Franchise Synergy," and "Creative Executive." Though these titles all contain industry-focused words like "synergy," "executive," and "president," as a whole, the group considers itself to be an entity which supports and inspires creativity, not promotion or intellectual property management. Certainly, the industry's investment in discourses that promote creativity as a driving force is not new. As Janet Wasko has argued about Walt Disney, "Walt Disney and others downplayed his role as capitalist presenting him and his company as interested primarily in making innovative forms of entertainment…"[4] However, more work needs to be done on the relationship between storytelling and management practices. Consider Bob Iger's response when addressing how he, as the CEO of Disney, manages "franchise fatigue." He argues:

> I think the first thing you have to recognize is that these franchises are only as good as the quality of the storyteller, the stories that you tell. If you don't have a good story to tell, you shouldn't tell it. Quantity is not what we're about. It's quality. The more often you tell a story, at times, the less quality you have.[5]

Here, the pace of the franchise's output, according to Iger, is determined by the availability of quality stories within the franchise. While Iger is talking to fans, we should not discount these

[4] Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 37.
[5] "Bob Iger on 'Galaxy's Edge:' The Whole CNN Business Interview," CNN Business, May 30, 2019, https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/30/media/bob-iger-star-wars-galaxys-edge-interview/index.html.

types of narratives as purely performative but consider how they might permeate actual production discourse.

This project aims to contextualize the dominance of storytelling as a discourse of management within franchising through historical inquiry and contemporary industrial analysis. The rise of the story group suggests that, within modern franchising, dominant discourses about storytelling might equally contribute, not simply to narrative style and creative choices, but to driving industrial practice. While it would be easy to draw attention to the transparency of this discourse and point out the ways in which these franchises are driven by industrial logics, it would be unwise to overlook the importance of storytelling as a powerful concept that can drive the management of franchised content. In other words, storytelling is a guiding logic of franchise management. This dissertation does not aim to counter arguments of political economy, nor does it aim to uncritically offer rose-colored claims that frame franchises as creative utopias of collective storytelling. Rather, I seek to build on a growing body of literature that has attempted to understand franchising as both a creative and commercial space in which industrial imperatives and individual creative identity is a negotiation. That said, I will put an increased emphasis on the managerial functions of creative personnel and the storytelling contributions of managerial labors, ultimately drawing attention to the overlap between the two. From this I argue that the texts, myths, and ongoing narratives that make up a franchise are also, in part, the means by which their corporate and creative hierarchies are organized, cross-corporate creative and business partnerships are negotiated, and ideas are disseminated legibly across conglomerate structures. In short, this dissertation argues that franchises are managed, in part, via the stories told within in them.

The concept of the story group is important for understanding the specific industrial-creative relationship I wish to unpack throughout this project. Lucasfilm is only one of many companies looking to narratively connect and build upon their ever-expanding narrative worlds in more streamlined ways. As media conglomerates seek to exploit their properties across various media platforms, finding ways of maintaining continuity and building cohesion across ever-expanding story worlds has become an important discourse within modern franchise management. Derek Johnson has pointed to the ways mainstream Hollywood production has been infiltrated by other media industries. He argues that when Marvel Studios started their own independent production company they, "launched a unique model for cinema production in the age of convergence - an independent production company with expertise in a different media industry drove blockbuster filmmaking."[6] This influence has likely only continued to shift the way narrative structures are understood across franchise storytelling, as Marvel has since been purchased by Disney and the company has slowly been applying Marvel's logics across their other franchises. As Sean Baily argues about the Disney princess brand, "[w]e thought if Iron Man and Thor and Captain America are Marvel superheroes, then maybe Alice, Cinderella, Mowgli, and Belle are our superheroes, and Cruella and Maleficent are our supervillains."[7]

In 2015, Paramount formed a creative team to outline the future of the *Transformers* franchise. Leading this team was Academy Award-winning writer Akiva Goldsman (*A Beautiful Mind* (2001)), who said, at the time, that the team would "look at the toys, the TV shows, the merchandise, everything that has been generated by Hasbro, from popular to forgotten iterations,

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[6] Derek Johnson, "Cinematic Destiny: Marvel Studios and the Trade Stories of Industrial Convergence," Cinema Journal, 54 no. 1 (Fall, 2012), 52.
[7] Drew Taylor, "Welcome to the Remake Kingdom," *Vulture*, n.d., https://www.vulture.com/2017/03/beauty-and-the-beast-disneys-remake-machine.html.

and establish a mythological timeline."[8] Sony formed Ghost Corps, a branded production company, that was set up to oversee the creation of a *Ghostbusters* transmedia universe.[9] Similarly, in May of 2017, Universal Pictures announced it was going to reorganize its classic monster properties under the moniker "Dark Universe" and hired a creative team that would be responsible for "reviving the studio's classic characters for a new generation."[10] The creative team consisted of director Alex Kurtzman, producer Chris Morgan, and writer-director Christopher McQuarrie. Donna Langley, the chairman of Universal Pictures at the time said of the decision, "[w]e take enormous pride in the creativity and passion that has inspired the reimagining of Universal's iconic monsters and promise audiences we will expand this series strategically." While these are some of the more high-profile attempts to establish a formal group of intertextual managers, other franchises have been progressed and sustained through less official, but equally influential mechanisms of distributed creative power. The implication being, the story can only be told properly through precise industrial management, and the franchise cannot be managed without careful consideration of storytelling. It is that logic I wish to unpack and explore with this dissertation.

Methods

Understanding the discourses of storytelling within a franchised environment requires a set of research methods which equally accounts for the texts produced within that environment and the discourses that are generated through those texts. With that in mind, this project takes a

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[8] Mike Fleming Jr., "Akiva Goldsman Explains 'Transformers' Writers Room As Paramount Adds Scribe Pair," *Deadline*, June 4, 2015, accessed October 10, 2018, https://deadline.com/2015/06/transformers-akiva-goldsman-writers-room-michael-bay-paramount-1201438017/.

[9] Justin Kroll, "Sony Sets Up 'Ghostbusters'-Branded Production Banner Ghost Corps," *Variety*, March 9, 2015, assessed October 10, 2018, https://variety.com/2015/film/news/sony-sets-up-ghostbusters-branded-production-banner-ghost-corps-1201449205/.

[10] "Universal Pictures Unveils 'Dark Universe' With Name Mark and Musical Theme for its Classical Monster Series. Press Release," Dark Universe, accessed December 14, 2018, http://www.darkuniverse.com/

critical media industry studies approach with a focus on decentralized power structures as they are produced through textuality and industrial discourse. Taking what Timothy Havens, Amanda D. Lotz, and Serra Tinic have referred to as "a 'helicopter' level view of industry operations," I consider everyday managerial decisions made by producers, hired writers, and contracted consultants as they contribute to ongoing franchise storyworlds.[11] That said, I consider the ways in which these industry workers operate under a negotiated agency in which the stories they generate and manage are commercial products and are therefore limited and shaped by industrial logics; yet, are also cultural products instilled with meaning. In this way, I understand "power as a form of leadership constructed through discourse that privileges specific ways of understanding the media and their place in people's lives."[12]

From this perspective, my consideration of texts must equally recognize their function as cultural objects that circulate in meaningful ways across generations and cultures, and as industrial products that serve corporate imperatives. For this, the term *industrial intertextuality* has surfaced as a way to conceptualize the "organized production of commercial products," while, as Dan Herbert has noted, also accounting for the cultural "work" of meaning-making done by both professionals, amateurs, and audiences.[13] Herbert argues that, although texts within franchises are "intertextual by design," they "accrue meaning through the broader work done to them when they circulate through culture."[14] With that in mind, throughout this dissertation, my interest lies in considerations of how meaning was "accrued" not just through the cultural circulation of text writ large, but more specifically how meaning is accrued within the corporate

[11] Timothy Havens, Amanda D. Lotz, and Serra Tinic, "Critical Media Industry Studies: A Research Approach," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 2, no. 2 (June 2009): 246, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2009.01037.x.
[12] Havens, Lotz, and Tinic, "Critical Media Industry Studies," 237.
[13] Herbert, *Film Remakes and Franchises*, 24.
[14] Herbert, *Film Remakes, and Franchises*, 26.

cultures of franchised media production – always with an eye toward how textual meaning circulates between industrial and mass culture.

In terms of the texts, my interest is not in a formal analysis of their intertextual relationships but in an analysis of the industrial functions of their intertextuality. Jonathan Gray and Kyra Hunting have argued that industrial intertexts often have an "indirect" economic value to a parent company suggesting their real value may lie in their "ability to create and promote brands."[15] Discussing the intertextual relationship between Disney Junior and other Disney properties they argue, "[l]oose intertextual ties…may, of course, not activate for many viewers, yet we should not underestimate their relative importance to Disney, as they ensure that Disney Junior constantly grows seamlessly into and out of other Disney properties, characters, and stories."[16] In this way, industrial intertextuality is not only about the circulation of texts, but the circulation (or management) of audiences through intertextual relationships. Throughout this dissertation, it is the managerial function of intertextuality that I focus on, not just as it pertains to audiences, but also how it serves a managerial role among industry workers.

In large part, the texts I consult throughout this project are read as paratexts. As Dan Herbert has suggested, "[a]ll texts are paratextual, in the sense that they all refer to others, pointing to others and orienting our attitudes towards other texts." If we can read all texts within the media industries as paratext, I would argue that it is especially true within a franchised environment. Every entry in a franchise has the potential to frame the next textual experience within that franchise. As Gray argues, "paratexts are not only forms of intertextuality, but they

[15] Kyra Hunting and Jonathan Gray, "Imagining Industrial Intertextuality," in *From Networks to Netflix*, ed. Derek Johnson, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 197
[16] Hunting and Gray, "Imagining Industrial Intertextuality," 200.

can control the menu of intertexts that audiences will consult or employ when watching or thinking about a text."[17] With that in mind, though I draw from texts that might otherwise be considered sequels, remakes or reboots, my interest lies in their ability to create discourse and manage other intertextual relationships. In that sense, I understand a bonus feature which might accompany a remake serving an equally important (but still maybe distinct) function as the remake itself, at least in terms of their role in the management of the franchise. Therefore, I draw from bonus features, public interviews, promotional content, as well as the text itself and consider them all to be paratexts in that they all exist to frame or reframe the entire franchise.

With this in mind, the case studies and evidence presented throughout this dissertation are built on research that has sought to understand the discursive power of storytelling, and its importance within the franchise through two primary areas of interest. First, many of these chapters are built around the actual media texts that franchises produce, and I often refer to them and analyze them with an eye towards their contribution to the meanings and readings associated with the franchise. Since I read them all as paratextual, I often give equal attention to the central text and the texts that are produced by it, be that bonus features, public interviews, trailers, official making-of production books and other myriad texts that circulate a franchise. The other main source of data I have acquired was drawn from workers within the industry. This was primarily achieved through a series of personal interviews conducted with creatives and managers from various levels of influence who are either currently working, or have worked, within major media franchises including *Planet of the Apes*, *Harry Potter* and various Disney properties. Additionally, I was also able to perform extensive research in the Arthur P. Jacobs archives held at the William H. Hannon Library at Loyola Marymount University in Los

[17] Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 141.

Angeles. Arthur P. Jacobs produced the original five *Planet of the Apes* films and kept extensive records of his correspondence throughout the development of those films. This research was invaluable, as it provided a basis for understanding how storytelling informed franchise management before franchises became ubiquitous. It also provided a slightly more behind the curtains look into the social interactions and everyday work cultures of franchise managers that, even through interviews, would be difficult to achieve within current franchise production. Through this industrial intertextual approach, combined with a critical cultural industries perspective, this project will reveal and catalog various types of management as facilitated through franchise storytelling; including authorial management, expectation management, brand management, and the management of cultural meaning.

Franchising, Management, and Storytelling

In his work on media franchising, Derek Johnson argues that we must consider the creative collaboration that goes into building a franchise. He suggests that we should think of franchising as a creative process, as "world sharing" instead of world building.[18] My project builds on Johnson's ideas about collaboration within the structures of the media industries by attempting to more concretely understand the ways the texts themselves speak to these collaborative relationships. It asks how the stories of franchised worlds operate as both technologies of restraint and potential agency. Johnson further argues that studies of franchising should be concerned with "the complex and slippery set of economic relationships, professional identifications, cultural exchanges, and meaningful discourses it has supported."[19] I consider the process of expanding and extending franchises as one important site of these meaningful cultural

[18] Derek, Johnson, *Media Franchising, Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 109.
[19] Johnson, *Media Franchising*, 66.

exchanges and intend to delve into the media industry through the lens of narrative management and storytelling logic. Ultimately, through this lens, we can further understand the ways the industry serves as a site of creative and cultural struggle over textual meanings, popular narratives and culturally pervasive mythologies that are propagated and popularized through the system of media franchising.

While this is a project that considers media proliferation, it is not one that is concerned with further investigating the differences between remake, sequel, prequel, reboot and other forms of intertextuality. There's a healthy and growing body of literature on these kinds of intertextuality which I draw from when relevant.[20] Instead, this project is concerned with which individuals are tasked with making a choice to continue a narrative rather than reset it and how those choices effect the franchise as a whole. I'm interested in the management of thematic and narrative continuity as a process of industrial organization. Constantine Verevis considers the relationship between the *Jaws* sequels and argues, "by analyzing and imitating their own most lucrative films, studios seek to establish cycles that are proprietary, exploitable and exclusive."[21] His work suggests that repeated content is not always a logic of immediate financial gain, but a long-form strategy that seeks to stake a claim on a certain genre. However, I would suggest that, within a media franchise, all proliferation, be it repetitive, expansive or some combination of the two, is tied to the long-term management of a given franchise. Just as Verevis argues studios

[20] See: Sarah Cardwell, *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel by Sarah Cardwell* (Manchester University Press, 1828); Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005); Daniel Herbert, *Film Remakes and Franchises* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017); Carolyn Jess-Cooke and Constantine Verevis, eds., *Second Takes: Critical Approaches to the Film Sequel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010).
[21] Constantine Verevis, "Vicious Cycle: Jaws and Revenge-of-Nature Films of the 1970s," in *Cycles, Sequels, Spin-Offs, Remakes, and Reboots: Multiplicities in Film and Television*, ed. Amanda Ann Klein and R. Barton Palmer, Reprint edition (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 97.

analyze" their texts, those working in franchised environments closely read the stories within them, interpret them, and then draw from them as they make managerial decisions.

Understanding how the complex set of creative and cooperative relationships that make up the media industries are coordinated and managed has been a core question for media industries scholars for decades. Early scholarship put much of the power in stockholders, suggesting corporate financial logics guided much of the proliferation that occurs within franchise management. While this political economy approach continues in some capacity, recent studies of media management draw more attention to the complex interactions among those that work within media industries, theorizing those relationships in increasingly complex ways. Mark Deuze argues:

> The management of media industries is, by all accounts, special. It not only involves the supervision and facilitation of creative individuals in the context of project-based labor and commercial enterprise - it also entails managing contacts and contracts with outsourced and subcontracted labor, as well as with all kinds of auxiliary industries, such as reproduction facilities, licensors, vendors, distributors, and retailers.[22]

This complex system of management is all the more compounded within media franchises that wish to maintain some form of narrative and thematic continuity across all their multimedia texts; past, present, and future. As Henry Jenkins argues of transmedia stories, a staple of franchise storytelling, "a transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinct and valuable contribution to the whole."[23] That level of coordination within the industry structures described by Deuze would be complicated in its own right. However, as Derek Johnson has noted, "…while franchising has been most commonly

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[22] Mark Deuze, *Media Work*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 66.
[23] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2008), 95.

understood as a function of transmedia storytelling, this remains only one manifestation within a much longer and more complex history…"[24] Johnson's work points to the way media franchises are not only coordinating stories across media; they are managing the cultural meaning of franchised content across generations, audiences, and industries. He argues that "whether an instance of sequelization or transmedia extension, media franchising proliferates from a logic of multiplied production…"[25]

Though Henry Jenkins argued that media convergence would facilitate this management process and that content would "flow" across platforms, he also noted, "for the foreseeable future, convergence will be a kind of kludge – a jerry-rigged relationship among different media technologies – rather than a fully integrated system." [26] Theorizing the "integration" of these systems has required media industries scholars to consider creativity in terms of organization and management of various individuals across a franchise. For example, when discussing the transmedia management of *The Matrix*, Jenkins associates the consistency and complexity of the interweaving stories that propagated across the franchise as being in large part the result of the vision and oversight offered by the Wachowskis.[27] Similarly, in her analysis of the *Lord of The Rings* franchise, Kristin Thompson gives much of the credit to director Peter Jackson in organizing the franchise and managing the flow of ideas across the franchise and achieving a certain level of quality. She argues that, fearing oversight from New Line, "Jackson was determined to have the production *entirely under his control* in New Zealand [emphasis

[24] Johnson, *Media Franchising*, 32.
[25] Johnson, *Media Franchising*, 41.
[26] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 17.
[27] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 106.

added]."[28] However, as Amanda Lotz has noted, when theorizing management we should be careful not to replicate auteurist approaches which can ignore "myriad creative workers who make meaningful decisions or, at the least, often narrow the universe of perceived options available to the manager as decision-maker."[29]

There has been a productive body of research that has aimed to understand the role of these creative workers within franchises. Historical transmedia work has been a particularly illuminating field, revealing a complex set of relationships and media professionals that facilitated the proliferation of intellectual property in meaningful ways long before concepts of convergence and franchising circulated widely within academia and the media industries. This body of research calls attention to the ways that, though certainly influential, media convergence did not upend the managerial institutions that had already been built into the media industries. Matthew Freeman has argued, "it is important to recognise the extent to which distribution and consumption models have remained bound to more traditional means of production."[30] Similarly, Avi Santo chronicles the ups and downs of managing the *Lone Ranger* property and considers the character's propagation, branding, and rebranding over its long history. He draws attention to the roles of managers in facilitating and communicating the importance of the property across media industries. Santo's work highlights the role of peripheral creative workers, such as

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[28] Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 76.
[29] Amanda D. Lotz, "Building Theories of Creative Industry Managers: Challenges, Perspectives, and Future Directions," in *Making Media Work: Cultures of Management in the Entertainment Industries*, ed. Derek Johnson, Derek Kompare, and Avi Santo (New York: NYU Press, 2014). 29.
[30]Matthew Freeman, "Up, Up and Across: Superman, the Second World War and the Historical Development of Transmedia Storytelling," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 35, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 215.

licensors and brand managers, in shaping what would later become, as he suggests, "commonsense strategies for extending IP."[31]

Freeman and Santo's work is indicative of a growing interest in the role of intermediaries in the production and dissemination of cultural content. These industry workers do much of the day to day work involved in the proliferation of cultural meaning. As Tim Havens has argued, "Media intermediaries serve as organizational 'linking pins' working across various units and holding multiple positions."[32] Derek Johnson, Derek Kompare, and Avi Santo have suggested that discourses of management "might best be understood as forms of intermediation that media industry professionals, (and scholars) use to explain how forces often designated as contradictory, oppositional, and irreconcilable – like creativity and commercialism – communicate, asymmetrically influence, and place pressure upon the other." [33] In that sense, they suggest intermediation is "a process linked to management," rather than "an occupational category in its own right."[34] With that in mind, this dissertation considers storytelling as a form of management discourse used to facilitate the communication between the "contradictory, oppositional, and irreconcilable" differences amid the industrial imperatives of media franchises in conglomerate structures, and the creative desires of those working within them.

Studying the work of management is not easy, as media management involves workers responsible for several levels of production that are often not visible to the casual consumer.

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[31] Avi Santo, *Selling the Silver Bullet: The Lone Ranger and Transmedia Brand Licensing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 10.
[32] Timothy Havens, "Towards a Structuration Theory of Media Intermediaries," in *Making Media Work: Cultures of Management in the Entertainment Industries*, ed. Derek Johnson, Derek Kompare, and Avi Santo (New York: NYU Press, 2014), 39.
[33] Derek Johnson, Derek Kompare and Avi Santo, "Introduction: Discourses, Dispositions, Tactics: Reconceiving Management in Critical Media Industry Studies," in *Making Media Work: Cultures of Management in the Entertainment Industries*, ed. Derek Johnson, Derek Kompare, and Avi Santo (New York: NYU Press, 2014). 6.
[34] Ibid.

Much of this work goes unrecognized. As Santo argues, "most of the cultural, managerial work that licensors 'do' hides in plain sight, diluted through various overt and mundane practices."[35] Furthermore, the work of industry managers is often complex and involves managing competing professional identities and corporate cultures of production. Johnson highlights the way media franchising, "must be understood as a system of resources animated by the social interactions of its users, and not a single, unified form."[36] It is these social interactions that make cohesion across a franchise storyworld difficult, as rather than produce "replication of sameness," franchise proliferation is "a more reflexive and iterative process."[37] Historically this has resulted in more of a "contingent" based franchise expansion rather than carefully orchestrated well-planned media proliferation.[38] Freeman has pointed out how, within early management of the Star Wars franchise, "…industrial convergences arguably facilitate narrative expansions of storyworlds that are indeed based on more ad-hoc developments."[39]

The intricacies and complexity of franchise management become more hidden as franchises become seemingly more successful at coordinating across departments and industries. One reason being, the privileging of auteur figures can hide the everyday management that keeps a franchise productive and organized. The assumption tends to be that organization must be the result of some kind of authoritarian control. Consider this excerpt from a *Vanity Fair* piece about producer Kevin Feige's role in managing the Marvel Cinematic Universe:

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[35] Santo, *Selling the Silver Bullet*, 11.
[36] Johnson, *Media Franchising*, 150.
[37] Johnson, *Media Franchising*, 151.
[38] Matthew Freeman, "From Sequel to Quasi-Novelization: Splinter of the Mind's Eye and the 1970s Culture of Transmedia Contingency," in *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling*, ed. Sean Guynes and Dan Hassler-Forest, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 61.
[39] Freeman, "From Sequel to Quasi-Novelization: Splinter of the Mind's Eye and the 1970s Culture of Transmedia Contingency," 62.

> Other studios, most notably Warner Bros., with the Justice League, have tried to create their own web of interconnected characters. Why have so many failed to achieve Marvel's heights? "Simple," said Joe Russo, co-director of Avengers 3 and 4. "They don't have a Kevin [Feige]."[40]

However, as Lotz has argued, we should be careful when it comes to these discourses within the industry. Indeed, Caldwell suggests "negotiated and collective authorship is an almost unavoidable and determining reality in contemporary film/television."[41] Therefore, even when it seems like a franchise is managed well because of a strong creative figure, we might also consider the ways strong auteur figures are likely discursive constructions of a well-coordinated franchise and not inherently assume that the correlation only goes one way. In other words, well-managed franchises inevitably generate authorship discourses that can be articulated around a single individual, but the success of the franchise may have little to do with the managerial style of that single person and likely has more to do with the management culture within the company. As Graeme Salamon argues, corporate culture informs the way in which management "thinks about, calculates, and acts in the structuring of organizations and the behavior of employees."[42] This would suggest that, within a franchised system, management success would be dictated by the corporate culture, and though it could be heavily influenced by a single upper-level manager, would rarely be completely determined by them.

Ultimately, as Amanda Lotz has pointed out, "[c]onceiving of agency as circumscribed and, consequently, widely variable makes broad theorizing about the role of individuals difficult

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[40] "Cover Story: Inside Marvel's Universe with Kevin Feige, Thor, Black Widow, Iron Man, Hulk, and More," *Vanity Fair,* November 27, 2017, accessed July 10, 2019, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/11/marvel-cover-story.

[41] John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press Books, 2008), 199.

[42] Graeme Salamon, "Culturing Production," in *Production of Culture/Cultures of Production*, ed. Paul du Gay, (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1998), 268.

to sustain."[43] She points to three frameworks that have been suggested in other media scholarship that might help to make sense of these complex power dynamics that guide the media industry. Lotz offers industry lore, circumscribed agency, and discerning savvy, as "nascent critical concepts relevant to theorizing the actions of media managers."[44] But she suggests, that, they remain, "far from established theories."[45] I would add that we especially lack a way for understanding how management has reacted to the pressures of competing with the Marvel style of complex interlocking and ongoing media "universes" which maintain a consistent and coherent storyworld across many, if not most, of their franchised products. In that sense, this dissertation offers storytelling as a framework for understanding the ways franchises are managed and coordinated across their vast industrial nodes of operation. It understands power as something that is negotiated and circulated through discourses of textual history, meaning, and knowledge of the story. In this way, industry lore may provide the best working theoretical framework for understanding the circulation of storytelling discourses among media managers.

Tim Havens argues that, "industry lore functions essentially as a carrier discourse," and that, "it is a way of talking and thinking about audiences and programming that permits television insiders to imagine connections between audience members and television programming from around the world."[46] Similarly, storytelling as a discourse carries encoded messages about audiences and media content, but I would add that it also, perhaps, more importantly, serves as a carrier discourse between the commercial and creative aspects of the industry. As a discourse, storytelling is a common language that acknowledges that both

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[43] Lotz, "Building Theories of Creative Managers," 31.
[44] Lotz, "Building Theories of Creative Managers," 32.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Timothy Havens, *Black Television Travels: African American Media around the Globe* (New York ; London: NYU Press, 2013), 4.

managers and traditional creative figures are often engaged in work that requires them to both *create* and *manage.* In other words, storytelling as a discourse helps makes sense of the way that franchises manage meanings, reception, authorship, and corporate expansion through creative output.

To be clear, I'm not suggesting that we think of storytelling as a replacement for the concept of industry lore, but rather that we should consider the way storytelling discourses permeate the industry lore which circulates within a franchised system of production. Lore within a franchise is deeply informed by the texts that circulate within it, not only the stories that they tell but the stories that get told about the franchise's history and cultural value more broadly. Industry lore gives us a theoretical framework to understand the complex relationships that manage and coordinate the media industries. However, within franchises, we should pay more attention to the way lore is intertwined with a discursive power derived from the cumulative history of the stories told within the franchise. Returning to the Lucasfilm Story Group, many of the members come from ancillary departments within the franchise. Creative Executive Pablo Hidalgo got his start developing StarWars.com as a resource for fans, and Leland Chee worked in licensing. These are industry workers who, through their past work, have accrued vast knowledge about the franchise's various narrative expansions. Their knowledge goes far beyond a single text. In this sense, the "Story Group" is not just posturing to accomplish an industrial purpose (though it does do that); it is, quite literally, a group who manage through their supposed omnipotent mastery of the franchise's storyworld.

Mark J.P. Wolf has written extensively about world building. Much like Johnson does with franchising, and Santo and Freeman do with licensing and transmedia branding, Wolf's work considers world building as its own history. In doing so, he productively calls attention to

the ways the two concepts, franchising and world building, evolved in relation to one another, arguing, "the growth of franchising and merchandising also aided the growth of world based franchises."[47] Wolf calls attention to the shift in the kinds of media proliferation that accompanied the rise of modern media franchising, arguing:

> During the first half of the century, most franchises were character-based (like those of Felix the Cat, Tarzan, Andy Hardy, and Ma and Pa Kettle) while only a few were world-based (like Oz, Barsoom, or Zonthique): but the second half of the century would see a great increase in world-based franchises, and ones of growing size and scale.[48]

Wolf's work points to a relationship between industrial management and storytelling practices. While the rise in merchandising and franchising gave new avenues to world expansion, it also created an issue of organization. Wolf suggests that computer technology has helped facilitate the management of continuity across these vast worlds. He points to the way many modern franchises have created large databases to keep track of the growing number of entries within the franchise storyworld. Wolf suggests, "the size of these databases is such that they would be difficult to manage or even search without computer assistance."[49] While Wolf is only pointing to the expansiveness of these worlds, he points out an important aspect of franchise management. We should be cautious about the level of control ascribed to these databases as it risks generating an image of the media industries that might more resemble a mindless system of mass production controlled by a computer algorithm, rather than the complex system of negotiated agency and creativity we know it to be. Rather, these databases offer an opportunity to consider the way discourses of storyworlds, and the image of 'the database,' are systems of oversight and control that present the world of the franchise as something 'true' and infallible.

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[47] Mark J. P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds*, (New York: Routledge, 2012), 137.
[48] Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds,* 134.
[49] Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds,* 147.

We should take note of the fact that those databases are created and maintained by individuals from various levels of the creative hierarchy within the franchise and, as such, are tools through which those individuals vie for creative power. With those things in mind, we should recognize these databases as an extension of a broader storytelling language used to manage franchise production. They are technologies of not only continuity management but of creative and industrial management, a form of management I wish to explore in the following chapters.

Chapter Overview

A guiding principle for this project, and perhaps the best way to read my choice of case studies and the organization of ideas, is as an attempt to understand franchises as a living set of texts that are continually being built, altered and expanded upon by the industry, fans, and the shifting cultural discourses that surround them. Thus, the chapters seek to move from the genesis of a franchise to its maintenance and expansion and conclude considering the cultural impact and lasting legacy franchised stories might have writ large. Chapter 1 considers the inception of a franchised narrative. Here I consider issues of authorship within a franchised environment and conceptualize authorship as a distributed system of contested creative authority among creative professionals often regulated by creative managers who, while not necessarily auteur figures, perform an authorship function through the regulation of that creative authority. Chapter 2 then builds on the concept of management as authorship by considering the role of corporations in the long-term management of franchised stories. Here I introduce the idea of *franchise refurbishment* as a way to understand the industrial motives and creative considerations behind certain repetitious practices. Disney's recent efforts to reimagine (or as I argue *refurbish*) their animated classics as live-action films provides a particularly useful case study for understanding the relationship between storytelling and industrial logic. I argue that franchised properties are

updated, in part, to maintain profitability and cultural relevance as well as to assert corporate authorship and that, while perhaps inherently financially motivated, these updates require creative personnel and managers, as storytellers, to negotiate and grapple with the often-fraught histories of franchised content.

The next two chapters consider the role of peripheral and intermediary figures in the maintenance and expansion of franchised stories. Chapter 3 considers the expectation management of refurbished texts paying close attention to the role of what Jenkins, Ford, and Green have termed 'grassroots intermediaries."[50] It considers refurbishment from the perspective of the fantrepreneur and argues that specific types of podcasts built around affirmational modes of fandom can serve an intermediary function that facilitates and manages the ontological transition from old texts to a new entry within a fan community. Ultimately, it suggests that the proliferation of franchised content creates increased opportunities for certain, often male, fans to professionalize as they capitalize on the media fervor that frequently sounds the promotion of a refurbished text. Continuing the focus on franchise maintenance and peripheral workers, Chapter 4 points to two important and related aspects of franchise management: expansion and consolidation. The capitalist logics of franchised media systems dictate franchises must grow and expand. However, creating new entries and installments that entice audiences and inspire investment in a franchise's future, and past, requires an understanding of franchise narrative worlds that is often beyond the scope of any single media manager. Each new entry and story must contribute to an ongoing narrative. However, simultaneously, consumption practices allow for a close reading across franchises, and online communities allow fans to point out continuity

[50] Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 7.

discrepancies easily. This creates a situation in which intellectual property holders must rely on outside sources to manage and consolidate franchised content to maintain a streamlined and coherent franchise storyworld. Ultimately, this chapter argues that, in this environment, continuity is maintained not necessarily through centralized industry-controlled systems of power, but rather via the strength and legibility of the storyworld itself which, in turn promotes sharing. The final chapter, Chapter 5, considers the relationship between franchised narratives and mythology specifically as they accrue mythic value through the management of their proliferation. I look at *Rocky* and *Rambo* as popular and influential modern myths and consider how each iteration's communication across various production teams and departments was managed through the communication of their mythic value. I argue the discourses of franchise management contributed to the mythologization of those characters and their story. I then consider the mythic value inherent in these stories and, using *Creed* (2015) as an example, argue that industry workers from historically marginalized groups can wield that power to recode these myths in ways that mainstream culturally specific stories.

Ultimately, each chapter tries to tell how stories are generated, managed, expanded, and disseminated within a franchise environment. As a whole, this project can be seen as an attempt to give the text a more central focus in critical media industry studies. Its purpose is to understand that the text is not simply a byproduct of a media franchise but a significant factor in its organization and management. This dissertation argues that text doesn't only acquire meaning as it is circulated through mass culture by fans and audiences, but that it also accrues meaning as it circulates within the confines of the corporate and industrial cultures that make up the franchise. Producers and writers discuss the value of the stories they tell. Corporations manage their image through the stories they produce. Media proliferation is often understood and

communicated across departments in terms of its contribution to the ongoing storyworld, and those within the industry draw from past texts as a discursive tool as they compete in on going struggles for agency and legitimacy in the pursuit of professional advancement. It is that final point that the first chapter will explore in more depth.

Chapter 1: The Development of the Apes: Shifting and Contested Creative Authority in Early Franchise Development

Coinciding with the release of Lucasfilm's underperforming Star Wars spinoff *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (2018), Abrams Books published a book of production art and concept designs from the production of the film titled, *The Art of Solo: A Star Wars Story*. In the foreword of the book, production designer Neil Lamont discusses the collective passion he and his design team had for the material, "[i]n this book, you will see passion – our hearts on our sleeves – in every artwork, each piece showing invention, skill, desire, and creative genius."[51] He goes on to point out the various departments that go into making a movie like *Solo* happen, suggesting:

> People from all departments (art, set direction, costume, creatures, and props) are showing off their talents: from concept, innovation, design, and manufacturing to the ultimate process of camera rolling.[52]

Lamont closes his foreword by saying the book as a whole is "a tribute to amazing teamwork." While much of Lamont's "teamwork" rhetoric is not uncommon within Hollywood, his words take on a special resonance in the context of *Solo*, as the production made headlines for the highly public firing of the original directors, Phil Lord and Chris Miller, nearly three-quarters of the way through filming.[53] The two were replaced by veteran director Ron Howard, who according to several reports had to reshoot a majority of the film as Lord and Miller had been ineffective at getting enough usable footage to edit.[54] Conspicuously absent from Lamont's forward, and the entire *Art of Solo* book, is the role any of the three directors had in shaping the

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[51] Phil Szostak, *The Art of Solo: A Star Wars Story*, (New York: Abrams, 2018), 9.
[52] Ibid
[53] Kim Maters, "'Star Wars' Firing Reveals a Disturbance in the Franchise," *The Hollywood Reporter*, June, 26, 2017, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/star-wars-han-solo-movie-firing-new-details-behind-phil-lord-chris-miller-exit-1016619
[54] Zack Sharf, "'Solo' Actor Says Phil Lord and Chris Miller 'Weren't Prepared' for 'Star Wars,' Alden Ehrenreich 'Just Not Good Enough,"*Indie Wire*, March 26, 2018, https://www.indiewire.com/2018/03/solo-actor-phil-lord-chris-miller-werent-prepared-star-wars-alden-ehrenreich-not-good-1201943599/

design and general visual direction of the film. The omission of these creative figures in the *Solo* book did not go unnoticed. Writing for *Collider*, Adam Chitwood suggests:

> the complete lack of even a mention of anyone is a glaring omission that lessens the impact of the book. Directors are the ones ultimately calling the shots, and as they oversee the entire production, can provide invaluable insight into a film's evolution.[55]

To Chitwood's point, Abrams had already published three similar books, *The Art of The Force Awakens*, *The Art of Rogue One* and the *Art of The Last Jedi*. Both *The Last Jedi*, and *Rogue One* books contained forwards by directors Rian Johnson and Gareth Edwards, respectively. While *The Force Awakens* book does not have a forward by director J.J. Abrams, he is mentioned throughout the book as a guiding force throughout the production process. Chitwood argues that the book would have been better if it could have given some insight into what changed once Director Ron Howard took over. However, when asked this very question in an interview Lamont answered, "…between the changeover from Chris and Phil to Ron, not much really changed at all, actually."[56]

Despite Chitwood's suggestion that the book is less interesting due to the omission of directorial oversight, it's actually that very omission that makes *The Art of Solo* perhaps more insightful than other "making of" books which place the director at the center of creative production from beginning to end. Though Chitwood and others are right in noting that directors tend to guide the general direction of a single production, many major and long-running franchises exist in a perpetual state of development. For *Solo*, production designs and concept art

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[55] Adam Chitwood, "'The Art of Solo' Review: A Gorgeous, Incomplete Look at the 'Star Wars' Story," *Collider*, June 19, 2018, http://collider.com/the-art-of-solo-review/#images.
[56] Neil Lamont, interview by Max Evry, *ComingSoon.Net*, September 19, 2018, www.comingsoon.net/movies/features/983629-cs-interview-solo-production-designer-neil-lamont#L12f3r4Yot1DPGjc.99

were being drawn up under the direction of Lucasfilm VP and Executive Creative Director Doug Chiang as early as 2013, even though Lord and Miller wouldn't join the project until 2015. As Phil Szostak points out in *The Art of Solo*, "from April to December 2013 Chiang and Lawrence Kasdan were in contact every two weeks." Kasdan, who wrote *Solo*, was working on the film since late 2012 after Lucasfilm was officially bought by Disney. It's worth noting how easily these supposed central figures were removed from a book about the production of the film. Consider this excerpt describing design supervisor James Clyne's oversight of the development of young Lando Calrissian:

> Bringing his learned sense of *Star Wars* aesthetic to bear on *Solo* was vital to Clyne's role as design supervisor. "I spent most of my days at Pinewood sitting with art directors and set designers saying, 'Well, this is cool but how do we make it a little more *Star Wars*-centric?'"[57]

The Art of Solo and the heavily publicized production of the film lays bare a network of distributed creative power that is characteristic of a franchised media environment. Many of the people overseeing the early stages of the production of *Solo*, who likely shaped the tone and story of the final film, are not directors, but various writers, creative executives and production designers who are already deeply embedded in the franchise. Many of the individuals mentioned in the book are Lucasfilm veterans with various levels of creative power. Kasdan's writing credits include *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *The Force Awakens* (2015), while Doug Chiang has worked in the design department since production started on *Episode I* (1999) in the mid-90s. To add context to the above description, James Clyne had been jumping around from various projects at the time including *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016), *The Last Jedi* (2017), and *Force Awakens* giving him a good idea of the variety of different designs going on

[57] Szostak, *The Art of Solo*, 159.

within the *Star Wars* universe. The assumption being, he knows how to make something more "*Star Wars*-centric" because he has a more in-depth knowledge of the franchise. In other words, it is their ability to claim a certain level of in-depth knowledge about the franchise that gives Kasdan, Chiang, and Clyne a claim to creative authority in the absence of a director. While one can assume some of that creative authority is given up or, as Derek Johnson might argue, 'shared' upon the hiring of a director, the firing of Lord and Miller suggest that the director's creative authority can also be challenged and lost – suggesting that creative authority within a franchise is constantly in flux.[58]

This chapter interrogates the creative development of the *Planet of the Apes* franchise to argue that, within franchised creative environments, creative power is best understood in terms of creative authority which is distributed and vied for in an effort to influence ongoing and ever-expanding franchise narratives. Creative authority is acquired by various workers across the franchise but is usually regulated by a select few individuals appointed to be in charge of the management of the franchise. For example, while Kathleen Kennedy may not write the scripts for any of the *Star Wars* films, direct any of the television episodes of the animated series, or have written any drafts of the tie-in novels, she does distribute creative authority to the individuals who oversee the hands-on creative work that happens within all of those areas of the franchise. Building on current work on the role of media managers and creative oversight within franchising, in this chapter I suggest that franchises tend to be spaces in which creative authority is unevenly distributed, frequently negotiated and often ephemeral. I push past the idea that the quality of a given franchise is tied to the guiding vision of a central creative figure, such as the director, and instead point to the ways franchises are fundamentally spaces of fraught creative

[58] Johnson, *Media Franchising*.

practice and that the long term development and evolution of franchised storytelling both necessitates and facilitates a decentralized creative power structure. Ultimately, it is this ambivalence towards centralized forms of authorship that allows franchised stories to perpetuate, progress, and continue across mediums and over generations in the ways I will discuss throughout this project.

Rather than argue that there is no central creative power within the franchise, I consider the relationship between what I call creative authority and narrative management as the *Apes* films progress. Most of the chapters in this project consider authorship across various texts rather than within them, and this chapter argues that, when we consider storytelling across texts, our understanding of this type of creative labor should shift from one of authorship to one of management. Thinking of concepts of management and creative authority, rather than authorship and creative genesis, I hope to draw attention to the inherent industrial collaboration that is required to envision and perpetuate a large-scale franchise with a complex interconnected story. With this in mind, this section considers how narrative management and creative authority are mobilized and put into practice as the series developed. How did those involved in managing the story imagine it should unfold over the course of the five pictures, how did other media play a role in this unfolding, and what might that tell us about modern storytelling practices? Most importantly, I want to consider who was imagined to have authority over these stories, how that power was maintained and mobilized, and what might this historical analysis tell us about current franchising storytelling practices. I conclude by briefly considering where *Planet of the Apes* is now and what its history might tell us about storytelling in the modern franchise era.

My central aim here is to show how creative authority is managed from the very early stages of a franchise. With that in mind, while I'll gesture towards contemporary examples of

creative authority in other franchises, my central case study looks at the early development of the *Planet of the Apes* series. While there are certainly other franchised properties that could provide a similar case study, *Apes* is uniquely positioned to reveal information about the way storytelling practices have evolved alongside the development of franchising for multiple reasons. First, the series was developed nearly two decades before "franchising" became a common industry term, shortly after the fall of the studio system, and before conglomerate structures subsumed the media industries. This time period allows for contextualization of certain storytelling practices outside of the influence of franchising as a discourse. Understanding how the executives and creatives who were trying to manage the *Apes* series encountered and worked through issues at the time might provide some insight into certain practices that would take hold decades later as franchising became increasingly ubiquitous within the media industries. *Apes* is currently a highly active franchise having just finished a financially and critically successful series of films; the franchise is in the midst of a renaissance making a reappraisal of its industrial history all the more compelling. With that in mind, I'll return to the *Apes* franchise in a later chapter discussing how storytelling processes have evolved since it was created.

Arthur P. Jacobs, the producer of the original *Apes* series of films, maintained a robust archive of communications, press kits, story drafts and news clipping which are all available in the special collections of the William H. Hannon Library at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Access to such embedded texts for an influential and lasting franchise from the moment of its inception and development is very rare. Though there have been in-depth production histories of important film franchises made possible through industry-granted access to current franchises, these can be limited by the nature of industrial self-reflexive and promotional discourse. Even when being interviewed outside the day to day promotional cycle of

the media industry, professionals are often only willing or able to offer a perspective that is influenced by the industrial moment and their own professional ambitions. As John Caldwell argues, "media industry realities are *always* constructed [emphasis in original]."[59] Caldwell also argues that "much more attention needs to be focused on the long and complicated journeys that story ideas take through the socio-professional networks that manage, develop, and cultivate them over time."[60] By turning specifically to the primary texts and the correspondence between individuals, it's possible to get a more accurate understanding of how those in charge of the *Apes* franchise were imagining the series and their relationship to it at any given moment rather than in retrospect. Therefore, this chapter focuses on evidence that comes from those papers, and this provides the basis for understanding the development of storytelling within the *Apes* franchise as it grew from a single picture into a cultural phenomenon. That said, some of those production histories offer exclusive interviews and insights that are useful in framing or expanding on some of the evidence in the archives, and I draw from them when beneficial to understanding the distribution of creative power. Ultimately, by focusing on this time period and these papers, I hope to push back against popular discourses that consider the collective storytelling logics of modern franchises as an entirely new development that somehow undermines the cultural value of franchised creative output. Rather, through this analysis, we can see how one of the oldest and most influential franchises of the modern era, from its inception, was a space of negotiated creative authority in which several creatives figures gained influence over the franchise through various modes of industrial practice.

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[59]John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television,* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 5.

[60] John Thornton Caldwell, "Cultures of Production: Studying Industry's Deep Texts, Reflexive Rituals and Managed Self—Disclosures," in *Media Industries: History, Theory, and Method,* ed. Jennifer Holt and Alisa Perren (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 205

From Authorship to Narrative Management

The case of *Solo* highlights the fraught nature of creative power within franchised environments. The central questions become: What individuals are responsible for steering the narrative and tonal direction of a franchise? When so many artists, writers, producers, and designers are all working together to build a project that can be developed over many years, how does one measure authorship? Franchising, as a space of collaborative shared creativity, should be a unique space to complicate the privileged position of the 'auteur' by drawing attention to the largely constructed nature of that concept. In other words, franchises require a level of coordination and creative cooperation that should, in theory, undermine any interest in looking for the auteur of the franchise and instead inspire researchers to investigate the various levels of shared creativity that often contribute to franchise story development. Any attempt to assign singular authorship to a franchise, especially one that has existed for several decades, misses an opportunity to explore the way franchising decenters authorship discourses in often productive ways.

While studies of authorship within franchising often remain fixated on the concept of the director as a key creative figure, there has also been an effort to highlight the increasing managerial role of the director in conglomerate media structures. Henry Jenkins has argued, "so far, the most successful transmedia franchises have emerged when a single creator or creative unit maintain control." Jenkins attributes much of the success of *The Matrix* transmedia efforts to the role of the Wachowskis' and their embrace of "collaborative authorship" in which they sought out trusted and skilled creative figures to expand *The Matrix* universe. He suggests that they:

> didn't simply license or subcontract and hope for the best. [The Wachowskis] personally wrote and directed content for the game, drafted scenarios for some of the animated shorts, and co-wrote a few of the comics.[61]

Though Jenkins does discuss the way various artists were given artistic freedom to expand *The Matrix* franchise, authorship is still imagined as extending from the creators of the universe, and their hands-on creative efforts are imagined to add value to the transmedia content. Similarly, in her in-depth analysis of the development *The Lord of the Rings* franchise, Kristin Thompson privileges Peter Jackson's ability to maintain control over the picture with what she considers to be "one of the most historically significant films ever made."[62] As she argues,

> Despite the high budget and his own lack of track record, Jackson was able to keep a remarkable degree of control over the *Rings* project, partly by making the film far from New Line headquarters, partly by having sympathetic producers working with him, and partly by sheer stubbornness.[63]

Thompson does acknowledge the creative contribution of Jackson's team in New Zealand throughout her analysis. However, it is Jackson's vision or "stubbornness" that is largely attributed to the film holding, in her mind, an exceptional status among other franchised content. She suggests that the movie has "a handcrafted" feel, in large part because Jackson was able to exist, literally, outside of Hollywood. Her analysis gives the impression that other franchises made within Hollywood lack the human agency required to tell meaningful and productive stories, or they are somehow less 'handcrafted' than ones with a central creative figure. Ultimately, Jenkins and Thompson privilege the act of creation and the role of the director as the ultimate architect of a franchise world and everything that stems from it. However, the focus on

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[61] Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 111.
[62] Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 8.
[63] Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*, 18

these central creative figures offers us little insight into the way authorship functions as a franchise and persists long after their creators have moved on to other projects.

Despite focusing on auteur figures, both Jenkins and Thompson's accounts productively highlight the ways authorial power is, in part, derived from an ability to manage creativity. Thompson does productively point to the ways Jackson was able to gain control over the production by making claims to knowing and understanding the franchise, perhaps more so than the executives at New Line. However, this is not unique to the *Lord of the Rings* franchise, or Spielberg and Lucas. I would argue media environments which favor a system of production that promotes the mass-proliferation of licensed content built around ever-expanding story worlds, have always required figures that occupy a liminal space between industry and creativity. Rather than think of them as a binary which has reversed, it would be more accurate to think of creative design and industrial management as integrated constructs that can articulate around individual industry workers.

