INTERPRETING THE GAME OF HISTORY: SYNTHESIS AND SHORTCOMINGS

BETWEEN REENACTMENT, LIVING HISTORY, AND ROLEPLAYING

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Civil War reenactors claim to be educational through the nature of their bringing the past to life. Their claims place them among heritage and cultural interpreters in how they connect the past with the audience before them. However, the practice of Civil War reenacting has come under scrutiny in recent years for propagating a narrow view of history informed predominantly by nostalgic ideas of a Confederate lost-cause narrative. Through personal experience as a reenactor and living history interpreter, together with in-depth research of these practices, I propose that Civil War reenacting may at times include interpretive practices, however, its primary function as a hobbyist's pastime places it in the realm of Live Action Roleplaying (LARPing) rather than heritage interpretation. From this, Civil War reenactments are largely based on the relationship between historically inspired personas and the actors' own personalities rather than creating an interpretive experience for the public audience. It is the confusion between these two tendencies that has resulted in the fields of American Civil War reenactments becoming breeding grounds where ideologically narrow views of history and national identity may be perpetuated.

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To those for whom our present will become their past.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."[1]

George Santayana, *The Life of Reason*

Each year, thousands of people take part in American Civil War reenactments, where the 1861-1865 conflict between the Union army of the north, and Confederate army of the south, is brought back to life even in states which never saw a battle between Union and Confederate troops, or weren't even a states until decades after the war ended. My home state of Washington is just one example. And I am just one of thousands who flocked to take part.

2014 was the first year in which I participated as a Civil War reenactor. As a budding student of drama and history, it seemed a perfect combination of all my interests. I proudly joined the ranks of people who for a weekend brought history to life. The practice of reenacting was perceived by me as intrinsically valuable towards preventing what Santayana feared. However, several years after I first donned a wool uniform and stepped out on the battlefield, I am prompted to ask that in repeating the past, do we necessarily remember it? Or, does the practice of reenacting have a harder time living up to its lofty ambitions than it cares to admit?

In a 2018 *New York Times* article, Kent State University history professor and Union reenactor Brad Keefer gave a startlingly blunt description of his fellow reenactors and their representation of the past. "Re-enactors look at the war as a four-year period between 1861 and 1865 in which you can cut out all the stuff leading up to the war and

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[1] George Santayana, *The Life of Reason or the Phases of Human Progress*, (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 172.

very much ignore everything that happened afterward. We don't get tangled up in all the

messy bits, which are the causes and outcomes, which are complicated and

uncomfortable."[2] This selective memory is a thread that indelibly weaves its way

throughout the fabric of Civil War reenacting. As I came to realize, the Civil War

reenactments I took part in did more to obscure issues and perpetuate a narrow view of

past than they did to create a space from which we may learn from interpreting and

critiquing the past.

However, when looking at the mission statements of organizations such as the

Washington Civil War Association (WCWA) which coordinates battle reenactments

throughout the state of Washington, the impression they give is that their primary

function is education and passing down our historical memory rather than inventing it or

manipulating it as we see fit. "Our objective" the WCWA Mission Statement claims, "is

to interpret and present the daily life of Confederate and Federal soldiers, and their

families and associates, for the public through living history, reenactments, first person

characterizations, and education."[3] Words like "interpret" and "educate" assert the

pedagogical ambitions of the organization. They endeavor like many other national and

historical sites to connect an audience in the present with ideas of the past in order forge a

better future. Indeed, there are many knowledgeable reenactors I have encountered in the

WCWA, whose impressions they create of soldiers and their encampments connect the

audience directly with what life was like on the march. The Union and Confederate

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[2] Bryn Stole, "The Decline of the Civil War Reenactor," *The New York Times*, July 28, 2018,
https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/28/style/civil-war-reenactments.html

[3] "Mission Statement of the Washington Civil War Association," The Washington Civil War Association,
accessed January 11, 2021.
https://www.wcwa.net/cabinet/data/Mission%20Statement%20of%20the%20WCWA%20%20170702.pdf

camps are set up as detailed interactive dioramas of the past. Rifles lean on each other outside of tents, meals cook over open fires, and the surgeon washes up after another amputation. Everything is correct for the time period, but reading further in the mission statement reveals how this may not be enough.

In keeping with their standards for authenticity, the WCWA asserts that "The display of historical flags and symbols at reenactments is an integral part of our mission to accurately recreate the events of the 1860's, and to inform and educate the public about life and attitudes of the time."[4] Though the Confederate battle flag is a potent symbol of slavery and racial injustice, the organization writes it off as merely a product of the times. True though it is that the organization does offer lectures at their reenactments about such topics as the evolution of Civil War battle flags, they are still isolated within the context of the 1860s without connecting it to a through-line of what it has come to mean today. As the saying goes, 'If you stand for nothing, you'll fall for anything,' and despite the attempts of organizations such as the WCWA to remain neutral, society has created through-lines connecting the past to the present whether the organizations like it or not.

On January 6th, 2021, the Confederate battle flag was seen billowing through the halls of the United States Capitol Building as it was stormed by far-right insurrectionists. As a result, one article from *The Guardian* stated in its title that "Trump's MAGA Insurrectionists Were Perverse US Civil War Reenactors" thus connecting the actions of far-right extremists to reenactors by means of the Confederate battle flag.[5] Author Sidney

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Sidney Blumenthal, "Trump's MAGA Insurrectionists Were Perverse US Civil War Reenactors," *The Guardian*, January 9, 2021. Accessed February 15, 2021.
https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jan/09/trump-maga-us-american-civil-war?CMP=Share_AndroidApp_Other

Blumenthal describes the twisted irony of mobs storming the capitol building, waving the stars and bars beneath the dome that Lincoln erected, and prowling about the aisles where senators were bludgeoned for decrying slavery.[6] These domestic terrorists have created their own through-line between past and present, however, "the warped history that the Trump mob thinks it is enacting, reenacting or conjuring is a costume drama of militant ignorance" for, it has more to do with conspiracy theories and trumped-up claims of alternative facts than research and objective facts.[7]

Here again, Brad Keefer is proven right. Either reenacting is an isolation of history or a corruption of history. Though organized reenactments may aspire to educate and have interpretive ambitions, the hobby has gained a bad reputation for itself. Rather than taking advantage of being an opportunity to confront our heritage, the practice of Civil War reenacting has come under scrutiny in recent years due to its habit of propagating an isolated view of history informed predominantly by nostalgic views of a lost-cause narrative. Rather than base its practices off of principals used for heritage interpretation to promote a learning experience in the audience, reenacting as a hobbyist's pastime often prioritizes the relationship between the characters the reenactors create and

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[6] The central dome of the Unites States capitol building was erected in 1863, its work uninterrupted by the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861. "Capitol Dome," Architect of the Capitol, accessed 5 April, 2021. https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/buildings-grounds/capitol-building/capitol-dome#:~:text=The%20Basics&text=The%20Capitol%20Dome%20was%20constructed,the%20total%20cost%20of%20%241%2C047%2C291.

This bludgeoning is referred to as The Caning of Charles Sumner, where anti-slavery senator Charles Sumner was beaten by Representative Preston Brooks of South Carolina on May 22nd, 1856 with a metal tipped cane in response to an anti-slavery speech Sumner gave. "The Caning of Senator Charles Sumner," Senate.gov, accessed April 5, 2021. https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/The_Caning_of_Senator_Charles_Sumner.htm#:~:text=Bleeding%20profusely%2C%20Sumner%20was%20carried,thereafter%20died%20at%20age%2037.

[7] Blumenthal, "Trump's MAGA Insurrectionists."

the actor's own personality; a practice that is more in the vein of a Live Action

Roleplaying (LARP) game than an interpretive experience of history.

And yet, roleplaying and reenacting still have the potential to be used as powerful

teaching tools for learning history. During the last year of my Master's studies, I took

part in a *Reacting to the Past* course through the history program at my university. As

part of this class, students took on the roles of different figures during pivotal moments in

history, in this case, the 1835 Treaty of Red Clay negotiated between the Ross and Ridge

factions of the Cherokee Nation, and the United States government. During the game,

each student was given a role to play and documents to read in order to give context for

who we were, what we believed, and what we wanted to advocate for in this treaty

council. The goal of this, according to the creators, is to "practice critical thinking,

primary source analysis, and argument, both written and spoken."[8] All of this went off

almost exactly like a living history interpretation or historical reenactment.

We each played different historical characters, the game book encouraged us to be

in-character as much as possible when debating the treaty, and it was all based on

primary sources. The class finally ended with a coda session where students were allowed

to debrief their experiences and "discuss the differences between your game character

and your personal beliefs and values" as well as see how decisions that were made in-

game either align or deviate from what happened in history.[9] All of this served to connect

students with the past by means of their present decision-making. It gave a sense of

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[8] Jace Weaver and Laura Adams Weaver, *Red Clay, 1835: Cherokee Removal and the Meaning of Sovereignty* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2018), Back cover.

[9] Weaver, *Red Clay*, 10.

immediacy to historical events by connecting the past to the present in the experience of the viewer and the participant. Even outside of the classroom, there are several reenactments and living history sites that create opportunities for the glossy consumerist images of history to be challenged. Rather than waving Confederate banners claiming to be making America great again while simultaneously ignoring the America of slavery and racial segregation those banners originated from, reenactments such as the German Coast Slave Rebellion and the interpretive programming of Colonial Williamsburg's 1997 slave auction seek to confront audiences with the difficult pasts that have been overlooked or outright censured. All I could think as I sat there in the classroom watching students learn history through roleplaying was, "Why aren't the reenactments I have taken part in more like this? What is different? What could possibly change reenacting for the better?"

This is the goal of the thesis I now write. There are many ways in which reenacting can be educational, but there are many ways in which it deviates from the mission it sets for itself. There are many ways reenactments are like interpretive programs and there are many ways in which reenactments are like roleplaying games. I intend to elucidate ways in which Civil War reenacting aligns and deviates from the traditions of heritage interpretation and LARP gaming. As part of my investigation, I will examine the methods utilized by first-person historical interpreters and compare how Civil War reenacting aligns or deviates from these interpretive methods. Furthermore, I will contrast this with how LARPers go about creating their characters and the ways in which it aligns or deviates from the way Civil War Reenactors go about creating their characters or 'Impressions' of historical persons. In carrying out this investigation, do I

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hope to 'fix' reenacting once and for all? Absolutely not. In the end I hope to be able to present reasons and methods for why and how reenacting organizations may be held accountable for the claims they make. The goal is not to shame the pastime and practitioners of reenacting by turning the mirror on them. Instead, it is my hope that this work may better guide those reenactors who do claim an educational purpose behind what they do, and allow them to fully live up to their missions of education and interpretation.