Though not speaking of franchises specifically, Warren Buckland has attempted to consider the role of auteurs in blockbuster filmmaking. He argues that figures like Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, and J.J. Abrams have become auteurs because they occupy "key positions in the industry."[64] He argues that the film industry, "is no longer governed by mass production," and therefore auteurs establish their unique identity through their film style, and then through the formation of their own production houses. For Buckland, figures like J.J. Abrams are auteurs because their economic position allows them to control the means of production. While Buckland's analysis still mythologizes the role of a central creative figure in

[64] Warren Buckland, "The Role of the Auteur in the Age of the Blockbuster: Steven Spielberg and Dream Works," in *Movie Blockbusters*, ed. by Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2003), 87.

cultural production, he pushes our understanding of an auteur figure by recognizing it as a shifting construct. He productively draws attention to the increasing managerial function of an author. For example, if we consider control of the means of production as a marker of authorship, could we not also consider Kathleen Kennedy to be an auteur figure?

Though it might be tempting to consider this complex relationship as a modern phenomenon, and certainly the concept of the 'story group' discussed in the previous chapter is relatively new, it would be useful to understand how storytelling and franchise management have developed alongside each other in a particular historical context. Franchises have been traditionally studied from an industrial point of view, focusing on the ways economic factors have influenced the mass production of content. Janet Wasko, like many political economic scholars, understands creative output as primarily a product of capitalist and industrial need. She argues,

> …for popular culture production, economic factors set limitations and exert pressures on commodities that are produced (and influence what is not produced), as well as how, where, and to whom these products are (or are not) distributed.[65]

Similarly, when discussing the management of the *Batman* franchise in the early 1990s, Eileen Meehan argued any analysis of Batman or his related texts must, "be supplemented by an economic analysis of corporate structures, market structures, and interpenetrating industries."[66] Certainly, the political economy perspective is essential for understanding the ways texts, intertexts, and paratexts are all interconnected within conglomerate economic structures. However, this perspective also assumes that the primary discourse that drives the proliferation of

[65] Wasko, *Understanding Disney*, 29.
[66] Eileen Meehan, "'Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!': The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext." In *The Many Lives of Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio. (London: BFI, 1991), 49.

content in the industry is one of profit margins and bottom lines. While I wouldn't disagree that money is a dominant discourse within the media industries, creativity and storytelling ability are also considered valuable capital, and whether Walt Disney, George Lucas, or Steven Spielberg's authorial roles are imagined or not, they remain powerful figures imbued with creative authority and influence over the franchise.

Tara Lomax has theorized authorship within franchising more directly, drawing attention to the more discursive function of the auteur figure. She argues that, though Disney has taken over *Star Wars* from Lucas, and put a creative 'team' in place to guide the franchise, "a more practical critical account should recognize that this new authorial structure still facilitates the authorial presence of a singular auteur brand."[67] She suggests, "while team-structured collaborative authorship is an important aspect of transmedia storytelling, this does not preclude the potential to identify a transtextual presence of singular authorship."[68] Lomax's insights into Lucas' role in the *Star Wars* franchise and the shifting role of the author since his departure, brings us closer to understanding how notions of authorship persist even as collaborative creative practices become more apparent. Her insights into Lucas' role within *Star Wars* echo Foucault's theories of authorship or the "author function." Foucault suggests authorship is a construct which serves several and shifting functions within culture, to classify and legitimate certain texts, validating them through their association with a particular person. He compares the process through which texts are attributed to certain authors to the way Christianity has selected which

[67] Tara Lomax, "'Thank the Maker!': George Lucas, Lucasfilm and the Legends of Transtextual Authorship across the Star Wars Franchise," in *Star Wars a History of Transmedia Storytelling*, edited by Sean Guynes and Dan Hassler-Forest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 46.
[68] Lomax, "Thank the Maker," 47.

text to consider dogma and sacred, by looking for patterns among various texts and ignoring or expanding away disparities between them – or a process Foucault terms, "authentication."[69]

Within franchising, authorship takes on a very similar role, and popular discourse often attempts to make claims to the cultural value of a particular entry in a franchise by highlighting the contribution of a particular author. After the release of *Solo,* a common obsession among fans, journalists and bloggers imagined what the movie *would* have been if Lord and Miller were able to enact their 'vision.'[70] Despite many claims that the only real difference was the efficiency of the shooting schedule, many attempted to figure out what parts of the movie were a product of Lord and Miller and what parts were Howard's.[71] Writing for *Variety* Andrew Barker suggested, "it would be a waste of a movie ticket to sit through 'Solo' trying to guess which pieces of the final cut belong to Howard and which belong to Lord and Miller," However he adds, "there are certainly hints of the 'Lego Movie' directors' style of insouciant cultural demythification in the scenes with Lando…"[72] In his review for the *AV Club,* Jesse Hassenger posits, "[s]ome recognizable Lord-Miller touches survive in the better bits of dialogue, particularly in the scenes with legacy characters…"[73] All of this is to suggest that even within a franchised environment, the construct of the central author remains closely tied to how audiences make sense of determining the cultural value of a given story.

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[69] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 127.
[70] Kate Erbland, "'Solo: A Star Wars Story': Phil Lord and Chris Miller's Original Film Was Going to Be 'Gritty' and Would Not 'Just Service Fans'," *Indie Wire*, May22, 2018, https://www.indiewire.com/2018/05/solo-a-star-wars-story-phil-lord-chris-miller-original-film-1201967484/.
[71]Chris Agar, "Han Solo: Ron Howard Shot The Same Script As Lord & Miller," Screen Rant, March 26, 2018, https://screenrant.com/star-wars-solo-movie-script-ron-howard-lord-miller/.
[72] Andrew Barker, Review of *Solo: A Star Wars Story* dir. Ron Howard, *Variety*, May 15, 2018, https://variety.com/2018/film/reviews/solo-a-star-wars-story-review-alden-ehrenreich-1202811559/.
[73]Jesse Hassenger, Review of Solo: A Star Wars Story dir. Ron Howard, *The AV Club*, May 15, 2018, https://film.avclub.com/the-entertaining-solo-gives-the-galaxys-favorite-rogue-1826004702

Many scholars have started to understand franchise creativity as a system of management across franchised spaces, pointing to "the growing role of corporate intermediaries in managing creativity across media…"[74] The focus on intermediaries draws attention to the ways transmedia practices necessitate and facilitate cooperative, creative practices across media industries – both in contemporary media industries and historically. However, the term 'intermediaries' has quickly become one used to describe a wide range of creative positions with varying levels of creative power over the direction of a franchise. Tim Havens argues that intermediaries are "organizational linking pins working across various units and holding multiple positions within the organization."[75] The term has been useful in describing the kinds of cultural power available to lower-level industry managers who draw upon what Havens terms "industry lore" which he argues "functions as a source of power/knowledge that makes the world of the intermediary knowable and manageable…"[76] While intermediaries and industry lore provide a valuable theoretical framework for understanding the media industries writ large, they lack the specificity needed to understand the negotiation of creative power within a single franchise. Though a franchise is made of several intermediary figures, the franchise is guided by various creative figures who seek to gain creative authority through both knowledge of the storyworld and creative practice. As Derek Johnson argues of D.C Fontana, a staff writer for *Star Trek*: "With power of approval over licensees, creators like Fontana could establish territories, reaffirm contractual hierarchies, insist upon deferential uses of shared resources, and shore up positions of

[74] Johnson, *Franchising*, 142.
[75] Tim Havens, "Towards a Structuration Theory of Media Intermediaries," in *Making Media Work: Cultures of Management in the Entertainment Industries*, edited by Derek Johnson, Derek Kompare, and Avi Santo (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 39.
[76] Havens, "Towards a Structuration Theory," 41.

creative authority."[77] Ultimately, authorship within franchising can be understood as a system of managerial oversight and negotiated creative authority.

Thomas Schatz has asked, "has the very notion of authorship in contemporary media-making become little more than a discursive construction, a necessary journalistic fiction, and marketing ploy?"[78] Schatz suggests that it is "imperative that we keep in mind the fact that media industries are *cultural* industries involving the systematic production and consumption of expressive, meaningful works that manifest our shared sense of ourselves, our lives, our values."[79] He feels that by losing a focus on authorship, we are also losing a focus on agency and the individual's ability to make a difference. In essence, media studies risk overlooking the cultural function of the media industries. While studies of the industrial relationships that contribute to the facilitation of creative ideas is imperative to a full understanding of the media industries, in an effort to point to the complex industrial relationships that comprise the media industries we must not lose sight of authorship as a cultural status which carries the potential for agency and meaningful contribution to cultural production.

However, perhaps Foucault's famous deconstruction of the author also offers a way to remodel studies of authorship that maintain the lost focus on culture Schatz has lamented. Foucault suggests "we should re-examine the empty space left by the author's disappearance; we should attentively observe, along its gaps and fault lines, its new demarcations, and the reapportionment of this void; we should await fluid functions released by this disappearance."[80] With this in mind, if the rise of conglomeration and franchising has made more apparent the

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[77] Johnson, *Franchising*, 14.
[78] Thomas Schatz, "Film Studies, Cultural Studies, and Media Industry Studies," *Media Industries* 1, no. 1 (2014), 40, http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mij.15031809.0001.108
[79] Schatz, "Film Studies, Cultural Studies…," 40.
[80] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," 121.

diminished role of "the author" as sole visionary and scribe, as media scholars we must not simply ignore the disappearance of the author or consider it an outmoded construct. Rather, we must examine the ever-present concept of authorship as a necessary and meaningful industrial practice without resurrecting the director (or any other entity) as a central creative figure within cultural production.

In the introduction to their book on management in the entertainment industries, Derek Johnson, Derek Kompare and Avi Santo argue, "managerial discourses might be understood as a form of intermediation between discourses of commerce and creativity."[81] They suggest that studies of media management might provide new insights into how creative and industrial imperatives exist simultaneously within cultural production. They suggest managers, as intermediaries, are integral to understanding the production of culture. Building off of this, I would like to consider the ways management can be, and often is, a form of authorship. Avi Santo's work on brand licensing offers a picture of how we might theorize distributed and negotiated authorship within a franchised environment as a process of networked and shared creative management. In his work on the shifting position of brand licensors during the Classical Network Era, Santo argues the relative success or failure of transmedia brands had less to do with any "inherent qualities" of a given brand and more, "with how each property was managed by its respective licensor, and with the degree of creative authority and control each licensor demanded over the production process."[82] Here, Santo places the brand licensors as being in a position of authorial power, though he doesn't use that term. Rather Santo uses the term

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[81] Derek Johnson, Derek Kompare, and Avi Santo, "Discourses, Dispositions, Tactics: Reconceiving Management in Critical Media Industry Studies," in *Making Media Work: Cultures of Management in the Entertainment Industries*, edited by Derek Johnson, Derek Kompare, and Avi Santo (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 6.
[82] Avi Santo, "Batman versus The Green Hornet": The Merchandisable TV Text and the Paradox of Licensing in the Classical Network Era," *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 2 (Winter, 2010), 65.

"creative authority" to discuss the amount of control that the licensor gave to television production teams to tell stories built on particular brands. Interestingly, Santo agues, that it was those that attempted to maintain tight creative authority that struggled in expanding their brands to television. Despite the assertion that modern franchising is somehow less culturally significant as it moves to a more collective form of creativity, franchised stories have often flourished in moments where creative authority was distributed among various media creatives and managers. By reframing concerns with authorship as an interest in the flow of creative authority throughout franchise systems, we might better understand the ways meaning and cultural value can be generated across franchises without the need for a single authorial creative force.

A focus on transmedia storytelling, and franchise management practices, as Santo's work illustrates, may open the door to work that considers creative agency, albeit negotiated and contested, *across* the media industries. However, it should not be surprising that the very media construct that has consolidated and converged the once distinct media industries and continues to reshape media production, might be a productive lens through which to study the evolving role of authorship and creative agency within them. In other words, it should be obvious that franchising has not only shaped and been shaped by industrial practice but also by creative process. Schatz argues, "[w]e who study the media are obligated to examine the industry process, with its necessary compulsion for standardization and commodification. But we are also obliged to identify and account for instances of disruption and innovation, the differences that truly *make a difference* in the industrial production of culture."[83] This chapter can be thought of as an attempt to answer the call to action by Schatz by attempting to outline a system of creative management which allows for disruptions and agency within a highly commodifiable franchise

[83] Schatz, "Film Studies, Cultural Studies…," 40.

structure. Many of the chapters that follow will try to point out the ways in which franchises truly can and do make a difference in how we make sense of the world around us, while also being sources of commercial and cultural value for corporate stakeholders. This dual function – as industrial product and meaningful cultural expression – is made possible largely through the system of negotiated creative authority that I outline here.

(Re) Vision: Managing the Construction of a Franchise

Despite being based on a single-authored novel, one could argue that – as a franchise – *Planet of the Apes* had, from its inception, at least two individuals with creative authority: author Pierre Boulle, and producer Arthur P. Jacobs. Yet only one of those individuals had managerial power. The initial idea – a planet inhabited by intelligent simians – originated with Boulle, a French novelist at that time likely known best for his book *Bridge Over The River Kwai* which had been adapted into an academy award winning film in 1957. As an author, Boulle had considerable control over how the story unfolded across those pages. Though he obviously received notes from his editor and publisher, his authorial role over the world of the apes likely went unchallenged. Jacobs acquired the rights to the book shortly before its initial U.S. release and immediately began reimagining the material as a movie, in the process staking a claim over Boulle's story. Jacobs and director J. Lee Thompson, who had recently worked with Jacobs on the film *What A Way to Go* (1964), put together a detailed pitch for the movie which outlined a clear vision of how the film could be translated from a novel into a major motion picture. The pitch described the story as "a rip-roaring horror story – a classic thriller utilizing the best elements of "King Kong," [sic] Frankenstein," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," "Things to Come,"

"The Birds" and other film classics."[84] Here Jacobs and Thompson contrived and managed an intertextual relationship between classic films and the yet to be produced *Apes* movie in a way that offered potential investors a specific lens or set of lenses through which to understand the story's potential. Ultimately, while Boulle had creative authority over the initial text, after purchasing the rights, Jacobs assumed managerial oversight over how the story would be interpreted and used his managerial power to distribute creative authority among various creative figures.

Jacobs' role became one of vision and revision. He shaped the story into one that would appeal to audiences and film executives by revising the novel into what he imagined to be a groundbreaking motion picture. Right away, he and his team acknowledged "certain major alterations" that would be "necessary to further enhance the property as a motion picture."[85] For example, they described a moment in the book in which a character makes an escape. They argue. "in the book, it is barely touched upon, but here we visualize a miniature version of "The Great Escape." Again, a well-known popular film of the time is used as a shorthand to encapsulate the movie. Though there are no films in the franchise, Jacobs and Thompson are managing the various intertextual relationship between the forthcoming film, the book, and various other popular films circulating within the cultural consciousness. The film is imagined to be a tapestry of the best film has to offer; it's thrills pulled from one source, it's drama from another and its action sequences from yet another. Jacobs leveraged his knowledge of the movie industry to pitch his vision for the series. Essentially, the concept of an ape-ruled world provided a new context for proven themes and story elements. By demonstrating (or performing) a unique

[84] "Planet of the Apes," initial story notes, October 25, 1963, Arthur P. Jacobs Papers (henceforth "Jacobs Papers") William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University, collection 23, box 58, folder 8.
[85] "Planet of the Apes," initial story notes, October 25, 1963, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 58, folder 8.

understanding of the book, the movie industry, and the potential inherent in their relationship, Jacobs secured himself a position of creative authority early on in the *Apes* franchise.

At this stage, Jacobs' primary role as a manager was to communicate the story's potential to others or position himself as a man with a vision. While Jacobs was working on pitching the *Apes* film, he was also concerned with the success of the book, likely assuming that the movie would be easier to sell to executives and audiences if it were based on a best-selling novel. A week after the book was scheduled to hit shelves, Jacobs sent a letter to Boulle's publicist expressing concerns with how the book was being promoted. He wrote, "'Planet of the Apes' has been in stores for over a week and yet no review has appeared in any major publication other than *Time Magazine*."[86] He continued, "I believe for an author of Boulle's stature and a book of this *potential* [emphasis added] better treatment is deserved and should be demanded." As the series progressed, his vision for the series became increasingly important as Jacobs found himself arguing for the series' creative and financial potential to studio executives and possible licensors throughout its run. When Fox was hesitant about making a fourth *Apes* picture, Jacobs argued that completing the story:

> has many benefits in the areas of rereleases and, additionally, has a further benefit many years to come when our main television syndication is played out whereby the four pictures can be made into one and then made into 13 half-hour episodes aimed at Saturday morning children shows, giving us still another source of revenue.[87]

Furthermore, the potential for *Apes* to have a life outside of the theater became part of making licensing deals and tie-in partnerships. As the head of publicity for Arthur P. Jacobs' production company, APJAC Productions, Jack Hirshberg tried to push various licensing deals

[86] Arthur P. Jacobs to Alain Bernhiem, November 20, 1963, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 59. folder 3.
[87] Arthur P. Jacobs to Elmo Williams July 22, 1971, Jacobs Papers, collection 23 box 68 folder 11

but was repeatedly ignored by Fox and their licensing partners. One major reason offered to them for this lack of interest was that manufacturers prefer "a continuing project – such as a TV series."[88] To this Jacobs and Hirshberg argued for the series potential as reason enough to invest in these types of merchandising efforts. Hirshberg wrote, "Arthur points out there will probably be a fourth film, that all three would be re-released in theaters and then on TV, and that CBS is negotiating for rights to the venture as a proposed TV series." Jacobs uses the promise of an ongoing story to sell the potential of the series to merchandisers. He attempted to sell them on how the series might be expanded rather than on how the series existed at the time. Much like Havens discusses intermediaries drawing their power from largely imagined industry lore, Jacobs' attempted to manifest managerial power over the *Apes* franchise by confidently communicating the series' largely imagined potential.

Jacobs assumed a position of authority by claiming to understand the value of the property more than any other party invested in its future – including Boulle and his publishers. Throughout early production of the first film, Jacobs was very protective of the tone and general aura around the *Planet of the Apes.* Jacobs was not interested in pitching *Apes* as a low-budget B movie aimed at children, but instead a movie that had something for everyone. Throughout negotiations with 20th Century Fox, Jacobs was willing to compromise when it came to budget, but he refused to sacrifice the overall quality of the picture. Writing to Fox producer Richard Zanuck, Jacobs expressed that he felt *Apes* "must be made with quality and not as a 'B' exploitation picture."[89] Jacobs' insistence on this point prolonged the negotiations and extended the selling of the picture by many years. Writing to Boulle's publicist who was seemingly

[88] Jack Hirshberg to Selwyn Rausch February 2, (n.d.), Jacobs Papers, collection 23 box 65 folder 6.
[89] Arthur P. Jacobs to Richard Zanuck December 10, 1963, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 59, folder 4.

unhappy with the protracted development period, Jacobs explained that they should not "try to make the fastest deal possible, or the cheapest deal possible, but instead make an all-out attempt to have it done importantly."[90] Jacobs' insistence on the film not being made into a B picture highlights an important role of narrative management: having a clear vision for the tone of the world being created.

Though there were several others who were contributing to the specifics of the story, Jacobs oversaw the transition from one medium to another, identified its creative and economic value, and attempted to communicate that value to each new party that entered the creative and industrial circle around the film. I don't want to suggest that Jacobs was an auteur figure or some sort of visionary, as many of the stories about Jacobs that surround the early *Apes* film do, nor do I want to rob Jacobs of creative contribution to the franchise. Rather, I would argue that during this development period of the franchise, Jacobs took on the very specific and necessary role as shepherd and his ability to position himself as a visionary was vital to his success as a manager. Whether driven by his financial investment in the property, or through a genuine affective relationship to the material, Jacobs cultivated and developed a particular version of the story. Rather than allowing the story to be subsumed into the logics of exploitation that might otherwise have churned out a quick and cheap B picture, Jacobs acted as a buffer between the material and the potential ambivalence of the industry. Avi Santo has discussed the complicated discourse of authorship that unfolds within a corporate environment around specific pieces of intellectual property. Specifically, he discusses the way the company Lone Ranger Incorporated often valued the "censorial powers" of its president George W. Trendle over the "creative work"

[90] Arthur P. Jacobs to Alain Bernhiem, February 12, 1964, Jacobs Papers, collection 23 box 59 folder 4

of others involved in the development of *Lone Ranger* stories.[91] A similar dynamic seemed at work within the *Apes* series, with Jacobs having possessed immense censorial powers. Along with that censorial authority, Jacobs exercised a certain delegatory power. As part of his managerial duties, he assigned individuals with creative authority so that they may oversee the development of aspects of the production.

Jacobs' vision was instrumental to his managerial role during the development of the franchise and as the project moved into the later stages of development, he increasingly used his power to revise the creative contributions of others. As more creative personnel were brought into the development process, Jacobs became responsible for managing several drafts and various interpretations of the *Apes* world. By 1964, Blake Edwards had replaced Thompson as the potential director for the film and Rod Serling, of the popular show *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964), was brought in to develop a draft of the screenplay. Both were respected individuals in their own right; Serling a well-known writer from television's Golden Era and Edwards well-known for directing dramas. These hires suggested that Jacobs had achieved his goal, and the film would be taken seriously and made "importantly." His managerial power was used to hire a team of people who perhaps shared his vision (or at least were willing to execute it) and could deliver on the potential he promised.

Jacobs' job was now to manage each party's interpretation of the story rather than offer his own. In 1964, Jacobs sent a letter to Edwards discussing Serling's early draft of the screenplay. In it, he made several suggestions about how the script should be altered, throughout crediting ideas to Edwards, Serling, and storyboard artist Don Peters. For example, at one point

[91] Avi Santo, Selling the Silver Bullet, 92.

he suggests an addition in which they, "incorporate Don's scarecrow approach" referencing a moment in the movie in which the humans encounter large scarecrows built by apes to keep out humans.[92] Later he suggests an idea from the book writing, "I think we should consider the possibility of the astronauts bringing a chimp with them, and eventually having it killed by Nova as in the book."[93] While Jacobs seemed keen to trust the people he hired, he also made some revisions to certain aspects that may have undermined the tonal quality he had originally envisioned. For example, though he liked Peters' visual rendering of the story, he had two points he did not care for and suggested they be omitted from the final script. He writes, "firstly, the men shooting up in the pods. Even though such things do exist now, they seem to give it a Buck Rogers approach…" Possibly Jacobs felt this approach was too reminiscent of the B pictures of which he was keen to avoid comparisons. He continued, "second, the animals floating in formaldehyde seems just a little too much, and too barbaric – as we certainly wouldn't have masses of chimps floating in little bottles. The mood of the surgery in that scene, however, I think is quite wonderful."[94]

Jacobs was, both by his own design and industrial practicality, the keeper of the *Apes* vision. His interaction with executives throughout the pitching of the film, and his insistence that the movie remained a family film that can appeal to a broad audience likely informed many of his opinions. More than that, Jacobs is acting as a creative supervisor and authorial figure attempting to find some uniformity among the various creative visions for the film. Perhaps the most obvious example of this type of intertextual management can be seen in the creation of the film's iconic ending. Though there is a twist ending to the book, the planet the astronauts land on

[92] Arthur P. Jacobs to Blake Edwards October 14, 1964, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 59, folder 3.
[93] Arthur P. Jacobs to Blake Edwards October 14, 1964, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 59, folder 3.
[94] Arthur P. Jacobs to Blake Edwards October 14, 1964, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 59, folder 3.

is never revealed to be Earth. Instead, it is simply presented as a different planet in which the evolutionary trajectory of apes and humans was reversed. The movie, however, ends with the reveal that Taylor (Charlton Heston) had been on Earth the entire time. He encounters a half-destroyed Statue of Liberty sticking out of the sand on a beach and collapses in shock and anguish when he realizes that humans had destroyed their own planet. The ending has become one of the enduring images of the series, and its nightmarish tone set a precedent for not only the films that immediately followed but many of the films that would be made in the decades to come.

Discussing the ending with Edwards, Jacobs revealed that "Rod is 100% sold on the "rosebud" ending but feels making the astronauts from another planet is a cheap device." The rosebud ending Jacobs refers to is the reveal of the Statue of Liberty, 'Rosebud' being a code word derived from the surprise ending of *Citizen Kane* (1941). This is presented as an idea Edwards and Jacobs had discussed, and Jacobs had then presented to Serling. Though Edwards liked this ending, he was concerned audiences would not believe astronauts would be unable to identify that they were in their own solar system. The solution the director offered was that astronauts would be from an entirely different planet in which case, presumably, the ending would only be a shock for the audience and not the character in the movie. Serling didn't like this ending and argued for a more straightforward version in which the astronauts were from Earth and in turn, are shocked along with the audience to learn of their location. Jacobs acted as a mediator suggesting to Edwards that, "Rod claims that if you allow him to write this version, he will positively erase any reservation you had about believability."[95] After Serling submitted his draft, Jacobs wrote Edwards again suggesting that "Don Peters has read the script and feels that

[95] Arthur P. Jacobs memo to Blake Edwards October 14, 1964, Jacobs Papers, collection 23 box 59 folder 3.

it works completely and that there is no problem whatsoever in regard to the believability about the earth's [sic] solar system, etc."[96] Jacobs' job was to organize the various versions of the *Apes* story circulating the project. He was managing the story of the book, the one being pitched by Serling, the one being imagined by Blake Edwards, and the one being drawn by Don Peters. Jacobs acted as a manager to creative personnel, attempting to negotiate their various perspectives. Unlike other producers of the time, who may have just been in charge of one book adaptation, Jacobs was in charge of continually revising and developing a growing franchise. While he occupied an authorial position within the Apes franchise, he authored through the management of central creative figures. Jacobs became the central source of creative authority which he could and did distribute as the franchise developed. Though this may still seem like we could theorize him as an auteur figure, it's important to note that his authority came from his time with the franchise and imagined understanding of the storyworld, rather than from a blind belief in his artistic vision. While this gave him a large amount of managerial power through which to disseminate that creative authority, other creative figures were able to negotiate various levels of creative control through their own knowledge of the text as the franchise grew.

Vying for Creative Authority

While narrative managers have the power to distribute creative authority, it is often fought for and can be easily lost by various creative personnel working within a franchise. During the first *Apes* film, Serling and Edwards were eventually replaced by Franklin J. Schaffner and Michael Wilson, respectively. A new writer and director brought new ideas and takes on the film. One suggestion Wilson made was to change the title of the film from *Planet of*

[96] Arthur P. Jacobs Letter to Blake Edwards December 22, 1964, Jacobs Papers, collection 23 box 59 folder 4.

Apes, which he felt was a "B-title."[97] This suggestion was clearly ignored; however, Wilson also fought for another significant change to Serling's draft. In Serling's draft, Taylor (then known as Thomas), the main character played by Charlton Heston, dies at the end, exaggerating what was already a dark ending. Wilson did not like that ending but Jacobs and director Frank Schaffner seemed attached to it. When submitting a final draft, Wilson held on to the final ten pages and made a plea to Jacobs, "…I have come to believe more firmly than ever that to kill off Thomas would be a grave mistake."[98] His arguments were well-considered, and he presented them clearly in a nearly two-page letter. Wilson believed that Jacobs' attachment to this particular ending was based on Serling's "altogether different" script. He argued, "Rod Serling's screenplay is a science fiction melodrama, solemn and earnest in tone, and in his treatment of the material Thomas's death does indeed, as you suggest, add structure to the whole piece." However, Wilson felt his screenplay, "while on one plane a tale of suspense and terror," was "basically a satire."[99] Ultimately, Wilson felt that "the final revelation of our film – that we are on Earth, and that man in his folly has blown up his civilization – is both satiric and tragic. This catastrophe cannot be topped by having Thomas die. His death becomes anti-climactic, merely a morbid aftermath."[100]

Creative authority, then, can be understood as a claim to a superior understanding of a given element or set of elements regarding the storyworld of a franchised property. While Jacobs is still the manager, Wilson positions himself as being the person who is more familiar with his version of the script and therefore can speak with more authority about how it should end. He carefully explains how he sees the tone of the story, what has changed since previous

[97] Michael Wilson to Arthur P. Jacobs, Mort Abrahams and Frank Schaffner, February 14, 1967, Jacobs Papers, collection 23 box 59 folder 5.
[98] Michael Wilson to Arthur P. Jacobs, March 15, 1967, Jacobs Papers, collection 23 box 59 folder 5.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

drafts and why his ending would ultimately fit the story better. While Jacobs may retain the right to deny Wilson's request, he was not impervious to other perspectives and was not in the truest sense, an author. He was a negotiator, a judge, and keeper of a specific vision of the series. However, if he were presented with a compelling case, as with Wilson, he would shift his perspective and revise the vision. Essentially, Wilson was attempting to assert his creative authority over the script, arguing that he understood the ending on a deeper level, more so than Serling and Jacobs. Ultimately, it was by demonstrating an intimate understanding of the franchise, in terms of tone, themes, and structure, that Wilson was able to garner enough creative authority to influence the direction of the franchise. In the process, Wilson downplayed Serling's understanding of the franchise and lessened his creative influence over the series. Throughout the early production stages of *Planet of the Apes,* creative authority would shift from individual to individual as more people were brought in to work on the project.

Generating a story for the first *Apes* sequel proved to be less than intuitive. Though Wilson ultimately received credit for the original *Apes* script, when it came time to produce a sequel, Jacobs and his team contacted both Rod Serling and Pierre Boulle and asked them to offer treatments for the film. Both authors pitched scripts that were ultimately rejected. Perhaps understandably, Jacobs turned to Boulle as a potential source of narrative expansion. This made sense considering he had conceived of the world in the first place and Jacobs often referred to the book when managing the evolving story that became the first film. *Planet of the Apes* had its wide release in April of 1968. The film was very popular among not just sci-fi audiences but general audiences and would go on to be one of the most lucrative non-roadshow pictures to come from Fox at the time.[101] That same month, Boulle had already been contacted about

[101] "20th Century Fox 1968 Annual Report," Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 62, folder 6.

developing a treatment for a follow-up. Simultaneously, Serling was also asked to work on ideas for the sequel.[102] As each writer worked on their version of the sequel, the producers, central among them being Jacobs, carefully considered the success of the first film and the purpose of the sequel. Essentially, each writer was offered an opportunity to demonstrate their value to the series and compete for creative authority.

Boulle and Serling were each vying for creative authority. Jacobs offered them the chance to each make their case for the future of the franchise. Each author had a very different approach to the sequel. Boulle's script was simply a logical continuation of the first film's narrative, turning its twist ending into a cliffhanger that set up the next movie. Essentially Boulle's pitch for the movie would open exactly where the previous film left off, in front of the Statue of Liberty. Nova and Taylor would then realize they were surrounded by primitive humans who would eventually accept Taylor as their leader. In a meeting with producer Mort Abrahams, Boulle outlined a script that would revolve around, "the efforts of these humans, stirred by Taylor's eagerness to rise back to their former state and dignity."[103] The movie would take place over the course of several years, culminating in an all-out war between apes and humans and Taylor's eventual death. Serling, on the other hand, was far more liberal in his interpretation of where a sequel might go. In his early letters to Abrahams, he seemed to favor a story that mostly used the original film as a "jumping off point" suggesting that from this angle "the world is our oyster and we can try myriad paths."[104] Serling seemed to favor a sort of anthology approach to the expansion of the world in which they perhaps either follow the

[102] Rod Serling to Mort Abrahams, April 15, 1968, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 62, folder 1.
[103] Mort Abrams, to Arthur P. Jacobs, April 17, 1968, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 62, folder 1.
[104] Rod Serling to Mort Abrahams, April 15, 1968, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 62, folder 1.

characters to some other time and place or stay on the planet they established and follow "another new bizarre adventure that in no way related to what we have already seen." [105] For Serling, it seemed the value of the original film was in establishing an interesting narrative space in which anything is possible.

Ultimately, though, neither aligned with Jacobs' vision for the series. Though they initially offered few specific ideas about how the story would play out, the producers did have one firm demand; something Abrahams expressed in his initial meeting with Boulle and continued to stress throughout the development. All the producers seemed in agreement that the new film contain two memorable scenes that correlated to the reveal of the gorillas on horseback which happens about halfway through the first film and the reveal of the Statue of Liberty which occurs at the end. In a follow-up letter to Boulle's agent, Jacobs reiterated the importance of these story elements in the final draft. While he stressed that he did not want to "understate Pierre's creative work" he suggested that "it would seem to be imperative for the sequel that we have two visual surprises for the audience – a surprise hopefully of the intensity and novelty of the one contained in the original."[106] Boulle and Serling were unable to garner any creative authority from Jacobs who used his managerial role to find a writer who was willing to shape the franchise in a way that aligned with his vision for the series. From this process of trying out various treatments and writers, we can see how consistency can be maintained within a franchise through managerial authorship. Though, as we will see, Jacobs gave future writers certain freedom to create within the franchise, this initial development and selection process was crucial

[105] Rod Serling to Mort Abrahams, April 15, 1968, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 62, folder 1.
[106] Arthur P. Jacobs to Alain Bernheim, April 22, 1968, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 62, folder 1.

to find creative figures he trusted with that level of creative authority – while simultaneously allowing he and his producing partner to revise and reaffirm their understanding of the franchise.

British writer Paul Dehn was brought in to develop the second film. As the series developed, Dehn would come to hold tremendous creative authority over the direction of the series even on occasions in which he wasn't credited as the primary screenwriter. Once involved in the series, Dehn became Jacobs' main source of ideas for future *Apes* stories. Dehn was the one who offered the solution for the third *Apes* movie in which Zira and Cornelius find an old ship and escape from the Earth, which had been destroyed in the previous film.[107] Dehn took ownership over the viewer experience and the characters much in the way Jacobs had during early production. In a letter to Jacobs, he outlined a rewrite on the first three pages of dialogue. In the letter, he demonstrated an understanding of where the film was in the production process and had ideas about how the dialogue could incorporate into the film using b-roll and voice-overs. He argued, "this dialogue is the first we hear in our picture, and I think it important that it should excite, intrigue, mystify and capture our audience."[108] While Dehn lacked the managerial power of Jacobs, by expressing genuine concern for these small moments Dehn was also reaffirming his understanding of not just the single film, but the collective *Apes* experience. It was not so much that Dehn demonstrated that he knew what fans wanted from the franchise, but also that he cared enough to reach out to Jacobs about it.

Dehn's authority came from his knowledge of not simply the current or past *Apes* films, but his knowledge across films. He retained a chronological outline of major events in the *Apes* world that might influence future texts. Some of these events were only passingly mentioned in

[107] Paul Dehn to Arthur P. Jacobs January 6, 1970, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 63, folder 4.
[108] Paul Dehn to Arthur P. Jacobs, January 8, 1971, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 66, folder 10.

other movies, yet Dehn attempted to make sure the dates lined up as best they could. For example, he posits that the "plague of dogs" mentioned by Cornelius in Escape (*Apes* 3) happened in 1981, brought to earth from a recent mission to Mars, and that shortly after Apes are trained as slaves.[109] He included this outline as an Appendix to drafts of *Conquest* to highlight how the films would eventually come full circle. The outline estimated that in 1990, "The nuclear bomb falls on New York, as verbally reported in APES 2." [110] Though the document was only a brief chronology of these events, Dehn's investment in understanding the relationship between the movies contributed to his ability to speak with authority about where the franchise should go. His creative authority was fixed in documentation and potentially could serve as a resource to future creatives working in the franchise.

Ultimately Dehn's creative authority, acquired through his knowledge of the storyworld allowed him to influence *Apes* scripts even when other writers were hired to write them. Due to health concerns, Dehn was unable to write a complete draft of the final film, *Battle For the Planet of the Apes* within the tight turnaround required by the production schedule. John William Corrington and Joyce Hooper Corrington were hired to write the script for the fifth installment in the series. Though one might assume they were immediately given a certain amount of creative authority, their unfamiliarity with the storyworld that Dehn and Jacobs had cultivated resulted in Jacobs asking Dehn to look at the script after the Corringtons had submitted their final draft. When it came time to assign credit for writing, Dehn requested a very specific credit, "Original Story and Script Supervision by..." [111] He was quickly informed by Fox that there is "no provision for such a title."[112] Dehn wrote the Writers Guild requesting he receive some form of

[109] Paul Dehn, "Conquest of the Planet of the Apes" story outline, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 69, Folder 4.
[110] Paul Dehn, "Conquest of the Planet of the Apes" story outline, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 69, Folder 4.
[111] Arthur P. Jacobs to Marvin Birdt, November 24, 1972, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 71, folder 9.
[112] Arthur P. Jacobs to Paul Dehn December 4, 1972, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 71, folder 9.

shared writing credit. Dehn, with the full backing of Jacobs, argued, he wrote "almost 100% of the dialogue" and his other changes were extensive and involved "'re-characterizing' all the major characters and "re-motivating one long crucial sequence."[113] However, the Guild refused to give credit to more than two writers. This instance points to the complex nature of creative authority. Creative authority may rest outside of the credited person on a given film. It may, in fact, lie with whomever producers deem to be closest to the storyworld (or the version of the storyworld the producers determine appropriate).

In his final draft of his treatment for *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*, Paul Dehn ended the screenplay with the words: "The Beginning of Something." [114] This was a turning point for the creative direction for the series, as the previous two films ended without much hope for an ongoing narrative. This opened the door for a clear trajectory for a sequel, which could follow Cornelius and Zira's orphaned child as he grew up as an intelligent ape in a world ruled by humans. Whereas previous films required creatives to work backward, *Escape* was the first in the series to have a built-in narrative thread that could be easily followed should franchise move forward. However, by including this line, Dehn also positioned himself as a person with knowledge about where that story would go and, in doing so, made himself valuable to the future of the franchise and likely assured himself a certain level of continued creative authority.

Conclusion

Halfway through the production of *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (2018), directors Phil Lord and Christopher Miller were released from the project. The official reason given for the abrupt decision was that the studio and the directors "had different creative visions on this film," and

[113] Paul Dehn to Alan Griffiths, March 16, 1973, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 71, folder 9.
[114] "Escape From The Planet of the Apes" treatment, August 8, 1970, Jacobs Papers, collection 23, box 66, folder 17.

made the mutual decision to "part ways."[115] However, *Variety* reported that parties close to the production claim the departure was due to mounting tension between the directors and key members of producer Kathleen Kennedy's team, naming writer Lawrence Kasdan specifically.[116] It was reported that Kasdan clashed with the directors as they opted to improvise several scenes rather than shoot the script as written.[117] In fact, some were reporting that Kasdan, who has written several entries in the *Star Wars* canon including the beloved *Empire Strikes Back* (1980), and the more recent *The Force Awakens* (2016), was being considered as a possible replacement for the directors. In an interview with *Variety,* Kasdan summarized the tension as an issue of "tone." He stated, "tone is everything to me. That's what movies are made of."[118] He argued that if the producers think the tone a director is going for doesn't align with the tone they want, "you're going to have trouble." If true, the story demonstrates a case in which Kasdan made a claim to superior creative authority over the iconic Star Wars character than the young directors who were brought in to direct it. It wouldn't be hard to imagine a scenario in which Kasdan made a similar plea to producer Kathleen Kennedy that Wilson did to Jacobs regarding the ending to the first *Apes* film. He knew the story, and his experience with the original trilogy

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[115] Christopher D. Shea, "New Han Solo Movie Loses Its Directors Over 'Creative Differences'," *The New York Times*, June 21, 2017, accessed December 1, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/21/movies/han-solo-movie-directors.html

[116]Brent Lang, "'Star Wars' Han Solo Spinoff: Lord & Miller Fired After Clashing With Kathleen Kennedy," *Variety*, June 20, 2017, accessed December 2, 2018, https://variety.com/2017/film/news/star-wars-han-solo-kathleen-kennedy-director-fired-1202473919/ .

[117] Kaitlyn Booth, "More Details About Chris Miller and Phil Lord's Firing from Solo: A Star Wars Story," *Bleeding Cool*, May 13, 2018, accessed December 2, 2018, https://www.bleedingcool.com/2018/05/13/more-details-about-chris-miller-and-phil-lords-firing-from-solo-a-star-wars-story/

[118]Kristopher Tapley, "Inside 'Solo': A 'Star Wars' Story's Bumpy Ride to the Big Screen," *Variety*, May 22, 2018, accessed December 2 2018, https://variety.com/2018/film/features/solo-a-star-wars-story-directors-reshoots-ron-howard-1202817841/.

outweighed any claim to creative authority Lord and Miller might have had. Kennedy, as one of the primary managers of the universe, valued his opinion over their opinion.

Though in reality most Hollywood stories are, on some level, shaped by collections of individuals as a project moves from development to production; the film industry, as John Caldwell has noted, "has traditionally denigrated television for writing by committee, while assuming ownership for itself of the traditional creative marker of quality: sole authorship."[119] Caldwell considers the role of authorship in modern media industries and argues that "negotiated and collective authorship is an almost unavoidable and determining reality in contemporary film/television"[120] Yet the case of *Apes* would suggest that this is hardly a contemporary phenomenon. Throughout the production of *Apes,* several voices were involved in shaping the narrative, and more voices would be involved as the series progressed. However, pragmatically speaking, all voices cannot be heard at all times, and at various points, different voices must assert some form of authority over the text. This is often done by an individual claiming to understand the text on a deeper level than the others whose opinions might be on the table.

Though it is important to understand franchises as economic constructions, appreciating the unique storytelling logics of franchised properties is an important part of understanding how franchising has circulated as a powerful discourse. The story of these early stages of what would become one of the most enduring franchises in history helps highlight the negotiation that takes place within franchised storytelling. Lasting franchise stories might neither be grandly conceived multimedia events orchestrated by singular auteurs nor mindless products of industrial dogma churned out with little thought. Rather, many of them begin and remain the work of several

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[119]John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 211.
[120] Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 199.

creative individuals who work to negotiate both industrial need and creative desire. In that collaborative process and especially throughout the development of the *Apes* series, I have highlighted the way storytelling practices were understood and often negotiated as each individual attempted to make their own contribution to the narrative. By analyzing this through a predominantly historical lens, I have tried to point out the way many of the processes we ascribe to modern franchises and consider to be the result of conglomerate media logics, were clearly present before franchising became a ubiquitous term in the industry and in culture more broadly. Jacobs managed a team of creative individuals, who functioned to govern and keep track of the ever-expanding story world. It was the ongoing story of the *Apes* franchise that guided its proliferation. Personnel decisions were decided and vied for through the imagined needs of the text, and industrial decisions were made largely based on claims that the story had potential. Ultimately, even in these early stages of the franchise, the *Apes* developed its own production culture which, while still intertwined with the logics of the industry writ large, had its own set of logics and rules. There was an *Apes* language that was used to communicate the property's significance and to justify industrial choices. In large part, that language was derived from the text itself and the stories within it.

Chapter 2: Twice Upon a Time: Managing Intellectual Property through Franchise Refurbishment

In February of 2017, during a family vacation to Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando Florida, I encountered a store in the Disney-owned outdoor shopping center, Disney Springs (formally Downtown Disney). The home décor store, called D-Living, contained an array of *Beauty and the Beast* themed products and merchandise. In fact, the entire store was themed to look like a room one might encounter in the Beast's castle, complete with a fake fireplace and a wall made to look like a library with books stacked haphazardly, as if waiting to be restocked. At times, it was hard to discern what was for sale and what was part of the display. That said, in true Disney fashion, almost everything was, indeed, for sale. From high-end porcelain to novelty mugs, from bedding to stuffed animal versions of the Beast, the store mixed high-end living decor with more run of the mill merchandising tie-ins. My trip to Disney was shortly before the release of *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) in March of 2017. This industrial intertextual experience gestures toward two important managerial functions performed by the retelling of franchised stories – specifically how they can reverberate throughout the franchise and culture in targeted ways. First, in the D-Living store, I was able to see merchandising aimed at adults from both the animated and the live-action films side by side. The release of the new *Beauty and the Beast* movie not only created new opportunities to sell *Beauty and the Beast* branded merchandise to adults, but it also served to add new value to branded content that centered on the animated film. The live-action release spurred a resurrection of the *Beauty and the Beast* franchise across the Walt Disney Company and likely allowed licensors to push a wider variety of products. Though the store sold lots of merchandise inspired by the original animated film, there were plates, tea sets and other items that were direct tie-ins to the live-action film, and these items were often more high-end

products targeted at adults. The new film not only generated new more adult-themed content, but it served to remind audiences of the original animated feature.

Recently, Disney has invested in a series of live-action versions of their classic films. While much of the discourse around them tends to frame them simply as remakes, they could equally be understood as the most recent iteration of common re-releasing strategies that have been used by Disney and other studios for decades. Disney specifically has kept their particular brand of fairytales culturally relevant through well-timed theatrical re-releases of their animated films. Starting with *Snow White* in 1944, they began re-releasing their films every seven years.[121] Recently, Disney attempted to update that trend by releasing a handful of their classic films retrofitted with 3D effects. While these 3D conversions didn't change the content of the original film, advertisements promised the audience the opportunity to see *The Lion King* "like you've never seen it before."[122] The first of those re-releases, *The Lion King 3D*, surprised executives bringing in over $30 million in its opening weekend.[123] In the following years, Disney re-released *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Monsters, Inc.* (2010) and *Finding Nemo* (2003) – all retrofitted with 3D effects. However, while still financially lucrative (each film made over $40 million worldwide, not including home video), those films failed to generate the same excitement as *The Lion King,* which resulted in Disney abruptly cancelling the 3D re-release of *The Little Mermaid* (1989) at the last minute, pushing it straight to home video[124] The very next year, Disney released a live-action retelling of *Sleeping Beauty* titled, *Maleficent* (2014),

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[121] Eric Hoyt, *Hollywood Vault: Film Libraries before Home Video*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014),108.
[122] DutchRainbowTrailers, "Lion King (3D) - Trailer," 2011 Online video, *YouTube*, August 13, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARwKheU8ImY
[123] John Young, "'The Lion King 3D:' Is it the Dawn of the 3-D Reissue," *Entertainment Weekly*, September, 27, 2011, https://ew.com/article/2011/09/27/lion-king-3d-conversion-rerelease/.
[124] "Bad News For 'The Little Mermaid,'" *HuffPost*, January 15, 2013, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-little-mermaid-3d-canceled-disney-animated-theaters_n_2481134.

followed quickly by live-action versions of *Cinderella* (2015), *The Jungle Book (2016),* and *Beauty and the Beast* (2017). As of this writing, Disney has also released live-action versions of *Dumbo*, *Winnie the Pooh* and *Aladdin*, with versions *The Lion King* and *Lady and the Tramp* set to be released later this year. Currently, they are in various stages of development on a handful of other live-action films including *Mulan*, *Pinocchio*, and *The Little Mermaid.*[125] This chapter uses these films as case studies to understand how they, and other recent franchise entries, can serve to organize a franchise through the management of a complex set of intertextual relationships.

This chapter is interested in the way in which franchises are managed through the retelling or expansion of the stories within them. I consider these particular texts in terms of their function as tools of intertextual management. Catherine Johnson argues, "[r]ather than attempting to police the boundaries between what counts as promotion and what counts as the 'primary text' or 'content,' we should be considering the different and multiple functions that media texts are now invited to play."[126] From this perspective, I consider the movies and the paratextual material that accompanies them to be at least functionally, one in the same. Similar to Johnson, I consider the way franchised text serves multiple functions within the franchise acting simultaneously as texts, paratexts and promotional content. As Jonathan Gray argues, a "key task for media producers is to streamline their various paratexts."[127] He suggests that, like a parasite, "a paratext constructs, lives in, and can affect the running of a text."[128] I argue that many texts within a franchise can act as sites of textual organization (or "streamlining"), in which various textual and paratextual fragments of sprawling, multigenerational, transmedia franchises can be

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[125]Adam Chitwood, "Here Are All of Disney's Upcoming Live-Action Remakes," *Collider*, July, 3, 2019, http://collider.com/upcoming-live-action-disney-movies-release-dates/#the-lion-king
[126] Catherine Johnson, *Branding Television*, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011),156.
[127]Jonathan Gray, Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 207.
[128] Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 6.

reined in under a new central text. This new text provides a space through which media companies can make claims to certain expressions of ideas and resurrect or rebrand intellectual property for a new generation. In what follows, I outline the industrial utility of franchised textual expansion, arguing that many reboots and sequels and other modes of franchised proliferation serve to facilitate a process of *franchise refurbishment* – or an instance of rebranding and intellectual property upkeep. I argue that refurbishment is both a textual and an industrial process, or a set of processes, that has evolved alongside the logics of modern media franchising to aid in the long-term management of intellectual property. As I argued in the introduction, storytelling and franchise management are intertwined concepts and we should consider storytelling to be as integral to franchise development as economic partnerships and shareholder meetings. Derek Johnson argues that "the franchise must be understood not just as a function of textuality, but as an industrially and socially contextual dynamic constituted by historical processes and discourses.[129] With that in mind, this chapter considers the way Disney manages their various franchised brands through the stories they tell, or perhaps more accurately, the stories they retell.