What becomes an inevitable part of this is to lay plain how reenactors may align with, or often deviate from, these standards they set for themselves. It does the practice no favor to cover up any blemishes reflected by it, and if Blumenthal's article and other media reports provide enough evidence, then the public tends to perceive plenty of warts as it is. Some media articles even perceive Civil War reenacting as a sick man of hobbies, with one 2017 article in *The Washington Post* even going so far as to ask in its title "Will Civil War Reenactments Die Out?"[10] Given reenacting's potential as a powerful teaching tool, I certainly do not come into this with the hope that it dies out. However, in treating the ailing patient, it often leads to a kind of medicine that is difficult to swallow. Though this is not the final say in what Civil War reenacting ought or ought not to do, what this thesis is meant to do is be a part of the process towards rehabilitation.

In moving towards this end, I shall first examine what constitutes an interpretive program, and analyze what professional living historians as well as natural and cultural heritage interpreters encourage for presenting history to an audience. Next, I will

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[10] Mark Guarino, "Will Civil War Reenactments Die Out?" The Washington Post, August 25, 2017, accessed 5 April, 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/will-civil-war-reenactments-die-out/2017/08/25/f43c6bc0-874b-11e7-a50f-e0d4e6ec070a_story.html

compare this with what American Civil War reenactors advocate for and encourage others to practice. Since roleplaying is such an important feature of reenacting, then as a foil to interpretive practices, it would do well for me to analyze American Civil War reenacting through the lens of theories developed by researchers in the field of gaming and roleplaying studies, particularly with regards to live action role-playing games.

Before I set out on this endeavor, it would do well for me to define some of the terms that will recur throughout this paper. The first is that of a *reenactor* versus a *living history interpreter*. Though the methods are much the same between the two of them, namely bringing history to life, the primary difference is one of profession. The reenactor is often a hobbyist who engages in battles or demonstrations either on weekends or in available time outside of a dedicated work schedule. The reenactor often invests much of their own money into events they go to, the only compensation being the joy of setting off a cannon, seeing someone's face light up with curiosity, or having a chance to go on an historically themed camping trip.

Living history interpreters, on the other hand, I consider to be the professional versions of the reenactors, who are employed either by a particular site or organization, or are independently contracted to present at schools, museums, or other historic sites. Since living history interpreters are either employees or independent contractors, they are compensated for their work by whomever is employing them. Author Stacy F. Roth discusses the different kinds of living history interpreters in her book *Past Into Present:Effective Techniques for First-Person Historical Interpretation* where she describes the interchangeability of the terms first-person interpretation, roleplaying, character interpretation, interactive historical character interpretation, interactive

historical roleplay (or roleplaying), and even mistakenly as actors, actor-historians, or guides.[11] All of these refer to the same basic practice where the interpreter is the point of juncture between past and present. In uniting these under the umbrella term of living history interpreter, Roth points to Jay Anderson's definition in that it is a "simulation of life in another time for the purpose of research, interpretation, and/or play."[12]

She, like myself, further separates the idea of reenacting out on its own by designating it as "those for whom living history is both a passion and a recreation," thus reasserting the difference between those for whom living history is a profession, and those for whom it is a hobby.[13] For my purposes, I will identify the non-professional hobbyist as the reenactor while the professional practitioner I will identify as the living history interpreter. Though both spheres do bring history to life in their own ways, and the reenactor's handbook *Reliving the Civil War* written by R. Lee Hadden identifies how both "Reenactment and living history are interested in the human stories of individuals," I need a way of distinguishing between literature directed at the professionals from those directed at the hobbyists.[14] As it turns out with most of the works I have found and events I have participated in, the mainstream hobbyists refer to themselves as reenactors far more than they do living historians. Some more dedicated reenactors who take great pride in the amount of research and work they put into their interpretations of history prefer the

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[11] Stacy F. Roth, *Past Into Present: Effective Techniques for First-Person Historical Interpretation*. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 13.

[12] Roth, *Past into Present*, 9.

[13] Ibid, 11.

[14] R. Lee Hadden, *Reliving the Civil War: A Reenactor's Handbook*. (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1996), 5.

living historian designation, I will defer to what seems to be most prevalent in the literature and my own experience as a hobbyist.

Since I discuss roleplaying games later in this paper, I will reserve the term *roleplaying* and *role-players* for people engaged within a gaming context regardless of whether it is about history or not, unless it is to draw a direct comparison between the other practices. Otherwise, I shall refer to those who practice reenacting as reenactors and those who practice living history interpretation either as living historians, interpreters, or living history interpreters.

With this line having been drawn horizontally between the recreational reenactors and the professional living history interpreters, I would like to bisect them vertically into two areas of practice that both the reenactor and the living historian may choose to operate in. This would be the areas of *first-person interpretation* and *third-person interpretation*. The difference between these is in how the reenactor or interpreter relates their own person to historical personas.

As indicated by the title of Roth's book, her work focuses primarily on the practices of first-person living history interpreters. In this style, the interpreter or reenactor refers to themselves in the first person, creating a direct corollary as they identify themselves as being the same as historical persons. The example Roth sites is that when talking about an historic location or the people who lived and worked there, the interpreters "speak from personal perspective: 'I built this house last year'; 'My wife and I sleep in that bed.'"[15] This clearly draws a parallel between living history interpretation and roleplaying, for the interpreter 'gets into character' as the historical person. However,

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[15] Roth, *Past Into Present*, 13.

the other form of interpretation, third-person, creates more distance between the reenactor or interpreter and the material being interpreted.