Franchise Refurbishment

While new texts in a franchise function as sources of revenue generation through the sale of tickets, home video releases and related merchandising, they also work as valuable spaces through which the franchise is managed. I contend one way to understand the industrial function of franchised storytelling is through the concept of *refurbishment.* Connecting the term to the management of franchising is not without precedent. Film critic A.O. Scott (2017) once used the

[129] Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 29.

term to make sense of the recent films in the *Alien* franchise, calling them part of a "21st century refurbishing of the franchise."[130] Although he doesn't go into the concept any further than that, Scott's use of the term productively contextualizes the recent *Alien* films within the broader industrial logics that spawned them. Franchise refurbishment, as a concept, draws attention to many of the textual logics and creative choices behind modern franchise proliferation, particularly the release of major installments in a franchise. The concept is particularly germane to the practices of Disney as a company. Janet Wasko has argued, Disney's theme parks "contribute significantly to overall corporate goals," and "it is difficult to think about the Disney brand without reference to the theme parks."[131] Anyone who's ever had the opportunity to visit one of the many Disney parks across the globe has likely encountered a sign that reads, "This area is being refurbished for your future enjoyment" [See Fig. 1]. This terminology denotes an area of the park, or specific ride, that is undergoing some sort of standard maintenance. The term "refurbish" actually means "to brighten or freshen up," and usually refers to a building or structure. In the parks, refurbishment often takes the form of updating or general maintenance. This updating can range widely from what amounts to a new coat of paint to a major overhaul of a ride's theming. In both cases, these changes often build on a pre-existing structure rather than tearing it down and starting from scratch.

[130] A.O. Scott, "'Alien: Covenant' Stays on Brand With Its Terror," *The New York Times*, May, 17, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/17/movies/alien-covenant-review-ridley-scott.html
[131] Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 158.

Fig. 1

Dan Herbert has argued of franchised texts, "[w]e cannot properly understand these different textual categories and intertextual relationships without acknowledging that these products are made as commercial endeavors."[132] While on the surface, movies like *Cinderella* (2015) and *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) seem to easily fall into the category of a remake, by shifting our perspective of these recent Disney live-action films from the text itself to the industrial environment within which they were produced, refurbishing functions become more apparent. While textually they function as remakes or adaptations of the films that came before them, within the context of the franchise we can see these as clear extensions of the franchise experience. When discussing how the *Pirates of the Caribbean* sequels function in relation to the rest of the franchise (which was based on a ride in the Disneyland theme park), Carolyn Jess-Cooke argues that with the release of each sequel, which in turn results in the release of paratextual materials and merchandise, "… spectatorship is (re)figured in the *Pirates of the*

[132]Daniel Herbert, *Film Remakes and Franchises* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 23.

Caribbean franchise as an increasingly sequential activity across multiple media platforms."[133] Jess-Cooke views the *Pirates* sequels as not necessarily extensions of the narrative world from the film, but sequels to the park or franchise experience more broadly. Similarly, Chris Anderson has called attention to the way Disney pioneered a "total merchandising" approach to their entertainment company creating, "a tangle of advertising and entertainment in which each Disney product, from the movie *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) to a ride on Disney's Matterhorn, promoted all Disney products."[134] In this way we can't consider the remaking of an animated film as a standalone event, but rather as a promotional text designed to draw spectators into a Disney owned "tangle of advertising and entertainment."

It would perhaps at this point be helpful to draw a direct parallel between park refurbishment and franchise refurbishment. In 1995, Disney opened a ride in the Magic Kingdom called ExtraTERRORestrial Alien Encounter. This attraction was an elaborate animatronic stage show that simulated a test of a teleportation system. During the testing phase, something goes wrong and a dangerous alien creature is teleported into the room with the audience. Over the next several minutes the audience is terrorized by a series of simulated sensations including splashes of blood from the alien's victims. Reportedly, when then CEO Michael Eisner tested the ride before it opened, he encouraged the designers (or "Imagineers" as they are called within the company) to make it more intense.[135] The ride was eventually deemed too intense for a Disney-

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[133] Carolyn Jess-Cooke, "Sequelizing Spectatorship and Building Up The Kingdom: The Case of Pirates of the Caribbean, or, How a Theme Park Attraction Spawned a Multi-Billion Dollar Film Franchise," in *Second Takes: Critical Approaches to the Film Sequel*, ed. Carolyn Jess-Cooke and Constantine Verevis (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 207.
[134] Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 134.
[135] Leslie Doolittle, "Disney Seeks Literally Terrific Alien Encounter: 3 Star Edition." *Orlando Sentinel*, January 17 1995, ProQuest.

owned theme park and was switched out for a tamer version with a *Lilo and Stitch* (2002) theme, called Stitch's Great Escape. One publication called it, "the refurbished replacement for the ExtraTERRORestrial Alien Encounter, perhaps the scariest ride in the history of the kid-friendly Magic Kingdom."[136] The story of the new ride generally remained the same. However, instead of a bloodthirsty alien, audiences were subjected to a cute but mischievous Stitch. Warm air, originally meant to simulate the alien's breath on the back of a spectator's neck, was now re-contextualized to simulate a burp, and the once horrifying splatters of blood were now simply the result of a rudely executed sneeze. The framework of the ride was the same, but its meaning had been drastically changed. It was now deemed more suitable for Disney audiences. These types of updates are attempts to maintain the marketability of certain rides and areas of the park, assuring they fall in line with the company's desired brand image and meet the demands of the current moment. This refurbishment can take a range of forms, be it technical (like installing a new type of roller coaster track) or more political (such as the taming down of a ride thought to be too violent for families). In this way, refurbishment serves a cultural function as it acts as a process of meaning management in which small changes to the aesthetic preserve the value of the internal structure for audiences.

In the context of Disney's recent live-action films, this refurbishment strategy might be particularly appealing as it would allow for new meaning to be mapped on to existing stories that are integral to the industrial function of the franchise. As Wasko has pointed out, the popularity of Disney films has resulted in a wide range of critical, often unflattering readings of their texts.[137] As I'll show in the following sections, Disney's live-action remakes attempt to erase or

[136] Sean Mussenden, "Disney World Debuts New Attractions," *Knight Ridder Tribune Business News*, November 17, 2004, ProQuest.
[137] Wasko, Understanding Disney, 109.

rework certain story elements in ways that update the stories, while still preserving their industrial value for the various departments that rely on those texts and their related imagery to run their respective areas of the Walt Disney Company. For example, while Cinderella might be given more agency in the refurbishment process, her general demeanor, the structure of her story and the associated products (the pumpkin carriage, the blue dress) need to remain the same to ensure uniformity across other Cinderella branded products and experiences. That said, just as the Stitch refurbishment made the ride more suitable for children, Cinderella's newly found agency in the live-action version might make her more appealing to more discerning adults who consider the animated films to be for children, or outdated in their gender politics. In turn, this broader appeal opens the door for new licensing opportunities.

Another, perhaps less obvious, function of franchise refurbishment is the evocative function it can serve. By evocative I mean to say that refurbishments sometimes occur as an attempt to resurrect or *evoke* latent feelings associated with a particular attraction in an effort to reinforce any nostalgic, affective, or historically significant meaning there might be in that object, thus generating more value in all its related texts and products. While this might be similar to the cultural function, the evocative function need not address or grapple with some broader problematic past. Rather, it serves only to reinforce and expand upon the elements that are imagined to give it value. Consider the 2007 refurbishment of the Haunted Mansion ride in Walt Disney World, which involved some general upkeep and maintenance as well as the addition of a few new or improved elements. As *Theme Park Insider* reported at the time, "Everything has been cleaned. The flashes of lighting are brighter, and the transition of the

pictures is greater and more stark." According to the same article, when the ride reopened, wait times remained steady at about 40 minutes suggesting a heightened interest in the ride.[138]

Though you'd be hard-pressed to find a Disney animated film (or any older text for that matter) that wasn't in some need of a cultural refurbishment to adjust certain elements that are now more widely understood to be problematic, some of these updated movies function more to evoke memories and maintain awareness of a brand than to fix anything specifically. We can see this with entries like *The Jungle Book* (2016) which operated to evoke nostalgia for a Disney version of the story at a time when another studio was considering making their own version of the public domain story. Both the *Jungle Book* and *The Lion King* (2019) are interested in upgrading the technology used to tell their stories to make them more appealing to modern audiences, not dissimilar to the way the Haunted Mansion attraction was updated to make it feel new and make an argument for its continued relevance. Similarly, the live-action *Dumbo* seemed more concerned with reasserting the story of Dumbo into the cultural consciousness, taking time to make sure each element of the original story was present in the recent live-action version, even inserting a moment that gestured towards the iconic park attraction.

Rather than moving a narrative forward, these live-action films act as an industrial extension of the experience of being a Disney fan more broadly, offering new ways to engage with the franchise in the same way a sequel or reboot would. For example, the Be Our Guest restaurant opened in Disney's Orlando theme park in 2012. The restaurant was themed after the Beast's castle in the animated film and served as an extension of the animated film, in which guests can dine in iconic spaces from the movie. The description of the restaurant on the Disney

[138] Mitchell Botwin, "The Haunted Mansion at Disney World Reopens, *Theme Park Insider*, September 17, 2007, https://www.themeparkinsider.com/flume/200709/471/.

parks website reads, “Step inside the Beast’s enchanted castle for a delicious quick-service breakfast or lunch – or an unforgettable sit-down dinner.”[139] The restaurant invites guests to extend their experience of the film and have a meal in the same spaces as their beloved characters. Five years later when Disney released the live-action version of the film, one could read it as a remake of the animated film, or simply a continued extension of the park experience, further attempting to bring the story to life for fans of the franchise. These films breath new life into virtually all aspects of the existing franchise.

Through the lens of industrial intertextuality, we can see how companies like Disney use reboots as sites of intertextual upkeep, in which areas of the franchise are updated and maintained. The degrees of refurbishment range with the needs of each text – perhaps better understood spatially as areas within the franchise. For example, while *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) added some new features to the original animated story, these changes can mostly be understood as a new coat of paint. Songs were added, and backstories were expanded on, but the structure from the original animated film remained the same. This works to maintain the value of the original while encouraging new consumer interest (or traffic) in that area. Similar to actual park attractions, the reasons behind these refurbishments are often efforts to keep up with modern technology, such as the use of cutting-edge CGI to retell or refurbish the story of *The Jungle Book*, or to adjust in accordance with modern-day world views, such as the gender dynamic between Cinderella and the Prince in the new *Cinderella*. Ultimately, these texts function primarily as a way for Disney to update their existing franchised properties in order to

[139] “Be Out Guest Restaurant,” Walt Disney World, accessed July 4, 2019, https://disneyparks.disney.go.com/au/disneyworld/dining/be-our-guest-restaurant/

ensure the "future enjoyment" of fans and the profitability and legacy of their intellectual property.

The Empowered Princess: Cultural Refurbishment

While all Disney films have been subject to various cultural critiques, Disney's princess films and their related merchandise have received steady scrutiny throughout their history for their portrayals of gender roles. Although the films have demonstrated an "increase in breadth of gender roles," over time, a majority of Disney films have been shown to retain "messages that are reminiscent of traditional roles."[140] Early Disney films often positioned their female characters as passive, awaiting a prince to save them from their misfortune. These prince characters often have very little in the way of personality, with the assumption being that because they are rich and handsome, they're well suited to save the princess from all of her problems. As Dawn Elizabeth England, et al. argue, "[i]n *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, the prince was rarely shown." They go on to suggest that, "[i]t was not clear how or why the princess fell in love with him; she seemed to be chosen by him and obligingly fell in love."[141] This problematic dynamic is evident in the animated version of *Cinderella* (1950) as well, in which the prince, "had a very small role."[142] In the animated version, Cinderella dances with the prince one time and immediately falls in love with him. When he comes looking for her after she abruptly leaves a ball, she's more than happy to marry him even though she, nor the audience, know anything about him. This lack of relationship between princesses and princes and the general lack of explicit agency given to the (particularly early Disney) female characters was a point of interest

[140] Dawn Elizabeth England, Lara Descartes, and Melissa A. Collier-meek, "Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses," Sex Roles; New York 64, no. 7–8 (April 2011): 564.
[141]England, Descartes, and Collier-meek, "Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses," 553.
[142] Ibid.

to media producers looking to refurbish these Disney properties who saw the remakes as an opportunity to rectify this dynamic.

While *Maleficent* (2014) reimagined *Sleeping Beauty* from the perspective of the villain, Disney's live-action *Cinderella* was their first real attempt to refurbish a Disney princess, particularly one so central to the princess brand. With the new version, producers sought to change the discourse around the character by providing the prince with a backstory and establishing a relationship between him and Cinderella before they meet at the ball.

Writer Chris Weitz states:

> You want to have a bit of comprehension of why she is attracted to the prince, other than his enormous wealth and good looks and charm, because that's not enough for us nowadays, or at least we can recognize that that's maybe not the best reason to have a relationship with somebody.[143]

One scene in the movie became a central topic of conversation during interviews. The scene involves Cinderella saving a deer that is being chased by the prince and his men on a hunt. The prince seems infatuated with her immediately, and they engage in flirtatious conversation. Before she leaves abruptly, Cinderella urges the prince to stop the hunt. When he replies, "it's what's done," Cinderella insists, "Just because it's what is done does not mean it's what *should* be done." Seemingly taken aback by her earnestness, the Prince smiles and tells her she's "right, again." Despite lasting roughly two minutes of the film's nearly two hour run time, the scene was talked about at length in just about every interview about the movie, likely in part because it was released in conjunction with the promotion for the film.[144] Director Kenneth Branagh felt the

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[143] "A Fairy Tale Come to Life," *Cinderella*, directed by Kenneth Branagh, Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment (2015), Blu-ray.

[144] Hannah Flint, "Cinderella meets her Prince Charming for the first time in a new clip from the live action Disney remake starring Lily James and Richard Madden," *Daily Mail*, February, 26, 2018,

scene was particularly important and asserted that it worked, "to remove even the visual iconography of the damsel in distress…"[145] Ultimately, this meeting sequence is the extent to which the movie attempts to position Cinderella as a stronger character than was represented in the original. In fact, with the exception of an extended introduction which attempts to introduce a mother figure, the scene is arguably the only overtly identifiable difference between the animated film and the live-action narratives. However, this scene works as a starting point to frame the character of Cinderella as a more empowered woman than had been previously imagined. A similar scene was inserted into the live-action *Aladdin* (2019), which highlighted a character's inner strength. A new song was written in which Princess Jasmine sings about speaking for herself in the face of men telling her to be quiet or do as she's told. Not only does the song function as a cultural refurbishment but, along with other reworkings of songs from the animated film, it serves to update the musical style to fit more within modern sensibilities. *Vanity Fair* called the various changes to song styles, "all very modern and, stylistically, a step away from the movie's established sonic landscape."[146]

Though the central goal of these refurbishment projects seems to be the empowerment of each of Disney's core princesses, each princess' expression of feminism is limited by characterizations that were established and have proliferated since their inception. Karen E. Wohlwend points out the way children who engage in play with Disney princess branded merchandise often can and do immerse themselves in branded content, "allowing children to *live*

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https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-2970593/Cinderella-meets-Prince-Charming-time-new-clip-live-action-Disney-remake.html

[145] Kenneth Branagh, interview by Christina Radish, *Collider*, March 16, 2015, http://collider.com/cinderella-kenneth-branagh-interview/.

[146] Yohana Desta, "How *Aladdin* Changes the Animated Version's Music and Lyrics," Vanity Fair, May 24, 2019, https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2019/05/aladdin-remake-music-lyrics-new-songs-changes

in-character."[147] She notes the way that, regardless of their form, be it as Barbie dolls or plush toys for infants, each princess contains, "recognizable signs in a color scheme that symbolize the eight Disney Princess characters."[148] Similarly, the refurbishment process, while open to pushing the limits of certain character's representations, remains constrained by the core values through which the princesses have proliferated throughout the franchise. Avi Santo calls these evergreen properties *heritage brands* and argues they must "reinvent themselves with each new generation of consumers without becoming unrecognizable to past brand loyalists - in other words, without altering their brand essence."[149] While Disney has maintained the relevance of characters like Cinderella, they also have long histories that Disney must uphold for "brand loyalists." For example, though Cinderella might be more empowered, her empowerment is represented through her kindness. When asked if she viewed Cinderella as a feminist, actress Lilly James replied, "[t]hat's so hard because what is feminism? It's different for everyone. For sure she's a strong, empowered young woman, and I think she's an incredible role model…" Though not willing to align herself with the word "feminist,'" James sees the character as being "strong." In another interview, James states, "… the strength that she possesses is so remarkable, really. I find it inspiring."[150] Though the characterization and utilization of Cinderella throughout the Disney intertextual ecosystem allows for empowerment through kindness, making the character overtly feminist runs the risk of undermining existing branding and licensing efforts across the princess branded properties, not the least of which is the portrayal of the princesses in the parks.

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[147] Karen E. Wohlwend, "Damsels in Discourse: Girls Consuming and Producing Identity Texts through Disney Princess Play," *Reading Research Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2009): 58.
[148] Wohlwend, "Damsels in Discourse,"65.
[149] Santo, Selling the Silver Bullet, 156.
[150] *Cinderella* Cast Interview, interview by Benjamin Lee and Henry Barnes, The Guardian, March 26, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/film/video/2015/mar/26/cinderella-kenneth-branagh-disney-video-interview

Cinderella's inner strength is a theme established early in the movie. On her death bed, Cinderella's mother urges her to "have courage and be kind." She goes on to tell her that she "has more kindness in her little finger than most people possess in their whole body" and she tells Cinderella that kindness "has power, more than you know." This sentiment is reinforced throughout the promotional interviews and bonus features for the movie. Allison Shearmur, one of the producers, seems to draw a parallel to superheroes arguing:

> All young girls around the world have what Cinderella has. They don't necessarily have a shield, a sword, a bow and arrow, but what they have is their inner fortitude. And they have a sense of themselves, and that's enough.[151]

Instead of giving her a sword and a suit of armor, the movie frames Cinderella as possessing an "inner strength." Actress Cate Blanchet, who plays the evil stepmother, situates this idea within the broader history of the story, stating, "this is really a story where kindness is a superpower."[152] By framing kindness as a source of strength, Disney works to subtlety instill a sense of agency in these classic characters (and the brand more broadly) without completely overwriting the original films or drastically changing the core audience.

Wohlwend has suggested that children that engage with Disney princess branded merchandise are "not passive consumers" but rather that, through the act of play, "experience dissonance as they enact restrictive stereotypical roles and prompts children to improvise to overcome gendered obstacles that block more satisfying identity performance."[153] She argues that as children act out the stories in the films, they recognize their limitations and often rewrite their roles. By framing Cinderella's as an "inner" power, there's no need to insert imagery that

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[151] "A Fairy Tale Come to Life," Cinderella, directed by Kenneth Branagh, Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment (2015), Blu-ray.
[152] "A Fairy Tale Come to Life," *Cinderella*, directed by Kenneth Branagh, Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment (2015), Blu-ray.
[153] Wohlwend, "Damsels in Discourse, "77.

might work against the goals of the franchise or undermine other readings. This doesn't necessarily upend any previous meaning of the character but instead encourages another reading in which Cinderella can be understood as a symbol of female empowerment, while never committing to the politics associated with feminism. Reframing Cinderella as a role model, or at least foregrounding her strength and empowerment, became a main source of a discussion for the film and worked to justify the existence of the remake. However, it was also a strategic move that worked to expand the understanding of the character in a way that works to make the princess (and her associated merchandise) more appealing to less conservative audiences and allow for more readily available empowerment readings. However, the character is still limited by her kindness and gentle nature.

With this in mind, when it came to emphasizing Belle's agency within the *Beauty and the Beast* story, Disney seemed more comfortable tying the character directly to popular feminist discourses, likely because feminism (at least a particular Disney brand of popular feminism) was already part of the character's brand. As Allison Craven has argued, "Belle's Disney feistiness is a carefully scripted concept of pop femininity, constructed to be acceptable and entertaining to both children and adults."[154] Before *Beauty and the Beast* was even in production, the casting of Emma Watson as Belle tied it to current discourses of feminism. Emma Watson officially announced her involvement in the reboot via Facebook in January of 2015.[155] The announcement came just five months after Watson gave her first public speech as the UN Women Goodwill Ambassador officially launching HeForShe - a campaign committed to fighting for gender

[154] Allison Craven, "Beauty and the Belles: Discourses of Feminism and Femininity in Disneyland," E*uropean Journal of Women's Studies* 9, no. 2 (May 1, 2002): 130.
[155]Dave Mcnary, "Emma Watson Cast as Belle in Disney's Live-Action 'Beauty and the Beast'," Variety, January, 26, 2015, https://variety.com/2015/film/news/emma-watson-belle-beauty-beast-disney-live-action-1201415167/.

equality around the world. In the speech, she reveals that from a young age she "started questioning gender-based assumptions" and she considers herself "among the ranks of women whose expressions are seen as too strong, too aggressive, isolating, anti-men and unattractive."[156] The speech was soon labeled as iconic by news outlets who championed Watson for reclaiming and mainstreaming feminism both as a word and a movement.[157] Watson had also made headlines for starting a feminist book club and leaving copies of feminist books in various locations on the London underground with notes inviting people to read them and share them. This display of feminism aligned well with Belle's book-reading brand of empowerment as it was portrayed in the cartoon and updated live-action film. [158] So, when Disney hired her to play Belle, it tied the character to Watson's public persona as a feminist.

When Watson was brought on to the film, she quickly began to frame Belle as a symbol of feminism. In one early interview, she recalls seeing the animated film for the first time, "I was so young that I didn't even know what I was tapping into, but there was something about that spirit and energy that I just knew she was my champion."[159] Throughout the promotion, Watson's role as a symbol of mainstream feminism was brought up not only by her but by other cast members. Actor Dan Stevens, who played the Beast, suggested in one interview that his interest in the movie stemmed mostly from Watson's involvement, suggesting that what excited

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[156] "Emma Watson: Gender equality is your issue too," UN Women, accessed July 4, 2019, http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2014/9/emma-watson-gender-equality-is-your-issue-too.
[157] Michael Hafford, "Emma Watson Almost Didn't Say "Feminism" In Her U.N. Speech," *Refinery 29*, November 30, 2015, https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2015/11/98565/emma-watson-un-feminism-speech.
[158] Alison Flood, "Emma Watson Leaves Free Copies of Maya Angelou Book on Tube," *The Guardian*, November 3, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/03/emma-watson-free-copies-maya-angelou-books-on-tube-harry-potter.
[159] *Beauty and the Beast* Cast Press Conference, posted by Christina Radish, *Collider*, March 15, 2017 http://collider.com/beauty-and-the-beast-emma-watson-interview/#dan-stevens-luke-evans

him most was seeing how Watson wanted to bring elements of her feminist philosophy into the film itself. [160]

While *Beauty and the Beast* was mostly a shot for shot, word for word copy of the cartoon, any scenes that were added seemed to exist for the sole purpose of supporting arguments in favor of Belle as a feminist role model. Other scenes earlier in the movie attempt to assert Belle as a more prominent and influential feminist figure within her "small provincial town." Perhaps the most obvious are scenes that suggest Belle is actually the inventor in the family and her father is more of an artist. For example, one scene shows her inventing a device to do laundry. This scene not only works to foreground Belle's intelligence and ingenuity by suggesting that she is actually the inventor in the family (as opposed to her father as in the cartoon), but it also attempts to affirm the character as a female role model by mirroring Emma Watson's position as a feminist advocate. Though the scene does, in fact, reinforce a common trope within Disney films of women performing housework.[161] That said, additional scenes like this enabled the film and, more importantly the character of Belle, to more explicitly be read through a feminist lens.

Many of the debates about the film had to do with specific aspects of the story, with some suggesting that it would be impossible to tell this story as a feminist tale considering Belle could easily be read as a victim of Stockholm Syndrome, rendering the entire love story it's built on problematic. The idea that Belle suffered from Stockholm Syndrome had been a widely held criticism of the original film (or more accurately, the original fairy tale). As Craven argues, "[h]er look at Beast, her sizing him up, her spotting of his 'talent,' is a moment of identification

[160] POPSUGAR Entertinment, "Emma Watson and Dan Stevens Talk About the Feminism in Beauty and the Beast," (web video) *You Tube*, March 9, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9zSPpDNQaw
[161] England, Descartes, and Collier-meek, "Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses," 563.

for the woman spectator, a moment of recognition and realization that, in patriarchy, female desire is captured before it is aroused. Belle is trapped, then she looks and decides/chooses. She does not choose before her capture, and her consent comes after."[162] Ultimately, her decision to remain in the castle was complicated by an implicit sexual desire for the Beast.

Watson was asked to comment on this aspect of the story directly. Watson addressed the controversy confidently. She argued:

> Belle actively argues and disagrees with [Beast] constantly. She has none of the characteristics of someone with Stockholm Syndrome because she keeps her independence, she keeps that freedom of thought.[163]

Here, Watson flat out dismisses the idea that Belle is a victim of Stockholm Syndrome. In the same interview, she goes on to say, "I think there is a very intentional switch where in my mind, Belle decides to stay. She's giving him hell. There is no sense of, "I need to kill this guy with kindness."[164] Notably, she evokes the "Disney feistiness" the original character possessed and attempted to make its presence more explicit and more tied to modern notions of feminism.[165] While it's not clear exactly which version of the film she's talking about, her statements are more supported by what few completely new scenes have been included in the live-action film. The first, and most important in terms of Stockholm Syndrome, is a scene in which Belle has a chance to escape shortly after her capture, and seemingly chooses not to take it. Even though she's caught attempting to escape, it's not by the threatening Beast but, instead, by the friendly and inviting Mrs. Potts, who doesn't try to stop her but only offers to make her a

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[162] Craven, "Beauty and the Belles,"133.
[163] "Beauty and the Beast: Emma Watson Addresses Questions Over Beast Relationship," interview by Anthony Breznican, *Entertainment Weekly*, February 16, 2017, https://ew.com/movies/2017/02/16/beauty-and-the-beast-emma-watson-belle-beast-relationship/
[164] Ibid.
[165] Craven, "Beauty and the Belles,"130.

cup of tea for her long journey. As she leaves the room, the rope is left out the window, as a visual representation of her access to an escape and emphasizes her agency in the situation. Furthermore, the presence of an andromorphic female teapot and absence of the Beast in this scene works against any readings that suggest her choice to stay is motivated by bestial sexual curiosity. One can imagine this is the exact moment Watson is talking about when addressing the issue of Stockholm Syndrome. In this way, additional scenes functioned to add to the discourse and add support to readings of Belle as a feminist character.

Another additional scene that resonated with many critics was one in which Beast and Belle travel to Belle's childhood home in Paris so that she can learn more about her mother and how she died. The scene stands out because it is one of the only entirely new sequences and it introduces a kind of teleportation magic that was never referenced in the cartoon version and is never explained or discussed again in the live-action version. The scene works to reinforce Belle's growing attachment to the Beast separating this moment of intimacy from the context of her imprisonment by literally removing them from the confines of the castle. This scene, as well as the added scenes in Cinderella that depict her relationship with her mother, demonstrate how, through the refurbishment of these individual films, Disney is attempting to manage not just those movies, but the broader Disney brand. Craven argues that Disney heroines, including Belle, are, "distinguished by bad or non-existent relationships with mother figures, but great loyalty and affection to father figures."[166] Though both princesses maintain their affection to their fathers, both the live-action versions of Cinderella and Beauty and the Beast deliberately insert scenes which highlight the lasting influence of their mothers on each character. Therefore, though this scene also addressed the issue of Stockholm Syndrome by inserting an additional

[166] Craven, "Beauty and the Belles,"128.

mode of escape open to Belle, it also highlights the way these films function as part of a larger cultural refurbishment project. Each movie not only reframes the narrative around the princess brand but also The Walt Disney Company, by aligning the properties that the company is built on with feminist discourses.

Part of the process of refurbishment involves generating discourses that can alter perceptions of franchised texts. Watson's role as not only a popular feminist icon but as an official UN ambassador for women's rights gave a certain authority to her claims, but also put her views under a microscope. As Disney and those involved with the film were insisting on reading it as a feminist tale, some critics challenged this idea in various op-eds and early reviews. In her extremely critical review, Zoe Williams of *The Guardian* stated, "[w]atching this film as a feminist fairy tale is like listening to someone who claims to be able to speak German, then realizing that they have only mastered one phrase."[167] Watson herself came under fire on Twitter for posing without a bra for *Vanity Fair,* with many saying the pictures undermine her message of gender equality. The BBC posted an article titled "Is Emma Watson Anti-feminist for exposing her Breast?"[168] The controversy happened, perhaps not so coincidently, days before *Beauty and The Beast* hit theaters, prompting Watson to address it during the press tour. Watson defended herself stating:

> Feminism is about giving women choice. Feminism is not a stick with which to beat other women with. It's about freedom, it's about liberation, it's about equality. I really don't know what my tits have to do with it.[169]

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[167] Zoe Williams, "Beauty and the Beast: Feminist or Fraud?," *The Guardian*, March 19, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/mar/19/beauty-and-the-beast-feminist-or-fraud.
[168] Cherry Wilson, "Is Emma Watson Anti-feminist for Exposing Her Breasts?," *BBC News*, March 6, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-39177510.
[169] "Emma Watson on Vanity Fair Cover: 'Feminism is about Giving Women Choice," *The Guardian*, March 6, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/mar/05/emma-watson-vanity-fair-cover-feminism.

The blunt and explicit nature of the latter part of that statement became a popular headline for various blogs and media outlets and worked to further tie the film to an ongoing debate about the nature of feminism, almost turning the decision to see the movie or not into a political act in itself.

While some critics were skeptical of the movie's feminist message, the new scenes provided supporters with enough evidence to praise it and support more progressive readings of not only the live-action film but also the original cartoon. For example, the issue of Stockholm Syndrome lead *Yahoo Movies* to contact Frank Ochberg, the psychiatrist who popularized the term, and ask him if he thinks Belle was in love or a victim of psychological turmoil. He ultimately determined that Belle's affections for the Beast are *not* a result of the syndrome, stating, "I think the case for *Beauty and the Beast* not being Stockholm syndrome is stronger than the case of it being Stockholm syndrome."[170] Ultimately, Ochberg concludes that Belle does not go through the feelings of terror and traumatization associated with the syndrome and therefore technically does not suffer from Stockholm Syndrome, a finding that likely only served to reinforce those who supported feminist reading of the film. It's never clear which film the Yahoo Movies' article is trying to vindicate, the live-action version or the original cartoon. This ambiguity was common throughout the discourse that surrounded the new movie and worked to establish all versions of Belle as progressive presentations of female empowerment.

Emma Gray of the *Huffington Post* praised the changes in the live-action film, stating:

[170] Gwynne Watkins, "Does Belle From 'Beauty and the Beast' Suffer From Stockholm Syndrome? We Asked an Expert," *Yahoo Entertainment*, March 20, 2017, https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/does-belle-from-beauty-and-the-beast-suffer-from-stockholm-syndrome-we-asked-an-expert-175449990.html.

> The new film goes to great lengths to demonstrate Belle's agency in every part of the story, amplifying things that are only subtly touched on in the animated version, and in some cases, creating totally new pieces of plot.[171]

Gray's sentiment suggests the new film is simply building on the progressive gender politics of the cartoon. As Watson argues in one interview, "It was just taking what was already there and expanding it.[172] Although Watson admitted to having a certain amount of influence over the direction of the character, she often emphasized that the character was always in some ways a feminist. In one interview she says:

> The original Belle was very progressive... it was really taking the DNA of who she was, which was someone who quite honestly didn't fit into her village…it was just really kind of expanding and expounding on that.[173]

By positioning the changes in the new film as simply expansions of pre-existing themes, Watson demonstrates the cultural function of these live-action refurbishments. They work to generate a discourse that doesn't acknowledge any previous shortcoming in the character's history but instead suggests that these feminist readings were always there, and were progressive for their time. In this way, all Disney's previous versions of the text are not rendered inert or identified as problematic but instead made even more valuable as they become part of an important feminist history. This was only exacerbated by the fact that the merchandizing around the release of the live-action film blurred the lines between the two movies. A Blu-ray release of the cartoon came out around the same time as the live-action movie, and new merchandise

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[171] Emma Gray, "How Disney Subtly Made 'Beauty And The Beast' More Feminist," Huffpost, March, 20, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-disney-subtly-made-beauty-and-the-beast-more-feminist_n_58cfd97ce4b0ec9d29dd676f.

[172] Beauty and the Beast Cast Press Conference, posted by Christina Radish, Collider, March 15, 2017 http://collider.com/beauty-and-the-beast-emma-watson-interview/#dan-stevens-luke-evans

[173] POPSUGAR Entertainment, "Emma Watson and Dan Stevens Talk About the Feminism in Beauty and the Beast," (web video) You Tube, March 9, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9zSPpDNQaw

appeared on toy shelves for both the new film and the 1991 cartoon, working to articulate a discourse of feminism around the cartoon and its branded property by conflating it with the discourse about the new installment.

(Para) Textual Turf-Marking: the Evocative Function of Franchise Refurbishment

Warner Brothers was the first to announce their version of Rudyard Kipling's classic set of short stories, *The Jungle Book*. In April of 2012, Deadline reported that Warner Brothers had started development on a live-action version of Rudyard Kipling's classic novel. At the time, writer Steve Kloves, who had worked on the *Harry Potter* movies for Warner Brothers, was attached to the project as the writer and director and there was no mention of a Disney version in development.[174] It wasn't until July of 2013 that Disney announced they would also be producing a live-action version of the story with no director yet attached.[175] In November of 2013, Disney was in talks with *Iron Man* director Jon Favreau to helm their live-action version.[176] Shortly after that, Warner Brothers switched directors from Kloves to Alejandro Inarritu.[177] Warner Brothers switched directors again in February with Ron Howard in talks to

[174]Mike Fleming Jr., "Steve Kloves To Write-Direct 'The Jungle Book' For Warner Bros," *Deadline*, April 27, 2012, accessed January 23, 2018, http://deadline.com/2012/04/steve-kloves-to-writedirect-the-jungle-book-for-warner-bros-263288/.

[175] Borys Kit, "'Jungle Book' Live-Action Reboot in the Works at Disney (Exclusive)," *The Hollywood Reporter*, July 9, 2013, accessed January 23, 2018, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/jungle-book-live-action-reboot-582283 .

[176] Borys Kit, "Jon Favreau in Talks to Direct 'Jungle Book' for Disney," *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 5, 2013, accessed January 23, 2018, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/jon-favreau-talks-direct-jungle-653717.

[177] Rebecca Ford, "Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu in Talks to Direct Warner Bros.' 'Jungle Book' Film," The Hollywood Reporter, December 4, 2014, accessed January 23, 2018, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/alejandro-gonzalez-inarritu-talks-direct-662507.

take over the Disney challenger, before eventually, settling on veteran motion capture actor Andy Serkis to make his directorial debut with the film.[178]

Before either film was in production, Disney used their casting announcement and press releases to let Warner Brothers know what kind of movie they intended to make. Each announcement likely pushed Warner Brothers to move in a new direction. Warner's initial announcement that Kloves would write and direct suggested the movie might still attempt to lean into the source material's more whimsical elements, attempting to capture a similar audience as the Harry Potter movies. However, Disney answered with the hiring of Jon Favreau, who directed films like *Iron Man* and *Elf*, suggesting Disney was possibly pushing for an action-adventure family-oriented story as well. Warner Brothers next move was more decisive, seemingly leaning into a more adult or at least highbrow version of the story hence their interest in hiring the director of intense dramas like *21 Grams* (2003) and *Babel* (2006). These early directing choices seemed like moves on a chess board, with each studio attempting to anticipate the other's move. Baily has suggested that Disney is not overly concerned about what other studios are doing stating, "Our philosophy is that we just put our heads down and do what we do."[179] However, when considering the chronology of early production choices, it's difficult to not see an aggressive strategy at work on the part of Disney.

Casting choices attempted to remain true to Disney's interpretation of the story's characters rather than risk taking them in new directions. Neel Sethi, who had no previous acting

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[178] Borys Kit, "Andy Serkis to Direct 'Jungle Book' for Warner Bros. (Exclusive)," *The Hollywood Reporter*, March 20, 2014, accessed January 23, 2018, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/andy-serkis-direct-jungle-book-690099; Borys Kit, "Ron Howard in Talks to Direct Warner Bros.' 'The Jungle Book' (Exclusive)," *The Hollywood Reporter*, February 14. 2014, accessed January 23, 2018, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/ron-howard-direct-jungle-book-680402.

[179] Pamela McClintock, "Disney Rules Hollywood's Fairy-Tale War as Other Studios Bite the Poisoned Apple," *The Hollywood Reporter*, April 29, 2016, accessed January 4, 2019, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/disney-rules-hollywoods-fairy-tale-888663.

experience, was cast as Mowgli. Though Favreau suggests he cast Sethi out of 2000 actors with more experience because he "had a quality" that he liked, it's undeniable that Sethi closely resembles the Mowgli of the cartoon in stature and temperament. With jet-black hair, and a slender build, once he was costumed in the iconic bright red shorts and given the proper haircut it was, as one journalist suggested, as if he "was basically born for this role."[180] Though Sethi would be the only non-computer-generated character in the movie, voice actors also appeared to be chosen to perfectly match either the personality or voice of the Disney movie as closely as possible. For example, King Louie was a propriety addition to the animated Disney version of the film. Though the Kipling story does contain a group of mischievous monkeys, they are leaderless. Disney added the King Louie character to bring levity to what could have been an otherwise darker moment in the story.[181] Musician, Louis Prima, voiced the original and portrayed him as a jovial, albeit eccentric chimpanzee who kidnaps Mowgli so he can learn how to make fire. Actor Christopher Walken was cast as Louie in the live-action film, whose iconic voice and eccentricities – both on and off camera – seemed closely matched to Prima's portrayal. Using the King Louie character not only emphasized Disney's exclusive contributions to the property, which could not be used by Warner Brothers, but also worked to highlight Disney's history of unique and memorable characters. As Janet Wasko has argued, from its inception, "Disney created strong characters that were marketed in various forms (mostly through films and merchandising) throughout the world."[182]

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[180]Joyce Duboise, interview with Jon Favreau, *Women and Their Pretties*, April 11, 2016, accessed December 15, 2018, https://www.womenandtheirpretties.net/the-jungle-books-jon-favreau-interview-casting-mowgli-visual-fx-more-cowbell-junglebookevent/.
[181]Rob Weinert-Kendt, "Cutting Through a Cultural Thicket," *The New York Times*, June 20, 2013, accessed December 15, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/23/theater/the-jungle-book-comes-to-the-stage.html?_r=0
[182] Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney*,1.

The casting of Baloo the Bear also worked to embrace the Disney version of the story over the source material. Though the character of Baloo the Bear is from the Kipling story, the version of the character in the cartoon was significantly changed. While the Baloo of the book acts as a fairly strict teacher who tries to instill in Mowgli the "Law of the Jungle" so that he may survive on his own, this somewhat serious interaction is transformed in true Disney fashion into the song "Bear Necessities," which was included in the movie and featured in advertising. Baloo himself was reimagined as a free spirit who roamed the jungle free of stringent rules or responsibilities. To match this more carefree version popularized by Phil Harris, Disney cast Bill Murray, known for playing similar carefree and slacker-type characters (*Stripes* (1981), *Ghostbusters* (1984)), as Baloo. [183]

Colleen Montgomery argues of the Disney video game *Epic Mickey* (2010), that gameplay "engages the players in memory work that cultivates affective ties to Disney archival media …"[184] Similarly, Disney aimed to encourage nostalgic feelings for their animated version of the story by favoring production choices that reminded audiences of the Disney version. The film itself contained images and scenes that were framed in ways that recalled the original film, giving audiences familiar with the cartoon a sense of familiarity with the world. One such image was Mowgli sitting on Baloo's belly while floating on a river – a scene which was featured in the first trailer. While these various scenes didn't match the animated feature exactly, they attempted to evoke a sense of familiarity and nostalgia for the imagery popularized in the Disney film. The music also heavily evoked the animated movie. The very opening scene of the movie opens with

[183] Dave McNary, "Bill Murray to Voice Baloo the Bear in 'The Jungle Book'," *Variety*, August 1, 2014, accessed December 15, 2018, http://variety.com/2014/film/news/bill-murray-to-voice-baloo-the-bear-in-the-jungle-book-1201274039/.

[184] Colleen Montgomery, "Cartoon Wasteland: Remediating and Recommodifying Archival Media in Disney's *Epic Mickey*," *Media Industries* 2, no.1 (2015): 91.

the exact score from the animated film before transitioning into a reworked modern score. Composer John Debney recalled his first conversation with director Jon Favreau about the project, "[o]ne of the things [Favreau] told me early on was that he wanted this classic orchestral Disney sound. Because he wanted it to be timeless."[185] In the included "making of" featurette, director Favreau also discusses the involvement of original songwriter Richard Sherman in reworking some of the old songs for the new iteration. The inclusion of Sherman helped to heighten the authenticity of the new production rooting it within the history of the animated picture and framing it as a natural extension of that production rather than a new production in and of itself. As Favreau noted of a new verse which Sherman contributed to "I Wanna Be Like You," "it feels like a lyric that might have been cracked out of a vault from when the movie was made. Same sensibility, same sense of humor."[186] In the end, many of the choices made in the live-action version of *The Jungle Book* were not made as ways of improving upon or overshadowing the animated version, but rather the new movie functioned to reinforce and expand upon the legacy of that animated film.

(Under) Mining the Source

The Kipling novels were important rhetorical and textual tools for both studios. After the Disney version was released, Andy Serkis suggested that their *Jungle Book* would offer, "...a slightly darker take, closer to the Kipling version."[187] However, whereas Warner Brothers used the book as a source of authenticity, Disney took a more ambivalent approach to the source

[185] "Reimagining The Jungle Book," The Jungle Book directed by Jon Favreau Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment (2016), Blu-ray.
[186] "Reimagining The Jungle Book," The Jungle Book directed by Jon Favreau Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment (2016), Blu-ray.
[187] Jada Yuan, "Cannes: Andy Serkis Says His Jungle Book Will Be Scary and 'Quite Dark'," *Vulture*, May 16, 2016, accessed December 15, 2018, http://www.vulture.com/2016/05/andy-serkis-jungle-book-will-be-scary-quite-dark.html?mid=twitter_vulture.

material. While they mined the stories for previously untapped characters and plot points, rarely were the original stories given much reverence; especially compared to the adoration given to the 1967 animated film. In "*The Jungle Book Reimagined*," a documentary included on the home video release, Jon Favreau suggests the original screenplay was, "geared towards more of a PG-13 movie…structurally it matched the Kipling version more." Favreau suggested that his immediate instinct after reading the darker version of the story was to "pull back towards the film I remembered."[188] Favreau positioned the animated Disney film as the central text, suggesting that the Disney version is, for him, the 'classic' version and that to be authentic to his memory – and the cultural memory– the story should be more lighthearted and *less* like the book. Constantine Verevis has argued, "…just as adaptations of literary properties often lead viewers back to source novels for a first reading, remakes encourage viewers to seek out original film properties."[189] In the case of *The Jungle Book,* 'the original' is framed as the Disney's version, and the producers of the included documentary take every opportunity to resurrect and canonize the animated version, assuring that it is read as the source text rather than the Kipling stories. The decision to make the film resemble the Disney animated version so closely in terms of tone, characterization and narrative elements functioned to take away the discursive power of the source texts by reinforcing the latent cultural nostalgia many audience members likely have for Disney's interpretation of the story.

Disney's live-action film incorporated several elements from the Kipling story that the animated film had omitted. However, these were never discussed in terms of their authenticity. While the songs, character designs and personalities, and various other moments are meant to

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[188] Jon Favreau, "Reimagining *The Jungle Book*," *The Jungle Book directed by* Jon Favreau Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment (2016), Blu-ray.
[189] Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 17.

evoke a sense of nostalgia for the cartoon, the Kipling book was not completely erased, and provided much of novelty in the latest Disney version. Minor characters from the book, such as Ikki the Porcupine and Chil the Kite were used to fill the background of the animated jungle in the new film. Though most of them are not referenced by name in the movie, some of their names appear in the credits at the end of the movie. Additionally, Mowgli's relationship with Shere Khan, (a tiger who is the main antagonist in both the book and the movie) was given more context. Whereas in the cartoon, Shere Khan and Mowgli have no previous connection, the live-action film reveals that Shere Khan killed Mowgli's parents. Though Shere Khan doesn't explicitly kill Mowgli's parents in the book, the idea that they have a deeper history more resembles their relationship in the book. Similarly, the ending to the Disney live-action film closely resembles a scene from the book in which Mowgli, in order to save his friends from Shere Khan, must go to the human village and retrieve fire. These small plot elements and other textual fragments from the book worked to fill out the narrative of the live-action film and helped give the story a more appropriate run-time for a live-action feature. Additionally, they also productively claimed them as part of the official Disney telling of the series, making Warner Brothers' attempt to differentiate their story by being more faithful to the source material all the more difficult.

Perhaps one of the most significant elements ignored in the cartoon, but central to the books is the Law of The Jungle. In the book, this is a series of laws and moral codes that each species in the jungle lives by. This code is central to Mowgli's growth throughout the Kipling stories, as he learns the codes. In Kipling's second collection of *Jungle Book* stories, he includes a short poem which represents the law of the wolf pack to which Mowgli belongs. Though exploration of the various laws of the jungle and Mowgli's education about them may have given

Warner Brothers some rich and innovative themes to explore, the Disney version includes an abridged version of Kipling's poem prominently throughout the live-action film. Though not as central to the story as in the book, the live-action version uses the law of the wolf pack to symbolize Mowgli's progression throughout the movie. Whereas early on he is unsure of his place in the world and he recites the law with little confidence, by the end of the movie Mowgli feels part of the jungle and recites the poem with conviction.

Though some of these subtle allusions to the Kipling version might go unnoticed to many, the bonus features included in the home video release work to point them out explicitly, taking away any ambiguity about their origin. In the commentary for the live-action *Jungle Book*, Favreau continually points to elements that came from the book as being "inspired by" the Kipling version. Pointing to a porcupine character who was voiced by the late Gary Shandling, Favreau says, "Here is Ikky, the porcupine that was not in the animated film, but was in the Kipling." And shortly after a shot of a bird with no dialogue at all flying away, the director says, "Chil [the] Kite, also from the Kipling." While these characters are not significant to the film's narrative, Favreau's insistence that they are those characters brings them into Disney's purview, ensuring that their unique expression of those characters is claimed, limiting Warner Brothers' options and perhaps reserving the right to explore those characters more deeply in a potential sequel.

Disney integrated these new moments in with their proprietary elements in such a way as to blur the lines between the cartoon and the source material. For example, by pointing to little moments throughout the movie that are supposedly inspired by the Kipling book, Favreau subtlety undermines the fact that, aside from some additions and unique interpretations, the entire movie is based on Kipling's stories and is within the public domain. Additionally, there

are moments in the commentary track and bonus features that frame the Disney version as the best of both worlds. During one entirely new sequence involving Mowgli saving a baby elephant, Favreau states that this, "little moment with the elephant… reminds me of the Disney film, but really taking the emotion from the Kipling story." His statement productively paints the Disney live-action version as a textual hybrid, essentially giving viewers a perfected version of *The Jungle Book* which draws the best moments, themes and emotions from the source to expand on and modernize themes and ideas introduced in the cartoon.

Disney has a long history of turning public domain folklore into branded intellectual property. When discussing the *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise, Carolyn Jess-Cooke (2012) points out how the story behind both the movies and the ride are drawn from various versions of the pirate mythos but are never explicitly cited as such.[190] Similarly, as a paratext, the Disney live-action *Jungle Book* blurs the line between the popular myth and the proprietary elements added by Disney. Each of these live-action films brings in more elements from the original story, but unlike those done by other companies, they are rarely framed as adding to the authenticity of the story. Rather, authenticity is derived from adherence to Disney's interpretation of the stories. By incorporating narrative elements from the book into this latest Disney branded version, Disney not only limited the portions of the source material Warner Brothers could use to distinguish their version but weakened their claims that their darker, more adult version was somehow more authentic.

Conclusion

While all media companies need to manage their intellectual properties from time to time, Disney has the unique task of maintaining ownership over titles that are mostly in the public

[190] Jess-Cooke, "Sequelizing Spectatorship," 212.

domain. For many people, the Disney brand is closely tied to the fairytale genre, therefore Disney has an investment in keeping *their* version of many popular fairytales alive in the public mind. When creating his popular show *Once Upon a Time*, Adam Horwitz did not consider that his memory of these stories was largely made up of Disney's proprietary creations. When he finally pitched the show to ABC, he realized how lucky they were that they ended up under the Disney umbrella because it provided them with the opportunity to play off what he calls our "collective memories" of these stories. As he suggests:

> It was more about stories and fairy tales in their purest sense...we didn't even think about it as a Disney show… we just thought about it as C*inderella*, *Snow White*… and all these things are all public domain fairy tales, so it didn't matter where we did it. But what we discovered is: Disney, because they did all these animated classics, they kind of own these iconic versions of them.[191]

This kind of control over the collective ideas of fairytales and brands is not self-evident. Disney, like many companies, must work to manage their intellectual property and keep it relevant with each new passing generation. Refurbishment is a process of reinvention for media properties and provides the opportunity for corporations to reaffirm their ownership over certain brands and, if needed, change the discourse around them. Each live-action remake Disney produces acts as a node of organization where textual and discursive fragments from the long history of these properties can be reoriented in ways that suit the needs of the franchise and the company. Industrial creatives and producers can use these new texts and the discourses they produce to shift, highlight, or overshadow certain aspects, assumptions and ideologies that have become articulated around them. In this way, refurbishments work to historically contextualize intellectual property, giving audiences new lenses with which to view the past, while assuring

[191] Adam Horowitz, interview with author, June 6, 2017.

them of the franchise's relevance now and into the future. They can tell a story that mirrors the original in almost every way, allowing them to maintain and draw attention to their intellectual additions to these properties while updating that imagery so it feels fresh and new using moments of innovation that can spark conversation that shift the discourse around each property.

This chapter considered the way Disney's recent live-action films work to manage their multiple branded texts through a process of franchise refurbishment that seeks to assuage certain problematic elements associated with the text while evoking personal memories of the text in an effort to ensure the continued value of these characters and stories across the franchise. These new films don't seek to replace the films the company is built upon; but instead, act as reframing tools that offer new readings of Disney branded stories and their related merchandise. Jonathan Gray argues that paratexts work to "position, define and create meaning for film and television."[192] Ultimately, the excitement and promotion for the live-action *Beauty and the Beast* created a new set of paratexts that facilitated feminist readings of both Disney's new movie and, more generally, all of Disney's related branded content.

Through the live-action versions of *Cinderella*, *Maleficent* and *Beauty and the Beast,* Disney has attempted to reboot their fairytale brand as one about strong, empowered women and all but erase the original texts of public domain stories. Each film works not only to reorient the discourse around individual texts, but can be seen as an attempt to reframe the company itself as one that is open to progressive and innovative takes on fairytales by creatives who have a personal investment in the franchise – so long as they take the Disney version as the primary source material. Discussing their effective erasure of all racial connotation connected to Disney's

[192] Gray, Show Sold Separately, 3.

Splash Mountain ride, based on the infamously problematic film *Song of the South,* Jason Sperb argues, "the deletion completes this particular theme park attraction's attempted emergence as a purified Baudrillardian simulation…and as a racially sanitized commercial venture ready for popular consumption."[193] Since Disney has denied access to the original film, Splash Mountain effectively functions to "erase *Song of the South* from collective popular cultural memories."[194] Similarly, through franchise refurbishment, Disney engages in an industrial and cultural exercise which favors the most commercially viable elements of their versions of the story. However, rather than hiding the past, as with *Song of the South*, Disney simply adds to a vast and ever-present paratextual web of possible meanings and readings until the past and the present are irrelevant. There is only The Franchise, a timeless evergreen branded entity in which all versions maintain their value to the corporate structure.

[193] Jason Sperb, "'Take a Frown, Turn It Upside Down': Splash Mountain, Walt Disney World, and the Cultural De-Rac[e]-Ination of Disney's Song of the South (1946)," *Journal of Popular Culture; Oxford* 38, no. 5 (August 2005): 935.
[194] Ibid.

Chapter 3 – 'Primed and Ready': Fan Professionalization and Recalibration through Franchised Proliferation

"We are very mad that we haven't been invited on your show, which has now taken over the universe," said actress Lauren Graham in 2016 when she sat down for an interview with the hosts of the podcast *Gilmore Guys*.[195] Rather than answering questions about the upcoming revival, Graham, the actress who plays Lorelai Gilmore on the show *Gilmore Girls*, and Alexis Bledel, who played her daughter Rory Gilmore on the series, spent much of the interview time asking the podcasters about the origins of their show. Sitting on the set of the, at that time, yet to be released revival series *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life,* Bledel responded, "…she's angry, I have questions…How did this start?" For hosts Kevin Porter and Demi Adejuyigbe, the moment marked the culmination of the *Gilmore Girls* discussion podcast they had started almost two years prior called *The Gilmore Guys*. As Adejuyigbe put it during the interview, "this is like when Anderson Cooper meets the president," pointing out how strange it feels to talk about a person and analyze their every move, and then finally meet them face to face. Porter proceeded to offer a brief description of the origins of their podcast, explaining how he was a fan of the show for a long time, and he invited Adejuyigbe, who had never seen the series, to be his co-host. Afterward, Graham asks, "what will happen when you get to the end? Then where do your lives go from there?" Adejuyigbe replied "Bunheads" referring to another series from the creator of *Gilmore Girls*, Amy Sherman-Palladino. Adejuyigbe continues, "So bring Bunheads back, so we have more to do of that."

The above exchange highlights a unique relationship between the podcasters and the *Gilmore Girls* production. Porter and Adejuyigbe are visible to the industry, as they were invited

[195] "The Gilmore Guys meet the Gilmore Girls" (YouTube Video), posted November 17, 2016, accessed December 20, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdPP1z2Ilyg&t=177s

to the set for an exclusive interview and both the lead actresses from the show have heard of their podcast. Graham's suggestion that she wants to be on the podcast reinforces its legitimacy by offering an endorsement from an official industry insider. Additionally, the exchange points to the way the future of the *Gilmore Guys* podcast is tied to the future of the *Gilmore Girls* (or any *Gilmore Girls* adjacent) property. Though the podcast could and did exist before Netflix resurrected the series, the production of new content provided the hosts with additional material to analyze and keep the podcast relevant. Furthermore, the impending release of *Gilmore Girls: A Year in the Life* strengthened the value of the podcast as a site of promotion for the industry and, in turn, as a potential liminal space of professionalization for the two hosts.

This set of relationships – between the podcasters and the producers, between the podcasters and the fans, and between the producers and the fans via the podcasters – are managed largely through discourses of storytelling. First, the podcast was able to gain a certain level of popularity through their ability to demonstrate a deep understanding of the *Gilmore Girls* narrative history. Their ability to interpret the story for new and old fans (particularly in a largely affirmational way) was of value to Netflix, who was looking to reintroduce the story to a new generation. In this way, we can see storytelling discourse at work in two distinct ways. First, the hosts of the show vie for authority within the fan community through discussions of the storyworld, not unlike the creatives in the *Apes* franchise from Chapter 1. Second, the industry utilizes the influence garnered by the podcasters to manage fan expectations and reactions to a newly refurbished story. In a more general sense, podcasts like *Gilmore Guys* are largely sustained through the logics of ongoing stories within the industry. Without new and continuing stories to discuss, the podcast has no material. Furthermore, the more complex the narrative history of a franchise, the more valuable the ability to interpret and translate that history for an

uninitiated audience becomes. In other words, this particular type of fan expression is made potentially more lucrative through the ongoing proliferation of stories within a given franchise. Ultimately, though this chapter shifts the focus slightly from industry management to various levels of audience management, it's still interested in the use of narrative as a central tool of that management.

Suzanne Scott argues a fantrepreneur is a fan "who openly leverages or strategically adopts a fannish identity for his or her own professional advancement."[196] These fans serve a valuable function and often find themselves in influential roles that place them in a liminal, and strategically valuable, space between the fan community and the industry's refurbishment efforts. Scott argues that these types of fans serve an important function as "(sub) cultural interpreters."[197] She and others have pointed to the various ways the convergence era embrace of fan communities allowed fans to function in privileged roles as intermediaries or, as Benjamin Woo defines them, individuals who "work between the moments of production and consumption and are concerned with circulation – not only of commodities, but also discourses about their meaning."[198] Within the context of repetitious media logics, *Gilmore Guys*, and similar discussion podcasts built around a single property, function as mediators between the property's preexisting fanbase and the industry's efforts to reintroduce the property into the mainstream. Essentially, these podcasts functions as not only intermediaries between industry and fan spaces but can also, when needed, facilitate the fan's transition from the past to the future of the franchise. I suggest that if we consider the work done to update and maintain the relevance of a

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[196] Suzanne Scott*, Fake Geek Girls: Fandom, Gender, and the Convergence Culture Industry* (New York: New York University Press, 2019),148.
[197]Scott, *Fake Geek Girls*, 174.
[198] Benjamin Woo, "Alpha nerds: Cultural Intermediaries in a Subcultural Scene," *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15 no. 5 (2012), 660.

text as a process of refurbishment, then we might consider the related process of managing the fan communities of the refurbished text to be one of *recalibration*.

The previous chapter theorized the creative/industrial process of franchise management as one of refurbishment, in which existing properties are updated and restored through new installments in ways that suit the continued cultural relevance and financial viability of the entire franchise. If the creation of a new text is imagined industrially as a process of refurbishment, then I argue the subsequent and inevitable attempt to manage the fan reaction to that refurbishment through promotional and marketing initiatives might best be understood as one of *recalibration*. To calibrate means *to correlate the readings of an instrument with those of a standard in order to check the accuracy of the instrument.* In the same way a new compass must be adjusted in relation to true north in order to assure its usefulness and accuracy, so must a new text be tested against a standard in order to determine its authenticity in relation to an existing text. In short, recalibration can be thought of as the industrial attempt to define that true north through the infiltration and mobilization of influential fans that will affirm the overall value of the property and position the newest refurbishment within the legacy of the property. Thus, podcasts like the *Gilmore Guys* provide an ideal intermediary space to center these recalibration efforts. Ultimately, in relation to storytelling, recalibration is a discursive process of making the newest story seem like a logical extension of the existing narrative world. It is a process of reinforcing textual and affective connections to existing texts in a way that emphasizes the intended refurbishment goals of the new text.

In what follows I wish to explore a specific type of fantrepreneur, one who directly profits off the industry's recalibration efforts. I argue that for these fans the ability to leverage certain fan practices into lucrative professional or financial opportunities is significantly aided by

(and in some cases largely contingent upon) the frequency and nature of the industry's refurbishment practices. When studios promote a new entry in a franchise, the hype generated by large scale marketing campaigns provides a heightened awareness of otherwise dormant properties, making related fan podcasts or websites more likely to acquire and maintain new listeners and readers respectively. Additionally, certain fans become increasingly valuable to the studio as they provide an opportunity for embedded promotional content that speaks directly to fans through fan-created and run channels. These fans are ever aware and intimately connected to the corporate logics of refurbishment as they largely exist as interpreters of that refurbishment process and are valued by the industry for their ability to generate interest and manage expectations of that process. Ultimately, times of refurbishment in a media property's lifecycle offer an increased likelihood of financial and professional opportunities for privileged entrepreneurial-minded fans to capitalize on their sudden heightened value to the industry. However, since they often take the position of more or less affirmational fans, their continued success is contingent on the success and consistent output of new material related to their respective franchise. In short, their value to fans and the industry is at best tenuous and at worst entirely ephemeral.

Podcasts built around the ongoing analysis of a given media property's back catalog are on the rise. This is in part due to the increasing availability of those back catalogs via streaming services. In the past, partaking in this kind of in-depth analysis would require a significant financial investment from the audience, not to mention space on the shelf. The ease of access to material combined with the democratization of podcasting technology has made this an attractive model for industrious fans looking to engage in their fandom. Several podcasts have emerged that focus on in-depth readings of a TV series, film franchise or the back catalog of a single

music artist. *James Bonding* is a podcast that exclusively discusses James Bond related media. Each episode engages in an intense and in-depth discussion of just one specific entry into the franchise. *The X-Files Files* is a podcast that considers episodes of the hit show *The X-Files* (1993 -), methodically analyzing each episode of its eleven seasons. This is certainly not exclusive to film and television. The music podcast *U Talkin U2 To Me* is a popular podcast in which two hosts dissect each album in the band U2's discography. These podcasters assume the role of experts in their respective objects of study and guide new fans through the series offering their readings of every detail.

Many of the more well-known of these 'fan' podcasts occupy a negotiated space between the fandom and the industry. The descriptions of each of the previously mentioned podcasts position the hosts as, first and foremost, fans. Consider the description of *James Bonding,* which reads*,* "Matt Gourley and Matt Mira love James Bond so much they decided to make a podcast about it." However, every podcast mentioned is hosted by people who occupy other positions within the industry. Matt Gourley and Matt Mira are comedians and writers. The hosts for *U Talking U2 to Me* are also industry professionals; Adam Scott is an actor, and Scott Aukerman hosts the popular podcast *Comedy Bang! Bang!* and is the co-founder of the podcast network Earwolf. The hosts of these shows are often intertwined with the entertainment industry giving them more credibility and recognition than the average fan would if they were to host similar podcasts. The description of *U Talkin U2 to Me* reads, "…Adam Scott (Parks and Recreation) and Scott Aukerman (Comedy Bang! Bang!) come together as superfan Adam Scott Aukerman to discuss the music and impact of the band." Here the hosts are positioned as fans, but their other notable credits are also mentioned to establish them as media professionals. Aside from the hosts often being industry insiders, the podcasts themselves at times seem to function as

promotional engines for the industry. For example, the hosts of *U Talking U2 to Me* landed an exclusive interview with the band during the promotion of one of their new albums and also received advanced copies of songs which they discussed on their show. Similarly, David Duchovny and Gillian Anderson appeared on *The X-Files Files* to promote the latest season of the TV show. Ultimately, these podcasts being both a part of the fan community as well as an unofficial promotional arm of the industry make them a potentially interesting space to investigate the overlap and cross-sections of fandom and industry logics, particularly as they pertain to refurbishment logics.

That said, it's important to acknowledge the inherently unequal power dynamics that exist within fan cultures, specifically the unequal and gendered politics of fan professionalization. As Scott has pointed out, "…the capacity to leverage one's own fan identity for professional gain overwhelmingly favors men."[199] This chapter is concerned primarily with the way franchising logics and these types of podcasts are mutually beneficial and perhaps even to some extent, mutually constitutive relationships. Thus, just as the franchising logics of repetition might contribute to the creation and continued production of these types of fan podcasts, the gendered logics of franchising incentivizes the privileging of male voices within these intermediary spaces. Though fandom itself has traditionally been feminized, it has been mainstreamed largely through its close association with straight white men. Mel Stanfill suggests that whiteness, cisness, straightness, and maleness "are central to how, when, and why [fans] are granted normative status."[200] Male consumption and engagement practices are often viewed as more attractive to the industry. Fan blogger Obbsession_inc productively identified some these

[199] Scott, *Fake Geeks Girls*,150.
[200] Mel Stanfill, *Exploiting Fandom: How the Media Industry Seeks to Manipulate Fans* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2019), 12.

gendered differences in her post outlining what she considers two types of fan engagement, "Affirmational fandom" and "Transformation fandom." She argues that in affirmational fan communities, "the source material is re-stated, the author's purpose divined to the community's satisfaction, rules established on how the characters are and how the universe works..."[201] Transformational fandom, alternatively, "is all about laying hands upon the source and twisting it to the fans' own purposes." In her post, she points to the ways these two types of fandom are, in her experience, significantly, gendered, with men tending toward affirmational fan engagement and women contributing more to transformation modes of fan production. Kristina Busse builds on these concepts to point out the way that female forms of fan engagement, which she agrees lean towards the transformational, are also largely devalued and seen as less legitimate both within and outside of fan communities. She argues fan communities and discourses around them reveal gender binaries "that identifies certain behaviors as masculine or feminine, with the former usually connoting active, intellectual, aggressive and objective, and the latter, passive, emotional, sensitive, and subjective."[202] These constructions of male fans as primarily affirmational tend to mean that male-dominated forms of fan engagement are more easily recognized by the industry as desirable and profitable.

The *Gilmore Guys* podcast occupies a potentially fraught space within the gendered politics of professionalization. The podcast capitalizes on the supposed irony or imagined incongruity of 'guys' interested in a show about 'girls.' The *Gilmore Girls* has often been celebrated for its strong and positive portrayal of its female characters, and the show was created

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[201] Obsession_inc, "Affirmational vs. Transformational Fandom,"*dreamwidth.org*, June 1, 2009, https://obsession-inc.dreamwidth.org/82589.html.
[202] Kristina Busse, "Geek Hierarchies, Boundary Policing, and the Gendering of the Good Fan," *Participations, Journal of Audience and Reception Studies,* 10 no.1 (2013): 74.

by and largely written and directed by a woman. Based on my survey, the male hosts are the minority even among their own fanbase. Porter said in my interview that if it weren't for the title, it's possible the podcast wouldn't exist. "We might not be having this conversation," he said.[203] Though my primary interest is in how the podcast capitalized on the media fervor and heightened awareness of the *Gilmore Girls* property facilitated by the revival series, it's equally important to draw attention to the way in which their professionalization is predicated on gendered assumptions about fan communities. In other words, *Gilmore Guys'* value as a site of recalibration largely hinged on the imagined gender binaries that frame masculine expressions of fandom as more normalized, more affirmational, more objective, and therefore more ideal for a property looking to reaffirm its legacy through refurbishment.

Though this chapter largely focuses on the rise and potential value of the *Gilmore Guys* podcast, throughout I draw from interviews with three fans turned professionals, including Kevin Porter of the *Gilmore Guys*. Each of those interview subjects currently has a career in the media industries which they largely attribute to professionalization opportunities afforded to them through the promotional and marketing logics of active franchises. Kevin Porter began his podcast just as *Gilmore Girls* arrived on Netflix. The timing of its availability on the popular streaming service and then the subsequent decision by Netflix to resurrect the series pushed Porter's podcast into the mainstream and gave him the opportunity to work in the industry in a variety of capacities. Similarly, Andrew Sims, while already a staff member at the fan site Mugglenet, started his *Harry Potter* podcast, *Mugglecast*, at the peak of the *Harry Potter* craze and considered its continued success directly tied to the continued activity of the franchise. Today, Sims owes his career as a Patreon and podcast consultant to the success of the podcast.

[203] Kevin Porter, interview with author, March 2018.

Lastly, Laura Byrne-Cristiano started one of the most popular and regularly updated *Twilight* fan sites on the internet, *The Twilight Lexicon*, which allowed her to become closely linked to the marketing department at Summit Entertainment (which would later be acquired by Lionsgate). She has since used that experience as a catalyst to pursue a career as a marketing and social media consultant for several major media companies. Each of these interviews provided a valuable perspective on the transition from fan to professional, specifically on the relationship between their professional success and the serial and repetitious practices of franchised content. In short, none of them feel they would be where they were today had the industry not told ongoing stories. All of them have had increased opportunities to professionalize during moments of activity or transition within their respective franchise. Ultimately, for these individuals, success is not tied to the output of media industries writ large, but rather the productivity and continued proliferation of a specific franchised property.

In addition to these interviews, I distributed a questionnaire to *Gilmore Guys* fans. With the help of Kevin Porter, I distributed a survey via Twitter and received over 700 complete responses. Because the survey was distributed by one of the hosts of the podcast, most of my responses were fans of the podcast. All the fan reactions are directly pulled from those surveys. These surveys are limited in that they don't give a broad picture of *Gilmore Girls* fandom, in general, but they are invaluable in their ability to paint a picture of how fans of the podcast engaged with it and what they perceive as being the value of such a fan experience. It's also helpful in directly identifying and considering what the value of these fan experiences might be for the industry, pointing to how they might be used to generate and normalize a very specific type of fan engagement. Lastly, I draw on several public interviews done with the hosts of the *Gilmore Guys* podcast as well as several articles simply written about them in order map their

rise to dominance in the mainstream and consider the way they were imagined and how they positioned themselves publicly within the fan community.

Throughout, I refer to these podcasts as *comprehensive chrono-affirmational podcasts* because they typically move chronologically through each installment or episode for a given property. *Gilmore Guys* started with the first episode of *Gilmore Girls* and moved through to the series finale. *U talking U2 to Me* moved album by album, building towards the latest release from the band. *James Bonding* bounced back and forth between chronological and reverse chronological order. In this way, the podcasts are also comprehensive. The idea being that by the end of the series, they will have discussed every installment in a given series or franchise. Many times, this also includes peripheral materials related to the main text. In *U Talkin U2 to Me* the hosts might devote episodes to not just albums, but special releases, live shows, and related documentaries. *Mugglecast* covered the Harry Potter Books and the movie series, and today even spends entire episodes on theme park attractions. Though *Gilmore Guys* focused mainly on the show, there were some episodes devoted to news bits that would surface, and after they ran out of episodes, spun off into a limited series which discussed showrunner Amy Sherman Paladino's limited series *Bun Heads*, with the show *BunheadBros*. It is these comprehensive elements that make chrono-affirmational podcasts so interlinked with the industrial logics of proliferation. Once the podcast reaches its logical endpoint, there is often little reason for it to continue to exist. While some podcasts might find innovative ways to continue, many, like the *Gilmore Guys*, come to an end or attempt to transition the success of the show into something else. However, when the industry moves forward with a new installment or set of installments, the podcast has a reason to start back up again. Lastly, I use the term affirmational to point out the general celebratory nature of these podcasts. That's not to say these podcasts are never or even

rarely critical. Many of them, including *Gilmore Guys*, spend ample time pointing to things within a franchise that didn't work or are potentially problematic. However, the general trajectory of these podcasts is celebratory and affirmational, calling attention to authorial intent, and attempting to highlight the better qualities of even the lowest point in a series.

Three Functions of the Comprehensive Chrono-affirmational Podcast

In order to understand the value of the comprehensive chrono-affirmational podcast to the industry, and how they operate as productive agents of recalibration for a refurbished franchise, I first want to highlight three distinct functions these types of podcasts offer to fans of a specific object – a *cultural function*, an *ontological function,* and a *liminal function*. Each of these functions positions comprehensive chrono-affirmational podcast as ideal spaces for recalibration, as they are embedded in the fan community and for many fans are a pseudo-official extension of the franchise itself. First, they serve an important *cultural function*, as they are important spaces through which an increasingly fragmented culture can remember and construct a sense of a shared cultural history. Second, they serve an *ontological function*, as they offer a space for fans who have perhaps mourned the loss of ontological security often associated with a fan object that has gone dormant. In this way, these podcasts create an affective relationship with their listeners that is strengthened through its ties to their original fan object. Lastly, these podcasts serve a dual *liminal function* as they can often come to facilitate the transition between *post* object, to what I call *pre* object fandom – or a fandom that is anticipating the release of a new installment from their object of fandom. This liminal function operates to help fans reframe and work through their past experiences with the object and to prepare their expectations for the new one. Ultimately, I want to highlight these three distinct functions before moving on to my analysis of

the *Gilmore Guys* and how they came to be agents of recalibration for the *Gilmore Girls: A Year in The Life*.

These podcasts seem to fulfill a cultural desire to reevaluate and recontextualize the past media object within the current moment and situate it within the franchise's history. Much in the way media repetition is often seen as a sign of creative fatigue and economic cynicism on the part of the industry, the consumption of these texts can often be equally disparaged by scholars and media critics. Despite decades of scholarship arguing the contrary, recent trends in reception studies have surfaced that seemingly resurrect pejorative readings of fan communities. Much of this work avoids using the term "fan" by instead claiming to be interested in the effects of "nostalgia" on our culture writ large. However, as Stanfill argues, "fan subpublics and counterpublics are becoming indistinguishable from the Public."[204] However, many of these discourses consider the normalization of fan activities to be a sign of an emerging and potentially problematic cultural obsession with the past. Ryan Lizardi has suggested that new technologies are largely responsible for this rise in what he calls, "perpetual narcissistic nostalgia." Lizardi argues 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 the narcissistic, melancholic, and perpetual tendency of contemporary media.[205]

Lizardi points to things like VH1's "I Love the …" series as evidence of a kind of obsession with the immediate past that "is dangerous to a healthy past engagement that might utilize and learn from history."[206] His use of the word "healthy" here calls to mind early concepts of fandom as a

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[204]Stanfill, *Exploiting Fandom*, 5.
[205] Ryan Lizardi, *Mediated Nostalgia: Individual Memory and Contemporary Mass Media* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 7.
[206] Lizardi, *Mediated Nostalgia*, 6.

symptom of a psychological disorder. According to Lizardi, this psychological disorder impacts an individual's ability to contextualize and understand their nostalgic objects. Again, this paints fans as uncritical masses who blindly consume whatever the industry is giving them. He also views engagement with what he terms "nostalgic objects," as being largely an individual and isolated experience, going as far as to consider it narcissistic. He argues, "[t]he dominate 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."[207] He pushes back against Janelle Wilson, who argues that nostalgia can be healthy and cathartic, by suggesting that, "…contemporary mediated nostalgia seems to fall short of this ideal and presents itself to consumers as myopic, individual, and uncritical."[208] Lizardi is not alone here. Looking at the music industry specifically, Simon Reynolds considers recent interest in the past to be an actual addiction and that this addiction is stalling our ability to progress.[209] Similarly, mainstream journalists find nostalgia to be an easy way to undermine the quality, or intelligence of certain audiences with headlines like, "Fuller House is Back Because Nostalgia is More Valuable than Quality."[210]

While there have been changes in the way media is distributed and managed over the past few decades, namely with the invention of streaming media, the assumption that these changes have somehow created a new obsession with the past ignores a long history of fandom that has always had an eye on the mediated past. These views often consider the current cultural

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[207] Ibid, 6
[208] Ibid, 20
[209] Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011)
[210] Jeremy Gordon, 'Fuller House Is Back Because Nostalgia Is More Valuable Than Quality.' Spin, November 1, 2016, accessed September 15, 2017, https://www.spin.com/2016/11/fuller-house-is-back-because-nostalgia-is-more-valuable-than-quality/

obsession with the past to be a recent development or at least an all-time high. For example, Reynolds recalls reruns being "few and far between, rarely dating back further than a few years."[211] However, as Derek Kompare has pointed out when writing about the same time period, television was built on reruns. He suggests the industrial need to reuse old content is actually how Americans have built a sense of heritage and shared history. Kompare argues, television repetition "became a part of the expected experience of television only once reruns had entered the cultural domain in their own right." [212] He suggests that by the 1970s, through several scholarly and archival developments, reruns became the primary way Americans built a sense of shared history. Things that were old became things to be revered, not things to be reviled. I would argue that this "narcissistic nostalgia" that Lizardi and Reynolds are warning against could just as easily be understood as an extension of relationships with the past that Kompare argues have been present since the 1970s. In that vein, we can see the rise of these particular podcasts, like *Gilmore Guys,* within fandoms as a byproduct of a more grassroots effort to develop a sense of media heritage. In other words, they provide fans with a communal experience that celebrates a shared cultural history in a world of increasingly fragmented media experiences. As one fan stated, "*Gilmore Guys* introduced me to an entire friend group all across the US and parts of the world. It is honestly one of the best things that has happened to me in the past two years" (Respondent 18). That said, though we might not theorize this fascination with the past in terms of narcissism, we should be critical of the ways in which this type of heritage is constructed, by whom, and to what end.

In my research, interest in past fan objects is anything but isolated or narcissistic as fans of these podcasts seem heavily invested in other people's opinions about their object. Rather than

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[211] Reynolds, *Retromania*, 58.
[212] Derek Kompare, *Rerun Nation: How Repeats Invented American Television* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 105.

offer a view of the past tainted with rose-colored glasses, *Gilmore Guys* offers an objective take on these fan objects and allow fans to reframe their own investment in them by opening them up to new perspectives. *Gilmore Guys* became an important paratextual lens through which to re-watch the series. When the podcast premiered, most fans in my survey had already been re-watching the series in a loop for years since it aired. Many credited the *Gilmore Guys* with breathing new life into this experience. Respondent 4 stated, "I went back to Sept 2014 when the podcast started and watched along with the podcast…" Respondent 24 emphasized the way the show shaped her viewing experience: "I think it adds a nice dimension to re-watching the series, new opinions and things they discuss that I hadn't noticed myself." Respondent number 74 said, "My relationship with the character had changed through rewatches and listening to the *Gilmore Guys* podcast. But it was still upsetting for me where Rory ended up." Watching the series along with the *Gilmore Guys* became a completely new experience for many fans. They used the podcast to challenge or reaffirm their preexisting opinions about the show, as Respondent 5 says, "I listened at work and often watched *Gilmore Girls* episodes after they were discussed to see if I agreed with an assessment."

Aside from creating a sense of shared cultural experience, these podcasts also function to ease the loss of ontological security that often coincides with fan object entering a period of stagnation. Rebecca Williams argues:

> When fan's relationships with objects end, they must suffer loveshock and need to cope with this period of mourning before refashioning their self-identity to deal with this rupture.[213]

[213] Rebecca Williams, "This Is the Night TV Died": Television Post-Object Fandom and the Demise of The West Wing, Popular Communication, 9 no. 4 (2011), 274.

Williams calls this "post object fandom," which she considers to be "fandom of any object which can no longer produce new texts."[214] While I would argue that on some level, and in the age of refurbishment especially, no fan object is beyond the promise of possible new texts, the loss of ontological security described by Williams is useful in understanding this second important function of analytical podcasts built around the sequential and episodic analysis of a single fan object. The regularity of the podcast, usually occurring on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, restores a sense of routine that Williams argues usually contributes to the sense of ontological security. Though no new texts might be available, the experience of watching an installment of a fan object in anticipation of a new episode of the podcast restores, at least to a degree, some level of ontological security.

This ontological function has clear managerial value to a company looking to promote a refurbished property and remind audiences of the positive feelings associated with the original text. Participants in my survey seemed to relate to the podcast in similar ways they related to the show. As one respondent put it, "I absolutely love the *Gilmore Guys* podcast! Similar to what drew me to *Gilmore Girls*, the podcast became a treat to look forward to (Respondent 12)." Many respondents pointed to the *Gilmore Girls* TV show as being a source of comfort that often got them through hard times. As one fan recalls, "it was a bright, positive spot (strong driven women but still vulnerable) in a time of upheaval for me" (Respondent 77). One participant stated, "It was/is my comfort show" (Respondent 69). Another elaborated more offering, "Whenever I'm homesick I go back to the original episodes and watch them, and it brings me joy and comfort" (Respondent 117). Many found the original series to be a source of great emotional support in times of stress, as one participant said, "I then got back into it after struggling with

[214] Williams, "This Is the Night TV Died," 269.

depression while studying abroad. Watching *Gilmore Girls* is what kept me sane" (Respondent 124).

Responses about the *Gilmore Guys* podcast seemed to mirror these emotional connections fans had to the original series. Respondent 4 draws parallels directly, stating, "[t]his podcast, just like the show it's based on, changed my life." Respondent 3 offered a similar assessment:

> My relationship to the *Gilmore Guys* kind of is like my relationship to the show: it's there for me and it's comfortable and I like it and sometimes it makes me mad. I usually download an episode after I just finish watching the corresponding ones.

It would seem, for many, the draw to the podcast was in its ability to generate the same feelings and filling similar voids as the show. Williams suggests that the ontological security offered by the text is threatened when the text ceases to produce new installments and ultimately, the "fan's self-narrative must be reworked in order to cope with this disruption."[215] *Gilmore Guys* seemed to emerge as not only a space that helped fans cope with the disruption caused by the ending of the initial series, but restored the ontological security provided by the original series in the first place.

Williams also argues, "one way this can be achieved is by moving onto new fandoms or recourse to other existing fandoms."[216] In this vein, we should acknowledge that the ontological security derived from these new podcasts is not necessarily a replacement for the old fan object, but can also be imagined as an entirely new fandom. *Gilmore Guys* fans didn't always consider themselves to be *Gilmore Girls* fans. *Gilmore Guys* fans had their own name, 'Gillies.' That said, Gillies fandom is largely built on the residual affective relationships with *Gilmore Girls*,

[215] Williams, "This is the Night TV Died,"272.
[216] Ibid, 275.

functioning as a mechanism through which latent feelings of ontological security can be reignited and articulated around a new fan object. As Respondent 60 stated:

> the rapport between Porter and Adejuyigbe and their different personalities and outlooks led to hilarity and sincerity and it began to develop the same sort of slightly-insane-but-always-comforting value of the *Gilmore Girls* show itself.

This ontological and affective relationship made the podcast an ideal agent of recalibration for a franchise seeking to resurrect passion for a dormant franchise.

Lastly, the liminal function of these podcasts is drawn from their ability to transition from a podcast about the past to one about the future, when needed. For example, *Gilmore Guys* began as a podcast interested in rewatching the original series and discussing the past. The show moved through each episode, analyzing them as moments of the past. However, once the revival series was announced the show quickly shifted to a show that helped frame the yet to be released episodes functioning to manage expectations and negotiate the fan transition from post object to pre object fandom. As the revival series approached its release, the podcast became one of the main sources of information for several fans. Some, like Respondent 8, used the podcast as a supplement to other news sources, stating though "[a] few news outlets kept me in the loop," they got their information "mostly through the *Gilmore Guys* podcast." Respondent 7 had a hard time separating official sources of promotion from the podcast, "I don't really remember how I first heard about the revival. From the *Gilmore Guys* podcast maybe…"

Even before the new series was announced, fans found the show to be a useful space to work their conflicting feelings about the series. As Respondent 9 indicated, "My favorite episodes of the podcast generally are during significant events in the show or for episodes of the show that the guys don't like as much." The fact that she engaged with episodes the hosts *didn't*

like implies she used the podcast as a main source of critique, perhaps challenging her own feelings on those episodes. Some fans even felt the podcast actually taught them *how* to watch the show. As one respondent said, "Porter and Adejuyigbe were consistently so funny and thoughtful, and it made me appreciate the show so much more as well as being more critical of it" (Respondent 120).

The podcast was a key site of expectation management for many listeners. While several fans re-watched the original series to prepare for the new show, many felt the *Gilmore Guys* rendered a re-watch of the original series unnecessary. One respondent stated, "I didn't watch the series in preparation but felt prepared because I had been listening to the *Gilmore Guys* podcast leading up to the revival" (Respondent 120). Respondent 119 didn't re-watch the series either because she "…felt pretty confident that I remembered everything. And I had been listening to the *Gilmore Guys* podcast so that helped jog my memory as well." While most people were fans of the original show before they listened to the podcast, when they went into the new series they often saw the show through the lens offered by the hosts of *Gilmore Guys* and their guests.

Essentially, the show facilitated the ontological transition from remembering or grappling with a past object and the anticipation associated with its pending rebirth. Even fans who had not listened to the podcast before the revival discovered it in an attempt to make sense of the new episodes. Respondent 84 explained this experience well. She stated, "I was looking for fans' opinions of the revival and stumbled upon the podcast, listened (and heavily agreed with) the hosts' opinions of the revival." While this fan already had formed her opinions, she used the podcast as a way to authenticate and validate them. She was drawn to the fact that they seemed to confirm her view on the series. They became the "true north" of the series, and most listeners compared their ideas about the revival series to the *Gilmore Guys*. For fans of the podcast, their

feelings of the show were intrinsically intertwined with their current relationship with the podcast. When asked how they felt about the series, many responses factored in the opinion of the *Gilmore Guys* even though the question didn't ask that of them. One fan talks about how the show directly impacted her perception of the character Rory:

> I used to like Rory a lot more when I was younger, pre *Gilmore Guys*, so I think that if I hadn't heard Porter and Adejuyigbe's views on Rory and been prepared for her epic suckyness (sic) I would have been disappointed by the revival but I wasn't all that surprised when it ended up that way (Respondent 91).

Rory became an extremely controversial figure in the new episodes. Many felt that she had lost her way and didn't quite correlate with the character they remembered from the series. However, on the podcast, they had been routinely pointing out moments where Rory was acting spoiled or just generally poorly as a person in the original series. Some fans felt the show helped them manage their expectations. One fan stated that even though she still disliked Rory in the revival series, "[m]y relationship with the character had changed through re-watches and listening to the *Gilmore Guys* podcast" (Respondent 74). Ultimately, for many fans, the podcast helped them find more joy in a series that in many ways had let them down. As one fan stated, "[g]enerally, I was more disappointed than not in the new episodes and listening to the podcast, later on, made me appreciate the good parts much more" (Respondent 13). It is likely this affirmational perspective of the series that positioned it as an attractive space for promotion and positioned the hosts as potential grassroots intermediaries.

I don't want to suggest listeners of the show blindly agreed with the *Gilmore Guys*, rather, that fans' opinions were often formed or reformed in relation to the podcast. The podcast offered them the ability to dig deeper into the show and have their opinions challenged and reaffirmed by people they considered to be authorities. The show worked as a tool of *refraction*, helping to reshape and redirect preconceived ideas, but not necessarily as the last word or gospel.

Some listeners actively disliked the podcast. Respondent 117 stated, “I don’t agree with much of what they say, and Gillies is the worst fandom name ever, I refuse to go by it.” In fact, one fan outright challenged the *Gilmore Guys’* entire premise. She asserted, “I am not that interested in the *Gilmore Guys* podcast. I've listened to a few episodes but I'm not a big podcast person and I didn't like the Guys’ opinions, honestly” (Respondent 11). She continues:

> Moreover, I feel as if its popularity asserts that these male opinions on a female-led television show matter more than other fans’ opinions, and I don't like that. I don't understand why it’s popular (Respondent 11).

These concerns are not unfounded. In my research, a majority of *Gilmore Girls* and *Gilmore Guys* fans are female. Of 718 completed surveys only 33 respondents identified as male. *Gilmore Guys* podcast overshadowed the very similar female-led podcast *Friday Night Dinner*, which predated *Gilmore Guys* by a year. Certainly, the rise of one fan voice over others is made more problematic when that voice is predominantly male. Many male guests often felt a need to defend their enjoyment of the show framing their initial interests as being inspired by their mother, girlfriends or wives. Though the humor was extremely tongue-in-cheek, Jason Mantzoukas’ humor could often be considered graphic and misogynistic. For example, one reoccurring joke in the podcast was that he once pitched an episode to the casting directors for the show in which he would “accidentally sleep with Rory and then, without knowing it, sleep and fall in love with Lorelai.”[217]

Many of the podcast’s female fans negotiated the hosts’ masculinity with the show’s feminist subject matter. While there were some who found this to be reason enough not to support the podcasts, others found reasons to embrace the dynamic. Several fans acknowledged

[217]“Gilmore Guys Live (With Jason Mantzoukas” (video), posted December 23, 2015, accessed December 14, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45nqPVcC5Rg.

the way the show brought in several different guests of all backgrounds and were drawn to the show precisely because of the wide breadth of viewpoints it offered. Respondent 80 highlights this point:

> I remember being impressed that three men (including their guest, DC Pierson) could talk about this "girly" show in a respectful, nuanced way, without any sexist asides. I think there was a moment where DC said something like, "If I was Lorelai, I would have done X," and that was deeply meaningful to me. I couldn't remember having heard a man relate to a female character's personality and circumstances, and take them on as valuable things worthy of discussion. I liked that a lot.

Others made a point to highlight the many female guests the show brought on. Respondent 12 offers a good example, "My favorite episodes were any with Aisha Muharrar, Sarah Heyward, and Alice Wetterland (her impression of Rory is my favorite thing ever!" So, while there were skeptics within the fan group, a majority of fans felt *Gilmore Guys* was a positive addition to the fandom. Some even described them as feminists. Respondent 4 sums up the variety of reactions people had to the show nicely:

> It's amazing how Porter and Adejuyigbe ended up being such a random but well-paired duo (the perfect duo in my opinion) to do this podcast. Them being the sweet, funny, inappropriate, feminist, kind, interesting and considerate, witty, intelligent, articulate guys that they are really complemented the pride fans of the show carry with them.

In any case, the *Gilmore Guys* podcast, though not officially part of the actual production, became an important cultural, ontological and liminal space through which many *Gilmore Girls* fans came to understand the show. Ultimately, fans turned to the podcast for insights into the production, clues about the upcoming episodes, and to find out if their feelings about the new episodes matched those expressed through the podcast. In this way, the show functioned as neither a space for pre object fandom or post object fandom but instead provided a continued sense of ontological security that was imagined to exist outside of the industry. We must keep in mind the way the podcast itself maintained a strong relationship with the production and was

securely in the purview of industry workers and those in charge of promoting the revival series. This is perhaps best demonstrated in the case of Jason Mantzoukas' appearance in the revival series.

Mantzoukas is a comedian and popular podcasting personality on the Earwolf podcast network. Shortly after the revival series was announced Mantzoukas appeared as a guest during a live taping of the podcast. While this was far from his first time on the show, it was his first appearance after the revival series had been announced. During the show, Mantzoukas introduced the idea of being in the revival episodes. He says to Porter "to answer your question honestly, I would love to be on the show."[218] Porter and Adejuyigbe encouraged their fans to start a hashtag to get Mantzoukas on the show, "hashtag MantzoukasforGilmore lets make that happen," said Adejuyigbe to the live audience.[219] His words were met with overwhelming cheers. When he appeared in a later *Gilmore Guys* episode, Mantzoukas tells the story about his interaction with the creators of the show he recalls telling them after the shoot, "I can't tell you how much this means to me, I'm just an enormous fan and they were like 'oh, we know.'"[220]

While there's no way of knowing for sure if the hashtag was directly responsible for Mantzoukas appearance in the series, his story about the appearance highlights the way he and the show now occupied a gray area between actual representatives of the production and members of the fan community. The idea of Mantzoukas being on the revival series was originated through the podcast and, through the hashtag, fans made it clear they were interested in Mantzoukas being on the show. Not only was he cast in a role, but he had a speaking part.

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[218] "Gilmore Guys Live (With Jason Mantzoukas" (video), posted December 23, 2015, accessed December 14, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45nqPVcC5Rg.
[219] Ibid
[220] Kevin Porter and Demi Adejuyigbe, "Summer," The Gilmore Guy (Podcast), *HeadGum*, December 19, 2016, accessed December 21, 2017, https://headgum.com/gilmore-guys/summer-with-jason-mantzoukas

After that experience, Mantzoukas was able to appear on the podcast not only as a critic but as someone who could speak about the production with authority. It's telling that Mantzoukas' role could easily have been cut, Mantzoukas mentions that in the podcast. His character was fairly insignificant. However, his inclusion in the final version of the show, and his interaction with the producers suggest an awareness by the producers of *Gilmore Guys* and its fans. Therefore, the strong influence *Gilmore Guys* maintained over the fandom is not completely separate from, but instead became an integral part of, industrial practice.

Intermediary Material

While these types of podcasts serve important functions for fan communities, they also serve as important spaces of professionalization for their creators. As Porter suggested, "I don't want to get too dramatic, but I was in a pretty bad place when the podcast started." Porter had some small freelance jobs here and there, but no real prospects that could sustain him or propel his career in the industry. Similarly, Andrew Sims worked freelancing for the blog *Mugglenet* before working his way up in the company and then starting *Mugglecast*, all on a volunteer basis. Alternatively, Laura Byrne-Cristiano, had no real industry ambitions when she started her fan site *The Twilight Lexicon*, but she demonstrated an ability to read a gap in the marketplace and enough technical skill to construct a popular website. Even before they were tapped to partake in the promotion for the upcoming series, Porter and Adejuyigbe had demonstrated an ability to utilize the growing popularity of *Gilmore Girls* to promote themselves as skilled industry laborers with a proven ability to attract and maintain an audience. Jenkins, Ford and Green define grassroots intermediaries as "unofficial parties who shape the flow of messages through

their community and who may become strong advocates for brands or franchises."[221] They suggest that "their activities often coexist or even coincide with corporate agendas."[222] Each of these fantrepreneurs had varying levels of industry ambitions, but they each demonstrated an ability to "coexist" with certain "corporate agendas," particularly an ability to read and meet the needs of a particular market.

The *Gilmore Guys* already demonstrated an ability to serve the fan community in a variety of ways, and therefore had a strategic foothold within a particular audience that was clearly of value for a company looking to capitalize on the affective relationship many have experienced with the show. However, the hosts of the podcast were also ideally suited to serve an intermediary role, as they aspired to be part of the industry and therefore were particularly open to working with marketing and promotional teams at Netflix. Both hosts had moved to LA in pursuit of a career in the entertainment industry. Adejuyigbe received some significant media attention for his Twitter video in which parodied Hozier's hit song "Take Me to Church," and had a fairly substantial following on the now-defunct social media platform Vine.[223] Porter had seen some success with his YouTube video titled "Sorkinisms" in which he had cut together clips from various TV shows and films written by Aaron Sorkin to highlight his repeated use of certain phrases and plot points.[224] The video and it's follow up, "Sorkinisms II" was linked to by

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[221] Jenkins, Ford Green, *Spreadable Media*, 7.
[222] Jenkins Ford, Green, *Spreadable Media*, 7.
[223]L.V. Anderson, "Demi Adejuyigbe's Mashup Videos Are the "Take Me to Church" Parody We've Been Waiting For," Slate, March 19, 2015, accessed January 6, 2018, http://www.slate.com/blogs/browbeat/2015/03/19/Adejuyigbe_adejuyigbe_s_take_me_to_church_mashup_videos_are_the_parody_we_ve_been.html; Jessica Contrera, "Two Guys Started a Podcast About 'Gilmore Girls' and It Really, Really Worked," The Washington Post, August 20, 2015, accessed January 6 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2015/08/20/two-guys-started-a-podcast-about-gilmore-girls-and-it-really-really-worked/?utm_term=.b0c9a2942be3
[224] "Sorkinisms -A Supercut," YouTube, last modified June 25, 2012, accessed, January 6, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S78RzZr3IwI

several popular publications including *The LA Times*, *The Atlantic* and *The Huffington Post*.[225] This exposure led to him having a fairly large social media following. Both hosts also held low-level jobs within the industry, Porter ran the social media accounts of a Hollywood composer and Adejuyigbe worked as a digital producer for the Comedy Central show *@Midnight*.[226] Ultimately, the podcast was as much an exercise in professionalization as it was a celebration of the *Gilmore Girls*.