Third-person interpretation, as the name implies, occurs when the interpreters or reenactors refer to historical people and events as being separate from the person doing the interpretation. Instead of "I" and "me," the interpreter uses "they" and "them." Often, however, the interpreters still have roleplaying aspects tethering them to the history they discuss in third-person. Hadden describes the benefits of third-person interpretation by saying that it "… gives more flexibility, since the reenactor can wear the correct clothes and use authentic equipment but can answer modern or comparative questions."[16] This, at least, seems to take the reenactor away from roleplaying and more towards the area of any other uniformed guide one might see at a national park or curator at a museum exhibit. With this, it is primarily in the conversation surrounding the reenactment or interpretation of history in which first-person and third-person interpretation can be identified. If the reenactor or interpreter answers a question in first-person, as though they are the historical person, then that is an instance of first-person interpretation. If they answer a question in third-person, as though the historical person is someone different from who they are, then that is a moment of third-person interpretation.

Depending on the program, first-person and third-person interpretation can be more fluid or rigid, with the interpreters or reenactors remaining solidly in first-person, solidly in third-person, or being allowed to move between the two as the situation demands. However, it is the relationship between the material artifacts and the

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[16] Hadden, *Reliving the Civil War*, 17.

reenactor's lived experience that tethers them to some element of roleplaying even if they answer questions and engage in conversations on a third-person basis.

Even though Hadden encourages the reenactor to refer to historical persons in the third-person as "they" and "them," the reenactor still has a first-person relationship with their historical counterparts by means of the clothing and artifacts they interact with. In the passage that Hadden gives, the clothing that "they" (the historical person in a third-person sense) wear is the same as the clothing that "I" (the reenactor or interpreter in a first-person sense) wear. The material similarities between the reenactors or interpreters and the historical persons, most often by means of costuming, is what creates a link to roleplaying even in a third-person interpretive context. It is the connection to the material culture of history, and the direct lived experience of those materials that provides living history's and reenacting's links to roleplaying. There are varying degrees to which reenactors have connected to these materials, but the two levels that will be in need of further defining are those of the *farbs* and the *hard-core* reenactors.

Often, these terms are applied to the idea of 'authenticity,' or how closely the materials used by reenactors coincide with those used by their historical counterparts. At the very bottom end, with the least accurate materials, are the farbs.[17] Though the exact

[17] Randall Allred, "Catharsis, Revision, and Re-enactment: Negotiating Meaning of the American Civil War," *Journal of American Culture* 19, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 3.

  Tom Dunning, "Civil War Re-Enactments: Performance as a Cultural Practice," *Australiasian Journal of American Studies* 21, no. 1 (July 2002): 67.

  Stephen Gapps, "Mobile Monuments: A View of Historical Reenactment and Authenticity from Inside the Costume Cupboard of History," *Rethinking History*, 13, no. 3 (September 2009): 400.

  Rory Turner, "Bloodless Battles: The Civil War Reenacted," *The MIT Press* 34, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 127.

meaning and origin of the term is uncertain, it is commonly understood to have come from the expression "Far be it for me to tell him it's wrong," where that reenactor's impression of what is 'accurate' is so far off the mark that it's not even worth trying to correct them.[18] These are the reenactors who eschew research and historical verisimilitude in favor of comfort and convenience. Recreating history is less so their focus, but they are at the reenactment to have a good time. Meanwhile, at the opposite end of the spectrum are those who are willing to go to extremes for the sake of what they consider to be historical authenticity. These are the hard-core reenactors.[19]

Within this group, they attempt not only to dress the same as their historical counterparts, but to live and behave the same as them. Tom Dunning describes in the *Australian Journal of American Studies* how hard-core reenactors have "re-created all aspects of the war, except for death and disease."[20] They prefer to sleep out under the stars and eat the same hard-tack and salt pork as soldiers in the 1860s. He cites Tony Horowitz's 1998 publication *Confederates in the Attic* when he describes how some hard-core reenactors went on crash diets to re-create the emaciated look of soldiers who have been marching for months on end.[21] The one that stands in the middle is most often mainstream reenacting, which constitutes the kind of reenacting that most hobbyists take part in, and are the ones I have predominantly taken part in. Though the reenactors may

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[18] Turner, "Bloodless Battles: The Civil War Reenacted," 127.

[19] Dunning, "Civil War Re-Enactments: Performance as a Cultural Practice," 67.

  Gapps, "Mobile Monuments," 400.

[20] Dunning, "Civil War Re-Enactments: Performance as a Cultural Practice," 67.

[21] Ibid.

change out the salt-pork and hard-tack for chili and biscuits, there is a dedication to material authenticity that some reenactors I have known spent hours meticulously hand sewing their uniforms rather than depend on what they might be able to buy ready-made to be authentic enough for their portrayal of history.

With this, the material elements that a reenactor or living historian engage with are necessary components of the roleplaying nature of their work. Though, there is one more term I would like to define, and that is how the roleplaying persona of reenactors and living historians is to be regarded. Roth has an entire chapter on whether living history interpretation is theater, highlighting how the idea can be incredibly divisive among the living history and reenacting community.[22] I myself came to reenacting and living history from a background in theatre, while another reenactor I know was incensed when a local newspaper referred to him "acting" as a chaplain. The claims to authenticity are an aspect Roth identifies as separating living history from theatre. In a reenactment or living history event, the materials and ideas being presented are ideally based in fact and research in order to be fully functional, whereas theatrical conventions tend to embrace 'artistic license' and visual impact over authenticity and functionality. However, Hadden openly admits that "reenactors are closer to professional actors than they are to historians."[23] The reason behind this is that, unlike historians who are interested in facts, information, and data, which culminates in the publication of an essay, article, or book,

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[22] Roth, *Past Into Present*, 50.