Porter recognized podcasting could be a viable career in itself and wanted to give the podcast every opportunity to succeed, so he put considerable effort into sounding as professional as possible.[227] Porter admits in a retroactively added intro segment to the first episode:

> The first and second seasons of the show are a little rough. Charming, but rough around the edges. What you're going to hear if you're listening to the show for the first time is myself and my co-host Demi Adejuyigbe figuring out how to host a podcast. Figuring out the balance of discussion, and *Gilmore Girls* discussion figuring out how to book guests. [228]

He frames the early episodes of the show as a learning experience and cautions new listeners not to judge the show based on these early attempts. Other fan podcasters without strong industry ambitions might not care if people notice the DIY nature of their podcast's early episodes, but Porter is likely not talking to fans simply looking for a *Gilmore Girls* discussion. Instead, this introduction is likely speaking directly to others in the media industry, such as those looking to book guests or networks looking to pick them up. He's also thinking in terms of

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[225] "Sorkinisms II': More Recycled Aaron Sorkin Dialogue, Moments From 'The Newsroom' To 'Sports Night,'" Huffpost, July 8, 2013, accessed January 6, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/08/sorkinisms-2-aaron-sorkin-dialogue_n_3562803.html; Ta-Nehisi Coates, "A Taxonomy of Sorkinisms," The Atlantic, August 6, 2012, accessed January 6, 2018 https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/08/a-taxonomy-of-sorkinisms/260674/

[226] Stephanie Brown, "Stars Holla: A love letter to the 'Gilmore Guys' podcast," The Community (Entertainment Weekly), September 21, 2015, accessed January 6, 2018, http://community.ew.com/2015/09/21/gilmore-guys-podcast/

[227] Porter, personal interview, September, 2018.

[228] Gilmore Guys, "Pilot."

advertisers, assuring them the show gets better, and even fans less interested in *Gilmore Girls* content, and more in search of a general comedy podcast, which throughout my conversation with him, Porter insisted they were. Porter uses this as an opportunity to point these specific listeners to episodes that represent what he thinks the podcast can be:

> If you're frustrated or bored. If you think we suck. I encourage you to check out some of our other episodes from future seasons like episode 307 "They Shoot Gilmore Don't They?" with Jason Mantzoukas or episode 401 with Jeff Hiller. I think the podcast you're looking for might be in those seasons ahead.

Interestingly, Porter points to the first episode with Jason Mantzoukas as a guest. Mantzoukas is one of the most well-known public figures they've had on the show, not including cast members from *Gilmore Girls*. He's been a regular on television shows like *Parks and Recreation*, *The League* and *Brooklyn 99*. He also is very popular in the podcasting comedy worlds and co-hosts the show *How Did This Get Made*, which is one of the more popular podcasts on the Earwolf Network. By pointing to Mantzoukas, Porter is nudging listeners to read the show as successful, popular, and interested in comedy as much as discussions about *Gilmore Girls*. This not only broadens the show's appeal but speaks to Porter's wide range of skills as a comedian and a podcast producer who can book high profile guests.

In my research, several individuals considered the guests to be an important aspect of their enjoyment of the podcast. And Mantzoukas was by far the most popular one. As Respondent 3 stated, "I've listened to every Jason episode at least 4 times." Respondent 5 reiterates this point:

> Jason's episodes were always the best because they were the funniest and he actually understood the show…knowing who Jason Mantzoukas was made the show connect a little more.

Ultimately, while Porter put effort into making the podcast seem professional, Mantzoukas and similar guests helped to legitimate the podcast and broaden its fan base. By gesturing towards this episode, Porter demonstrated an ability to understand and meet the wants of his fan community. As Respondent 13 notes:

> I only very recently found the podcast in March or April and only wanted to listen to the discussion about the new episodes. I was surprised that they got Jason Mantzoukas as a guest and that they were extras on the show and then I went back to listen to all of their Gilmore Gabs with the actors, writers, etc."

This respondent also points to the fact the show eventually was able to have interviews with several cast and crew members from *Gilmore Girls,* not only making the show feel like a professional podcast but also an authority on the production of the show itself. Mantzoukas especially helped open the show beyond *Gilmore Girls* fans and positioned it as more of a general comedy podcast. He acted as the main attraction for some viewers who had never even seen *Gilmore Girls*. Respondent 18 recalls, "I fell in love with podcasts in 2015 and as a product of that: Jason Mantzoukas. Which led me to the *Gilmore Guys* podcast."

As the podcast grew in popularity, it became more valuable as a vehicle not only of promotion and recalibration but as a way to display the talents of his hosts. Towards the peak of the podcast's popularity, the two embarked on a live tour that hit various major cities across the country between April of 2015 and October of 2016, ending almost exactly a month before the release of the revival series. The timing of the tour capitalized on the excitement generated by the announcement of the revival, and during the shows, Adejuyigbe and Porter took the opportunity to showcase their other skills. Shows kicked off with flamboyant introductions that often-incorporated music, costumes, dancing and generally highlighted the skill set of their hosts. In episode 601, the two hosts performed a mashup of several Christmas songs, changing the

lyrics to be about the show and the episode itself rather than the holiday season. In another episode, Adejuyigbe, equipped with an electric guitar and amp, parodied the Prince song "Let's Go Crazy" changing lines such as "Let's go crazy, let's get nuts," to "let's see Rory, let's see Luke." Parody songs were common, and several other live episodes started with recap raps that go through the episode they're about to discuss. These introductions resemble the elaborate performances often seen before award shows like the Emmy's or the Academy Awards and productively work to establish both Adejuyigbe and Porter as capable and entertaining MCs with a versatile set of skills well suited for a variety of positions within the media industries.

Listeners of the podcast often found the hosts to be the best part, framing Porter and Adejuyigbe as more important to their enjoyment than the actual analysis of the show. One respondent stated, "I think Porter and Adejuyigbe have an excellent dynamic and bring such unique and different perspectives to analyzing the show" (Respondent 10). The podcast acted as a calling card showcasing the many talents of the hosts. When asked what they liked about the podcast, responses often focused on humor. Respondent 7 stated, "I have been listening to the podcast for a couple years now. It's definitely in my top 3 favorite podcasts - I love the humor!" As another respondent noted, "I also love the episodes that have ongoing bits" (Respondent 3). The use of the word 'bits' is particularly interesting as it works to position the hosts as primarily comedians rather than fans. The listener acknowledges the construction of the jokes and credits them to the hosts. Respondent 4 provided a more specific example of one such 'bit,' "omg the one where they did the April fools satirical Entourage podcast episode. SOOOO funny, I kinda wish they had done more like that!" This listener wishes the show was *more* skit or joke-based content in place of the straightforward analysis. One listener pointed out, "My favorite episodes are usually the live shows, even though it is sometimes a pity that they don't have as much time

to discuss the episodes due to time constraints" (Respondent 24). Ultimately, the podcast worked to establish Porter and Adejuyigbe as comedians or talents within the industry, seemingly just as interested in positioning themselves as valuable industry workers as much as true fans of the show. In my interview, Porter stressed that while they were a popular voice within the fandom, they always considered themselves more of a comedy podcast. [229]

The show not only highlighted the comedic and entertainment chops of the hosts, but their promotional and behind the scenes skills. Porter, who had received attention for his videos on YouTube, used some of the segments in the show to further highlight his editorial skills. One reoccurring segment involves cutting together several pop culture moments from each episode. These segments range in length from just a few seconds to well over three minutes. In an interview with the business blog *Billfold,* Porter goes into detail about how much time is invested in the show:

> Maybe 8 hours is spent on prep work and recording, and then we go into post-production. We listen to the entire episode to tighten stuff, like eliminating or shortening pauses, getting rid of mic pops. Editing, re-editing, mixing the sound, putting it out, uploading it on our server, promoting… this takes 4–5 hours. So, it's about a 15-hour process, from start to finish, per episode.[230]

The podcast also has several musical interludes and sound clips that Porter often brought in to highlight specific moments on the show. As Porter was the only engineer, this showcased his ability to multitask and further demonstrated his value as an industry worker. Many articles highlighted the way the show was an independent venture and a product of hard work from the hosts. In an article for *The Atlantic,* Porter emphasizes this point, "For us to build it from the

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[229] Porter, personal interview, September 2018.
[230] Meryl Williams, "How the Gilmore Guys Do Money," The Billfold, December 4, 2015, accessed January 6, 2018, https://www.thebillfold.com/2015/12/how-gilmore-guys-do-money/.

ground floor without a built-in apparatus to help us promote, other than ourselves and word-of-mouth," Porter said, "it's been incredibly satisfying."[231] Here, like any other industry worker, Porter uses the interview as a way to promote himself as someone who can accomplish a great deal with very little support.

Once the show was tapped by Netflix to serve as a promotional space for the upcoming series, Porter had demonstrated an ability to manage the day to day business of promotion and production. In the introduction to *Gilmore Guys* episode 721, a live episode, Adejuyigbe raps "Come on now we gotta do this right, get you primed get you ready for *A Year in the Life*."[232] This was the penultimate episode covering the initial broadcast run of television series. The podcast would then shift to being almost entirely about the soon to be released revival episodes *Gilmore Girls: A Year in The Life.* It's here that Adejuyigbe outlines their new mission moving forward, *Gilmore Guys* is now a show aimed at *preparing* audiences for the new episodes. As a dominant voice in *Gilmore Girls* fandom, the show now existed to help listeners manage their expectation for the upcoming series and then make sense of their reactions to it. As Porter pointed out in my interview, he felt the podcast shifted from being less about nostalgia and more of an active podcast about this upcoming series.[233] At this point in the podcast, several high-profile guests had appeared on the show, and the hosts had been given exclusive behind the scenes access to the revival series. They had even been invited to moderate a panel with the cast and crew of the series at a *Gilmore Girls* fan festival in Connecticut.[234] There was no doubt that

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[231] O'Keeffe, "The Guys Who Loved Gilmore Girls."
[232] Kevin Porter and Demi Adejuyigbe, "Unto The Breach," The Gilmore Guy (Podcast), HeadGum, October 31, 2016, accessed December 20, 2017, https://headgum.com/gilmore-guys/721-unto-the-breach-with-jason-mantzoukas
[233] Porter, personal interview.
[234] Kevin Porter and Demi Adejuyigbe, "Bon Voyage Part 1," The Gilmore Guy (Podcast), *HeadGum*, November 11, 2016, accessed December 20, 2017, https://headgum.com/gilmore-guys/722-part-i-bon-voyage-with-aisha-muharrar

they were industry-approved liaisons between the fans and the production. In that sense, their rousing performance on stage mirrored their actual function within the fandom at that time. They were the opening act, there to get everyone excited for what was to come or, as Adejuyigbe put it in his rap, get audiences "primed and ready for *A Year in the Life*." Having productively curated relationships with those in the industry and built a level of trust and emotional investment from the fandom, the show acted as an intermediary space between the two. The hosts of the *Gilmore Guys* were, themselves, 'primed and ready' to function as grassroots intermediaries.

However, the ability to professionalize for these fantrepreneurs is often integrally connected to the popularity of their respective properties and the industry logics of proliferation. Cristiano suggested that *Twilight Lexicon* became increasingly popular as more material was added to the franchise. She suggests, "I would say things kind of exploded by the time the third book, [Eclipse], came out…and then it exploded again once the first movie came out. And it was just insane."[235] According to Cristiano, the website jumped from an average of 500 views per day to millions of people visiting from around the world a day. For *Gilmore Guys*, much of the show's success stemmed from the shifting popularity of the series, first spurred by its arrival on Netflix and intensified by the revival series. In several interviews, Porter talks about how the podcast was thought of as an opportunity to capitalize on the series being released on Netflix. The availability of the show on Netflix allowed Porter to appeal to a wider range of fans and even non-fans than he would have had he relied on only those with access to the DVDs. Of the 718 completed survey responses, 17% of respondents had not even seen the show until it came to

[235] Laura Byrne-Cristiano, interview with author, February 13, 2019.

Netflix, so there was an influx of new potential podcast listeners once the show became readily available.

The industrial ambitions of the *Gilmore Guys* podcast are only highlighted when we compare them to other fan-generated content. While *Gilmore Guys* arose as the most visible voice within *Gilmore Girls* fandom, it's important to note that they come about within an already active fandom. A simple search on fanficition.net reveals over fifteen thousand stories about *Gilmore Girls* characters, only about five hundred of which were published within the past two years, indicating that fan activity within the community has been healthy long before the podcast. In fact, the show wasn't even the only *Gilmore Girls* podcast when it debuted. The podcast *Friday Night Dinner* continues to air bi-monthly as of September 2017.[236]

Friday Night Dinner more resembles the type of analysis podcast one might expect to emerge organically from within the fandom. The name comes from the weekly dinners with the three generations of Gilmore women that the early seasons of the show are built around. On the surface, *Gilmore Guys* were not entirely different than *Friday Night Dinner*. They're both shows structured around two people having in-depth discussions about individual episodes of the show *Gilmore Girls*. They're designed to be companion pieces to the series and released in podcast form. However, when looked at more closely, *Friday Night Dinner* is far less interested in commercial success and its hosts are seemingly much less concerned with using the podcast to start a career in the industry. The most notable difference is the number of listeners the podcasts have. While the women from *Friday Night Dinner* are likely not opposed to fans, their failure to acquire a significant listenership has not stopped them from continuing the podcast. They also

[236] Serena McClain, host , "Dean, Rory + the Sweetest Vintage Car," Friday Night Dinner (podcast), posted June 19, 2014, accessed January 3, 2018, http://fridaynightdinner.podbean.com/page/4/

don't seem to be actively courting them with hooks and "special guests." Each episode is simply the two hosts Serena and Scarlet talking about an episode of the show in detail. *Friday Night Dinner*'s release schedule is much more relaxed, airing only two episodes a month compared to *Gilmore Guys* who aired two episodes a week. The slower rollout of episodes has allowed the podcast to continue for a much longer time, as they're only about halfway through the series while Adejuyigbe and Porter are free to pursue other podcasts and opportunities (which they have). The *Gilmore Guys* podcast was timed to perfectly align with industrial milestones for the show. They launched the day the series hit Netflix and ended with the airing of the revival series. This timing allowed for the podcast to exist alongside several promotional moments for the show. So, while Porter and Adejuyigbe were advertising their show to their social media followers, they were able to promote it alongside Netflix's promotional campaigns for both their syndication of the original series and their production of the revival. Using hashtags to piggyback off the official promotion from Netflix. This timing carefully set them up to have the maximum listenership possible for the duration of the show. *Friday Night Dinner,* on the other hand, started a full year before *Gilmore Girls* became available on Netflix. This required fans who wanted to follow along with the women on the podcast have a more active investment in the show through the purchase of DVDs or the illegal streaming of episodes. Lastly, whereas Porter and Adejuyigbe seemed intent on demonstrating their ability to appear as professional as possible even going as far as to apologize for early episodes that seemed less polished, the women of *Friday Night Dinner* fully embrace the amateur nature of their venture. Their audio quality is rarely great with one person always obviously talking from off mic, pointing towards the lack of professional equipment at their disposal. Even in recent episodes they often are out to

dinner recording the podcast on their phones and simply having a discussion about the episodes rather than attempting to mimic a perfect studio environment.

Despite the fact that *Friday Night Dinner* has been around longer, *Gilmore Guys* have arisen as a more popular voice within *Gilmore Girls* fandom. None of this is to suggest that the *Gilmore Guys* are somehow *not* true fans of the show or less authentic than other fan-generated media. Rather, by comparing the two shows we can see how one gained success over the other not because of their opinions or level of investment in the show but because of their ability to conform to certain industry standards and expectations. The *Gilmore Guys* seemed professional, therefore they attracted listeners and industry insiders. Once popular insiders gave the podcast an endorsement, fans read the podcast as an authority within the fandom. As Porter stated in one interview, "I'd been wanting to start a podcast for a while, but I couldn't think of anything that was a fresh enough angle."[237] Once he saw *Gilmore Girls* was being added to Netflix, Porter decided "two guys talking about a show that primarily was intended for women, or was thought to be intended for women, felt fresh enough that it was worth it to do."[238] The idea that Porter needed "a fresh enough angle" implies that his goals were to build a following and find success in the industry, rather than simply discuss a show he was a fan of. He was going to start a podcast either way. It wasn't his passion for the show that spurred his creativity, but rather his entrepreneurialism that lead him to recognize the opportunity the show's fanbase might afford an aspiring industry professional.

[237] O'Keeffe, "The Guys Who…"
[238] Ibid

Conclusion

While many fans might have the potential to become cultural intermediaries, the industry seems attuned to individuals who have demonstrated both an interest and an ability to work in the industry and model a type of specific, male-centered affirmational fandom. But it should be noted that their success is also directly related to the logics of media proliferation tied to franchised production, which provides them with content to discuss and analyze as well as a promotional moment from which to draw upon.

This chapter has aimed to offer further insight into the process of refurbishment by demonstrating the way it is complicated by fan communities. Powerful voices that originate within fan communities homogenize fan discourse into one dominate expression of fandom. These voices, while originating from outside the walls of the official media industries, are not as separate from the industry as they appear. The industry benefits from their discursive power as they are recruited as agents of industrial recalibration. These individuals or groups of individuals are often industry minded and therefore highly qualified to act as liaisons between the fandom and the industry. Their ability to conform to industry standards of production, skill, and taste make them ideal public representatives of the larger fan community. In other words, though *Gilmore Guys* was not generated by the industry, they were identified, approved, and mobilized by it. Their position outside the official industrial promotional machine, combined with their influence over the fandom also affords them a level of both agency and power and allows them significant influence over the refurbishment process. But their success was tied to the health and productivity of their chosen media object.

Similarly, Andrew Sims launched *Mugglecast* in 2005 just after the release of the sixth *Harry Potter* book. He suggests, "[i]t really took off because it was just this new way to talk

about the *Harry Potter* books."[239] In the fall of their first season, Sims and his Mugglenet team got tickets to the New York Premiere of the fourth *Harry Potter* and decided to do a live podcast in a small bar to give a spoiler free review. The event quickly became bigger than the venue and they had to move it to a bigger space. Sims remembers, "[i]t was the first time where we had seen how excited people were by the podcast and just our voices. We felt like we were celebrities because these people came out to the show and were really excited and were asking for our autographs and taking pictures with us. It really caught us off guard."[240] Each of these podcasts experienced booms in listenership and popularity built around the release of material within the franchise. As Andrew Sims has said about the future of the podcast, "we feel we have a safety net through the *Fantastic Beast* film series."[241] The *Fantastic Beasts* films are a prequel film series written by J.K. Rowling. Sims suggests that as long as those movies are coming out, there will be a demand not only for a podcast about those, but for podcasts that talk about the franchise more generally.

Once each of these shows became popular with fans, the industry took notice, and they became important cultural intermediaries. Porter became fairly close with people at Netflix working in the promotion department, and even helped run a social media campaign connected to the series.[242] Though he maintains that he doesn't think they were all that important to the show, they did end up being invited to do on set interviews and were even given a cameo in the show. Similarly, Cristiano's success with the *Twilight Lexicon* led her to become an unofficial consultant within Summit Entertainment who was attempting to develop its own fan site, a role I

[239] Andrew Sims, interview with author, February 7, 2019.
[240] Sims, personal interview.
[241] Ibid.
[242] Porter, personal interview.

will discuss further in a later chapter. However, this gave her the confidence to be able to pursue other paid opportunities in the future. As she suggested,

> …there was sort of this awakening that we knew more than the advertising executives and the PR executives, at the studio there was sort of this glimmering of awareness. I may not have gone to school for this, but they didn't either, and I know more than they do.[243]

All of them were able to capitalize on their ability to leverage fans' affective connection to a franchised property and the promotional output that coincides with media proliferation to further their careers within the industry. *Mugglecast* is currently supported almost entirely through their Patreon account and Sims is now a freelance Patreon consultant. Laura Byrne-Cristiano is a social media consultant and the *Gilmore Guys* hosts have spun the success of off into other podcasts. Porter admitted that during the height of the podcast, just before the release of *A Year in the Life*, it was so successful he was able to live off it entirely for almost a year. All of these fantrepreneurs have admitted that their success is owed predominantly to the timing of their original podcasts. As Cristiano said:

> Before this, I was teacher and director of admissions in a private girl's high school. Umm, and this you know, exploded into a career of web management, social media marketing, online marketing. Without question. My career changed with this.[244]

These fans profit from the industry, modeling their behaviors off of industry practices, gaining endorsements from industry workers, and feeding off of promotional energy spurred by the release of new texts. Similarly, they benefit from the enthusiasm and passion of the fan communities they tie themselves to, providing fans with some form of ontological security in exchange for similar emotional attachment and fan loyalty offered to the fan object itself. Despite owing their success to both the fans and the industry, these individuals arguably have no

[243] Cristiano, personal interview.
[244] Cristiano, personal interview.

allegiance to either. While the *Gilmore Guys* felt very official and was courted by the industry, they were not an official podcast of the *Gilmore Girls* and therefore remained free to say whatever they wanted about the revival. They also were not attached to their fan objects. Once the revival series was over, both hosts moved on to other projects. As Adejuyigbe suggested in an interview shortly after the podcast became a big success, "[t]he biggest thing the podcast has done is it has raised our profile to do things outside the podcast."[245] Ultimately, these individuals were able to professionalize by offering their services as managers of their respective audiences. Not unlike the writers in the *Apes* franchise in Chapter 1, these fans and aspiring industry workers were able to lay claim to a specific understanding of the story, and its value to the audience. They were then able to utilize that supposed knowledge to professionalize themselves in the industry. In turn, the industry managed audience expectations through their ability to form a promotional relationship with these independently operated podcasts, making them technically *un*official, but still important arms of the promotional campaign.

[245] Williams, "…Do Money."

Chapter 4 – Managing from the Margins: Coordination and Continuity through Legibility

In October of 2016, female attendees of the New York Comic Con found an unusual piece of graffiti written on the bathroom stalls. The Latin phrase "nolite te bastardes carborundorum" was written in bright white letters across the doors. Loosely translated, the phrase means, "Don't let the bastards grind you down." While most attendees likely paid it little attention, fans of the Margaret Atwood novel *The Handmaid's Tale* easily recognized the iconic line and began sharing photos on social media. This bathroom graffiti was not the result of some over-enthusiastic fan, but rather was part of a clever marketing campaign to promote Hulu's upcoming adaptation of the classic feminist novel. The campaign not only generated buzz about the show, but also spoke directly to fans of the source material. The online popular feminist publication *Bustle* was impressed by the ad and wrote:

> "The teaser and the Comic-Con marketing should be reassuring to fans who feared the miniseries might not do the book justice. It is clear Hulu understands the importance of *The Handmaid's Tale* in the feminist literary canon and plans to honor its warning to society not to dehumanize people."[246]

Though the *Bustle* article credits Hulu with the marketing stunt, a New York-based company, Campfire, coordinated and developed the campaign. According to their website, Campfire specializes "in world-class participatory programs and immersive experiences that ignite fan cultures, encourage spread, and drive awareness."[247] Campfire has coordinated transmedia campaigns for several high-profile television shows including *Game of Thrones* and *Westworld*. According to their founder Mike Monello, they are far more than a marketing

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[246] Sabienna Bowman, " 'The Handmaid's Tale's' Clever Feminist Marketing Will Have You Psyched For The Series," *Bustle*, October 9, 2016, accessed April 4, 2018, https://www.bustle.com/articles/188599-the-handmaids-tales-clever-feminist-marketing-will-have-you-psyched-for-the-series.

[247] "Home," Campfire, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.campfirenyc.com/.

company. As he points out, "[w]e have constantly played up the fact that the agency was founded by filmmakers rather than marketers."[248] In other words, though they often work with marketing departments, they consider themselves to be cut from the same cloth as the showrunners, writers, and producers who work on the series Campfire is hired to promote.

This chapter argues that shifting media consumption practices and fragmented markets have resulted in a need for this model of contracted creative labor. These contractors enter the franchise, not through licensing agreements or by being hired by producers tied directly to a series or franchise, but rather through promotional efforts. These companies occupy a liminal and often marginalized space between creative partners and outsourced labor. While I've discussed the role of the fantrepreneur and the grassroots intermediary in Chapter 3, specifically pointing to the role of these types of groups and individuals play in the promotion of refurbished content, people like Monello are far too embedded in the industry to be defined using those terms.[249] The figures I'll be discussing occupy a space somewhere between the upper-level creative figures discussed in Chapter 1 and the intermediary figures discussed in Chapter 3. It would be inaccurate to paint people like Monello as existing outside the industry. Unlike Kevin Porter and other figures from Chapter 3, they are already professionalized. They run companies that work with some of the biggest media conglomerates in entertainment. However, Monello and figures we will delve into in this chapter, such as Jeff Gomez, occupy a marginal space within the franchises they work in as they are rarely, if ever, given permission to interfere with the 'primary' text and characters in the main franchise. Whatever creative power they are given must be earned by continually demonstrating their value to the industry. Like any other project-

[248] Mike Monello, interview by author, phone, October 12, 2018.

based company, they're interested in securing their next project and selling their services to interested parties. In this way, they attempt to negotiate a low level of creative authority by demonstrating their ability to understand the storyworld of the franchise from the perspective of a fan. Essentially, their value lies in their ability to make the storyworld legible across departments to facilitate transmedia expansion. While this may seem somewhat tangential to the main franchise, this work of legibility significantly impacts the way the franchise is discussed and the storyworld is understood across departments.

With that in mind, Suzanne Scott's concept of the "fanboy auteur" would be useful in providing a framework for understanding the utility of fandom within this type of negotiated creative power economy. She argues that the fanboy auteur is "a creator who leverages his fan identity for a preexisting media property as rationalization for his professional "fit" for the project…"[250] While the fanboy auteurs are often more public figures than the individuals discussed here, they do leverage their fandom as a way to improve their professional standing. Furthermore, Scott argues that the "The fanboy auteur is constructed simultaneously by author, industry, and audience, with each constituency investing in and wielding this emergent authorial identity to different ends." Figures like Monello are constructed, by themselves and the industry, to be utilized as agents of franchise management. While the audience has less of a direct role in the construction of these individuals, considering they operate largely behind the scenes, the imagined desires of the audience are often used as a rationale for their value to the industry. In this way, they are not actually fanboy auteurs as Scott theorizes them, but derive a certain level

[250] Suzanne Scott, *Fake Geek Girls: Fandom, Gender, and the Convergence Culture Industry*, Critical Cultural Communication 22 (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 160.

of authorial control over transmedia content via the evocation of their fan identity in a similar way as that described by Scott.

Derek Johnson discusses the contractual relationships within franchised environments as partnerships. He argues that licensing agreements "loosened licensor's direct control of labor and rendered media franchising a meaningful site of negotiation among the varied corporate interests of licensor, publisher-licensee, and developer."[251] While there is a similar creative negotiation taking place between these transmedia companies and intellectual property holders, the economic relationship is somewhat different than that of a licensed partnership. Though these companies are responsible for creating extensions of franchised storyworlds that shape fan experiences, the relationship between Campfire and Amazon is different than something like the one between Lucasfilm and a comic book or toy company. For example, Kerry Gough has argued that Dark Horse's *Aliens* comic series was the result of a mutually beneficial partnership between the relatively unknown Dark Horse and 20th Century Fox. Ultimately, the resulting comic book series sparked new interest in the franchise while also giving Dark Horse the ability to compete with larger comic book publishers like DC and Marvel, "thus benefitting the studio, the comics company, and the fans alike."[252] However, this mutual benefit is not as self-evident for those who work as consultants or contracted creative laborers. Their contribution is largely anonymous; and as the *Bustle* article's failure to acknowledge Campfire suggests, their work is often credited to another company. This results in what might be considered a silent partnership, in which these individuals are hired and contribute to the franchise, but are ultimately left

[251] Derek Johnson, Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013), 97.
[252] Kerry Gough, "Translational Creativity and Alien Econ(c)omics: From Hollywood Blockbuster to Dark Horse Comic Book," in *Film and Comic Books* ed. Ian Gordan, Mark Jancovich, and Matthew P. Mcallister (University Press of Mississippi, 2007) 38.

without much recognition outside of the industry. However, creative workers like Monello are increasingly able, through these contracted partnerships, to make a case for their importance in the overall management of the franchise; namely through their ability to manage audience and create value through innovative forms of storytelling.

Campfire is just one of several companies that have emerged in the wake of the transmedia craze that seek to facilitate the proliferation of stories across various platforms. Starlight Runner Entertainment is another company that specializes in this type of content. They claim to be "the world's leading producer of transmedia entertainment franchises and corporate narratives."[253] Their clients include Disney, Sony Pictures, and 20th Century Fox, and they've overseen transmedia campaigns for *Men in Black*, *Pirates of the Caribbean,* and *Avatar*.[254] While these are two of the more established U.S. based companies offering clients cutting edge solutions to audience engagement issues, there are also several freelance consultants and digital marketing gurus that offer similar services to companies of varying sizes and needs. Globally, these kinds of companies have become even more ubiquitous as corporations look to use storytelling to introduce their brands to an increasingly unpredictable marketplace.

The rise of these companies is indicative of a rise in the outsourcing of certain practices often associated with media franchising, such as transmedia storytelling, world-building, and fan engagement, to smaller more agile companies able to facilitate "change at a pace larger organizations find difficult."[255] Companies like Campfire and Starlight Runner Entertainment blur the lines between traditional creative work, marketing, and public relations. Their rhetoric

[253] "Who Are We," Starlight Runner About , accessed April 18, 2019, https://starlightrunner.com/about.
[254] "Who Are We," Starlight Runner About , accessed April 18, 2019, https://starlightrunner.com/about
[255] Kevyn Eva Norton, and Michelle Helena Kovacs, " Human and Business Success Factors for Transmedia Design Collaborations." *Media Industries* 4, no. 2 (2017): 47.

and corporate mission statements often frame storytelling as their central concern. For example, ReThink – New Media Solutions is a Finland-based company that believes, according to their website, "a well-crafted story takes projects, ideas and collaborations forward in the desired direction, to the benefit of everyone involved." Similarly, the opening of Campfire's "About Us" page reads, "Campfire was born from our passion for storytelling." The rise of these companies complicates the distribution of creative power among media workers and raises questions about how and why power is delegated among peripheral individuals and companies within the media industries. It also raises questions about how franchised narratives are shaped and managed in meaningful ways by parties that lie outside of the traditional creative pipeline studied by media studies scholars and reported on by popular media outlets. While it might be easy to dismiss these companies as relatively inconsequential to the main franchise, they are responsible for the creation of paratexts or texts that frame and shape other texts.[256] The transmedia campaigns created by these companies not only act as creative advertisements that introduce non-fans to exciting new storyworlds, but serve to deepen those worlds and enrich the overall franchise experience for existing fans.

This chapter will focus on two case studies in order to understand the role of these outside parties in the development of modern franchises. These case studies explore the development and maintenance of franchised storyworlds through the lens of industry workers who function behind the scenes to coordinate the narrative expansion and consolidation of their respective franchise. First, through the transmedia experience *Resistance Radio,* I draw attention to the way the Emmy nominated transmedia experience was coordinated across departments

[256] Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013).

through the *legibility* of the narrative world of *The Man in The High Castle.* Transmedia scholars have primarily been interested in the circulation of media content among audiences, often focusing on what kinds of content will inspire viewers to engage with, and share content among, their social circles. Jason Mittell argues that transmedia storytelling is facilitated through "drillable," stories which, "encourage forensic fans to dig deeper, probing beneath the surface to understand the complexity of a story its telling."[257] He suggests, "drillability as a metaphor suggests that viewers are mining to discover something that is already there, beneath the surface…" Jenkins, Ford, and Green, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of a text's "spreadability." They suggest that spreadable media "values the activities of audience members to help generate interest in particular brands or franchises."[258] These terms are closely related, as Jenkins et al. argue, drillable texts, "do indeed foster engagement through spreading."[259]

In order to understand my arguments here, and because my overarching argument throughout this project is that storytelling logics are intertwined with industrial management, it is useful to theorize the ways in which storyworlds spread among industry workers. Just as certain stories encourage a wider (spreadable) or more in-depth (drillable) fan engagement with less direct control from the producers, certain stories can encourage various levels of interdepartmental cooperation without the need for a central creative or managerial figure. Within an industrial context, while the drillability and spreadability of stories might be important for some industry workers, in a more practical sense, I would argue that *legibility* might be a more appropriate way to understand how continuity can be maintained within an industrial

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[257] Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 288.
[258] Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York ; London: NYU Press, 2013), 7.
[259] Jenkins, Ford, and Green, *Spreadable Media*, 135.

context. While some departments might be eager to "drill" deeper into the story, others are just looking for something legible enough so they can perform their given job, while not veering too far away from the logics of that narrative space. The utility of legibility will be explored in the first section through an interview with Mike Monello, as well as a textual analysis of the *Resistance Radio* program created by his team at Campfire.

The second half of the chapter then explores the way in which the need for intercorporate franchise legibility offers new avenues for creative authority for those who can claim encyclopedic knowledge of a franchised storyworld. Returning to *Planet of the Apes*, here I argue that a deep knowledge of the storyworld and the ability to make that story coherent to others is a valued skillset among franchised managers and intellectual property owners. I'll end by suggesting that this has resulted in a restructuring of franchise creative hierarchies so that those with knowledge of more ancillary material, like those traditionally involved in licensing and merchandising, are now more privileged that they may have been in the past. To use an example, Jeff Gomez, the CEO of Starlight Runner, got his start working in tabletop adventure games and now is a consultant on the creative management of major franchises.[260] Similarly, Leland Chee, who currently serves as part of Lucasfilm's story group as a Senior Creative Executive in charge of franchise story and content, started his career as part of Lucasfilm's licensing group. In fact, it was his experience developing a Star Wars D20 style roleplaying game for Wizards of the Coast that inspired him to start keeping track of continuity in a more coordinated ways, which in turn made him a valuable member of the creative team when Disney purchased the company in 2014.[261] While not perhaps having the direct creative control of a

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[260] "Talking Transmedia: An Interview With Starlight Runner's Jeff Gomez (Part One)," Henry Jenkins, accessed July 6, 2019, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2008/05/an_interview_with_starlight_ru.html.
[261] Leland Chee, interview with Marie-Claire Gould, *What the Force* (audio), January 28, 2019,http://whattheforce.ca/interview-with-leland-chee/

writer or director, these marginal figures do often possess a certain level of managerial power in that that can dictate what characters should and should not be used in what ways across the franchise. Ultimately, I argue the privileging of cohesive ever-expanding transmedia universes has created an environment in which the in-depth fan knowledge of a franchise's narrative history has redistributed creative authority. In this way, within franchise environments, significant creative authority is afforded to individuals or groups of individuals who can make legible the value of the storyworld for intellectual property holders looking to further exploit a franchise.

From Partnerships and Participants to Contractors and Consultants

While many media studies scholars have discussed the process of world-building as central to the construction of successful franchises, there has been little research done on the process of world-maintenance and ex post facto universe construction that characterizes many multigenerational franchises.[262] Much work on the study of franchises focuses on the expansive nature of franchise universes, paying attention to the ways the financial logics dictate and facilitate the propagation of a virtually unlimited amount of texts and material.[263] However, given modern financial logics of franchise universes, consolidation has become an equally valuable practice within franchised media production. Though expansive logics still exist,

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[262] For discussions of world-building and franchising see: *The Frodo Franchise: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006); Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2013); Mark J.P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012)

[263] For discussions of the industrial logics of franchised expansion see: Eileen Meehan, "'Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!': The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext," in *The Many Lives of Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media*, ed. Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio (BFI, 1991); Janet Wasko, *Understanding Disney: The Manufacture of Fantasy* (Polity Press, 2001); Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, Revised edition (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2008).

property holders are often more judicious and prudent about their proliferation attempts. For example, though Star Wars has become a more active franchise, they've also taken steps to reign in their long history of licensed properties by removing many novels and other aspects of what was called the "expanded universe" from canon into what is now considered the "legends" collection. Leland Chee argued that this choice was in part spurred by a desire to make sure they could utilize Chewbacca in the upcoming Star Wars movies, as the character had died in the expanded universe. Chee argued, "if we were going to overturn a monumental decision like that, everything else was really just minor in comparison."[264] The decision by Lucasfilm to officially remove licensed items from canon in order to avoid any continuity errors in the future of the franchise suggests that the studio is taking the narrative coordination of the franchise's future very seriously. Since Disney took over, Star Wars content released in conjunction with the recent movie installments, including the launch of the new theme park, is carefully integrated into the storyworld of the franchise. For example, Disney released a series of tie-in books and comics which explain how iconic ships like the Millennium Falcon, and known characters came to occupy the planet of Batuu, the fictional setting of the *Stars Wars: Galaxy's Edge* theme park.[265] This type of continuity across all franchised experiences requires an in-depth knowledge of not just main entries, but all of a franchise's authorized ancillary products. Companies like Starlight Runner and Campfire, as well as individuals like Leland Chee, have emerged to facilitate this type of narratively coordinated franchise expansion.

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[264] Jordan Zakarin, "Inside Lucasfilm's Top Secret Star Wars Database (Fandom Files #13)," *SYFY WIRE*, January 15, 2018, https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/inside-lucasfilm%E2%80%99s-top-secret-star-wars-database-fandom-files-13.

[265] "Disneyland's Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge Tie-In Comic, Novels Detailed," *CBR*, January 31, 2019, https://www.cbr.com/star-wars-galaxys-edge-comics-novels/.

In his 2007 book, *Media Work,* Mark Deuze suggested that:

> In the context of the emergence of a global convergence culture and increasing pressures on media workers to interact and co-create with their intended audiences, there is potential for an unprecedented new visibility for advertising practitioners…". [266]

Despite this potential, the role of marketing departments, especially in terms of their creative contribution to franchises, has remained largely overlooked by media scholars. Part of the reason for this invisibility may be that their work often occupies a gray area between traditional marketing and transmedia storytelling. Jenkins has argued that "we are still in a period of experimentation and innovation. New models are emerging through production practices and critical debates, and we need to be open to a broad array of variations of what transmedia means in relation to different projects."[267] While many scholars have considered the role of transmedia narratives since Jenkins coined the term, few have paid attention to the ways the popularity of transmedia as a discourse and consumption practice has influenced the workflow and management of creative and non-creative media workers. Kevyn Eva Norton and Michelle Helena Kovacs have argued, "while many scholars attend to questions about audience engagement, distributed narratives, and immersive storyworlds, less attention has been given to the interpersonal and inter-organizational dimensions of transmedia collaborations.[268] The case of Campfire suggests a merger of marketing and franchise discourses that warrants a closer investigation about the role these types companies have in the dissemination of franchised content and the construction of franchised storyworlds.

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[266] Mark Deuze, *Media Work* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2007),114.
[267] Jenkins, Henry. "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections." *Confessions of an Aca-Fan, July 31, 211.* http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html
[268] Kevyn Eva Norton, and Michelle Helena Kovacs, "Human and Business Success Factors for Transmedia Design Collaborations." *Media Industries* 4, no. 2 (2017): 46

The relationship between marketing and franchise storytelling has not gone completely unstudied by media scholars. Melanie Bourdaa considered Campfire's previous work with the show *Game of Thrones* and argued that HBO used transmedia storytelling as an extension of their broader branding strategies. She ultimately suggested that HBO embraced transmedia strategies as a way to reinforce their quality branding discourse – that is, as a space beyond television. In other words, the slogan "It's Not TV" was reinforced by marketing strategies that extended the storytelling experience beyond the television.[269] Though HBO embraced transmedia storytelling as part of a broader branding strategy, transmedia marketing's influence spreads far beyond what we might traditionally consider "quality television." Transmedia marketing has become increasingly ubiquitous among all media producers interested in developing a piece of intellectual property into a marketable and merchandisable brand.

Carlos Alberto Scolari has suggested that applying semiotic theory to transmedia storytelling would help provide a more stable definition to the term suggesting that, "[n]arrative brands, like *The Matrix*, *24*, or *Harry Potter*, are founded on a set of characters, topics, and an aesthetic style that define the fictional world of the brand. These traits can be reproduced and adapted to different media and genres."[270] While thinking of franchises as "narrative brands" helps understand how marketing and transmedia storytelling are perhaps inherently related, media scholars have been resistant to this type of association as it risks undervaluing the artistic and creative contributions made by marketers and transmedia storytellers. It especially might overlook the way that these companies and branding campaigns can truly help shape the

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[269]Melanie Bourdaa, "This is not Marketing. This is HBO: Branding HBO with Transmedia Storytelling," *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network* 7, no. 1. (Spring 2014): 22.
[270] Carlos Alberto Scolari, "Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds, and Branding in Contemporary Media Production." *International Journal of Communication* 3, no. 0 (2009): 600. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/477.

narrative word of a franchise in important and lasting ways. Jenkins has argued that, though branding may be part of transmedia storytelling, it is only "one thing you can do with transmedia."[271] He argues that he is mainly interested in "focusing on emergent forms of storytelling which tap into the flow of content across media and the networking of fan response."[272]

Jenkins' stance is echoed by other media scholars. Most work that discusses these "emergent forms of storytelling" seems less interested in peripheral industries and individuals who facilitate and manage this work and more interested in seeing this kind of storytelling legitimated through association with creative personnel already ascribed with creative authority, such as writers, showrunners and directors. In terms of world creation and world-building, a central element of transmedia storytelling scholarship tends to focus on the world-building efforts of figures like J.R.R. Tolkien, George Lucas, the Wachowskis and Gene Roddenberry. Most successful transmedia campaigns are attributed to the creative efforts of these few individuals. Yet few have considered the managerial work required to make those storyworlds legible across departments. Some scholars seem to consider outsourced transmedia labor to be less than ideal. Consider Jason Mittell's insights into the state of transmedia narratives within the television industry:

> One of the chief challenges for creating canonically intergraded transmedia for an ongoing serial is that the demands of running a complex series already tax the energies of producer-managers…leaving paratexts in the hands of hired-gun writers who frequently fail to meet the expectations of producers – creating a coherent complex transmedia narrative requires a degree of storytelling control that the current system of television production seems unable to fully meet…[273]

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[271] Jenkins, "Transmedia 202."
[272] Jenkins, "Transmedia 202."
[273] Jason Mittel, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2015), 306.

The assumption is that there must be some sort of control over a transmedia world to manage the quality of transmedia stories and that that control must come from someone directly involved in the production of the main text. This type of centralized creative control has likely never been fully achieved even in the years since media convergence has made realizing that control theoretically more possible than ever. Recently, more scholarship has emerged that considers transmedia and franchise world construction as an ongoing process of negotiation, complete with fits and starts and constant revisions. As Karin Fast and Henrick Orebring have argued:

> Many transmedia worlds have been created over many years, by many people (industry - employed, fans and/or fans-turned-industry-employed) and therefore have a) accrued characteristics that are more ad hoc/contingent than planned; and/or b) contain disjunctions and contradictions that are actually the result of strategic planning decisions (i.e. strategic planning of transmedia worlds is not necessarily focused on creating a seamless, coherent world).[274]

Matthew Freeman points out that even Star Wars, which we may consider one of the more planned and orchestrated franchises in history considering Lucas imagined the world himself and maintained licensing and sequel rights for most of its history, contains many disjunctures especially early on. He suggests, "…during the late 1970s at least, transmedia storytelling occurred as a complex interplay between different models of filmmaking and other related contingencies of profitability that afforded a wide range of possibilities for telling many kinds of Star Wars stories."[275] These studies suggest that transmedia is not in a temporary state of flux, but rather has long unfolded in an 'ad hoc' manner and how stories are told is relative to the industrial logics of the moment. The position of those texts might shift as a franchise evolves and

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[274] Karin Fast and Henrick Ornebring, "Transmedia World-building: The Shadow (1931-present) and Transformers (1984-present)." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 20, no. 6 (September 2015): 637. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877915605887.

[275] Matthew Freeman, "From Sequel to Quasi-Novelization Splinter of the Mind's Eye and the 1970s Culture of Transmedia," in *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling* ed. Sean Guynes and Dan Hassler-Forest (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), 72.

proliferates. Derek Johnson builds on Jenkins' concept of world-building by arguing that creation within a franchised environment might "better be conceived in terms of world-sharing than world-building." He suggests that in this environment, "the world in play in franchised production offers a shared creative context in which many different individuals and communities can draw resources and contribute in kind."[276] Avi Santo has historicized this licensor/licensee relationship. His research draws particular attention to the labor of the peripheral workers who sold, branded, and rebranded the Lone Ranger character throughout the first half of the 20th century.[277]

A key aspect of world-sharing, as defined by Johnson, is the ability to incorporate elements from an existing world "while also pushing for recognition of a difference that allowed production communities to make meaningful claims to creative and professional distinction."[278] However, he suggests that when worlds are shared across industries, "[t]o negotiate their culturally constructed and industrially disciplined distance from perceived creative centers, users of worlds shared across media have often claimed identity in solidarity with those privileged users, rather than seeking distinct labor identities that would set their work apart." Johnson argues that, in this environment, licensees in other industries tended to respect the creative authority of those working directly on a film or program often privileging the validity of other's creative contributions over their own.

While these creative hierarchies still exist within current media structures, the value of continuity across all franchised products, while not upending power structures, offers an

[276] Johnson, *Franchising*, 109.
[277] Avi Santo, *Selling The Silver Bullet: The Lone Ranger and Transmedia Brand Licensing* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2015).
[278] Johnson, *Franchising*, 123.

increased opportunity to redistribute power away from the central authorial figures traditionally imagined to shape the direction of a franchised narrative. In an interview with Henry Jenkins, Jeff Gomez discussed the way he felt the value of *The Crow* franchise was undermined by producers who "chose to ignore the fictional rules and tenets set down by the original work." It became what he called, "an anthology franchise, that could be wildly altered based on the vision of individual artists and storytellers." In Gomez's opinion, "[t]hey chose to place the needs of their artists above the integrity of the mythology of the universe – a mythology that the fan base deeply cared about."[279]

This statement functions, in some ways, to undermine the creative authority of the "individual artist" and "storytellers" who are often credited with the creation of franchised texts, by suggesting that the story itself should dictate the direction of the franchise, not directors and writers. Though Gomez frames this as something that ultimately benefits the fanbase by giving them what they want, placing more emphasis on the importance of the coherent and controlled development of the storyworld, Gomez is arguing for his own importance as an interpreter of those worlds; in a sense, removing the creative authority from those figures and suggesting it should be rearticulated around him. Ultimately, we can see how individuals with knowledge of the history of a franchise, can vie for creative authority over the direction of the franchise by acquiring knowledge and arguing for its value. Gomez exhibits the tendency for the "deference" Johnson describes of licensed industry workers within franchised structures. However, he does not defer to a single medium or creative figure within the franchise, but to the storyworld of the franchise as an authorial voice in and of itself.

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[279] Jeff Gomez, Talking Transmedia: An Interview With Starlight Runner's Jeff Gomez (part one), interview by Henry Jenkins, May 28, 2008, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2008/05/an_interview_with_starlight_ru.html.

Returning to the contractor analogy, you wouldn't consider yourself to be sharing your yard with the contractor who builds your deck. Rather, the contractor is allowed on your property to perform a very limited set of tasks that pertain only to the construction of that object – which itself would only be seen as a modification of the existing structure. In this sense, we might consider the owner of the property to be the holder of the intellectual property. Companies like Campfire might be considered a contractor hired to build a deck on the house. The deck now exists to further the value of your original investment. Once the deck is finished, those in the house would expect the contractors to leave and have no further stake in the house. However, what Gomez's statement points out is that writers and directors are simply tenants on the property and, though they may think they have a claim to ownership because they reside in the house to which it's attached, they don't have any more claim to such ownership than the contractors hired to build it. Marketing executives and franchising consultants contribute to the development of the franchise narrative only in discrete ways that fill a specific need, be that audience engagement, world extension, or consolidation.