[23] Hadden, *Reliving the Civil War*, 5.

the reenactor is interested in "the human stories of individuals," focusing more on the subjective, lived experience of history.[24]

If anything, the element of pretense needed for a living history interpretation or reenactment places it functionally in the realm of theatre. With regards to the Washington Civil War Association, even though events are hosted all over the state, not a single battle was fought on what was then "Washington Territory." The suspension of disbelief needed in order to imagine that the encampments seen today a few hours outside Seattle are the same as those in rural Georgia over 150 years ago is something incredibly theatrical. Yet, are we to refer to the reenactors and living historians as "actors" and are the historical personas they put on "characters"? In keeping with his conception of reenactors being more like professional actors, Hadden refers to them in a theatrical sense as "roles," especially where he breaks down reenacting as civilians rather than soldiers with "Roles for Women," "Roles for Men," and "Roles for Children."[25] Roth refers to them theatrically as well, having an entire chapter on "Developing a Character" in spite of the controversy she mentions earlier that such notions of living historians as actors may stir up.[26]

One word that insists on making an appearance in the scholarly literature is that of an *impression*.[27] Mitchell D. Strauss, when describing the relationship reenactors have

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[24] Ibid.

[25] Hadden, *Reliving the Civil War*, 92-95.

[26] Roth, *Past Into Present*, 57.

[27] Dora Apel, *War Culture and the Contest of Images* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 48. JSTOR.

with their uniforms and materials, gives perhaps the most thorough definition of what an impression consists of. According to Strauss, "While reenacting, participants create historical impressions of Civil War era soldiers at camp and in battle. Impressions are created through donning period dress, emulating period behavior, and brandishing period accoutrements and weaponry."[28] Here, the reference is based more so in period accuracy and the ability to trace what is being presented back to an original source; both in terms of the materials being worn and handled, and in terms of the persona being portrayed. This term pleases those reenactors and interpreters who insist on period accuracy and highlights how the interpretation of history being presented is just that; an interpretation, or, an *impression* of what life was like.

This clues into the open-ended nature of history very well, but it also causes a bit of unease in that it can be an overly subjective and capricious take on the past by describing a role as "my impression" of a certain historical person. Indeed, when first-person living history interpreter Joyce M. Thierer creates her taxonomy of history interpretation, encompassing everything from lecturers to museum theatre to the Society for Creative Anachronisms, she apparently holds reenactors and their impressions of the past in exceptionally low regard. According to Thierer, reenactors will "usually create a persona, or 'impression,' from their era," but these reenactors "may or may not have done extensive research into that person and his or her immediate context."[29] Optimally, both

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Strauss, Mitchell D. "Identity Construction Among Confederate Civil War Reenactors: A Study of Dress, Stage Props, and Discourse." *International Textile and Apparel Association* 21, no. 4 (2005): 150.

Thierer, Joyce M. *Telling History: A Manual for Performers and Presenters of First-Person Narratives* (New York: AltaMira Press, 2010), 15.

[28] Strauss, "Identity Construction," 150.

[29] Thierer, *Telling History*, 15.

reenactors and living history interpreters would put in a great deal of research before showing their portrayals of history to the public. When I was employed as a living history interpreter for the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, I worked together with staff historians to put together an entire bible of primary and secondary resources for the character I was to portray in their interpretive programming. When it came to me starting out in Civil War reenacting, however, this was not necessarily the case.

When I was due to take part in my first Civil War reenactment, I kept asking my unit commander when rehearsals were going to be, or when there would be a training session to get me prepared before I showed up on the field. But instead, I was told to come as I was on the day of the reenactment, and they would get me ready; with all the clothing, that is. Of course I was instructed about safety regulations, but as far as history was concerned, I could have said anything I wanted and if the public didn't know any better, they would have believed me just on the basis that I was in a uniform.

The amount of preparation needed for a quality reenactment or living history interpretation is in some ways related to the preparation of an actor for a performance. A reenactor or interpreter would study historical texts as much as an actor studies their role. For how often theatrical techniques are mentioned in texts surrounding reenactors, such as Stanislavski and method acting, I find it prudent to oblige the use of the term characters when describing the historical personas reenactors and living history interpreters take on. The term also dovetails nicely with the language used by scholars in roleplaying studies later on in my work, so due to the fact that it casts such a large shadow over the many different areas I will be discussing, I will use the term character over impression.

Finally, the term used to identify that period of conflict between 1861 and 1865 is itself highly contested. There are many colorful titles attached to that period of conflict, particularly in the American South such as the "War Between the States" as Hadden calls it, or "WBTS" for short. In the understatement of the 19th century, Hadden notes that his Virginian grandmother referred to the period as "the late unpleasantness."[30] I have also heard it referred to by the more fire-and-brimstone Southerners as the "War of Northern Aggression" and the "Yankee Oppression." Similarly passionate, but on the other side of the Mason-Dixon line are those who label the conflict as the "Slaveholder's Rebellion."[31]

For the sake of using a title that all are familiar with, and that most all seem to accept, I will refer to it either as the Civil War or more specifically the American Civil War. This is because, strictly speaking, it was a conflict that broke out internally of the United States of America, therefore making it a *Civil* war as civilians were turning against civilians on the battlefields. I also define it specifically as the *American* Civil War because ours was not the only country in which a civil war has broken out historically, therefore I feel the need to distinguish it from those of other countries. A better description to use for it may be that of "United States Civil War" so as to distinguish it from other countries in the Americas, but this is almost never used in the literature surrounding the war, and if there is one thing the January 6th attempted insurrection at the Capitol Building in Washington D.C. showed, it is that even all these years after the war has ended, we are still far from united.

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[30] Hadden, *Reliving the Civil War*, xi.