Gomez's statement asks us to take the contractor metaphor just one step further. He interestingly puts the power of the franchise or positions the owner of the property not in the hands of the intellectual property holder, but in the hands of the fans who give it value. Marketing managers have long considered their role to be interpreters of fan behavior or "as facilitators and moderators of dialogue between companies, consumers, interest groups, and other stakeholders in their client's environment."[280] That is one of the main ways that companies like Campfire and Starlight Runner understand their role within the media landscape; as interpreters of fan interests and facilitators of fan participation. Understanding how those in

[280] Deuze, *Media Work*, 129.

marketing imagine fan communities is vital for truly making sense of the logics by which franchised stories are managed. That said, when media studies scholars focus on how fans are contributing to narrative worlds, these conversations tend to fall into two distinct categories. The first is largely celebratory and focused on fan creation that is completely separate from the industry, such as fan fiction. Alternatively, when discussions of fan-industry interaction are considered, they are focused almost exclusively on the power hierarchies that are revealed within those relationships and the assumed exploitation of fan labor. Derek Johnson has offered the concept of "enfranchisement" to understand the negotiated position of fans within franchised media environments. He argues, "'enfranchisement,' in this case, does not imply the utopian aura of empowerment or emancipation, but instead a more ambivalent recognition of the contradictory positions offered to and taken up by consumers within the institutions of media franchising."[281] He goes on to warn:

> …critical perspective should not grimly reject consumers' productive agency or dismiss their meaningful identities and subjectivities, but instead recognize how those cultural factors have paradoxically affirmed the institutional power of industry over cultural production at the same time as disputing it.[282]

Still, many studies that consider fan contribution to transmedia storyworlds focus more on the potential exploitation of fan labor than on the lasting effects of their contribution. Consider Matthias Stork's assessment of *Glee*'s attempted fan-generated transmedia experiences:

> Behind this benevolent veneer of cultural discourse, however, is revealed an elaborate commercial economy. Labor is partially rewarded, albeit noneconomically, but more is constantly asked for. To use French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) terms, the transmedia geography rigorously fosters Glee's cultural capital to be cashed in as economic capital. Its social construction effectively operationalizes fans' involvement in the show, economizing their emotions and cultural activities as marketing rhetoric. This

[281] Johnson, Franchising, 199.
[282] Johnson, *Franchising*, 206.

> pseudo-collaborative (one might even call it protoexploitative) practice went to further extremes after the zenith of Glee's popularity at the end of season 1.[283]

The labor that is often asked of fans and studied in terms of exploitation is labor that generates content. However, the fan labor I'm interested in here is less about indirect uses of fan data and mass content generation, but rather isolated instances of individual fans (or groups of individual fans) being recruited as content interpreters and knowingly entering into a working relationship with the industry. Suzanne Scott offers the term "fantrepreneur" or, "one who openly leverages or strategically adopts a fannish identity for his or her own professional advancement."[284] This term acknowledges the growing importance of fan activity and fan knowledge to the industry. The reason these professionals are able to leverage their fandom is due to the fact that their knowledge or their position as a fan is now greatly valued for industrial management.

However, as argued in the beginning of this chapter, 'fantrepreneur' might be too broad a term to capture the unique nature of the fan-turned-consultants I discuss here. Many of the fans I'm discussing weren't seeking to leverage their fandom into a professional career, per se, but rather were sought out by the industry because they demonstrated an ability to understand and gain respect within a specific fan community. While some of them eventually leveraged this into a career, they were often unpaid (at least monetarily) for their efforts. Jenkins, Ford, and Green offer the term "grassroots intermediaries" as a potential way of understanding the increasing importance of non-industry participants in the circulation of media content. They suggest, "[b]y

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[283] Matthias Stork, "The Cultural Economics of Performance Space: Negotiating Fan, Labor, and Marketing Practice in "Glee's Transmedia Geography," in "Fandom and/as Labor," ed. Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 15.

[284] Suzanne Scott, ""Cosplay Is Serious Business": Gendering Material Fan Labor on Heroes of Cosplay." *Cinema Journal* 54, no. 3 (2015): 148.

'grassroots intermediaries,' we mean unofficial parties who shape the flow of messages through their community and who may become strong advocates for brands or franchises."[285]

Rather than offer some new term that combines the concepts of a 'fantrepeneur' with that of a 'grassroots intermediary,' I'd rather acknowledge the fluidity of these roles – that is, consider the way they may exist on a spectrum that moves ever closer to industry involvement and ever further from a pure fan identity. In such a model, marketing departments and peripheral franchise story management become productive spaces that facilitate the transition from one end of the spectrum to the other. It is through the logics of coherent transmedia story worlds – or universes – that fan knowledge of narrative and industrial history becomes not just valuable, but essential to the textual expansion of a franchise world. In turn, fans are offered an avenue through which they may become cultural intermediaries, and from cultural intermediaries may leverage their position into roles as fantrepreneurs and then finally, as fantrepeneurs, might acquire a set of skills that enable them to pursue a career in transmedia storytelling or marketing. As Jenkins, et al. argue:

> In a stickiness model, it's clear who the "producer," the "marketer," and the "audience," is. In a spreadable model, there is not only an increased collaboration across these roles but, in some cases, a blurring of the distinctions between these roles.[286]

With their transmedia promotional campaign created for Amazon's *The Man in the High Castle*, *Resistance Radio,* Campfire was able to occupy all three of these role, claiming to understand the audience's needs, produce a transmedia experience that is guided by the legibility of the storyworlds, and in turn help reshape that story world in the absence of a central creative figure. In essence, Campfire was able to assert some creative authority through their claim to an

[285]Jenkins, Ford and Green, *Spreadable Media*, 7.
[286] Jenkins, Ford, and Green, *Spreadable Media*, 7.

understanding of the needs of the fan community, which in turn gave them the ability to shape the public perception of the franchise.

Origins of Resistance Radio

The pilot episode of *The Man in the High Castle* was, at the time, the most-watched pilot episode for Amazon since they began producing original programming. The show is based on the novel by science fiction writer Phillip K. Dick which tells the story of an alternate history in which the Axis powers win World War II. After the war, the United States is split into two halves: the Pacific States in the west, ruled by the Japanese Empire, and the Greater Nazi Reich in the East ruled by Hitler in Germany. In this fictional dystopia, the Rocky Mountain area is set as a buffer between the two powers and becomes a lawless area known as the Neutral Zone. The show depicts the efforts of a small resistance who are given hope by a widely distributed movie called *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* produced by someone known only as the Man in the High Castle. The movie imagines a reality in which the Allies *won* the war and Germany and fascism were defeated. The plot centers on a group of characters attempting to discover the nature of these films. However, the blend of history and fiction made advertising the show somewhat challenging.

The first marketing campaign for *The Man in the High Castle* (which was not handled by Campfire) covered New York City subways with Japanese and Nazi imagery. Seats of a subway train were covered with the American flag reimagined with a Nazi Eagle in place of the stars (in

the show this is a swastika).[287] Another shuttle was decorated in Japanese Rising Sun flags.[288] The ad campaign elicited a reaction from local politicians with Mayor De Blasio stating:

> While these ads technically may be within MTA guidelines, they're irresponsible and offensive to World War II and Holocaust survivors, their families, and countless other New Yorkers.[289]

The ads were eventually taken down at the request of New York Governor Andrew Cuomo.[290] Amazon representatives responded to the controversy stating:

> Amazon Studios creates high-quality, provocative programming that spurs conversation. 'The Man in the High Castle,' based on an acclaimed novel, explores the impact to our freedoms if we had lost World War II. Like 'Transparent' and the movie 'Chi-Raq,' stories that society cares about often touch on important, thought-provoking topics. We will continue to bring this kind of storytelling to our customers.

While the controversy may have sparked some recognition for the show and given Amazon the opportunity to tout their storytelling prowess, the ads likely did little to introduce audiences to the nuances of the show's storyworld. The plastered subway car didn't speak to potential viewers about how the show critiques fascism through its careful reimagining of the alternate universe created by Phillip K. Dick. Some passengers might have been inspired to look further into it, but according to reports, many of the passengers interviewed by reporters either

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[287] Laura Wagner, "New York Subway Pulls Nazi-Themed Ads For New Show, 'Man In The High Castle'," *NPR*, November 25, 2015, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/11/25/457410075/new-york-subway-pulls-nazi-themed-ads-for-new-show-the-man-in-the-high-castle.
[288] "'Man In The High Castle' Subway Ads, Featuring Nazi Symbols, Removed From Trains," *CBS New York*, November 24, 2015, accessed April 18, 2019, https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2015/11/24/man-in-the-high-castle-subway-ads/
[289] "'Man In The High Castle' Subway Ads, Featuring Nazi Symbols, Removed From Trains," CBS New York, November 24, 2015, accessed April 18, 2019, https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2015/11/24/man-in-the-high-castle-subway-ads/.
[290] "'Man In The High Castle' Subway Ads, Featuring Nazi Symbols, Removed From Trains," CBS New York, November 24, 2015, accessed April 18, 2019, https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2015/11/24/man-in-the-high-castle-subway-ads/.

already knew about the show or were completely turned off by what they perceived as an obtuse attempt at a marketing campaign.

Despite the controversial ad campaign, the first season of the show was very successful for Amazon, drawing 1.15 million users to the subscription video service. With a $72 million price tag, Amazon spent about 63 dollars per new subscriber. Season two, however, proved less successful. Amazon spent about $107 million on the season which ended up costing them an estimated $829 per new subscriber.[291] Halfway through the second season showrunner Frank Spotnitz stepped down leaving his duties in the hands of a "deep and talented bench of producers."[292] Amazon brought in producer Eric Overmyer to develop the show's third season.[293] Although the show was reportedly shot in 2017, Amazon waited until October of 2018 to release the third season of the series. Despite some speculation, there was little in the way of official reports on why they delayed the season, and strangely, despite the underperformance of season two, Amazon confirmed season four was in development well ahead of the season three release date.[294] All this is to say that Amazon was invested in bringing a larger audience to the world of *The Man in the High Castle* and required some way to articulate its unique storyworld to a wider audience.

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[291] Todd Spangler, "Amazon Spent $107 Million on 'Man in the High Castle' Season 2 (Report)," *Variety*, March 5, 2018, accessed April 18, 2019, https://variety.com/2018/digital/news/amazon-documents-internal-spending-originals-man-in-high-castle-1202727642/.

[292] Nellie Andreeva, " 'The Man in the High Castle' Renewed for Season 3 by Amazon, Gets a Showrunner," *Deadline*, January 3, 2017, accessed April 18, 2019, https://deadline.com/2016/05/the-man-in-the-high-castle-showrunner-frank-spotnitz-exits-amazon-series-1201759933/.

[293] Nellie Andreeva, " 'The Man in the High Castle' Renewed for Season 3 by Amazon, Gets a Showrunner," *Deadline*, January 3, 2017, accessed April 18, 2019, https://deadline.com/2016/05/the-man-in-the-high-castle-showrunner-frank-spotnitz-exits-amazon-series-1201759933/.

[294] Michael Ahr, " 'The Man in the High Castle' Season 3 will be Returning Soon, and We've Got the Latest Trailer, Cast News, and More," *Den of Geek*, September 11, 2018, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.denofgeek.com/us/tv/the-man-in-the-high-castle/260880/the-man-in-the-high-castle-season-3-release-date-trailer-cast-news.

Getting a larger audience for the show would require a new marketing campaign that not only increased awareness but introduced audiences to the world of the show. If ads depicting Nazi symbolism were controversial in 2015, it certainly would have been no less controversial in 2017 when Amazon was trying to promote their third season of the show. In the wake of the polarizing 2016 presidential election, far-right neo-Nazi-groups become a prevalent part of the news and media landscape. In this environment, Nazi imagery became as much indicative of the current moment as of the WWII era being depicted in the show. If Amazon were to have success with *The Man in the High Castle* and appeal to new audiences, they would need to introduce those groups to the world of the show in more inviting ways than through the shock of fascist imagery on a subway car. As Mike Monello, co-founder of Campfire suggested, "that's a real challenge [when] the look and feel of the show communicate something that it's not."

Amazon came to Campfire with a specific request, to come up with something that "extended the world" of the show. World expansion meant the team would be looking for things that the show didn't touch on rather than pulling narrative points and characters from the show itself. Up until that point the show had been more concerned with characters and story rather than building the world and mythology of the fictional series. Aside from the opening credit sequence, there was very little time spent on how the world arrived in its current state or what the lives were of everyday people in that world. Furthermore, there was almost no time devoted to the genocide that likely took place in the Eastern part of the United States after the Nazi's took over. While the show spent significant time on world design through clothing choices and altering iconic U.S. locations to fit within this world (for example, one of the first major reveals in the series comes when a character enters Times Square, and there is a giant swastika on a

building), the first season of the show spent very little time investigating the culture and history of the fictional world the characters inhabited.

The siloed logics of media companies often require transmedia stories to play within parameters that won't interfere with the main story. As Jason Mittell has argued, "in a high-stakes commercial media industry, financial realities demand that the core medium of any franchise be identified and privileged, typically emphasizing the more traditional television or film over newer modes of online textuality."[295] Discussing Campfire's work on *Game of Thrones,* Monello points out how their media campaign for the show was "driven by the fact that George R.R. Martin does not want other people telling stories in his world… So we were restricted from telling stories." The resulting website turned into an interactive experience that slowly introduced fans to the world of the show, "our campaign became about building the world and making it tangible." For example, the campaign also consisted of special perfumes given to targeted influential fans which with smells that represented different areas of the world of *Game of Thrones*.[296] Campfire's limited access to the main narrative forces creative world-building solutions. With *The Man in the High Castle,* Monello points to the general siloed logics of the industry as a restricting factor for Campfire. Campfire couldn't tell a story that utilized existing characters or major plot points from the show because that would require, as Monello put it, "too much coordination."

While Monello frames the world-building efforts as creative solutions to not being able to deal with story elements, it should also be noted that world-building generates cultural and financial value for the franchise being developed. Wolf argues, "worlds often exist to support the

[295] Mittell, 294
[296] Bourdaa, "This is not Marketing," 24.

stories set in them…" Yet he also suggests that "worlds can exist without stories, but stories cannot exist without a world."[297] Derek Johnson and Kristin Thompson have noted that "overdesign" is an increasingly important aspect of modern franchising logic.[298] While George R.R. Martin may have authored the world of the books, its current popularity and the paratexts that that popularity has generated, stem primarily from the television show. Monello's website, while based on the world created by the showrunners and Martin, framed the world for the average viewer and non-viewer alike.[299] Mark Deuze points to how "[a]dvertising, marketing and public relations (PR) are industries that enable much of the production of content occurring in other commercial media."[300] As Carlos Alberta Scolari suggests, in transmedia storytelling "the brand is expressed by the characters, topics, and aesthetic style of the fictional world. This set of distinctive attributes can be translated into different languages and media." Ultimately, while Campfire is often hired to come up with creative marketing solutions, the transmedia world-building practices they engage in to meet those demands reverberate in meaningful ways throughout the franchise. As Bourdaa suggests, Campfire's campaign, "acted as a rabbit hole and was rabidly spread on social media by bloggers."[301]

To promote *The Man in the High Castle*, Monello and his team decided to focus on the cultural aspect of the fictional world, paying attention to music, news movies and other pop culture elements. He suggests, "one of the things the show hadn't even touched on was the cultural resistance, which always happens in the case of totalitarian rule."[302] Monello felt that a

[297] Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds*, 29.
[298] Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*; Johnson, *Franchising*.
[299] Gray, *Show Sold Separately*.
[300] Deuze, *Media Work*, 114.
[301] Bourdaa, "This is not Marketing," 24
[302] Monello, interview.

transmedia campaign devoted to this cultural resistance would perform two important functions for Amazon. He felt *Resistance Radio* would be:

> Interesting to people who are watching the show because they are seeing another side of the world that has only been hinted at in the show. And it's interesting to possibly new people who have looked at the show and thought it was about WWII.[303]

Ultimately the *Resistance Radio* transmedia experience consisted of two main components. There was an album produced by Danger Mouse and 30th Century Records which featured artists such as Beck, Norah Jones, and Sharon Van Etten, and there was a fictional radio broadcast produced by Campfire. The album, *Resistance Radio: The Man in The High Castle Album*, received some positive coverage from various media outlets due to the involvement of Danger Mouse and the first single from indie songwriter Sharon Van Etten.[304] NPR's *All Songs Considered* called the album "a fascinating collection of songs" and noted how " happier sounds from long ago were repurposed for a darker reality."[305] The album, however, was only part of the campaign and was mainly designed to supplement the pirate radio broadcast being produced by Campfire which could be accessed via the iHeartradio app or at Resistanceradio.com. The broadcast consisted of three segments, each narrated by a different DJ broadcasting from an undisclosed location from within the Neutral Zone. Each DJ gave a different insight into the cultural revolution and the history of marginalized people living within the fictional world of *The*

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[303] Monello, interview.
[304] Robin Hilton, "Sharon Van Etten Asks Why the Sun Still Shines for 'The Man in the High Castle'," *NPR Music*, March 3, 2017, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.npr.org/sections/allsongs/2017/03/03/517691187/sharon-van-etten-asks-why-the-sun-still-shines-for-the-man-in-the-high-castle
[305] Bob Boilen, "Resistance Radio: Darkly Reimagining The '60s Sound," *NPR Music*, March 3, 2017, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.npr.org/sections/allsongs/2017/03/03/518166877/resistance-radio-darkly-reimagining-the-60s-sound.

Man in the High Castle. Much like with their previous efforts, word was spread about the campaign by sending certain influencers special packages.[306]

Despite being coordinated across various divisions (marketing, music, programming, sales) and incorporating several different industries (music production, marketing, television production) the campaign was cohesive and blended well both aesthetically and thematically into the world of the show. While this type of coordination might counter assumptions about the siloed logics of the media industries, Monello suggests that *Resistance Radio* worked well in spite of them. He insists that despite being invested in these types of transmedia marketing experiences, the industry as a whole does not have the infrastructure to support consistent large-scale coordination across departments. Monello suggests, "if the stories good enough and the property has enough value internally you will see departments come together and collaborate." Crafting a quality transmedia experience that flows across various departments and involves various production teams is aided by a strong storyworld that pulls in other departments, not by any real centralized mechanism of creative control, but by a legible idea that sparks the imagination of the individual teams. In other words, it's not a central creative figure or some emergent corporate structure that facilitates the smooth expansion of story-words as much as the storyworlds give the illusion of coordination, even though each department likely worked independently.

Therefore, when speaking in an industrial context, it might be useful to think less about the way a transmedia story encourages exploration, and instead of its ability to flow across departments coherently. Or put another way, the story world need not be interesting or exciting

[306] Christy Dena, " A Narrative Designer's Experience of Amazon's 'The Man in the High Castle' Resistance Radio Campaign," *Medium*, March 10, 2017, accessed April 18, 2019, https://medium.com/@christydena/a-narrative-designers-experience-of-amazon-s-the-man-in-the-high-castle-resistance-radio-72100489552d

to all members involved in the development of franchise transmedia expansion efforts for them to appear coherent, but it must be comprehensible. The world must be made readily legible by a wide group of workers in order to successfully flow across departments and individuals. Monello describes a situation with Resistance Radio in which all of Amazon's major departments were in the conference room as they pitched their idea, including their Alexa team and their social media team. In his perspective, "everybody kinda saw a role to play."[307]

Bob Bowen, the head of music at Amazon Studios contacted Brian Burton (Danger Mouse) with the idea for the album and, intrigued by the idea, Burton agreed to produce it. According to Burton, they used a lot of old equipment to get the sound they were looking for. He says, "the version that you're hearing is coming off of a vinyl record, which takes a little bit of the shine off in a way that sounds more accurate to what we're looking for."[308] Deuze suggests that within the media industries, including marketing departments, "project- and teamwork-based media production, just as media consumption, tends to be done within a cultural context of what it means to the people involved, more so than according to rational, scientific, objective, or strictly economical principles."[309] Monello says that his team didn't give much oversight during the production of the record. He argues that it all came together so well largely because the story inspired artists like Burton to experiment:

> The story we're all working from is the same. That's why Danger Mouse as producer put all the songs on vinyl and put all the final mixes from vinyl to get the right warmth and sound of the world. That's not something we told him to do...[310]

[307] Monello, personal interview.
[308] Boilen, "Resistance Radio."
[309] Deuze, *Media Work*, 66.
[310] Monello, interview.

Though the album generated a lot of buzz, the core of the *Resistance Radio* was the pirate radio broadcast experience. Through the app or on the website, fans could access a fictional broadcast from the Neutral Zone hosted by three different DJs. The first DJ, Miss Evangeline, was presented as an African American refugee in the Neutral Zone who fled the Nazi Reich before the genocide. "I know a lot of y'all in the Reich ain't heard a black voice in years," she says early on in the broadcast. Her words immediately draw attention to something that was never explicitly stated in the show: there are no people of color in the Reich. Though there are people of color in the show itself, there had been no episodes that dealt directly with their unique experience under the new world order. In her radio show, she told the story of how she first heard that the Allies lost the war on the same day she learned her mother was dying of cancer. She discusses how she and other "undesirables" fled the Reich and found their way into the Neutral Zone. Her show was probably the most overtly politically charged and engaged with issues of gender and race that resonate in the current political climate. Ultimately, Evangeline acts as a voice for the marginalized in this fictional world and uses her show to critique, not just the Reich, but America before the Reich took over.

The second DJ, Bob Montez, uses his show to explore paranormal tales of lights in the sky and secret government conspiracy theories. "Calling America, are you out there?" he says early on in his broadcast. The themes in his broadcast are alternate histories and propaganda. "Our history is not the one we learned in high school," he warns. Montez's show functions to encourage the listener to explore the world, to read between the lines of the show and focus on the most insignificant detail. He also introduces us to concepts like the assassination of President Roosevelt, which sparked the shift in the war, and the creation of the "Heisenberg Device." Through his show, we gain an understanding of the German fascination with technology,

innovation and the supernatural. Lastly, Jake Rumiel is a Jewish American comedian who had a radio show in New York and fled the city right after he learned a bomb had dropped on Washington D.C. His show is an attempt to insert some mild comedy into the fictional world. At one point he jokes, "[m]y father always told me, 'son the best way to make money is to find a lawless stretch of land between two fascist states and become a pirate radio host.' Or maybe he told me to become a doctor, hard to tell with that thick Yiddish accent of his." Jake tries to make jokes, as he picks apart the latest news stories circulating within the Reich and the Pacific States. While there are Jewish people represented in the show, Rumiel offers some additional insight into what the Jewish experience was like after the war in *The Man in the High Castle* universe.

Though Monello and company were limited by how much overlap they could have with the show, some moments do reward viewers of the show by offering potential sites of intersection. For example, when the DJs mention an attempted assassination of the Japanese prince, an event from the first season, listeners are not only reminded of that detail but offered a new perspective. In the radio version, we get to see more of how that information what subverted within the media, raising questions in the mind of Evangeline about the circumstances surrounding it and feeding the conspiracy theories of Bob Montez. Another moment of overlap happens when Jake, the comedian, recalls being questioned by the Kempeitai about the whereabouts of a brown-haired, green-eyed girl, which was likely a reference to Juliana Crain the main character from the show who is often being pursued by the Japanese police.

Aside from adding to depth, the show also acted as a paratext which prepared listeners to watch the show. The broadcast subtlety introduced themes that would become more central in the third season. For example, the show becomes heavily invested in supernatural themes after the second season, and while that might seem out of left field to some viewers, if you listened to

Resistance Radio Bob Montez already had you primed to think about the Nazi fascination with the paranormal. However, perhaps the largest benefit of the transmedia experience was its ability to consistently contextualize the series in a way the show never does. Despite each announcer offering very different perfectives on the world of *The Man in The High Castle,* there's was a lot of overlap and repetition throughout each of the broadcasters' monologues. The DJs cut to songs from the album throughout their broadcasts. Before and after each song, the announcers make a point to mention that they were living in a world between two fascist states. For example, take this excerpt from Bob Montez's show:

> This is Bob Montez, and you're listening to Resistance Radio live from the Neutral Zone. It's been 17 years since Germany and Japan won the war and carved up our country. But don't stop fighting. The airwaves can't be silenced; we're broadcasting hope to any American that will listen.

Unlike the New York bus ads, which provided no context, the radio show was constant context. Events not mentioned explicitly in the show such as the assassination of President Roosevelt, and the creation of the 'Heisenberg device' which was ultimately responsible for the destruction of Washington DC were repeated every few minutes. This repetition throughout the broadcast made it likely that audience members tuning in only for a few minutes would catch a bit of the back story for the world. They would always make clear that the world was divided into two segments and that they were broadcasting from the Neutral Zone. Additionally, each DJ made an effort to cultivate a sense of urgency and danger by frequently mentioning they might be discovered at any time. At one-point, comedian Jake Rumiel hears a noise outside and is audibly shaken and cuts to a song. The moment is effective and keeps the listener clued into the sense of constant danger that these individuals face daily as refugees. They also draw the listener in by reminding them that listening to Resistance Radio is a crime and they should be

sure to listen in a secure location. These constant reminders functioned to let listeners know they were not listening to a broadcast about the current moment, but a fictional world in which the US had fallen to the Axis powers.

Resistance Radio was effective at not only spreading awareness about the Amazon series but also at framing the show as a relevant critique of the current political landscape. Though *The Man in the High Castle* itself makes no explicit allusions to the current political climate, *Resistance Radio* openly invited those comparisons. Miss Evangeline's broadcast most explicitly evokes current cultural issues, as her monologues often pointed out the hypocrisy and irony of white Americans mourning the loss of freedom, when, as she argues, black Americans had been denied many of those same privileges since the birth of the nation. At one point she says, "… the Germans, they didn't want to run America [that would be] too much work… they wanted us to be just like them…imagine their surprise to learn the truth…we were like them the whole time." Ultimately, she continually calls out white Americans and notes how easy it was for many of them to make the transition to a fascist state. She argues, "[y]'all white folks in the Japanese Pacific States have spent the last few years learning what it's like to be Black in America." Her words and rhetoric tap directly into the current political climate. At one point she even talks about "fake news" virtually breaking the fourth wall of the show making a direct connection to the buzz word of 2017.

The show was effective on multiple levels. Despite constant reminders that the pirate radio station was being broadcast from a fictional alternate reality, *Resistance Radio* made headlines when several conservatives on social media made the mistake of tweeting about the show, clearly thinking it was an actual left-leaning radio station resisting the current administration. The situation led to several online clashes between these conservatives and those

pointing out their mistake. This clash resulted in media outlets writing stories about the misunderstanding and, in turn, about the marketing campaign.[311] The show also was celebrated for broadening the appeal of the show. In her assessment of the show, transmedia marketer Christy Dena, who had previously felt put off by the show's fascist subject matter, suggested, "it is here, in the voice of Miss Evangeline (and Bob and Jake), that I found a worldview I could align. I now have a personal affinity with *The Man In the High Castle.*"[312] Additionally, the show earned Amazon an Emmy nomination for "Outstanding Creative Achievement in Interactive Media."[313] Ultimately, the campaign was considered a success by the creative team in charge of the show as well, as the producers incorporated a small segment about it in the second season of the show.[314]

Despite often being considered an ad agency, Mike Monello does not consider what Campfire does to be marketing or advertising in the traditional sense. "I call us an ad agency when we need to be," he says, "but we do a wide variety of things."[315] Monello suggests they pitch themselves to whatever department has the money to fund their creative ideas. Most transmedia content is still funded through marketing departments and rarely considered crucial to the development of a movie or series, but rather only considered after something has already

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[311] Michael Nordine, "'The Man in the High Castle': Fight the Nazis (And Piss Off Trump Supporters) by Listening to 'Resistance Radio'," *Indie Wire*, March 12, 201, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.indiewire.com/2017/03/the-man-in-the-high-castle-resistance-radio-trump-1201792771/; Travis M. Andrews, "Amazon Launched a Fake Radio Station to Promote 'The Man in the High Castle.' Angry Trump Supporters Thought it Was Real," *The Washington Post*, March 13, 2017, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/03/13/amazon-launched-a-fake-radio-station-to-promote-the-man-in-the-high-castle-angry-trump-supporters-thought-it-was-real/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.42da89445dcb.

[312] Dena, "A Narrative Designer's Experience…"

[313] "The Man in The High Castle Resistance Radio," Emmy's Website, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.emmys.com/shows/man-high-castle-resistance-radio

[314] *Man in the High Castle*, season 2, episode 5, "Duck and Cover," directed by John Fawcett, aired December 16, 2016, on Amazon Prime Video, streaming.

[315] Monello, interview.

become successful. Monello resents that the legacy of his work with things like *The Blair Witch Project* often gets tied up in discourses of marketing, for example when *Wired* magazine referred to *The Blair Witch Project* as being the result of a clever marketing campaign Monello says:

> I would pull my hair; I was so pissed at *Wired* magazine in particular because *Wired* magazine didn't recognize what was happening. *Wired* friggin magazine the magazine that was supposed to be covering technology and new culture and how it was changing culture, were like, 'oh cool marketing campaign,' and didn't recognize that something else was happening.[316]

Though Campfire might go where the money is for their creative projects, Monello clearly wants to be seen as much more than a marketing company. He calls the kinds of projects that Campfire is involved with a type of "conversational storytelling." The company actually stays away from work that might be considered straight forward PR or marketing. Monello asserts:

> We made a choice to specifically not chase after certain lines of business that I think would ruin it. We don't manage social media feeds for clients. We don't do the kind of standard marketing fulfillment that agencies do in order to earn day to day agency of record relationships with clients.[317]

While operating as a boutique outlet that is selective about who they work with might help build the identity of Campfire, it also serves an industry interested in expanding storyworlds and generating franchises without the hassle of dealing with a central creative figure. Mark Deuze argues, "a largely project contracted workforce is cheaper, easier to control, and less likely to collectively organize or oppose increasingly transnational business practices."[318] According to Monello, Campfire works on a "project basis." Companies come to Campfire to solve problems and to create experiences for viewers. The fact remains, no matter how

[316] Monello, interview.
[317] Monello, interview.
[318] Deuze, *Media Work*, 131.

influential or creative their solution is, as contracted labor they get very little recognition for their contribution to a franchise. Much like *The Handmaid's Tale* campaign, which was attributed in many articles to Hulu, their work goes largely uncredited and is often ephemeral. Resistance Radio is now inaccessible as Amazon pulled the website down. Ultimately, Resistance Radio deepened the world of *The Man in the High Castle* and brought some much-needed diversity to the franchise. However, once the buzz was created and Amazon generated a new audience that could understand the show through a more progressive lens, the creative labor of Campfire could be dismissed.

The work of companies like Campfire makes the world legible to audiences. In doing so, they also make the world legible within the industry making it more apparent how other sections of a company might find a role in the expansion of the world, or might simply find a way to use the world in the marketing of their own product. While *The Man in the High Castle* is a relatively new franchise, existing franchises also require this kind of work as they may have become less legible as the franchise proliferated. Therefore, while sometimes this work is external and takes the form of promotion and narrative expansion, it can also be internal work that takes the form of consolidation.

Constructing Institutional Memory through Creative Consultants

Over the past 50 years, the *Apes* franchise has produced several stories imagining a world ruled by primates; including five sequential films between 1968 and 1973, both a live-action and animated television series, a 2001 remake of the original film directed by Tim Burton, as well as myriad of comics, toys and other peripheral material. The release of the most recent trilogy of films *Rise of The Planet of the Apes* (2011), *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014), and W*ar for the Planet of the Apes* (2017) provided the franchise with a level of critical and financial success

it had not experienced since its inception. Each iteration of the franchise brought new production teams and creative personnel who reimagined the world for new mediums, cultural moments and audiences. Through this long history of storytelling, little attention was paid to how each version connected to the previous one. While the first five films are, for the most part, sequential, the remaining entries are much more difficult to fit within a singular timeline. Though the live-action TV series could arguably be considered a prequel, the animated series and Tim Burton film more or less reimagined the original story rather than continuing it.[319]

The recent films occupied a grey area between a full reboot and a prequel to the original 1968 film. At the time of *Rise's* release, there were many questions about how exactly the movie would line-up with the original trilogy. Director Rupert Wyatt suggested the film was "part of the mythology" of the original movies, though not "a continuation of the other films." He compared the movie to "Batman Begins" in that it would bring in fans of the property but reimagine the origins of that story.[320] William Proctor has argued that films like *Batman Begins* function as reboots, as they restart a new series of films and "seek to disavow and render inert its predecessor's validity."[321] *Rise* was interested in starting a new series of films, but it also seemed interested in gesturing towards the original film. In interviews, writers struggled with what to call it. Writer Rick Jaffa originally called it a "reinvention" until a journalist pointed out to him that Tim Burton used the same word to describe his widely panned 2001 remake. Ultimately, Jaffa suggested that the movie attempts to set up a situation in which our modern world "could lead to apes taking over the planet and, perhaps, getting Colonel Taylor on that

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[319] Nicholas Benson, "Apes on TV: Medium Specificity and Considerations of Continuity in Early Transmedia Storytelling," *Critical Studies in Television* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2019).

[320] Germain Lussier, "*Collider* Visits The Set of RISE OF THE PLANET OF THE APES; Plus Video Blog," *Collider*, April 14, 2011, accessed April 18, 2019, http://collider.com/set-visit-rise-of-the-planet-of-the-apes/85807/.

[321] William Proctor, "Regeneration & Rebirth: Anatomy of the Franchise Reboot," Scope 22.1 (Spring 2012); 4.

beach in thirty-nine hundred years." Indeed, *Rise* does gesture towards this possibility by inserting a scene which references the launching of the space shuttle 'Icarus,' which is the name of Taylor's shuttle from the original movie. This ambiguity about where the films were leading and if they would somehow line up with the original only became more convoluted as writers and producers inserted plot points and characters with names which correlated with characters from the original movies. While most read this as an homage, other fans felt it could be a sign that the series might try to connect back to the original timeline. Some pointed to the fact that the studio took the time to digitally de-age Charlton Heston for the small news clip about the missing Icarus space mission as evidence the stories would clearly line up in the end.[322] *War of the Planet of the Apes* writer Mark Bomback tried to downplay these theories saying that many connections were not meant to suggest a literal tie, rather "[it] was more that we wanted to convey the idea that history is unwittingly cyclical."[323] Regardless of what producers intended, the discourse the recent *Apes* trilogy spurred is indicative of a larger shift in franchise storytelling that favors soft-reboots and clear narrative connections to past characters and films, rather than an erasure of the past.[324]

After *War of the Planet of the Apes* was a success at the box office, Fox was left with a renewed franchise, but little idea of how to move forward. Throughout its history, the *Apes* series lacked a consistent set of creative managers. Each major iteration of the franchise was guided by industrial need, as in the TV series, which required an episodic story that appealed to mass

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[322] Damion Damaske, "Fan Theory: How the New Planet of the Apes Movies Connect to the Originals,"*JoBlo*, July 14, 2017, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.joblo.com/movie-news/fan-theory-how-the-new-planet-of-the-apes-movies-connect-to-the-originals-669

[323] Jeremy Fuster, "Why Nova in 'War for the Planet of the Apes' isn't Meant to Be the Nova From the Original," *The Wrap*, July 16, 2017, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.thewrap.com/nova-war-planet-apes/

[324] Chris Agar, "Why Soft Reboots are the Ideal Compromise Between Remakes & Sequels," *Screen Rant*, February 11, 2015, accessed April 18, 2019, https://screenrant.com/movie-franchise-soft-reboot-continuation-discussion/ .

audiences, or by a completely new creative team. As Fox attempted to make sense of *Apes'* long history, they enlisted the help of Andrew Gaska, a graphic novelist and avid *Apes* fan who had been working on an *Ape*s novel at the time. At the time of our interview, Gaska held the title of "franchise consultant" for 20th Century Fox. Gaska was brought in while the third film, *War*, was in production. He says that despite the discrepancies and disjunctures throughout the series, Fox was still interested in somehow making their movies feel part of a connected universe. Gaska suggests, "they're trying to streamline everything to be an expanded universe like Star Wars has." Accordingly, Gaska was tasked with trying to make the movies fit within a coherent timeline.

Gaska's road to working for Fox is an interesting one and, perhaps, indicative of how freely Fox distributed *Apes* licenses pre-*Rise*. Gaska purchased a publishing license for the *Apes* property independently to produce his *Apes* book *Conspiracy of the Planet of the Apes*. He says, "I took a gamble… I put 40,000 dollars into producing *Conspiracy*, and it launched my career pretty much."[325] Gaska's novel, *Conspiracy of the Planet of the Apes,* built on the existing Apes properties, and attempted to fill gaps within the continuity. He jokingly refers to the project as a "Betweequel" as it takes place during the events of the original film. However, rather than following any of the main characters, the story follows the unaccounted-for moments in supporting characters' timelines. Specifically, the story focuses on one character, Langdon, from the time he is separated from Taylor to when he is lobotomized by an ape scientist.

Gaska's 40,000-dollar risk may have put him on Fox's radar, but it was his encyclopedic knowledge of *Apes* history that was of value to the studio. Gaska had, in many ways, been

[325] Andrew Gaska, interview by author, July 31, 2017.

preparing for this job from an early age. While watching the original films in syndication, Gaska noticed "contradictions" between the movies and assumed that he "must have missed the movie that took place in between..."[326] Gaska would then imagine what might have happened in the movies he thought he missed. But when Gaska was a little older, he realized that many of the moments that he thought he remembered from the *Apes* films didn't exist, as he had made them up. From those ideas emerged the outline for his book. As Gaska put it "… that always interests me and makes me want to say, 'well why would that have happened? And how can we make that make sense?" Gaska does similar work with his books based on other properties such as *Buck Rogers* and *Space 1999*. Gaska discussed the way the pilot episode of *Space 1999* (1975 -1977) was originally three hours long but was reduced to 45 minutes before it aired. His *Space 1999* book, "put all that extra stuff that was cut out back into that story and added some stuff continuity-wise to make the characters that show up randomly later in the season make sense like they were there from the beginning." [327] This points to another aspect of what Gaska does, and the expertise his investment in this type of continuity work involves. Gaska is not only well versed in the textual history of the property, but he also has important knowledge about the industrial history of these properties that informed the text. Consider Gaska's discussion of his approach to his Buck Rogers story:

> "In Buck Rogers, between seasons one and two, there's a massive change, they basically decided the show wasn't working so they decided to reformat the entire show and instead of dealing with being a James Bond in space type of character…they were going out to do a Star Trek thing instead. They sort of change mid-season and caused season two to be canceled halfway through. But my novels that are coming out for that right now explain how this change happened."[328]

[326] Gaska, interview.
[327] Gaska, interview.
[328] Gaska, interview.

In a sense, Gaska is not simply interpreting an *Apes* timeline for Fox, but he is organizing and translating the franchise's institutional memory. Institutional memory can be thought of a set of stored information about a company's history that is drawn upon as companies make decisions and move forward. While traditional concepts of institutional memory have largely been thought of as a set of stored data (for example, the way The Walt Disney Company maintains detailed and carefully curated archives of all their past projects), recent research has suggested a more "'dynamic' people-centered conceptualization that sees institutional memory as a composite of intersubjective memories open to change."[329] This new approach understands intuitional memory as a discourse between various actors who are "crucial interpreters of memory."[330] Fox most likely has some internal records about the production process. However, the franchise has largely been passed along to various producers, licensors, marketing executives, writers, and directors. All of the producers working on the new films, while fans of the original to a varying degree, were not involved in the original production. This lack of a consistent and centralized set of actors who can interpret institutional records about the franchise creates an environment in which fan knowledge becomes incredibility valuable, especially knowledge like that which Gaska has built over a long history with the series. Gaska draws from his industrial knowledge of the series and, with the gift of hindsight, is able to smooth out the jagged narrative edges and jarring thematic shifts that can often happen when a series is being guided by the industrial logics of the moment.[331] While Gaska admits that his stories help make the continuity of the *Apes* universe

[329] Jack Corbett, Dennis C. Grube, Heather Lovell and Rodney Scott. "Singular Memory or Institutional Memories? Towards a Dynamic Approach." Governance 31, no. 3 (February 2018): 556.
[330] Jack Corbett, Dennis C. Grube, Heather Lovell and Rodney Scott. "Singular Memory or Institutional Memories? Towards a Dynamic Approach." *Governance* 31, no. 3 (February 2018): 556.
[331] Freeman, "From Sequel to Quasi-Novelization."

work, he emphasizes his creative contribution and argues that it's also about "telling a story with it rather than just connecting the dots."[332]

Though Gaska's interest in continuity is not unique within fan communities, it proved to be a valued skillset among a group of executives trying to organize the *Apes* franchise. Gaska had been working with a licensor on his book who put him in touch with Fox directly. At that time, as Gaska describes it, "[Fox] had a team of people trying to work this stuff out."[333] Despite obvious discrepancies within the series, Fox was mainly concerned with bridging the gap between the modern films and the older ones so that they could all be considered part of the same canon. And so, drawing on the knowledge he had acquired through writing his book and his fandom, Gaska pitched to Fox a universe that was unified by a theory of infinite timelines, an idea referenced by a character in the original films. Gaska said "…they were like, 'yea how much is it going to cost to have you come in here and do this for us because this just makes no sense to us…'" So Gaska began the process of combing through comics, books, and other *Apes* material to figure out what could be considered canon and what would not.

While Gaska was working with Fox to make sense of the canon behind the scenes, publicly Fox began what they called a "year-long celebration of *Planet of the Apes*," which centered around the launch of a website that promised to be "a digital exploration through half a century of innovative storytelling."[334] The site was not only devoted to the original 1968 film (which was the only text celebrating a milestone) but rather used the anniversary to celebrate every major film release within the franchise's history. Posts across the franchise's social media

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[332] Gaska, interview.
[333] Gaska, interview.
[334] "Planet of the Apes 50th Anniversary," Planet of the Apes News and Updates, accessed April 18, 2019. http://www.planetoftheapes.com/anniversary/article-50th-kickoff

and web spaces paid equal attention to the characters, places, and actors who worked on the classic films, the modern ones, and even the Tim Burton remake. The site provided a portal through which fans could not only be exposed to different products the franchise had to offer, but also could educate themselves about the world of the apes. His labor in creating a legible *Apes* franchise may have informed the creation and layout of the site as Gaska did inform me that his timeline "is what they're using internally now[335]."

One section on the website titled "universe" provided a quick encyclopedic look into various characters, locations, and institutions that exist *across* all *Apes* films. By grouping them under one banner, it gave the impression that these were all various parts of one ongoing narrative world. Franchises like *Game of Thrones* have similar sections on their websites to help audiences make sense of the various characters and locations that exist within a singular complex storyworld. When Gaska was asked to work through what would be considered part of the *Apes* universe, Fox was mostly interested in the movies being part of the universe but was unconcerned with other licensed novels and comics. Gaska says he had to make an argument for the live-action TV series and the animated series, "I was like, you know, guys you produced this. It was filmed. You have fans of this stuff; this has to count."[336] However, while there is a section that mentions both TV series, under the "universe" section of the website only the characters and locations from the movies are included, suggesting that Gaska's advice is not consistently implanted across the franchise and, while he and those with his skillset may be moving toward more central roles in the production process, they still occupy marginal roles in the industry.

[335] Gaska, interview.
[336] Gaska, interview.

Much of the content on the *Apes* website attempted to find connective tissue, no matter how minute, between the classic series and the modern *Apes* films. For example, several posts discussed the role of strong and powerful women across the *Apes* franchise. On Mother's Day, the website posted an article entitled "Mothers of the Front."[337] The article highlighted the many mothers who served an important role in the *Apes* stories both in the classic series and the modern one. Another article titled "Ladies on set" highlighted the actresses who popularized many of the female roles throughout the series and "On the Ape Planet," provided a brief history of heroines in the Apes universe. These posts included characters from the modern films, the past ones, and, occasionally, the Tim Burton film. Another recurring theme was the franchise's history of cutting-edge special effects. For example, one post titled "The Evolution of the Apes," outlined the history of the visual effects used in the *Planet of the Apes* franchise, starting with Jon Chambers and ending with Andy Serkis' use of cutting-edge motion capture technology.[338] These articles worked to unite the franchise under shared themes and histories rather than concrete agreed-upon canon. It's also worth noting that they serve to refurbish the franchise by modernizing the classic *Apes* films and highlighting the way their themes may have been ahead of their time and could be relevant today.

The site also promoted a shared history of fan passion by routinely offering a space for the exhibition of fan-produced media, from unlicensed comics to fan-made posters. They even posted a set of ape currency that a group of fans imagined and created with incredible detail. The caption under the featured picture read:

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[337] "Mothers of the Front," Planet of the Apes - The Planet, accessed April 18, 2019, http://www.planetoftheapes.com/anniversary/article-mothers-of-the-front.
[338] "Evolution of the Apes," Planet of the Apes – Apes Evolution, accessed, April 18, 2019, http://www.planetoftheapes.com/anniversary/article-pota-evolution.

> When bringing the Ape Planet to life, producers across the franchise paid careful attention to the finest details to create captivating worlds for their audiences to enjoy. Talented graphic designers Rhuan Santos and João Victor Rosa Campos took this inspiration to heart as they put together their vision of what the currency of the Ape Planet would look like.[339]

While the post celebrates the world-building efforts of fans, it first points out that detailed world-building was always a major part of the franchise. It's also worth noting that the post imagines "The Ape Planet," as a singular world, without acknowledging that the currency might look different depending on which timeline was being represented.

The site featured several interviews with influential fans throughout the year. One fan, who created *The Forbidden Zone*, one of the largest *Apes* fan sites, was celebrated for keeping the franchise alive when there was a dearth of material. The introduction to the interview read, "[d]isappointed with the lack of fan resources for *Planet of the Apes*, Roger started the site in 1996. Now, it dishes out the latest franchise news, contains multimedia archives, and offers fascinating discourse about the *universe* of the Apes." [340] Incidentally, *The Forbidden Zone* became a key promoter of several new official *Apes* comics, products and the official website itself. Jenkins, Ford and Green suggest, "grassroots intermediaries may often serve the needs of the content creator, demonstrating how audiences become part of the logic of the marketplace and challenging what "grassroots" means, as such activities often coexist or even coincide with corporate agendas."[341]

One particular fan was featured prominently on the website throughout the year. Russell M. Hossain, a London based graphic artist, wrote several unlicensed *Planet of the Apes* comics.

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[339] "Featured Fan Art: Ape -Enomics," Planet of the Apes – Fan Zone, accessed April 18, 2019, http://www.planetoftheapes.com/anniversary/article-fan-art-currency
[340] "Interviews on The Planet of the Apes, Part 3," Planet of the Apes – The Planet, accessed April 18, 2019, http://www.planetoftheapes.com/anniversary/article-interviews-on-the-planet-of-the-fans-part-3.
[341] Jenkins, Ford and Green, *Spreadable Media*, 7.

Perhaps not so coincidently, some of Hossain's more popular comics tell stories that attempt to connect the classic *Apes* work with the modern one. In his interview, he discussed the importance of continuity to him and how he, not unlike Gaska, enjoyed making connections between texts. He said:

> "With the onset of the new movies, I began thinking of ways that the new Serkis films could be folded into the canvas of the Classic five APJAC [Arthur P. Jacobs produced]movies, without the need for ignoring the original continuity. Jumping off from that, I've been motivated to draw a number of fan-comic strips which might conceivably take place in a reality where ALL [emphasis in orginal] Planet of the Apes stories and worlds are part of one mighty "Apes-Multiverse."[342]

Hossain's view aligned with Fox's long-term desires for the franchise and they were not subtle about promoting Hossain and his work on the site. The website featured several of Hossain's comics throughout the year. One of which was posted with the description that read:

> Ever wonder how the classic *Apes* movies might be connected to modern movies? Russell M. Hossain returns with another amazing *Planet of the Apes* fan work that makes a pretty good case for it!"[343]

So, while Gaska was behind the scenes working to construct a coherent timeline for Fox, publicly, they seemed more than willing to promote fan theories that made more concrete connections for them.

This logic, that audiences must be invited into the conversation, has permeated many marketing departments across the media landscape. Though interaction on social media has been the main way this relationship has been understood, fans are now consulted more directly in various capacities as consultants. Nancy Kirkpatrick, the former president of worldwide

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[342] "Interviews on the Planet of the Fans, Part 1" Planet of the Apes – Fan Zone, accessed April 18, 2019, http://www.planetoftheapes.com/anniversary/article-interviews-on-the-planet-of-the-fans-part-1

[343] "Planet of the Apes: The Lesson," Planet of the Apes – Fan Zone, accessed April 18, 2019, http://www.planetoftheapes.com/anniversary/article-planet-of-the-apes-the-lesson.

marketing for Summit Entertainment, became a prominent figure in Hollywood when she oversaw successful marketing campaigns for both *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight* series. Her marketing success was attributed in large part to her willingness to work directly with fans, particularly female fans.[344] Kirkpatrick took meetings with fans and often would give them tours of the studio. This direct interaction created a close relationship with the fan community which resulted in actual shifts in marketing strategies, and changes and the direction of the franchise. As one of those fans, Laura Byrne-Cristiano says, "she basically, understood that fans could make or break [Twilight] being a success and was very happy to partner with fans, ask us question about what we thought would or would not work, or if something was not going great she wanted to hear about it."[345] Byrne-Cristiano and some of her fellow fans sat in on board meetings, contributed ideas for the official website and acted as outside consultants for the marketing team who wanted to know more about the fan community.

These types of websites are often developed by marketing teams and serve the function of holding the franchise over from one major installment to the next. They also provide a space through which the disparate segments of the franchise "universe" can be brought together under one specific space. Star Wars has a similar site for their franchise. Byrne-Cristiano suggests that when she was brought in to consult on *Twilight*, "they had some thoughts that maybe they could spin this series off into a TV series and this website could be very crucial to that."[346] However, she suggests that with that website the fan input didn't come until the very end, her impression

[344] Pamela McClintock, Nancy Kirkpatrick and the 'Twilight'-Fueled Transformation of Summit Entertainment, *The Hollywood Reporter*, December 5, 2012, accessed April 18, 2019, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/women-entertainment-nancy-kirkpatrick-summit-397443.
[345] Laura Byrne-Cristiano, interview by author, February 12, 2019.
[346] Byrne-Cristiano, interview.

was that the marketing department was asked to create this space for fans by executives in the hire up departments and:

> The marketing department had to live with what they were being directed to do, and by the time they were able to involve us like there wasn't very much to be said or done at that point to change the direction it was going in.[347]

Once brought into the development process, fans like Gaska and Byrne-Cristiano do have a voice within the franchise and can even shape the direction of the marketing. Gaska's assumed knowledge of the franchise gave him the power to determine canon and shape the institutional memory of the franchise. Though she felt they were brought in too late in the process, Byrne-Cristiano and other Twilight fans sat in on conference calls and were included on email chains. She even met with Kirkpatrick personally and discussed the fan community and the marketing campaign. During one of those interactions, Kirkpatrick asked if Byrne-Cristiano needed anything from her for her popular fan site *The Twilight Lexicon* which she created and ran with her friends. Byrne-Cristiano mentioned that she could use a picture of the director of the latest movie in which he wasn't "flipping the bird." She recalls:

> I was like yea, could we just get a picture of the director where he's not flipping somebody the bird. And she goes excuse me? And said all the publicly available pictures of David Slade he's throwing up two fingers, that's not a peace a sign that's the British symbol for Fuck You. And she looked at me; she goes "No? That will stop now."[348]

While grassroots intermediaries have a relationship with the film studios and marketing department, they are not employed or regulated by content creators and also may act counter to corporate goals."[349] During the production of one of the Twilight movies, Byrne-Cristiano and her friends found some old tweets from the person set to direct the next film. Rather than post it

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[347] Byrne-Cristiano, interview.
[348] Byrne-Cristiano, interview.
[349] Jenkins, Ford, Green, *Spreadable Media*, 7.

immediately on her fan site, she went to Kirkpatrick first. As she recalls, "I was like, FYI here's your director dissing your project, this isn't going to go over well, you guys have something to say about this?"[350] Kirkpatrick orchestrated an apology from the director that was posted on the Twilight Lexicon along with their story about the disparaging tweets.

While it's clear that many marketing executives are willing and often eager to work with fans, it's important to consider how this type of outsourced labor is expendable, and the relationships forged by marketers with fans are likely not to last through major corporate shifts. Considering Disney now owns *Planet of the Apes*, one can imagine the consolidation process will intensify. However, how much they will rely on fans like Gaska remains to be seen. As this develops, we should pay attention to how Disney manages not just *Apes* but the other franchises they have acquired, focusing on which voices are valued within those franchises, which stories are considered to be important to the development of future products and therefore remain canon, and what this says about the future of licensed partnerships within franchise environments. Byrne-Cristiano suggests that when the independent company Summit was purchased by Lionsgate, they began listening to the fans less and less as the marketing executives that had relationships with fans left or were hired by other companies, Byrne-Cristiano, and her friends lost their direct line to the studio.[351]

Conclusion

As building immersive coherent and fully developed universes becomes an increasingly important aspect of franchise management, this contracted and outsourced creative labor not only becomes more common but the nature of franchise expansion shifts from one of creative and

[350] Byrne-Cristiano, interview.
[351] Byrne-Cristiano, interview.

economic partnership to one of contracted labor. As much of the money for transmedia promotion and franchise maintenance comes from the marketing department, that labor, while creative and meaningful to the long term development and health of the franchise, is largely becoming outsourced. Therefore, the creators responsible for these expansions are largely unrecognized by the general public, and their work normally remains the sole property of the IP holder. As of now, the *Apes* timeline is still officially undefined. Though Fox was meant to release Gaska's official timeline during the 50th Anniversary celebration, they have yet to do so. Despite Gaska's significant investment into the project, there's no contractual agreement saying his work must be made public. While you can still buy the album for *Resistance Radio*, the broadcast is unavailable anywhere online. Much like Campfire's work made the narrative world of *The Man in The High Castle* legible across departments to create a coherent transmedia campaign, Gaska's work makes the franchise legible to individuals across departments for future streamlined proliferation of the *Apes* property. Yet, also similar to Campfire, his labor is often unseen by the public.

As movie universes become more common, corporations are restructuring departments to account for continuity across branded content. In 2014, Star Wars officially removed all of their previously licensed stories, formally known as the Expanded Universe from canon, rebranding them under the banner "Legends." Speaking about this choice, Continuity Database Administrator (also known unofficially as "The Keeper of the Holocron") Leland Chee said, "[f]or me, it came down to simply that we had killed Chewbacca in the Legends — a big moon had fallen on him."[352] While there were certainly other reasons to ignore the expanded universe,

[352] Jordan Zakarin, "Inside Lucasfilm's Top Secret Star Wars Database," *SyFy Wire*, January 15, 2018, accessed April 19, 2019, https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/inside-lucasfilm%E2%80%99s-top-secret-star-wars-database-fandom-files-13.

the death of a beloved (and more importantly merchandisable) character within a licensed story represents just one of the potential issues facing IP holders wishing to construct rich and coherent narrative universes. In this environment people like Chee and Gaska, with a deep knowledge of a franchise's textual and industrial history, are increasingly valued as franchises seek to consolidate and expand properties into previously untapped corners of the consumer market such as live-action television shows and theme parks. Today, Chee has moved from the licensing department to become a central figure within the famed Lucasfilm Story Group; a team formed by Kathleen Kennedy with the mission of facilitating quality and continuous storytelling across all licensed properties. This reorganization points to shifting hierarchies within franchised properties and is indicative of shifting priorities for producers in which those who traditionally occupied discrete realms of the franchise, have moved into central positions of power in which they consult across multiple production sectors.

Continuity maintenance is a central role, and Chee's knowledge of the Star Wars canon and his ability to organize and explain that knowledge has become increasingly valued within the corporate structures of Lucasfilm and Disney. Considering Disney now owns *Planet of the Apes*, as a result of their acquisition of 21st Century Fox, one can imagine they will similarly restructure departments around franchises as they seek to build a more streamlined and more officially maintained institutional memory around the franchise. As this develops, we should pay attention to how Disney manages not just *Apes* but the other franchises they have acquired. Who has the power to shape not only the future stories told within those franchise but the legacy and history of those properties? What peripheral individuals and industries are helping to shape those stories, whose voices are valued within those franchises, which stories are considered to be

important to the development of future products and therefore remain canon, and what this says about the future of licensed partnerships within franchise environments.

Chapter 5: "Know the Past, Own the Future:" Identifying and Recoding the Mythical Value of a Franchised Story

In a 'making of' documentary included on the home video release of *Creed* (2015) titled "Know the Past, Own the Future," athletes from various backgrounds discuss the impact the Rocky franchise has had on them. Each person, regardless of their race or gender, speaks about the way the story affected them in one way or another. One such athlete, female Mixed Martial Arts fighter Miesha Tate, explains what she saw in the story:

> This guy didn't have all the best tools, he didn't have all the best heavy bags, he didn't have all the best trainers, but he had the heart and the will power and the determination. It just was inspirational as a young girl to say, 'hey you know if you really put your mind to it, it doesn't matter what kind of obstacles you have in front of you, you can accomplish it.'[353]

This chapter argues that franchises are sites of contested popular mythology. That is, within the industrial processes through which franchised stories are managed and disseminated, that popular myths are created, perpetuated and condensed until they exist as a set of highly concentrated culturally pervasive symbols with dominant, but not fixed, meanings. In this way, the symbols distributed through myth present us with a reflection of a reality that is taken to be 'natural' or 'commonsense' and removes any specifics that would prove the myth untrue (the everyman overcomes obstacles through perseverance). Until this point, I have read franchises as spaces of collaborative creativity. The stories within them, I have argued, are the result of both creative and industrial circumstances and are managed over time by multiple individuals and shifting corporate and creative logics. This creates an environment in which stories and meaning within franchises are always in flux, being reimagined (or refurbished) with each iteration and repeated with various additions and subtractions, and within new contexts. We can think of the

[353] *Creed* [DVD]: Bonus Feature: Know the Past own the Future.

type of mythic discourse that circulates within franchises as a type of industry lore which is drawn from the text itself. Tim Havens uses the term industry lore as a way to conceptualize governing "institutionalized discourses" that circulate within the media industries.[354] He argues that industry lore, "is a way of talking and thinking about audiences and programming that permits television insiders to imagine connections between audience members and television programming from around the world."[355] Similarly, industry insiders communicate in mythical shorthand as a means of making the assumed evergreen and universal qualities of a specific franchise appear common sense, and function to render its value legible not only to audiences but across franchised production.

Tate's statement demonstrates the way the ongoing process of telling and retelling stories over time and within various industrial and cultural contexts generates narratives that exist beyond a singular text and carry symbolic power that circulates within culture. *Creed* itself is evidence of the ways that the supposed 'universal' themes of the Rocky myth, though often tied up with discourses of white masculinity, carry a cultural resonance that permeates demographic boundaries. Tate is drawing from one scene in particular, in which Rocky uses a slab of meat as a heavy bag. For Tate, this scene symbolized determination and overcoming obstacles. She internalized it and understood it as a myth that could apply to her circumstances as a woman in a patriarchal society trying to gain traction and recognition in a male-dominated sport. Stuart Hall refers to this as a process of "decoding," or the interpretive process that takes place in the mind of the audience as they make meaning of the "encoded" message presented to them.[356] As Hall

[354] Havens, *Black Television Travels*, 4.
[355] Havens, *Black Television Travels*, 4.
[356] Stuart Hall, "Encoding, Decoding in Television Discourse" CCCS paper, 1973,

suggests, "before this message can have an 'effect' (however defined), or satisfy a 'need' or be put to 'use,' it must first be perceived as a meaningful discourse and meaningfully decoded."[357] Tate engages in what Hall would consider a "negotiated reading." He argues the negotiated reading, "accords the privileged position to the dominant definition of events, whilst reserving the right to make a more negotiated application to 'local conditions…'"[358] The image of a man punching a slab of meat in a freezer, applied to Tate's "local conditions," took on a new (and potentially political) meaning. For Tate, it became a symbol of overcoming patriarchal oppression within the sports industry.

Roland Barthes considers myth to be "depoliticized speech."[359] Franchises, on one hand, could be seen as spaces in which this process of depoliticization is perpetuated. Stories are told and retold until their origins are barely perceptible and they are a set of legible 'universal' ideas that easily communicate hegemonic messages. As Hall argues of the consistent rigid structures of the western film genre, "from this deep-structured set of codes, extremely limited in its elements, a great number of surface strings and transformation were accomplished; for a time, in film and television, this deep-structure provided the taken-for-granted-story-of-all-stories, the paradigm action-narrative, the perfect myth."[360] However, as Hall points out, in the process of encoding messages, "they draw topics, treatments, agendas, events, personnel, images of the audience, 'definition of the situation' from other sources and other discursive formations within the wider socio-cultural and political structure of which they are a differentiated part."[361] As I have argued throughout this project, franchised stories are products of fraught and contested creative

[357] Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," 3.
[358] Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," 17.
[359] Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1972), 142.
[360]Hall, "Encoding, Decoding,"7.
[361]Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," 3.

authority which is negotiated between managers and creators. Furthermore, industrial needs often require franchised stories to be modernized or refurbished in ways that account for shifting cultural norms. Therefore, while franchises do generate a set of symbols which are often decontextualized from any historical significance and primed to support hegemonic norms as Hall would say, their meaning "cannot be fixed, single and unalterable, but must be capable of signifying different values depending on how and with what is its articulated."[362]

With that in mind, I offer the concept of "recoding" as a way to theorize the deliberate re-articulation of the mythic symbols that surround a given franchise's narrative around different bodies and within new contexts in ways that directly challenge the hegemonic reading of the myth. To be clear, while recoding might be applicable in other contexts, it is best understood, much like refurbishment, when applied within the context of franchised textual management. That is to say, the tendency of franchises to continue stories in ways that feed back into the overall franchised storyworld, including all its past iterations and future proliferation, offers a unique scenario in which a negotiated message is encoded into the source code of the franchise from which it originated. Ultimately, recoding at its purest form can be defined as a story that has been read and interpreted as meaningful by an underrepresented audience and has been reimagined by and for that audience. A recoded myth's symbols are articulated around new bodies and its mythic value applied to a new set of circumstances that work to complicate and complement previous readings of the myth itself.

This chapter draws from two case studies in order to consider, first, the industrial process through which a single story becomes popular mythology, and second, how those symbols might

[362]Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," 9.

be recoded back into the myth itself through those same franchising logics. The first section considers the 'Rambo myth' and how it was transformed from a story with strong ties to actual historical events, civil unrest and disenchantment in the wake of the Vietnam war, to becoming a set of largely mythic, easily transferable symbols that might be (and have been) reapplied to various global contexts. The second chapter shifts the case study to focus on the 'Rocky myth' and looks specifically at the way Ryan Coogler spearheaded an expansion of the Rocky story in which he and a group of African American filmmakers utilized the structures and storytelling logics of modern franchising to recode the myth in a way that reflected his own negotiated reading. Barthes has argued "…the best weapon against myth is perhaps to mythify it in its turn, and produce an *artificial myth*…[emphasis in orginal]."[363] Ultimately, this chapter strives to investigate the way in which the logics of media franchises generate mythical stories but also offer a means for reconstituting those myths in meaningful and subversive ways.

Barthes takes political to mean "describing the whole of human relations in their real, societal structures, in their power making worlds; one must above all give an active value to the prefix de-." In this sense, the franchising process can be seen as one that encourages a type of "depoliticized speech." The management of franchised stories is often the management of a franchise's history, as discussed in Chapter 2, in which the refurbishment process can be understood as one that attempts to actively rid a franchise of its political history. In a sense, franchises do indeed produce a set of easily translatable structures and stories and as Barthes argues of myth, "gives them a clarity that is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact." They are often at the center of political discourse; however, their politics lie in how they are read and the discourses they generate. As myths, franchises claim to present us with

[363] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 134.

'universal' themes and some form of generalizable 'truth.' They present us fictional stories as if they are fact and the proliferation of those 'truths' are negotiated, refined and then redistributed. In that sense, the first half of this chapter considers this depoliticization process, or the process through which franchises generate a mythic story that exists outside of the context of any single text or history but is still imbued with a kind of mythic meaning. How does a shirtless man in a bandana come to represent violence and retaliation or some 'universal' form of justice? Yet those symbols, by their very nature, are not static. They can be recoded to carry new meanings. Once recoded, these stories open spaces for creators from traditionally marginalized groups to participate in the future management of a franchise.

Myths and Franchising

Sarah Cardwell has argued, "…adaptations can be regarded as points on a continuum, as part of the extended development of a singular infinite meta-text: a valuable story or *myth* that is constantly growing and developing, being retold, reinterpreted and reassessed [emphasis added]."[364] Media franchising itself is a process of "growing and developing," in which stories are retold, not just in a singular progressive textual way, but in a perpetually proliferative way. Within a media franchise, the myth is being "retold" and "reinterpreted" among industry workers as they discuss the best ways to exploit the narrative across myriad media and over periods of time, even when no new text is actively being produced. Drawing again from Hall, [t]he consumption or reception of the television message is thus also itself a 'moment' of the production process in its larger sense…"[365] Therefore, the mythic discourse that circulates around a franchise does not exist in a vacuum, but rather, is connected to how each iteration of

[364] Sarah Cardwell *Adaptation Revisited: Television and The Classic Novel* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 25.
[365][365] Hall, "Encoding, Decoding," 93.

the franchise story is understood and interrupted. In this way, there is a mythic feedback loop (which, as Hall has argued is, by its very nature, a "distorted" one) in which a story is told and retold. A stand-alone story is reimagined as part of a media franchise, distributed, received, and that reception itself becomes part of the narrative that is then recirculated back into the franchise in various ways. This cycle of meaning between those managing the franchised story and those reading it contributes in large part to the general fluidity of the franchise mythification process.

Though I draw from other theories of myth, in reading Rambo, Rocky and other franchised stories as myth, I'm drawing primarily from Lévi-Strauss' understanding of myth as a form of language. Building off of Ferdinand de Saussure's theories of language, Lévi-Strauss argues that myths, like language, have both synchronic and diachronic meanings.[366] Myths can be understood in terms of their meaning in a specified time (synchronic meaning). For example, when analyzing the meaning of Rambo in the 1980s, it became common to think of the character as a symbolic representation of American nationality and jingoistic patriotism. However, a diachronic approach seeks to understand how a myth has developed over time. The earlier iterations of the Rambo myth are more about a broken and disenfranchised masculinity. Only later did the franchise come to be read as something more overtly patriotic, and the myth has shifted again and again with each retelling. If, as this chapter aims to do, we want to understand how popular myths can be reinterpreted through a system of modern franchising, we need to understand how those myths perpetuate themselves within that system in the first place. To do this, my approach favors a reading that considers how the myth has developed, considering it in its totality.

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[366] Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," *Journal of American Folklore*, 270, no. 68 (Winter 1955): 428-444.

Many scholars have engaged in projects that try to understand franchise stories across their various texts. Many who read franchises get caught up in one static understanding of a myth that is usually based on superficial and stylistic choices and attempt to apply each narrative iteration to current political situations. For example, Susan Jeffords reads Rambo as a representation of the hard-bodied masculinity that was popular during the 1980s. Ultimately, Jeffords concludes, "[t]he hard body has remained a theme that epitomizes the national imaginary that made the Reagan Revolution possible… continues, in the post-Reagan, post-cold war era, to find the national models of masculinity conveyed by some of Hollywood's most successful films."[367] While Jeffords' reading speaks to a specific national moment, it doesn't necessarily get at the value of Rambo beyond the hard-bodied era of masculinity nor how Rambo has traveled as a myth far beyond a U.S. context. Eric Greene offers perhaps one of the most compressive and in-depth readings of a franchise in his analysis of *Planet of the Apes* as racial allegory. Greene argues, "Planet of the Apes, and later its sequels, was about difference, fear, guilt, survival, violence, and reconciliation. And race."[368] Greene arrives at what could be understood as the mythic value of the *Apes* franchise. It is a universal story of fear, guilt, and survival. However, I would complicate Greene's assessment slightly by suggesting its racial allegory is only one application of that mythic value. While myth can be allegorical, reading it allegorically may lose sight of what makes it so proliferative, particularly in a franchised environment.

If we are to understand the persistence and cultural power of certain franchised stories, we must separate allegorical readings from the *mythical value* of the narrative. As Laurence

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[367] Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 192.
[368] Eric Greene, *Planet of the Apes as American Myth: Race, Politics*, *and Popular Culture* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), 3.

Coupe suggests in his book *Myth*, "we do an injustice to a myth if we read it as an explanation of the world: it can then be assessed as being once true but no longer true, and so dismissed in the present as a false remnant of the past."[369] Coupe considers allegorical readings to be diluted versions of a myth. Similarly, I argue that while iterations of a myth might be allegorical, at a given time, those readings are ephemeral as politics and filmmaking styles all fade from the public memory but the story remains. In other words, while Rambo may have been an allegory for Vietnam, more current iterations of Rambo have nothing to do with Vietnam, yet the character is still relevant, still identifiable, and it is imagined to still have value. Marina Warner has argued that modern myths "represent ways of making sense of universal matters…"[370] It is this universal way of making sense of the world that makes up the mythic value of a franchised story. In its simplest terms, the mythic value is the translated and relatable core of the story through which people might make sense of their world. While I have pointed to various reasons stories get retold within a franchised system, it is the universal belief in the mythic value of a narrative that drives the persistent retelling of certain stories most of all. As Lévi-Strauss suggests, the "…mythical value of the myth remains preserved, even through the worst translation."[371] Therefore, we can understand mythic value as the universal story from which the myth draws its power; the timeless truth that allows the myth to carry weight and meaning regardless of the context in which it's told.

To be clear, I am not endorsing the idea that there are 'universal truths' inherent in these stories by using the term 'mythic value.' For my purposes, in discussions of franchising, my use of this term is to point out that, within media franchises, these stories are imagined to have *value*

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[369] Laurence Coupe, *Myth* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 88.
[370] Marina Warner, *Six Myths of Our Time: Little Angels, Little Monsters, Beautiful Beasts*, and More (New York: Vintage, 1995), XIX.
[371] Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," 430.

because of the *mythic* qualities they possess or, put another way, their value is often communicated through the use of mythic language. Many franchises are built on preexisting mythic structures. Perhaps the most famous instance being Star Wars. George Lucas modeled the story on Joseph Campbell's 'Hero's Journey' model of mythic structures. [372] As I argued in the previous chapter, stories must be made legible in order for them to flow across departments. Part of that involves attempting to explain the mythic value to others. Considering Jeff Gomez's statement from the previous chapter about the failure of *The Crow* encapsulates this well, as he argues, "[t]hey chose to place the needs of their artists above the integrity of the *mythology* of the universe..." [emphasis added]. While I am not endorsing the idea that there is an actual 'universal truth' being communicated, franchise management encourages the discourse that supports the idea that there are universal truths within each story, or as I argue here, a *mythic value*.

Franchised myths are often built on top of preexisting mythologies. If a mythic structure is not self-evident, one can be applied during the early production process to facilitate the smooth transfer of ideas across departments. As an example, when attempting to coordinate the production design of *Solo: A Star Wars Story,* designer James Clyne and his team pulled from myths of the American Frontier and westward expansion in order to create landscapes and vehicle designs for young Han Solo's journey. Clyne argues that the frontier represents a universal (at least in an American context) set of ideals. He suggests, "it's the cowboy in us that isn't afraid to fail and wants to keep trying new things and exploring new avenues – which gets us into trouble sometimes – but it's a very American thing."[373] Here, the frontier myth is articulated around the Solo story early on in the production and informs it throughout. In an

[372] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Novato, Calif: New World Library, 2008).
[373] Phil Szostak, *Art of Solo: A Star Wars Story* (New York, NY: Harry N. Abrams, 2018), 13.

attempt to create an easily translatable set of themes and aesthetics, a mythic value was ascribed to the narrative. Han is a cowboy. Though Solo did not continue as its own spin-off franchise, it's likely if it had, this western motif would have separated it from the main Star Wars franchise, which has often been discussed more in terms of its fairytale qualities. While the mythic value is not representative of an actual 'universal truth,' it becomes an important aspect of progressing the franchise. In the franchise environment, the myth has utility. Barthes argues, "[m]yth does not deny things, on the contrary its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact." It is, essentially, the clarity offered through mythic speech that makes them useful as tools of franchise management.

Just as Solo was built on the bedrock of the myth of the American Frontier, the franchises discussed in this chapter are built on a set of enduring myths about masculinity. Rocky and Rambo are both heavily influenced by Stallone's interest in masculine myths. In the opening scene to the documentary that accompanies *The Expendables* (2010) Blu-ray titled, "Inferno: The Making of *The Expendables*," Sylvester Stallone talks about seeing a version of Hercules for the first time as a child:

> You would have these men, trying to overcome incredible odds even at the risk of their own life, in fact, they would willfully give their life for a higher ideal, and that kind of philosophy has followed me throughout my life.[374]

He goes on to talk about *The Expendables* more directly, "…though it's an action film, it has a lot of heart. At the core of it, it's about finding real value in your life, some sort of spiritual value." Many of Stallone's films are constructed as modern myths. They all have been read

[374] *The Expendables* [DVD], Bonus Feature: Inferno: The Making of the Expendables.

allegorically at various times and it is their easily communicated mythic value that makes the structures infinitely repeatable. Rocky and Rambo are no exception to Stallone's mythic approach. While I don't want to treat Rocky and Rambo as one central myth, it's useful for this analysis that they each are built on myths of hegemonic masculinity. In part, this is related to the star text of Sylvester Stallone, which heavily informed some of the early discourse around the movies, and likely helped shape how the mythic value of the texts was discussed. But the mythic value exists beyond Stallone's star text.

Masculine myths are often seen as contributing to hegemonic masculinity, white supremacy, misogynism, and patriarchal power. Figures like Stallone have been chastised and dismissed as wholly problematic representations of hegemonic masculinity. R.W. Connell argues hegemonic masculinity is the ascendancy of one group of men over another, "which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth."[375] Connell argues that cultural figures like Sylvester Stallone and Humphry Bogart are constructed and sustained by men who find their dominance over subordinated groups appealing and comforting. She calls these "fantasy figures" of masculinity."[376] This idea has perpetuated within media and cultural studies and often shapes the way these masculine figures are read. Mark Gerzon argues in his book *A Choice of Heroes: The Changing Faces of American Manhood*, that "men today consume certain images of manhood even though the world from which they derived may have disappeared – if it ever existed at all."[377] Mark Gallagher's more recent study of American action films comes to a similar

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[375] R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 184.
[376] Ibid.
[377] Mark Gerzon, *A Choice of Heroes: The Changing Face of American Manhood* (Boston: Replica Books, 1992), 5

conclusion; he argues of movies like *Black Hawk Down* and the *Perfect Storm*, "[w]hen bolstered by claims of authenticity, highly conventionalized visual representation of active masculinity can be promoted as gritty reality rather than stylized fantasy."[378]The idea that men compare themselves to these fantasy figures has often overshadowed conversations about the stories being told within those texts. The focus, like Gallagher's assessment, tends to be on stylistic choices, performance and moments of action and violence. But as Lévi-Strauss points out of the myth, "its substance does not lie in its style, its original music, or its syntax, but in the story which it tells."[379]

Studies that read the text as allegories prescribe a universal meaning on them that overlooks that these texts are often decoded in ways counter to the dominant messages within them (such as, in the introduction, the way Tate read Rocky as relevant to her struggle as a young woman in a patriarchal society). Recent studies of masculine figures have pointed to the ways they offer a set of messages that can be read in negotiated ways and in global contexts. Russell Meeuf has argued that John Wayne cannot be dismissed as "a nostalgic icon of right-wing manhood…"[380] He points to the ways Wayne has been traditionally only understood with the narrow context of his U.S. popularity. He argues that despite being " a star with mythic significance around the world who continues to resonate today,"[381] John Wayne "has been largely ignored and oversimplified within film and media studies, resulting in an incomplete vision of 1950s masculinity…"[382] Meeuf offers an example of how the feedback loop of

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[378] Mark Gallagher, *Action Figures: Men, Action Films, and Contemporary Adventure Narratives* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 43.
[379] Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," 430.
[380] Russell, Meeuf, *John Wayne's World: Transnational Masculinity in the Fifties* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 2.
[381] Meeuf, *John Wayne's World*, 4.
[382] Meeuf, John Wayne's World, 4.

franchised mythology operates on a global scale, and more importantly, how "mythic significance" (or mythic value) facilitates that process. Ian Huffer interviewed several British men about their relationship to Stallone and his body. He argues, "we need to be wary of simplistically equating the character of Rambo with an all-American nationalism." Ultimately, he concluded that Stallone and his associated characters are read in myriad and complex ways.[383]

The difference between a myth and a star text, however, is that a franchise myth is ongoing. In a franchised system, readings of Rambo can circulate and eventually make their way back into the franchise. Though John Wayne as a mythic figure can be read differently over time, Wayne is not himself able to react to those new interpretations. However, a franchised story is ongoing, not just in a figurative sense, as in the way Wayne's image is still discussed, but franchises continue to put out new texts with virtually no end. Therefore, the mythic value can be recoded and repurposed with the structures of modern franchising in meaningful ways. Derek Johnson has argued that we should understand "franchised production and reproduction of culture as a dynamic site where power, meaning, and value collide."[384] If we understand that franchised stories are more than their allegorical readings, we then understand franchising as a site of contested struggle over the mythic value of a franchised text.

Chris Holmlund, building on Jacques Lacan's work on the female masquerade, argues that "masculinity and femininity are both masquerades…"[385] Therefore while Stallone might be tied to these characters to an extent, as a masquerade, the character's mythic value is

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[383] Ian Huffer, " 'Who wouldn't want a body like that?'," in *The Ultimate Stallone Reader: Sylvester Stallone as Star, Icon, Auteur*, ed. Chris, Holmlund (London: Wallflower Press, 2014), 198.
[384] Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 65.
[385] Chris Holmlund, "Masculinity as Multiple Masquerade," in *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood cinema* eds. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (New York: Routledge, 1993), 216.

transferrable. From this perspective, recoding can be seen as a more powerful way of calling attention to the masquerade rendering its hegemonic potentials less potent. In this vein, taking a popular masculine myth and rearticulating its mythic value around a traditionally marginalized body weakens its hegemonic power by associating the myth with a non-dominant culture. As Jack Halberstam points out, "Masculinity becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body."[386]

Halberstam points to the power in recycling previous imagery and reclaiming it as queer.[387] Similarly, Nicole Fleetwood has pointed to the ways the meaning of iconography is in flux. As she suggests, "what might seem dominant or radical in one era can be incorporated into dominant messages at another historical moment, and vice versa."[388] With this in mind, we should look for the mythic value of popular iconography and pay attention to the ways that iconography can move from belonging to the dominant culture to becoming part of a radical or non-dominant message. Stallone, Rambo, and Rocky still stand as mythic figures that are embraced on a global scale. While it is essential to hold these texts accountable for their potentially problematic readings, equally important should be an analysis of their core mythic value which has facilitated their cultural persistence and global circulation. It is through this kind of analysis that we might then understand how these stories can be, and have been, mobilized in more progressive and inclusive ways.

Rocky and Rambo are interesting case studies precisely because they have often been seen as some of the clearest and most pervasive myths of hegemonic white masculinity. Connell

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[386] Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.
[387] Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure,* 19.
[388] Nicole R. Fleetwood, *On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 3.

has argued, "achieving hegemony may consist precisely in preventing alternatives gaining cultural definition and recognition as alternatives, confining them to ghettos, to privacy, to the unconsciousness."[389] Recoding a mainstream symbol of hegemonic white masculinity gives control to an alternative point of view and frees it from the "ghettos," "privacy," and "unconscious." In other words, when making *Creed*, Ryan Coogler was able to articulate the mythic value of the Rocky franchise in a way that decentered whiteness from the core myth. In this way, he recoded and rebooted it as productive space for African American filmmakers to tell distinctly African American stories for mainstream audiences. Before I discuss how exactly Coogler was able to do that with Rocky, I want to first take some time to consider how mythic value is translated as part of the franchise management process, focusing first on Rambo.

Biceps, Blade, Bandana: Mythologizing the Franchise

> His name was Rambo, and he was just some kid for all anybody knew, standing by the pump of a gas station at the outskirts of Madison, Kentucky. He had a long heavy beard, and his hair was hanging down over his ears to his neck, and he had his hand out trying to thumb a ride from a car that was stopped at the pump.[390]

These are the first lines of David Morrell's 1982 novel *First Blood*. Morrell's Rambo is presented as a kid, unimposing but disheveled looking, on the side of the highway sipping a coke. Morrell has said the character was inspired by seeing news footage of Vietnam juxtaposed with civil unrest in the United States during the summer of 1968.[391] In what he thought of as "a loose allegory," he wanted his character to "represent the disaffected." Morrell's Rambo is "embittered by civilian indifference and sometimes hostility towards the sacrifice he has made for his country…", as Morrell suggests in the forward to recent editions of the novel.[392] Already

[389]Connell, Gender and Power, 186.
[390] David Morrell, *First Blood* (New York: Warner Books, 2000), 3.
[391] Morrell, *First Blood*, vii.
[392] Morell, First Blood, ix.

Morrel points to a mythic value in the character, discussing the way it represented a certain group of people. At that time, the character was tied directly to the aftermath of Vietnam. Since that time, the character has moved from a single book to a set of films and then a broader media franchise. In that process, Rambo has shed the specifics of this allegory and became a myth which could be, and has been, applied to various contexts.

Ten years after the release of the book, *First Blood* was turned into a film starring Sylvester Stallone as Rambo. The film follows the story of a Vietnam vet who journeys to a small town in the Pacific Northwest to find an old war buddy, only to discover that he has died of cancer. While Rambo is walking through town, he is harassed by a local sheriff who arrests him for vagrancy. Eventually, the harassment from the officers at the precinct trigger an episode of post-traumatic stress which sends Rambo into a violent rampage. Rambo is chased into the woods where he is hunted by the local police, and then later by the national guard. Rambo, a trained military veteran, uses his unique skill set to expertly evade and incapacitate the people pursuing him. Eventually, Rambo's commanding officer, Col. Trautman, comes to talk Rambo down. Once Rambo has laid waste to much of the town and comes close to killing the Sherriff, Trautman eventually gets Rambo to surrender, but not before Rambo breaks down into tears and gives an impassioned speech about how lonely he is.

The first Rambo film and the book set up a character that is representative of a disenfranchised group of people. From the very first time we meet Rambo in the movie, while he's not all that different than the character described by Morrell, Stallone brings an unassuming presence to the character and is in many ways a much more sympathetic version than depicted in the book. We like the Rambo in the movie, perhaps a bit more than we like the character described in the opening lines to the book. In a reassessment of the film *First Blood* (1982) after

its 2018 4K rerelease, Andy Crump wrote in the *Hollywood Reporter* that when you think of Rambo, "[y]ou think first of brawn. You think of badassery. You don't, most likely, think of bitterness, or bleakness, or the unknowable and crippling sense of isolation too many soldiers experience on returning to civilian life after serving in combat."[393] He notes that this is, in part, a result of the success of sequels. He suggests that taken on its own, "*First Blood* isn't about a beefy rebel kicking indiscriminate ass. It's about a man bereft of everything, right down to his dignity, by the government he trained to serve."

Indeed, it wasn't until the second film that Rambo becomes more widely associated with over the top action and violence. In *First Blood Pt. 2*. we see Rambo as a true master of war as he takes on both Vietnamese and Russian forces and makes his way through the jungle to rescue forgotten Vietnam prisoners of war. While in the first film Rambo's feeling of being abandoned by his country is more of an abstract idea, linked to the aftermath of the Vietnam war, in *First Blood Pt. 2* we see Rambo literally abandoned by his country. When he returns to a rendezvous point with a POW in hand after what was only supposed to be a reconnaissance mission, he realizes the mission was just for show. The U.S. government had no intention of saving POWs. Once they see he had a POW in hand, the leader of the mission orders the mission to be aborted. Rambo, who just fought his way to the meeting point, stands with a POW over his shoulder in the middle of a rice paddy as a helicopter, almost an arm's reach away, turns around and leaves him to be captured. While his vengeance in *First Blood* was misguided and largely the result of severe post-traumatic stress, in the sequel Rambo's actions are more justified within the context

[393] Andy Crump, "When 'Rambo' Was a (Relatively) Grounded Character Study," *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 17, 2018, www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/why-rambo-is-an-oscar-movie-compared-sequels-1162195.

of the story. Rambo has a noble agenda; he wants to save men who have been left behind. He becomes more of a symbol than an actual person. As Barthes argues, "the function of myth is to empty reality."[394] Though still connected to the Vietnam war, the second film begins to strip the myth of its basis in actual circumstances. The story sees Rambo take the war into his own hands in one of the most violent action films of the time or as *Variety* called the film "one mounting fireball."[395] In a sense, the second film laid bare the mythic value of Rambo, a mythic value that would help turn the film into a more exploitable franchise.

This simplification was largely tied to the context within which the movie was produced. *First Blood Pt. 2* was directed by George P. Cosmatos, a Greco-Italian filmmaker, who, with the help of co-writers Stallone and James Cameron, transformed the character into a modern-day cross between a classic American cowboy and a Greek hero. As Cosmatos since has argued, "when I made the movie, I didn't see it has a political movie, I saw it as an action movie."[396] Paul Smith has argued of Clint Eastwood that his masculine persona was constructed through the lens of Italian filmmaker Sergio Leone who reimagined the western hero, "as a kind of ritualized, stylized and heavily gestured masculinity."[397] In essence, through Eastwood, Leone exaggerated the image of the American cowboy into a more straightforward type of American masculinity that could be quickly understood by global audiences. Similarly, Cosmatos transforms Rambo from a disillusioned everyman to an exaggerated American action hero. As Stallone has said, George [Cosmatos] filmed a Rambo character who is a bit more flamboyant…now we see what he was born to do.[398] Here Stallone implies that in some ways First Blood Pt. 2 revealed some

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[394]Barthes, *Mythologies*, 142.
[395]Variety Staff, review of *First Blood Part II* directed George P. Cosmato, *Variety*, May 22, 1985, https://variety.com/1984/film/reviews/rambo-first-blood-part-ii-1200426492/.
[396] "Do We Get to Win This Time," Rambo: First Blood Pt. 2, Bonus Feature.
[397] Paul Smith, *Clint Eastwood: A Cultural Production* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1993), 10.
[398] "Do We Get to Win this Time."

central truth or authenticity in the character. If the mention of the name Rambo conjures images of a bare-chested, chiseled Stallone draped in a bandolier wielding a gun running away from a fiery explosion it is most certainly *First Blood Pt. 2* that is responsible for creating and popularizing that imagery. But it is the discourse around the film facilitated through the franchising process that this mythic value is negotiated and managed into a set of 'truths' about what the character 'is.'

As we follow the development of the series, it becomes clear that the Rambo myth was not the product of any single entry in the franchise, rather the mythology was built through the discourses produced through the production and release of each entry in the franchise. The second film reworked the character to fit within a modern action blockbuster format. The 1980s were a time of what Justin Wyatt has called "high concept filmmaking." He argues, "high concept can be considered as a form of differentiated product within the mainstream film industry."[399] In part, high concept filmmaking of the 1980s, argues Wyatt, emphasized a film's style and overall marketability. In this way, the mythic value can be seen as closely tied to the marketability of the movie, as they both are imagined to be easily understood and distributable aspects of a story. As Wyatt argues, "the concept must also be marketable in two significant ways: through the initial "pitch" for the project, and through the marketing, the "pitch" to the public."[400] While Wyatt is talking about the story specifically, I would suggest that streamlining the narrative so that it is easily communicated via a pitch inherently draws out the story's mythic qualities. In other words, the complex elements of *First Blood* were set aside to draw out the more marketable and hegemonic qualities of the character which, in turn, fed the myth: noble

[399]Justin Wyatt, *High Concept: Movies and Marketing in Hollywood*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 7.
[400] Wyatt, *High Concept*, 8.

man fights evil bureaucracy. The reality of a man grappling with the complexities of a lost war are replaced with a fantasy: one man wins the war for everyone.

Through the logics of high concept marketability, the disenfranchised army vet was transformed into a more easily marketable set of symbols and logos. For example, Rambo's body became increasingly important to the marketing of the movie. The poster for *First Blood Part 2* depicted Rambo without a shirt, wielding a rocket launcher. Even if you didn't see the movie at the time, the poster likely helped generate an idea of what the Rambo myth was in the public mind. If the mythic value of Rambo is imagined to be tied to hard bodied masculinity, it is the second film that introduces that idea. Of the 69 kills Rambo racks up throughout the movie, the *LA Times* estimated that approximately 46 of them occur while he was entirely shirtless.[401] By contrast, the body count in the first movie was 1. Whereas in the first movie, the exposure of Rambo's body served a narrative purpose – to depict his scars from being tortured in Vietnam – in *First Blood Pt. 2* his body takes on new meaning. It is something to be marveled at and admired and something eye-catching for mass-market distribution. The poster featured the tagline: *No man, no law, no war can stop*. Ultimately, if the process of mythification began with *First Blood*, that process was intensified immensely as the single film was streamlined into a set of more easily marketable symbols. While the mythic value would remain in flux as the Rambo story was repeated, it is likely the image on the *Rambo: First Blood Pt 2* poster that is the most pervasive image of the character, a shirtless hard-bodied man wielding a rocket launcher, engulfed in flames. However, it's worth noting that the second poster isn't stylistically all that different from the poster for *First Blood*. The structure remains the same, Rambo, wielding a

[401] Hunter Stephenson, "Rambo Death Chart," *Slash Film*, January 23, 2008, https://www.slashfilm.com/rambo-death-chart/.

weapon. However, the new poster exaggerates everything: the gun is bigger, his shirt is off and he's now surrounded by fire.

Between *First Blood Pt. 2* and *First Blood Pt. 3,* there was a relatively short-lived Rambo animated television series called *Rambo: The Force of Freedom* (1986). This series imagined Rambo as part of a small team who traveled the globe preventing the fictional terrorist organization S.A.V.A.G.E from trying to take over small (mostly) fictional countries around the globe. While it may be odd to have this violent action hero who has PTSD become a Saturday morning cartoon, the series was comparatively less violent than other shows of the time such as *G.I. Joe.* Though it was one of the few series to utilize real guns and military vehicles, it was rare that anyone was shot or injured in the series. Head writer Mike Chain has pointed out that, "… in all 65 episodes of Rambo, no one ever gets hurt, let alone killed, with the exception of Rambo himself who breaks an arm falling out of an airplane in one episode."[402] Despite the show being largely non-violent leaning heavily on Rambo's ingenuity and physical ability over his use of excessive force or weapons, the popular understanding of Rambo as a character worked against the show. While the cartoon was short-lived, it was very popular. The series quickly became one of the highest-rated animated shows on television and spawned a lucrative toy line that continued well after the show had been canceled."[403] However, the show's popularity garnered some unwanted attention from parental groups who felt the show's source material was far too violent to provide the basis for a children's cartoon. ABC canceled the series fearing more bad publicity.

It was here, in its translation to a new medium, that Rambo became a set of easily recognizable and packageable symbols that could be rendered into various franchised spaces. In

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[402] Matthew Chernov , "10 Secrets From the Cast & Crew of the '80s Rambo Cartoon," *Topless Robot*, May 4, 2015, https://www.toplessrobot.com/2015/05/rambo_force_of_freedom_stallone_first_blood_morrel.php.
[403] Ibid.

essence, because they were unable to make Rambo violent and he couldn't have PTSD, they needed to exaggerate the qualities that made him an identifiable figure across all iterations. Perhaps the most obvious way they did this was through the way the character looked and sounded. Voice actor Neil Ross has said in interviews that, although the producers said they didn't want a Stallone impression, that is ultimately what he ended up doing for the character's voice. He recalls, "I went in and they said, 'Now, we don't want a Sylvester Stallone sound-alike.' So I said, 'Got it, no Stallone.' Then I started reading the copy in a Sylvester Stallone voice, just to make them laugh. And they jumped on the button and said, 'That's it! We love that!'"[404] Taken at face value, Ross' anecdote further highlights how Stallone's persona was intimately tied to the character. Though consciously the producers claimed not to want the character to sound like Stallone, it was the Stallone impression that was seen as fitting the character most closely.

The show took visual cues from the second film's depiction of Rambo more than the first one. Rambo was, again, almost always depicted without a shirt on. Even when he was in an airplane under no distress with his crew, they would be all clothed, and he would be shirtless. In terms of muscles, Rambo's pecks and biceps were swelled up beyond anything Stallone could have hoped to achieve in real life, more resembling a Mr. Olympia contestant than a lean, special forces operative. There was strong continuity in terms of the character's design between *First Blood Pt. 2* and the animated version of Rambo. The character was always in the same pants and combat boots he wore throughout the second film, and his outfit was complete with his signature

[404] Ibid.

red headband and a necklace around his neck, which was given to him by his love interest in the second movie, Co (Julia Nickerson), just before she died in his arms.

Rambo's key physical features were repeated throughout the series. The opening credits of the cartoon was essentially an edited down version of Rambo's gearing up montage from the beginning of *First Blood Pt. 2* in which Rambo gets ready to go on his missions by sharpening his knife, loading his gun and putting on his combat boots. In the cartoon, the gun is cut, but we see a close up of his bicep as he ties his shoes, then he sheathes his knife at his side and finally, puts on his red bandana. Many episodes reach a point where Rambo and his team are separated, and Rambo must complete the mission with no support. Each episode mirrored the structure of the second film, in which Rambo is required for a mission, things go awry and then Rambo saves the day. This getting ready sequence was often repeated at the mid-point of each episode just before Rambo would have to accomplish the end of a mission on his own. This introduced a Rambo formula that could be easily plugged into different situations, continuing the simplification of the story and making his proliferation easier to manage.

The show not only perpetuated some of the most popular aspects of the Rambo myth but expanded and strengthened the mythic value of the character. Rambo becomes more of a superhuman figure within the animated world of the cartoon. As Mike Chain argued, "[w]e could have Rambo jump out of an airplane, and float through the air and land on another plane." The episodes played up Rambo's moral altruism more so than in the movies, making the character a more acceptable role model for children. Each episode contained small lessons for children watching. These ranged from little bits of information about animals and nature, such as how piranhas only go into a feeding frenzy when they are starving and in shallow water, to more practical advice such as, "open spaces away from buildings and powerlines are the safest in an

earthquake."[405] Critiques of the U.S. government and real-word political conflict were downplayed. Rather, the series referenced Rambo as a moral figure whose 'powers' were used to fight evil, "anywhere and everywhere the S.A.V.A.G.E. forces of general Warhawk threaten the peace-loving people of the world." As the opening voice-over suggests, he is "the honor-bound protector of the innocent." Rambo missions often involved helping people in need, like in 'Guns of the Suez' when General Warhawk's men attack relief supply ships, Rambo's mission is to get the people the food they need, stopping Warhawk is secondary.[406]

The animated series transitioned Rambo into a set of symbols that could be easily disarticulated from any one specific cultural moment, at least in the mind of the children who watched the show. The series never once mentioned the Vietnam war, Rambo instead was a character of high moral value who wanted to use his strength and ability to help people fight oppression all over the world. Several episodes saw Rambo as a peacekeeper and humanitarian. When asked what it was about Rambo that made him so iconic, Mike Chain suggested:

> It's a strong morality tale. Rambo is kind of like the samurai heroes from Japanese films or the Kung-Fu heroes in Chinese films. He's a symbol. He's a lone man fighting for justice. He's a good guy, who's also an outcast, fighting against great odds all by himself. And that's something powerful that appeals to a lot of people. It gives you the feeling that you can actually make a difference. And that's the thing about Rambo that made him work. He was brave, he was strong and he fought for right. And he made a difference.[407]

Lest we think the animated series was somehow unimportant to the trajectory of the main series of films, the third Rambo film drew heavily from not only the narrative structures of the

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[405] *Rambo: The Force of Freedom,* episode 43, "Attack on El Dorado," aired November 12, 1986, ABC; Episode 18, "Disaster in Delgado," aired October 8, 1986, ABC.