[31] Marvin-Alonzo Greer, "I Refuse to be a Reenactor and Here's Why," Mag the Historian: Black History Blog, September 26, 2016. Accessed 20 May, 2021. https://magthehistorian.com/2016/09/26/i-refuse-to-be-a-reenactor-and-heres-why/

That being settled, let us now delve into what I originally set out to accomplish. As I have outlined above in defining what reenacting and living history are, it is evident that there are elements of historical interpretation as well as roleplaying in both. Perhaps if it could be better understood how the techniques of interpretation and methods of roleplaying factor into, or are neglected by, reenacting, it may help to explain how it is that mainstream American Civil War reenacting in general, and Confederate reenacting in particular, have worse reputations than that of living history interpretation for bringing the past to life. Ultimately, this analysis may prove to be a bitter medicine for American Civil War reenacting so that it may take steps to redeem itself, or at the very least, better honor the mission it sets for itself in portraying the history and heritage of the United States. Let us begin with the professionals.

CHAPTER II

LIVING HISTORY INTERPRETATION

The story of natural and cultural interpretation as a unique field of practice begins with Freeman Tilden. Trained initially as a journalist, playwright, and novelist, in retirement Tilden toured the United States as an Administrative Assistant for the National Parks Service (NPS).[32] In doing so, Tilden's primary job for the NPS was to "formulate a plan for public relations and interpretation."[33] The endeavor led to him being granted free reign to access the national parks, even branching out to state parks and other historical sites.

The culmination of his efforts, and the "plan" he eventually created, took the form of his 1957 work *Interpreting Our Heritage*. Though there have been other rangers and interpreters for the National Parks Service to theorize and advocate for methods of interpretation and engagement, such as Enos Mills and John Muir, these consisted mainly of pamphlets and other smaller publications circulated internally of the NPS. Furthermore, the work of Mills and Muir was primarily concerned with natural interpretation, rather than heritage interpretation. *Interpreting Our Heritage*, however, put forward ideas that were applicable to both natural and cultural interpretation and became widely distributed as a published book. Through this, its position both inside and outside the NPS was assured as one of the foundational texts on which the field of interpretation was built.

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[32] Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting our Heritage*, Fourth ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 6.

[33] Tilden, 6.

Using Tilden as my starting point, I will discuss his main ideas for what interpretation consists of, then break these down in terms of particular themes that are shared or elaborated on by later authors. In doing this, I hope to define what some of the important tenets of interpretation include, especially in how they may be applicable to the practice of living history and historical reenactment. My goal is not to be reductive nor dismissive of the multiplicity of elements that go into the practice of natural and cultural Interpretation. Instead, I wish to emphasize those areas of Interpretation which I see as being most directly applicable or recurrent within the subcategory of interpretation I call living history.

Tilden and His Six Principles

The primary thesis that Tilden puts forward is that interpretation can engage an individual with learning materials in a way that is active and participatory, rather than passively receiving facts as it may be in the classroom environment. In the first chapter of Tilden's book where he introduces the concept of Interpretation, he likens it to the process of meaning-making that a language interpreter might engage in. Furthermore, on the audience's part, Interpretation is a "kind of elective education that is superior in some respects to that of the classroom, for here [in an interpretive program, the audience member] meets the thing itself."[34] That being the case, the audience's relationship with the interpretation is much more voluntary and hands-on. The audience member stays because they choose to stay, and what is the reward for their decision to be present?

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[34] Ibid, 25.

Being able to meet "the thing itself," or have an encounter wherein the theoretical world of the classroom is made to be practicable, tangible, and immediate.

In an attempt at creating a dictionary-like definition of what his notion of interpretation consists of, Tilden postulates the following idea:

> An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.[35]

Here again, the assertion is that it is an active and participatory way of teaching. The inclusion of words such as "activity" and "firsthand" reinforce how interpretation is an active form of teaching and learning. The lessons learned through an Interpretive manner of delivery are ones that are focused on "meanings and relationships" rather than "factual information." For example, it is possible for a teacher or naturalist to go on all day about the different properties of flora and fauna and geological formations. They describe the 'what.' The Interpreter, on the other hand, gives the 'why' of how this material connects to the audience at hand. The Interpreter connects the flora and fauna and geology, not only with the greater ecosystem in which it exists, but with the personal experience of the audience there in the moment.

Shortly after giving this dictionary definition, Tilden adds two qualifiers: one for private contemplation and another for use with the public. The first is that "interpretation is the revelation of larger truth that lies behind any statement of fact," while the other asserts how "interpretation should capitalize mere curiosity for the enrichment of the

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[35] Ibid, 33.

human mind and spirit."[36] With regards to the first, interpretation is giving, not only the meaning of something, but the meaningfulness behind it. Interpretation is communicating *why* something matters in addition to explaining *what* that thing is. The second qualifier builds off of the active relationship between audience and Interpreter. Since the Interpreter depends on the audience electing to stay with them, the savvy Interpreter may convince the audience to stay and learn more by acting on what the audience is personally curious about, or if it is lacking, then sparking that curiosity within them.

This does provide some more concrete instruction for how the Interpreter is to go about carrying out their duties, but much of the rest of what Tilden speaks of appears to be very abstract. Despite the tactile aspect of original objects, firsthand experience, and illustrative media, Tilden asserts that interpretation ought to "reveal meanings and relationships," but how exactly is someone supposed to do that?[37] Fortunately, he breaks down his theory into six areas or principles to be put into practice. I include them here in their completion, as they form the basic foundations for interpretive practice, even to the present day.

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.

2. Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based on information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.

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[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical, or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.

4. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.

5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole [person] rather than any phase.

6. Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentations to adults but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.[38]

Based on the foregoing discussion about Tilden's definition of interpretation, we can already see how the ideas of "relate," "reveal," and "the whole" are exemplified. These constitute the first aspect I choose to discuss with relation to first person interpretation, which is how interpretations are created to focus on the audiences' experience, and what they learn and discover.

Audience Experience

Despite Tilden's early separation between interpreters and teachers, there is a close connection shared between them. They both have a similar function of education and pedagogy, and their function does have much to do with the sharing knowledge and dispersing facts. Indeed, Tilden makes a point of saying in his second principle that "… all interpretation includes information," however, what is interesting to note is that

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[38] Ibid, 34-35.

information is only the second most important principle.[39] What is telling about how Tilden conceptualizes the art and practice of interpretation is that the first principle is not the dispensing of information, but the ability to "relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor."[40] While interpreters ought to be keenly knowledgeable in whatever subject they are presenting, it is a mistake to think that the interpreter is working on a strictly one-way path. What is of primary importance for an interpretive program is the connection being made between audience and material. The interpreter may have their display ready and their materials at hand, but they are not ready to interpret until they understand what it is that the audience brings to the table with them. Rather than being a monologue, an interpretive experience is a dialogue between audience and interpreter. A conversation.

Sam Ham, author of *Interpretation: Making a Difference*, takes exactly this stance when elaborating on how interpretation is to be practiced. Like Tilden before him, Ham similarly grapples with how to define interpretation in the context of nature and culture. Ham does include Tilden's definition, but makes a few adjustments to come up with a definition of his own. Ultimately, Ham determines that "Interpretation is a mission-based approach to communication aimed at provoking in audiences the discovery of personal meaning and the forging of personal connections with things, places, people, and concepts."[41] In Ham's view, interpretation is at its core an approach to communication. It is not just a one-way path of teaching information, but a two-way path of

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[39] Ibid, 34.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Sam H. Ham, *Interpretation: Making a Difference on Purpose*, (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2013), 8.

communicating and most importantly connecting audience with material. A similar conclusion is reached by Lisa Brochu and Tim Merriman, which is evident even by the title of their book, *Personal Interpretation: Connecting Your Audience to Heritage Resources*.

Published through the National Association for Interpretation, this book constitutes what may be considered the 'official' stance on interpretation, if not just by the fact that it was created by and for professionals in that field. Taking their inspiration from the two-part National Parks Service guidelines for interpretation, the definition Brochu and Merriman create for the NAI is that "Interpretation is a mission-based communication process that forges emotional and intellectual connections between the interests of the audience and the meanings inherent in the resource."[42] Here again, the ideas of connection and communication are reiterated. To Brochu and Merriman, the breadth and depth of information are of equal importance. It is not only the intellectual connections to facts and information that are the focus of interpretation, but of equal importance are the emotional connections being made. Both of these are the priorities of an interpreter, and to flourish, they require an open line of communication between interpreter and audience. The interpreter must understand the audience's emotional landscape so they may forge those emotional connections with material resources.

Each of these definitions are beneficial toward understanding what interpretation *is*. However, both Ham as well as Brochu and Merriman similarly define interpretation in terms of what it is *not*. Understanding what interpretation is not provides a word of

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[42] Brochu, Lisa and Tim Merriman. *Personal Interpretation: Connecting Your Audience to Heritage Resources*. Third ed. (Fort Collins, CO: InterpPress, 2015). 17-18.

caution about what happens when one throws off the balance of an interpretive experience and goes too far into the realms of strictly information or strictly personal connections. Brochu and Merriman begin with something similar to Tilden's second point, where information alone is not interpretation. The tendency towards disseminating as much information as possible without concern for emotional connections leads to what Brochu and Merriman call "Interpredata."[43] In such a case as this, the audience becomes overwhelmed by a deluge of facts, which have no personal connection with the audience. Similarly, neglecting information in favor of emotional connections is termed "Interpretainment," where the interpreter goes out of their way to create personal connections and memorable experiences of laughter or sorrow, even if the audience doesn't quite remember what it was they were laughing or crying about later on.[44] Ham incorporates these ideas into his book as well, taking less of an antagonistic and more of a cautionary stance towards these two extremes in identifying several archetypes of interpreters. Two of these archetypes include the interpreter as "teacher" and the interpreter as "entertainer."[45]

With these, Ham asserts that, though they may be somewhat inferior forms of interpretation, they may be understood by considering what their particular "endgames" are focused on.[46] By thinking of them as having different endgames, Ham recognizes the value inherent in each of the archetypes and how they may be navigated by the

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[43] Brochu & Merriman, *Personal Interpretation*, 18.

[44] Ibid, 20.

[45] Ham, *Making a Difference*, 55.

[46] Ibid, 53.

prospective interpreter to create the program they want. As such, Ham states that with regards to the teacher, "In this endgame, success is an audience learning, recognizing, or being able to remember the facts presented during the interpretive encounter."[47] The entertainer, on the other hand, has it where "Success in this endgame is making each interpretive encounter enjoyable and holding the audience's attention."[48] Thus we see that there are potential benefits, albeit with potential flaws, if an interpreter follows only one path or the other in creating their program. But what becomes of an interpretive program that follows neither one of these? Brochu and Merriman offer an idea first proposed by master interpreter Bob Roney of Yosemite National Park, which is that of "Interpreganda."[49] With this, the interpreter pays little heed, neither to accurate information nor connecting with the audience on a level of engagement or entertainment. The interpreganda form of interpretation is that which:

- Ignores multiple points of view

- Skews facts toward a foregone conclusion

- Oversimplifies facts

- Comes from a perspective that the audience is ignorant

- Communicates in one direction by discouraging dialogue

- Does not allow audience members to have and maintain a personal perspective[50]

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[47] Ibid, 58.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Brochu & Merriman, *Personal Interpretation*, 18.