[406] Episode 15, "Guns over the Suez," aired September 26, 1986, ABC

[407] Chernov, "10 Secrets…"

animated series but also continued some of the more humanitarian traits that had been articulated around the mythic character.

One could easily read *First Blood Pt. 3* as supporting the U.S.' Cold War agenda of the 1980s. In the late '80s, the U.S. supported Afghan rebels as they fought for liberation from the Russians. Rambo eventually ends up identifying with the Afghan people. When talking with his local guide as he takes him through the desert, the guide tells a story about how many people have tried to take over the country and that each has failed. He asked Rambo, do you know what this means? And Rambo replies, "it means you guys don't take any shit." Later on, when Rambo asks a group of soldiers for aid, they tell him a tragic story about why they fight. He tells Rambo that they are fighting for their family because they as soldiers "are already dead." Rambo is almost brought to tears by the story. Even Trautman, who throughout the series has come to embody the politics of the U.S. military, tells the Russian commander that the Afghan people will never stop fighting. He tells him, "[w]e've already had our Vietnam, we lost, now you have yours." In the end, it is the Afghan soldiers that save Rambo and Trautman, and the movie ends with the words: "This film is dedicated to the gallant people of Afghanistan." The Rambo myth, much like Rambo himself, is empowered by not any specific political moment, but rather Rambo is a symbol of resistance and strength in the face of overwhelming oppression. Rambo is not inherently a myth of American nationality, or a myth about hegemonic masculinity, though the myth has certainly been used to further those ideological perspectives. Once we understand that, we can more easily understand how myth can be transformed and applied to myriad contexts and situations.

Several decades passed before the Rambo myth was revisited. The fourth Rambo film worked to reinforce the universal mythic value of the character shedding its U.S. hard-bodied

context and instead mobilizing the character as a global symbol of freedom and resistance. *Rambo* (2008) opens with actual news footage of mass genocide and civil war in the war-torn country of Myanmar. The footage is hard to watch and likely was jarring to an audience expecting a throwback 1980s nostalgia trip. In the director's commentary, Stallone discusses his choice to open with the actual news footage:

> I really wanted to start this movie off with being in Burma and trying to educate the audience about the dilemma of the Burmese people which has been pretty well guarded because of money paid to lobbyists and publicity firms in Washington DC to kind of keep a lid on this. I thought it was important to let people know this is not a fantasy film.[408]

Stallone utilized the story to draw more national attention to the Burmese crisis. He made clear in the commentary and promotion for the movie that he intended for the film to spur some kind of global action that would stop the atrocities. The movie takes significant time to position the Myanmar police force as ruthless. Immediately following the video montage, the movie depicts soldiers marching villagers into rice paddies, they throw land mines into the field and make the villagers walk from one end to the other while taking bets on who blows up first. The Karen rebels, on the other hand, are positioned as sympathetic and much like the Afghan soldiers in the third film, as noble warriors. In the final battle scene, Rambo is shot and it appears that for the first time in all the films he might lose. He continues to fight, but the soldiers are winning. When things look bleakest, a small band of rebels emerge from the jungle and push back the soldiers. It is at this moment that Rambo seems newly energized. It is the rebels that save Rambo and give him a reason to keep on going, Rambo draws his power from their determination and their hope. He stands up and starts fighting back harder.

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[408] *Rambo,* Sylvester Stallone, Audio Commentary.

The story perfectly conforms to the fully realized Rambo myth as it has developed. What we see in *Rambo* is a character unencumbered by U.S. politics. Much like the Rambo in the animated series and the *Rambo in First Blood Pt. 3*, Rambo becomes a symbol of hope for a new group of people. In the fourth film, we see Rambo, perhaps for the first time in all his iterations, choosing to fight entirely on his own, choosing to use his gifts for his own purposes on his own terms. As he tells a band of mercenaries who he convinces to join his cause, "die for something or live for nothing." It's telling that, at that moment, he chooses to fight for a group of people unrelated to the current American political landscape. Though Stallone wrote and directed the film, he also incorporated Karen rebels and freedom fighters directly into the production, giving those who the story was about at least some agency in how their story was being told.

The movie was an inspiration to the Karen rebels still fighting in (then) Burma. Shortly after the release of Rambo, *The Telegraph* reported that the Burmese government had banned the film because it was being used as propaganda for freedom fighters who apparently were using the film's tag line "live for nothing or die for something" as a rallying cry. One freedom fighter is quoted as saying, "I like the movie very much because Rambo fought against Myanmar soldiers."[409] DVD copies of the movie became illegal to sell and distribute in Myanmar, with many shop keepers risking going to jail for up to seven years if they're caught with it. Andrew Selth has pointed out that the film quickly became, "popular with Karen insurgents based along the Thai–Burma border, many of whom idolized Rambo even before Stallone's latest film."[410] Selth argues that movies like *Rambo*, though made for entertainment, actually have a real impact

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[409]Thomas Bell, "Banned Rambo Film Hot Property in Burma," *The Telegraph*, February, 18 2008, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1579082/Banned-Rambo-film-hot-property-in-Burma.html

[410] Andrew Selth, "Burma, Hollywood and the Politics of Entertainment," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Culture* 22, no. 3 (June 2009): 330.

on global perceptions of the Burmese conflict. He suggests, "whether or not they are intended to convey a specific political message, all movies about Burma are a kind of propaganda and need to be viewed as such."[411] Selth points to the way *Rambo,* while drawing attention to the conflict, risks oversimplifying the conflict to dramatize the events. He points to one line of dialogue between Rambo and a missionary looking to hire him to bring supplies into the country. Rambo asks, "are you bringing any guns with you?" when the reply is "of course, not" Rambo responds, "then you're not changing anything." Selth suggests, "[t]he only way to improve the situation in Burma, Stallone's film is clearly saying, is to overthrow the regime by force."[412]

That said, though the movie is incredibly violent, the Karen rebels had admired Rambo long before Stallone reworked the story to fit their specific situation suggesting they were already attuned to its mythic value. Taken into context with the rest of the franchise, Rambo's kinship with the Karen rebels and their affinity for the character likely goes deeper than just a symbol of violence. Selth himself argues, "Rambo is such a gross caricature of the violence being perpetrated against the civilian population that few will see it as a convincing picture of contemporary Burma."[413] Similarly, the Karen people likely understand the film is a dramatization. Considering the myth more broadly, the violence within the movie is more a symbol of action (be it violent or non-violent) in the face of apathy. In fact, Stallone himself is an outspoken anti-gun advocate, suggesting that Stallone sees the violence in his movies as mythic and symbolic, rather than supportive of some a specific political view. [414] However, Selth's concerns draw attention to the potential shortcoming of a recoded myth that is not controlled by

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[411] Selth, "Burma," 322.
[412] Selth, "Burma," 329.
[413] Selth, "Burma," 329.
[414] Asawin Suebsaeng, "Rambo Hates Guns: How Sylvester Stallone Became the Most Anti-Gun Celeb in Hollywood," *Daily Beast*, August 14, 2014, https://www.thedailybeast.com/rambo-hates-guns-how-sylvester-stallone-became-the-most-anti-gun-celeb-in-hollywood

those seeking to mobilize its mythic power. It would be much more meaningful and likely nuanced if the Karen rebels were more directly involved in determining how Rambo was applied to their situation, much like African American storytellers were able to do with the Rocky myth.

"From Our Point of View": The Recoded Myth

In May of 2019, it was reported that Bollywood action star Tiger Shroff would be starring in an Indian version of *Rambo*. The actor claimed he had been a Stallone fan since he was a kid and jumped at the chance to play the classic character.[415] Director Siddharth Anand said of the project, "Rambo is primarily known for its action, but I can promise you that in my film, the story will resonate too with our audience. It's a story that needs to be told, given the present political dynamics in the country."[416] The poster for the movie reveals Shroff, shirtless, with scars across his brawny chest. Around his head, he wears a bandanna, this time black instead of red. At a casual glance, this could be a young Stallone. He even has the long shaggy haircut Stallone had throughout the series. Shroff, an action star in his own right, has a lean athletic body that makes visible his muscles throughout his torso and arms – except for those hidden behind his M-60 machine gun. Behind him, we see helicopters and tanks as Shroff fires his weapon at an unseen enemy off the edge of the poster. The only thing missing from the poster is Rambo's iconic blade, but the bandana and biceps are on full display. Anand's statement suggests the Rambo myth will be applied to current political situations within India. He believes it's an important story for the country to hear at this point in time. Rambo's mythic value, his aggressive and honor driven brand of retaliation will be taken up by an entirely different country,

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[415]Nayandeep Rakshit, "Tiger Shroff Planning to Take the Hollywood Route with Rambo Remake?," *Pinkvilla*, May 21, 2019, https://www.pinkvilla.com/entertainment/exclusives/exclusive-tiger-shroff-planning-take-hollywood-route-rambo-remake-451581.

[416] FP Staff, "Tiger Shroff's Hindi adaptation of Sylvester Stallone's Rambo to release on 2 October2020," *First Post,* May 17, 2019, https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/tiger-shroffs-hindi-adaptation-of-sylvester-stallones-rambo-to-a release-on-2-october-2020-6648781.html .

in an entirely different entrainment industry and applied to a new set of political circumstances; it's mythic value recoded.

Creed (2015) recodes another Stallone myth, transforming the Rocky franchise into a story about a decidedly African American experience. The movie marked the first time since the orginal film Stallone had stepped away from the franchise and allowed a new writer and director to have control over the series. Ryan Coogler, fresh out of film school, approached Stallone looking to make a movie about the son of Apollo Creed, Rocky's competitor turned friend. As Coogler tells it, the story meant a lot to him as he and his father watched the Rocky movies growing up. "Before I had a big game he would make me watch it on VHS," remembers Coogler.[417] When his father became sick, the Rocky story took on new relevance, and he had an idea to continue the franchise in a new direction. As Coogler told *Variety* before the movie came out, "I wanted to see my dad's hero go through something similar to what we were going through."[418] Coogler wanted to take his negotiated reading of the mythic value of the Rocky story and apply it to situations that were personal to him. Havens argues that industry lore is "not monolithic." [419] He suggests, "different firms and executives compete to shape industry lore in ways that benefit them and their organizations."[420] Similarly, industry workers like Coogler can reshape the mythic value of a franchise by attempting to retell the story from which it is drawn.

The Rocky story is somewhat more ubiquitous than Rambo. The series has managed to stay within the cultural zeitgeist for the past 40 years, releasing at least one installment every decade. The saga follows Rocky, an unremarkable boxer from Philadelphia who gets the

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[417] Creed [DVD]: Bonus Feature: Know the Past own the Future.
[418] Ramin Setoodeh, "Why 'Creed' Was Sylvester Stallone's Toughest Role," *Variety*, January, 5, 2016, https://variety.com/2016/film/news/creed-sylvester-stallone-oscars-rocky-1201671457/
[419] Havens, *Black Television Travels*, 4.
[420] Havens, *Black Television Travels*, 4.

opportunity to fight the heavyweight champion of the world, Apollo Creed. Though he holds his own against the boxer, he loses the fight but ultimately garners the respect of the crowd. Each film in the series sees Rocky take on new challenges both inside and outside of the ring, but the core story remains the same; Rocky finds the strength within himself (and often with the help of his friends and family) to push forward through physical and emotional obstacles to defeat fighters that are objectively better than him. Throughout the films, he deals with the trappings of fame and fortune, and then the slow decline from popularity, until finally, in the final pre-*Creed* Rocky story, the character is largely back where he started, living in a small working-class community in Philadelphia, aimless and alone. Each new installment follows a similar structure. Rocky is challenged by a fighter who seems superior to him, Rocky fumbles until he finds some inner strength, there are some training montages, and then the last 10-20 minutes of the movie is a highly dramatized boxing match in which Rocky is brutally beaten, but to the astonishment of his opponent continues to get up and fight.

Taken on their own, each film can be read allegorically in a variety of ways. As Clay Motley has argued of the original film:

> Critics curious over the surprise success of the Rocky conjectured that it was simply a fairytale of the American Dream or sentimental Bicentennial pap; or perhaps it was an important statement about the neglected American working class, or a sign of growing "ethnic" American pride; maybe it was a dangerously racist film, or a portend of a vigorous and violent "New Right."[421]

Motley offers his own reading, connecting the story to the antimodernist movement of the 1890s, suggesting, "[i]n the face of such unsettling modernizing forces, both cultures – and

[421]Clay Motley, "Fighting for Manhood: 'Rocky' and Turn-of-the-Century Antimodernism," *Film & History* 35, no. 2 (September 2005): 60.

particularly the men of those cultures – sought "authentic" experiences that would reaffirm their own and the nation's sense of greatness."[422] Ultimately he argues, "Rocky is an example of Americans seeking what was "genuine," "manly" and "true" in a society perceiving itself as losing its original purpose, toughness, and authenticity."[423] While Motley's reading offers some insight into why the movie may have resonated with 1970s audiences, it is only of the original film and doesn't necessarily capture the reason the story has persisted over the past several decades.

Rocky's dominant mythic value as it's understood within the industry is probably best articulated by the person who has told and retold the story over the past forty years, Stallone himself. The mythic value as its creator sees it is encapsulated in the sixth film in the series *Rocky Balboa* (2006), Stallone's final time directing and writing the character. Stallone, through Rocky, states what he sees as the franchise's value bluntly in a monologue to his son:

> The world ain't all sunshine and rainbows. It's a very mean and nasty place, and I don't care how tough you are it will beat you to your knees and keep you there permanently if you let it. You, me, or nobody is gonna hit as hard as life. But it ain't about how hard ya hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward.

Perpetuating the idea that this myth has 'universal' appeal, the speech has become a popular internet meme. It has been widely shared online in various forms and has been transformed into various pieces of fan art that are distributed through commerce sites like *Etsy*. It crystallizes the Rocky mythos into an easily distributed package that has come to represent, for better or worse, personal strength and motivation in times of hardship and trouble. Much like Rambo's tag line "live for nothing or die for something" became the rallying cry for the Burmese

[422] Motley, "Fighting for Manhood," 60.
[423] Motley, "Fighting for Manhood," 60.

rebels, over the years Rocky has become a symbol of courage and persistence against the mounting pressures of everyday life.

Coogler had understood and internalized that mythic value when he was young. He recalls his relationship to the movie:

> I love those movies because I watched them with my Dad. They could make him cry. And Rocky meant something to him… And it was always interesting because *Rocky II* was his favorite and we would watch Rocky beat the black guy up… My Dad was cheering for Rocky. That kind of was a lesson to how powerful film is and how it can make you root for whoever you're spending time with.[424]

While there are several ways one could read the Rocky myth, Coogler tapped into something else going on within the story. The image of a black man cheering as another black man is getting beaten up suggests an affective relationship to the story that goes beyond one's racial identity. Coogler recognized there was a power to having ownership over a story like that. What Coogler has articulated is the value of the myth. Not simply the financial value, which justifies the continued proliferation of the franchise, or the communicative value, which facilitates the management of the story across departments, but a *cultural* value that can generate an emotional connection. Coogler is expressing a moment in which the language of the Rocky myth became apparent to him, a language he could later use to facilitate his own proliferation of the Rocky story. The core myth reapplied to new scenarios that more closely resembled Coogler's life and could be equally "powerful." As Coogler goes onto say, "It's just American Myth. That's why Rocky has a statue. They give Greek Gods statues, and that's what Sly was tapping into was myth…"

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[424] Ryan Coogler, "Ryan Coogler: Extended Interview," interview by Van Jones, *CNN*, April 6, 2018, video, 10:25, https://www.cnn.com/videos/entertainment/2018/04/06/van-jones-ryan-coogler-intv-full.cnn.

Though Stallone was hesitant to give his blessing to the project at first. After seeing Coogler's movie *Fruitvale Station* (2013), which told the story of Oscar Grant, a young black man who was shot by a police officer in 2009, Stallone changed his mind. He argued:

> After seeing all this fresh talent and watching the heart and soul oozing off the screen, I would have been a grand fool not to listen to this young director. He had the magical touch. It's not something you can purchase or acquire, or even learn, it's a connection to the pulse of humanity… it's the ability to reach off the screen and metaphysically grasp the audience by the heart and not let go until they have been taken on a special journey.[425]

It would seem that Stallone saw the same level of mythic storytelling he brought to the Rocky and Rambo stories and therefore felt comfortable handing over the reins to this relatively unknown filmmaker. He also likely saw it as a refurbishment opportunity to make the property more modern, therefore appealing to new audiences.

The story Coogler pitched Stallone was one that continued the Rocky saga, but spun it off in a new direction, with a young Black protagonist. *Creed* follows the story of Adonis (Michael B. Jordan), Apollo's son born out of an extramarital affair. Apollo never got to meet Adonis as he died before he was born. In *Rocky IV* (1985), Apollo is killed during a boxing match with the Russian Ivan Drago. After his mother dies, Adonis is put in a foster home until Apollo's widowed wife, Mary Anne Creed (Phylicia Rashad) decides to take him in and raise him as her own. When he grows up, although he has a good job and security, Adonis longs to be a fighter. He spends his nights traveling to Mexico and entering into unsanctioned bar fights. Eventually, he quits his job in California and moves across the country to train with Rocky. His goal is to make it on his own, rather than go by the name Creed, so he fights under his mother's maiden

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[425] Sylvester Stallone, "Oscars Last Call: Sylvester Stallone On Towering Triumph Of 'Creed' Mates Ryan Coogler & Michael B. Jordan On 'Black Panther'," *Deadline*, February 13, 2019, https://deadline.com/2019/02/sylvester-stallone-black-panther-triumph-creed-ryan-coogler-michael-b-jordan-oscars-1202555021/

name. In Philadelphia, Adonis finds Rocky, living a solitary life, running a small Italian restaurant named after his late wife, Adrian. The two form a familial bond, and Rocky, after much convincing, decides to train Adonis. The movie follows his rise through the ranks until eventually, someone leaks his name to the press resulting in the opportunity to fight the heavyweight champion of the world. During Adonis' preparation for the fight, Rocky is diagnosed with cancer and refuses treatment. Eventually, Rocky agrees to treatment, as long as Adonis keeps training. In the end, Adonis loses the fight, much like Rocky lost to Apollo, but embraces his father's name and he and Rocky continue to fight Rocky's illness together.

The story of *Creed* embodies the mythic legacy of the Rocky series on many levels. First, and most obviously, the structure of the story follows the first – and really all – the Rocky films very closely. Adonis, like Rocky, is a relatively unknown boxer who pursues his career despite those closest to him telling him he should give up. One of the first scenes in Rocky is his coach Mickey asking, "Hey kid, you ever think of retiring?" When Rocky replies, "no," Mickey tells him to think about it. Similarly, in *Creed,* Adonis' mother and Rocky both try to tell him that he should not fight. His mother tells him, "I didn't take you in so you could go backwards." Similarly, Rocky asks him, "why would you want to pick a fighter's life when you don't have to?" The turning point occurs when Adonis gets the opportunity to fight the heavyweight champion purely out of luck. This is exactly how Rocky gets his chance in the original film. Apollo is simply looking for publicity. He's a showman and businessman. He sees value in taking on an average guy and giving him the chance to win the heavyweight championship title. Apollo picks Rocky mostly for his name, "The Italian Stallion." When Apollo's manager says he never heard of Rocky Balboa, Apollo replies, "Look, it's the name man, The Italian Stallion." Similarly, the only reason Adonis is given a chance at the title is that his name is Creed, as

promoters think people will pay to see the current heavyweight champion fight the son of the greatest boxer of all time (in this fictional universe). Though the specifics are different, the story beats align well.

Adonis' motivations and his drive are from the start tied to his childhood and his fear of abandonment, specifically his lack of a father figure. When we first meet Adonis, he is fighting in a juvenile facility brutally beating up a fellow teen who said something about his recently deceased mother. When Mary Ann Creed goes to adopt him she mentions how when his father died, it was hard for her. Adonis replies resentfully, "I ain't got no father." This theme is threaded throughout the movie. While some might see Rocky, in *Creed*, as a stand-in for Mickey, the two never seemed to have a father-son relationship in the original film. If anything, Mickey sees Rocky as a younger version of himself. He's living vicariously through Rocky's success. Rocky trusts Mickey and his wisdom, but they never reach the level of family. Adonis, on the other hand, affectionally refers to Rocky as "unc," short for uncle. He moves in with Rocky, he and his girlfriend Bianca (Tessa Thompson) share meals in Rocky's home and slowly develop what could be seen as a family unit. In one of the pivotal scenes, Rocky is refusing cancer treatment and Adonis is arguing with him. Rocky says to Adonis, "I'm to you just an old trainer, that's what brought us together. We're not a real family." Adonis is clearly hurt by the statement.

The forces that drive Adonis and Rocky, while at their core similar, seem to come from very different places. One of the most vital and heart-wrenching scenes in the Rocky movies comes just before the final act of the first movie. After walking through the convention center where he will fight Apollo, Rocky returns home and lies in bed with his girlfriend, Adrian. He reveals to her, "I can't beat him…who am I kidding I ain't even in the guy's league." Adrian

asks him what he's going to do. He replies, "…it really don't matter if I lose this fight, it really doesn't matter if this guy opens my head either. Cuz all I wanna do is go the distance. Nobody's ever gone the distance with Creed. And if I can go that distance, ya see, and that bell rings, ya know, and I'm still standin, I'm gonna know for the first time in my life, ya see, that I weren't just another bum from the neighborhood." This cements Rocky's motivation, to prove something to himself; that he matters and that his life has a purpose.

Though similar, Adonis' revelation in *Creed* is imbued with new meaning as it's articulated around a new character and associated with notions of the lasting emotional effects of being abandoned by a father figure at a young age. The theme of fatherhood comes full circle when Adonis finally reveals why he has subjected himself to this life, why he feels he needs to fight, what is it that makes him keep getting back up when his opponent keeps knocking him down. When Rocky threatens to stop the final fight so that Adonis doesn't get hurt, Adonis says, "No, Let me finish. I gotta prove it." When Rocky asks, "Prove what?" Adonis replies, "That I'm not a mistake." After a small pep-talk from Rocky, Adonis gets up, and the classic Rocky theme music starts. Adonis now carries with him the mythic value that once belonged to Rocky; he's fighting not to win but to prove something to himself. The movie seemed to resonate with minority audiences and did, "particularly well among African Americans and Latinos," as the *LA Times* reported after its debut.[426] As Ryan Coogler has argued, *Creed* is "very much a story about coping with an absentee father. You have people growing up with a lot of situations like that, especially for men, and young Black men, it means something."[427]

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[426] Tre'Vell Anderson, "'Creed' a Huge Hit in Philadelphia, and with Black and Latino Audiences," *Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 2015, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/cotown/la-et-ct-creed-philadelphia-black-latino-audiences-box-office-20151129-story.html.

[427] Ryan Coogler, "Director Ryan Coogler Talks Sylvester Stallone & Creed Inspiration," interview by Danielle, Robay, *Clevver News*, November 17, 2015, video, 1:55, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zOQvcAsbvZc.

Tessa Thompson echoes this sentiment. When talking about her and Michael B. Jordan's chemistry on set she discusses the way the movie allows for a presentation of Black love in a mainstream space, she says:

> I love that sort of normalizing of our love. Our love is universal, it looks like everyone else's love, but inside it, there's also specificity that has to do with undoing braids and cocoa butter, and silk wraps that we know and understand. So that when we go to the cinema we look at the images projected and we go, 'oh I know that, I've seen that. That sort of recognition I think, is deeply powerful.[428]

Thompson's comments highlight the ways *Creed* not only reimaged a myth but also acted as a vehicle through which Black experiences are inserted into mainstream discourse via known mythology while also drawing attention to their unique cultural individualities. Jamie Broadnax of the website *Black Girl Nerds* praised the film for Thompson's portrayal of Black femininity stating, "[h]er character is an independent career-driven woman and she also suffers from a disability which is sometimes rare to see in films with Black characters. I really appreciated that."[429] Rather than being a story made by Black filmmakers for Black audiences, or a refurbished story made by largely white producers for mass audiences, it is a story controlled by Black filmmakers and storytellers but not segregated from the mainstream.

While the Rocky franchise did have some merchandise associated with it, perhaps the most popular ancillary material generated by the franchise were the soundtracks. Aside from Bill Conti's memorable theme song "Gonna Fly Now" from the original, which plays when Rocky reaches his peak physical readiness before the big fight, many of the sequels' soundtracks became important aspects of the movie. "Eye of The Tiger," recorded by the rock band Survivor

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[428] Tessa Thompson, "Michael B. Jordan & Tessa Thompson Strive for Realistic Love," interview by Jacqueline Coley, *Fandango*, November 19 2018, video, 9:12, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1A-u_EN8_MY.
[429] Jamie Broadnax, "Creed The Movie: A Contender For Your Heart," *Black Girl Nerds* (blog), November 23, 2015, https://blackgirlnerds.com/creed-the-movie-a-contender-for-your-heart/.

for *Rocky III,* became perhaps even more iconic than the original theme, and *Rocky IV* contained several montages in addition to the standard training sequences featuring popular music from the 1980s. Ultimately, the music of the Rocky films has perhaps become some of the most culturally pervasive aspects of the myth. Coogler recognized this and put an equal focus into the soundtrack for *Creed*. He argued, "the music was a big focal point… 'Eye of the Tiger,' 'No Easy Way Out,' all those songs were a massive hit. And we embraced that. We recorded original songs for the movie."[430]

The resulting soundtrack was filled with prominent African American musicians, from Philadelphia rapper Meek Mill to popular artists like Donald Glover and Future. Discussing how he chose artists for the soundtrack to work with, composer and producer Ludwig Goransson said, "The first name that came to mind was obviously Meek Mill because we needed a voice from Philly. Meek's voice is just so aggressive. It really pokes out in a great way that I love so much. For me, that was an obvious choice for the big training montage." Using language like "authentic" and "obvious" Goransson is generating mythic discourse around the franchise that begins to disarticulate some of the hegemonic meaning from the core Rocky myth. He presents the choices as not marketing decisions but as being informed by the mythic value of the story.

The theme itself, called "Fighting Stronger," is a sweeping orchestral piece that blends modern production, hip hop, and Bill Conti's original score to create a brand new theme for Adonis, that, like Bill Conti's theme, comes to a peak during the final training sequence just before the big fight. Writing for the Hollywood Reporter, Todd McCarthy said, "[t]he score by Ludwig Goransson and a varied array of musical samples gives the score a very different feel

[430] Leila Cobo, "Will 'Creed' Song 'Fighting Stronger' Be the New 'Eye of the Tiger'?" Billboard, September 16, 2016, http://archive.is/GdhQ9.

from that of the *Rocky* sextet, although an echo of Bill Conti's famous theme floats through at one point."[431] Much like the film itself, the score recalls the original but never copies it. This was not an accident. Goransson says that they watched all the Rocky films and paid attention to the music. He says ultimately, "I wanted my music for *Creed* to be as original and legendary, I wanted it to impact people."[432] Goransson and Coogler's emphasis on the importance of the soundtrack emphasizes the way the recoding process reverberates throughout the entire franchise. It's not about a single film, but actually changing the way the mythic value of the franchise is communicated across all departments – African American culture becomes part of the myth, it becomes "obvious" and "authentic." The album started a trend which continued for *Creed II* thereby generating a reoccurring space within the *Rocky* franchise not only African American filmmakers but musicians.

Stories about how media is made are myths themselves. As John Caldwell argues, "[w]ar stories and against-all-odds allegories give to storytellers an earned mystique of technical mastery that is crucial for those who function as mentors in the industry's stratified labor caste system."[433] He continues, "[g]enesis *myths*, function less as celebrations of work than as celebrations of an originating moment and artistic pedigree" [emphasis added].[434] In many cases those war stories are not only used as career capital but feed back into the mythic value of the franchise itself. *Creed* also taps into the Rocky myth by mirroring the personal origins of the Rocky story. The legacy of the character is tied up in Stallone's actual life. The first film tells a

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[431] "'Creed': Film Review," *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 18, 2015, accessed July 12, 2019, https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/creed-film-review-840220.
[432] "From Childish Gambino to 'Creed': Producer Ludwig Goransson's Grand V…," interview with Ludwig Goransson, *Pigeons&Planes*, September 16, 2016, http://archive.is/BxT0c.
[433] John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*, (Durham, N.C: Duke University Press Books, 2008), 47.
[434] Ibid.

story that reflects Stallone's real-life situation leading up to the making of *Rocky*. Many stories reveal that Stallone was out of money, and Rocky was a last-ditch effort to make a living in the film industry. The story is very much his life, a young working-class guy from Philadelphia who just wants to prove himself. The movies continue to loosely reflect Stallone, albeit through the avatar of a far humbler version of himself. As Andrew Bujalski has astutely pointed out, through Rocky, Stallone, "has been in a remarkable position to shepherd himself through a shadow life, and to write large a fantastical autobiography of the man he might wish to have been."[435] At its core, the Rocky myth is not as grand or deeply political as the Rambo myth. If Rambo serves as a symbol of honor and forceful protest in the face of clear injustice on a grand scale, Rocky is a personal journey of self-actualization. It is the relationship between Stallone and Rocky's triumphs and missteps that, at its best, contributed to the way the Rocky myth resonated with many viewers from all backgrounds.

Coogler approached the movie from a similarly personal perspective. Adonis' path reflects Coogler's attempt to get the movie made. He approached Stallone several times before Stallone eventually came around. The persistence of Coogler is reflected in scenes that show Adonis approaching Rocky over and over until eventually, the retired champ can't ignore the passion and commitment Adonis has, much like *Fruitvale Station* made Stallone well aware of Coogler's potential to craft a story. Rocky's illness in the movie was inspired by Coogler's father's real-life battle with a degenerative muscular disease.

In an early scene in *Creed,* Adonis watches an old fight between his father and Rocky projected on a big screen. He stands up and begins to mirror Rocky's punches. As the fight

[435]Andrew Bujalski, "A Unified Theory of the "Rocky" Movies," *The New Yorker*, November 10, 2015, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/a-unified-theory-of-the-rocky-movies

continues the image of Rocky becomes projected perfectly onto Adonis as he trades punches with Apollo. The metaphor here is clear; Adonis is fighting the ghost of his father. However, this scene also works on another level. The scene is from Rocky II, the movie Coogler said was his father's favorite and the one that left an impression on Coogler, as he watched his father cheer for the white character over the Black character. Here we see Adonis mirroring Rocky's moves, but the scene takes on new meaning as he now fights his father. In the same way, Coogler learned the moves from Stallone, studied the mythic value of Rocky, and then recoded his own story on top of it to make something entirely his own. He draws directly from the industry lore that has circulated around the Rocky myth – that the story was the product of Stallone's struggle for legitimacy and success within the industry and in turn imbued his iteration of the Rocky story with his own mythic narrative of personal struggle and perseverance.

Though I have suggested allegorical readings overlook the mythic value of a franchised story, it would be useful to consider how Coogler's recoded myth complicates specific readings of the Rocky myth, specifically the role of Apollo Creed in the broader franchised mythology. Motley argues of the Creed character in the original Rocky, "Creed comes to symbolize a gilded American Dream, one that has lost its authentic, traditional meaning and is only used for crass commercialism, (ab)using the Bicentennial celebration as a marketing ploy."[436] In *Creed*, just before the final fight, Adonis is handed a gift from his mother. She gives him his father's red, white and blue shorts, part of Apollo's "commercial (ab)using" of American pride suggested in Motley's reading of the character. However, at this moment in the story, Adonis has shed any semblance of the "gilded" lifestyle represented by his father. He has given up his white collar job

[436] Motley, "Fighting for Manhood." 64.

on the west coast, moved into a small gritty apartment in Philadelphia and trained with the most authentic man of them all, Rocky Balboa. Motley suggests:

> Rocky's path to becoming a successful man is paved with rugged work, such as rising from bed before dawn, eating raw eggs, and running through sleepy city streets. He is reclaiming his sense of purpose and power through the training that will slough off his soft exterior, leaving only his virulent manhood.[437]

At this point in the movie, Adonis has accomplished this task. In that way, we could read *Creed* as a disarticulation of the hard "antimodernist" masculinity that Motley argues made the character so attractive to the 1970s audience from Rocky and a re-articulation of those qualities onto Adonis. This reading is most clear during the training sequences after Rocky's cancer diagnosis. As Rocky becomes smaller and weaker, Adonis becomes stronger and more virile. Stallone's masculine uniform, his "masquerade" comes undone and is dawned by Adonis.

Therefore, when Adonis takes his father's shorts just before that final match, they no longer carry the "crass commercialism" associated with Apollo, they are purified and authenticated through Adonis' "rugged work." The myth is now revised, the recoding complete. Now Coogler's father can watch the same myth without negotiating its reading; he can root for the Black man. As Coogler himself has said, "for *Creed* it was about taking a piece of this myth, this sports myth, this American myth and looking at it from our point of view."[438]Ultimately, Coogler took the structure and character of Rocky and repurposed it in ways that recoded its mythic value. *Creed* went on to be widely successful and critically acclaimed. It has since spawned its own franchise. The sequel *Creed II* (2018) was directed by another young African American filmmaker, Steven Caple Jr. and was co-written by writer Juel Taylor. These young

[437] Motley, "Fighting for Manhood." 64.
[438] Coogler, interview by Van Jones.

Black storytellers took ownership over the myth and continue to take it in new directions that build on the themes introduced in *Creed.*

Conclusion

While the industry and the structures of franchising facilitate the proliferation of myths, it is sometimes the mythic value that draws creatives to these narratives, and it is their mythic qualities that give them resonance and a kind of cultural power that can be wielded by both dominant and non-dominant groups within Hollywood. The mythic value of Rambo, Rocky, Star Wars, and other franchised narratives don't diminish with replication but grow more pervasive and become concentrated. The structure and value are often streamlined and the mythic core made more apparent through the process of repetition. When retelling a myth, especially decades later, producers must identify the most lasting and prescient aspects of that myth and then decide how to adjust them to fit into modern times.

I have argued that recoding is a process of mobilizing the mythic value of a text or set of texts in culturally influential and politically meaningful ways. Though truly recoded myths, ones completely controlled by those who the message is being remobilized for, are rare, there are degrees of recoding. These new iterations expand and deepen the mythology of their franchise while also reinforcing its mythic value. In a way, we might consider refurbishment and recoding to exist on a spectrum, on one end a purely crass corporate calculation aimed to cash in on trendy progressive politics, and on the other, a mythical reworking inspired and driven by a genuine affective connection to a story by an individual or group of individuals who have been marginalized within the narrative up until that point. It might be useful to think of the way many franchise expansions (including *Creed*) fall somewhere in between, corporately driven but created by people who genuinely believe in the remobilization of a certain story in a new

context. However, considering that commercial logics of franchised production are inescapable, it would be more productive and accurate to think about how most franchises are both extremes at once. For example, though *Creed* was presented as a recoding project by Coogler, there are those in the industry who saw this as a crass attempt to expand the franchise into a new, perhaps under-explored, market share. The recoding process involves more than simply inserting known characters and stories into a new context, but also systematically disarticulating the characters from some of the more hegemonic readings of them.

It's also important to recall the way creative authority is negotiated and distributed among various levels of industry workers. Each of these individuals has some power to recode the myth, but they can also reinforce it. Though there has yet to be a Star Wars film written or directed by a woman, Kathleen Kennedy and several of the other executives within Lucasfilm story group are women and people of color who have significant control over the direction of the franchise. As I have previously discussed, producers within a franchise environment possess a great deal of creative authority that they distribute according to their vision of the franchise. The stories that Kathleen Kennedy and her team have developed have brought people of color and women into more central roles within the franchises. In the same way that, Ryan Coogler took his affective relationship with the Rocky character and transferred some of the mythic value from Rocky onto Adonis, Kennedy has developed Rey in a way that embraces elements of both Luke and Han, both mythic heroes in their own right. Rey has the mechanical skill and the well-earned survivalist attitude of Han Solo, while also containing much of the naive optimism and mythic hero qualities that defined Luke. In both cases, Adonis and Rey aren’t simply tired carbon copies of their predecessors, but their race and gender allow them to embody new meaning. Though they’re still imbued with the same ‘universal’ mythic qualities of their past iterations, they take

on new value drawn from their racial or gendered specificity. Kate Aguilar has argued that, "*Creed* is so impactful for the genre because it reminds America of how vital Black men are *and* have been to the world of boxing by connecting Donny [Adonis] to Apollo and both to the American landscape."[439] She suggests.

> What *Creed* does so subtly and thus so deftly is remind an American audience that every Black man has to fight; whether rich or poor, straight or gay, alone or a part of a community, on some level each struggles for social acceptance and to redefine himself in a society that has defined its fears through him. Each Black man spars with the paternalistic and racial language of the nation-state.[440]

It is the articulation of mythic value around historically marginalized bodies that allow these franchised stories to be unique and powerful spaces for empowerment, for it's through the myth that these representations are kept from the margins and thrust into the mainstream discourse, empowered through the very mythic structure that subordinated them.

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[439] Kate Aguilar, "Sparring with Cinematic 'Truth': Race, Boxing, and Place in the Movie Creed (2015)," *Sport in American History* (blog), January 7, 2016, https://ussporthistory.com/2016/01/07/sparring-with-cinematic-truth-race-boxing-and-place-in-the-movie-creed-2015/

[440] Aguilar, "Sparring with Cinematic 'Truth.'

Conclusion

In his review of the (then) latest entry in the *Star Wars* franchise, *Solo: A Star Wars Story*, Anthony Lane suggested, "[v]iewers may experience a warm trickle of nostalgia as they hear John Williams' original score, rising softly to greet the Millennium Falcon—dusty and battered, and almost certainly requiring new brake pads, but still the real deal,"[441] referring to a scene in the movie in which Han Solo first encounters his iconic ship for the first time in the prequel film. Lane goes on to point out that this scene was far from original, lamenting, "[i]f only the scene wasn't such a blatant retread of "Skyfall" (2012), in which 007 opens a garage door and reveals an Aston Martin DB5, as seen in "Goldfinger" (1964), to the sultry accompaniment of a Bondian chord sequence on the soundtrack." Ultimately, Lane seems to dismiss both these scenes as cheap tricks arguing, "[n]othing like the old tunes to get an audience on your side." Despite being largely dismissive, Lane productively points to a common narrative strategy within franchise storytelling – the strategic implementation of scores and visuals to evoke a sense of a franchise's history. Though he writes this off as a rip-off of *Bond*, the same strategy was used in J*urassic World* (2015) when two characters encounter the visitors center from the original film. As they walk through the now dilapidated structure, a single piano teases the notes of the original *Jurassic Park* (1993) theme. The iconic and uplifting score once brought to life by a full orchestra, here is transformed into a melancholy meandering arpeggio of lone notes, as if the person playing it is slowly remembering how it went. While Lane's observation is accurate, it's not as unique as one might think. Franchises often find ways to connect their past to their

[441] Anthony Lane, "'Solo: A Star Wars Story,' Reviewed," May 24, 2018, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/06/04/solo-a-star-wars-story-and-how-to-talk-to-girls-at-parties.

present as they manage uncertain paths to the future. It is a byproduct of a system of creative and industrial management that draws its power from a franchise's textual history.

Throughout this dissertation, I have pointed to the various ways in which media franchises are governed in large part through the discursive power offered through the text. The first two chapters considered the management of authorship within a franchise both from the level of individual creative workers and from a corporate perspective. In Chapter 1, I pointed to the ways creative workers maintain and vie for creative authority through their ability to demonstrate a deep understanding of both the inherent themes and intertextual relationships that exist across a franchised story. Creative workers negotiate and distribute creative power through discourses that center on the text. Textual knowledge is often acquired through seniority. Even today, those who can claim a closer and longer relationship with the textual history of a franchise can often reach positions of influence. Chapter 2 used the concept of *refurbishment* as a way to understand the industrial functions of proliferative texts within a franchise. I have argued that sequels, reboots, and remakes within a franchise offer the opportunity for intellectual property holders to manage the intertextual relationships across their franchises, ensuring the continued relevance and ultimate profitability of some of their most lucrative properties. Largely, this is done through text, both through the creation of a new text and by resurrecting images and discourses associated with previous versions, ensuring all pieces of the property remain relevant and valuable.

The next two chapters shifted the focus from authorship to considerations of the professional, amateur and liminal peripheral work that goes into managing the proliferation of media franchises. Chapter 3 considered the management of the audiences and conceptualized it as a process of *recalibration*. This chapter argued that, in promoting refurbished texts, franchises

might want to widen or shift the types of audiences being courted and utilize carefully selected cultural intermediaries to facilitate this transition. This chapter also introduced the idea of media proliferation as a site of potential professionalization for privileged fans looking to break into the industry suggesting that there is an economy of proliferation in which both the industry and the fans can generate real and professional capital through the logics of ongoing storytelling. Chapter 4 then considered how texts proliferate and franchises are managed via individuals who often may be thought to be at the margins of franchise production. Here I considered how outside sources are often consulted to make a story more legible and facilitate the flow of ideas throughout a company. Franchises are often thought of in terms of expansion, but this chapter ended by suggesting that of equal importance is a process of consolidation, in which a long-term franchise must organize its various properties and construct a coherent universe that can be easily understood as the franchise expands and moves into the future. The final chapter, Chapter 5, considered the meaning that a franchise accrues within the industry as it proliferates. I theorized this as the "mythic value" of a franchise which, while culturally constructed, carries a certain managerial power that is closely related to Havens' concept of industry lore, albeit lore connected to a specific set of texts rather than the industry writ large. Being able to understand and effectively articulate a franchise's mythic value to those in the industry and to audiences offers the opportunity to create a new text that can wield its culture power, while also offering an opportunity to destabilize hegemonic assumptions tied to it.

Future studies should consider how franchises generate stronger and more potent storytelling discourses through carefully maintaining their industrial histories. While this is something I touched on in Chapter 4, institutional memory, from my perspective, seems like a significant indication of how well organized a franchise's proliferative practices are. Some of the

most well-maintained franchises are legendary for their extensive and highly exclusive production archives. Lucasfilm and Disney both have extensive archival histories and more research should be done on not only what they consist of and how they are curated, but on the discursive power they hold over the franchise. For example, it is in part through these archives that Disney's live-action *Jungle Book* was able to tout its authenticity and suggest that their version was an extension of the company's history of innovative storytelling. For the new production, they pulled songs, props, and other bits of institutional history from the Walt Disney Archives. While I think this would be a difficult area of study, as many of these archives are private collections rarely opened to the public, simply understanding the discourses that surround the archives would shed some light on how institutional memory, or the stories that franchises tell about themselves, are also managerial discourses.

Storytelling, as a managerial discourse, could prove to be a productive framework in understanding the role of theme parks, franchised experiences, and interactive or immersive franchise spaces. This area of the media industries offers audiences the opportunity to become part of the storytelling experience. Recently, Universal Studios debuted their latest ride in the *Wizarding World of Harry Potter* theme park in Orlando, which they are calling a "story coaster."[442] The ride, called "Hagrid's Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure," incorporates many elements from the *Harry Potter* universe and promises guests there the opportunity to, "fly deep into the wilds of the Forbidden Forest, beyond the grounds of Hogwarts castle."[443] Theme

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[442] Emma Pocock, "Universal Orlando's Harry Potter 'Storycoaster' Will Add to J.K. Rowling's Wizarding World," Forbes, April 19, 2019, https://www.forbes.com/sites/emmapocock/2019/04/19/universal-orlandos-harry-potter-storycoaster-will-add-to-j-k-rowlings-wizarding-world/.

[443] "Hagrid's Magical Creatures Motorbike Adventure™," Universal Orlando Resort, accessed July 12, 2019, https://www.universalorlando.com/web/en/us/things-to-do/rides-attractions/hagrids-magical-creatures-motorbike-adventure.

parks have become a much more important part of overall franchising in recent years. Global spending on theme parks reached a record high of $44.8 billion in 2017 and continues to grow.[444] Corporations have taken notice. Disney has channeled more money into the development of their theme park assets over the past few years than into film production, a trend that looks as though it will continue for the foreseeable future.[445] This "experience economy," as it's called by those in the industry, could be a lucrative sight of study for media scholars. However, any research into this area should focus on the ways this expansion is largely being managed, much like the Universal story coaster, through storytelling discourses. Theme park managers can generate themed attractions that build on existing stories and feed back into the broader franchise universe connecting the experience economy with traditional media economies through intertextual relationships and storytelling logics.

Marie-Laure Ryan has argued, "[t]he proliferation of texts around worlds, of worlds within text, and of stories within worlds may be as old as narrative itself, but it is only in contemporary culture that it has been systematically explored, and elevated into an aesthetic."[446] Though this was in no way a formal analysis of such "aesthetics of proliferation," as Ryan calls them, her observation is useful for pointing out that, at least from the outside looking in, media franchise stories seem to move across texts and time in coordinated ways that suggest an increased level of collaboration and centralized systems of management. However, as I have argued, the system of management which has emerged post-convergence is not one governed by

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[444] Christian Sylt, "'Experience Economy' Boosts Theme Park Spending To A Record $45 Billion," Forbes, November 4, 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/csylt/2018/11/04/experience-economy-boosts-theme-park-spending-to-a-record-45-billion/.

[445] Christian Sylt, "'Experience Economy' Boosts Theme Park Spending To A Record $45 Billion," Forbes, November 4, 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/csylt/2018/11/04/experience-economy-boosts-theme-park-spending-to-a-record-45-billion/.

[446] Marie-Laure Ryan, "The Aesthetics of Proliferation," in World Building: Transmedia, Fans, Industries, ed. Marta Boni (Amsterdam University Press, 20170913), 31–46, http://www.oapen.org/search?identifier=1004106.

any single person but rather a decentralized system of organization based on the texts within a franchise. What we have seen, at least as I have argued here, is the rise of storytelling as a prominent managerial discourse through which franchises are organized. It is through the texts within a franchise that individuals vie for creative authority and those on the outside find paths to professionalization. It is through the text that franchises are refurbished to maintain their cultural relevance and attempt to modernize outdated politics associated with their brand. It is through the legibility of the storyworlds that intra-corporate collaboration and proliferation are facilitated, and it is the accrued mythic value of a story that encourages narrative expansion. Ultimately, within franchised environments, storytelling discourse is a language that can be used to constrain, maintain, and control those working within the industry. However, it is a language that is accessible through the texts within a franchise and therefore, if mastered, can also be a technology of agency and subversion within the corporate structure of franchised media production. If there is a consistent aesthetic quality across franchised content it is one generated by not a single individual but multiple media managers coordinating and communicating across several industries in sometimes direct, but often only tangential ways. The "aesthetic" suggested by Ryan, I would argue, is not the product of a central or well-planned design coordinated by a "group," or a well-maintained computer database, but rather is the byproduct of a shared language offered through the texts that circulate within a franchise.

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