[50] Ibid.

Interpreganda is the failure of information and personal connection, for it concentrates on the interpreter's interests and opinions, rather than a dialogue of different ideas with the audiences, and has a biased or all-out inaccurate information. The interpreganda interpreter formulates the worst kind of interpreter due to their disregard for the two elements of interpretation: accurate information and connection with the audience. So far we have seen the benefits or drawbacks of an abundance of one of these elements or the other leading to 'interrpetainment' or 'interpredata,' but what about a balance between them? Brochu and Merriman emphasize an "Interpretive Equation" in creating a balanced interpretive experience. This equation consists of "Knowledge of Audience + Knowledge of Resource x Appropriate Techniques = Interpretive Opportunity."[51] The informational aspect is included in the 'knowledge of resources' part of the equation, while the entertainment aspect is one of many 'appropriate techniques' available to the interpreter. And to make sure that it doesn't stray from connecting with their audience, the equation includes a section for 'knowledge of audience' to be sure that the interpreter maintains an attitude of open dialogue rather than one-way monologue. That is all well and good, but what are we to call this kind of interpreter? When listing his archetypes, Ham gives a third option in addition to the entertainer and the teacher, which is what Ham calls the "Provoker."[52]

It is notable how often the word "Provoke" has been used or mentioned in the various definitions formulated about what interpretation is and what interpreters do. This concept forms another key principle listed as Tilden's fourth principle, and it is an idea

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[51] Brochu and Merriman, *Personal Interpretation*, 39.

[52] Ham, *Making a Difference*, 55.

that I saw recur over and over in the works of interpreters, particularly those specializing in living history interpretation. If interpretive experiences are made up of information and connections with the audience, then the careful balance of these result in what Tilden states as the "chief aim" of interpretation, which "is not instruction, but provocation."[53] Since this idea is so emphatically asserted by Tilden, and so omnipresent in the work of natural and cultural interpreters, that one idea alone is worthy of its own consideration.

<p style="text-align:center">Provoking the Audience</p>

Returning again to Ham, he describes the provoker as being someone who encourages people to "think for themselves, and in doing so, to find their own personal meanings and connections."[54] Like the entertainer, the provoker is concerned about the connection being formed with the audience. But, where they differ is in how the entertainer is concerned with the in-the-moment process and act of interpreting, whereas the provoker is more concerned with what the audience takes away with them afterwards, or what they discover for themselves. Since a great amount of agency is left in the audience's hands to create meaning, the work of a provoker is much more ambiguous that that of an entertainer. Where the entertainer knows if they are doing their job well in the moment based on how the audience reacts, the provoker's focus is directed more internally in how the audience thinks and feels, which may not be fully understood, even by the audience member, until much later after they leave. Tilden elaborates on provocation as being the ability to "stimulate the reader or hearer toward a desire to

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[53] Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 35.

[54] Ham, *Making a Difference*, 57.

widen [their] horizon of interests and knowledge, and to gain an understanding of the greater truths that lie behind any statements of fact."[55] As such, the provoker seeks to inspire within an audience a longer-term change of heart, which in turn leads to changes in behavior or new ways of thinking. To rework an old proverb, the provoker could be thought of as someone who leads the horse to water, and if they did their job well, the horse would have the desire to drink. The important aspect is that agency is still left in the audience's hands to make up their own minds and reach their own conclusions based on what the interpreter gave them.

In an ideal scenario, the perfect interpreter would be a combination of all three archetypes. Ham describes how they would be a "skilled communicator [the Entertainer], armed with knowledge [the Teacher], who knows how to get between people's ears and provoke them to think on their own [the Provoker]."[56] However, Ham makes a point of discussing how, if there is one archetype that an interpreter ought to follow, or "ultimate endgame" that encompasses all the others, which would it be? What Ham arrives at is that it is the provoker "who emerges as most indispensable when it comes to interpretation's potential to make a "difference" in the audience it reaches."[57] This makes sense in the context of what Ham seeks to accomplish, for if interpretation is doing as the title of his book asserts, namely *Making a Difference*, then it would do well for the prospective interpreter to act on that endgame which makes the greatest impact on the life of the audience member after they leave. After all, "achieving any and all [of the

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[55] Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 59.

[56] Ham, *Making a Difference*, 60.

[57] Ibid, 64.

endgames] depends first on provoking the audience to think."[58] The facts and information are useless if the audience does not remember them outside the interpretive experience, and the entertaining engagement is pointless if it does not relate the experience to their life outside of the interpretive environment.

Another note must be added with regards to Ham's idea of what it means for something to be enjoyable. Of course, the first impression left by seeing the entertainer endgame of interpretation is to think that the audience is pleased by what they are seeing, the best of which results in laughter. Ham, on the other hand, uses a literal translation of the words *Enjoy* and *Entertain* to describe how it is not necessarily frivolous pursuits of punchlines, but instead can incorporate serious subject matter. Ultimately, something is "enjoyable" if "they attract our attention, even though they don't make us smile or laugh."[59] The subject may be something revolting such as ecocide or genocide, but we cannot turn away for it has so strongly grabbed hold of our attention, connected with our minds, and activated our curiosity. Tilden mentions the idea of provocation being a widening of someone's horizon, especially where it concerns their sense of understanding. Larry Beck and Ted T. Cable amplify this message in the fourth chapter of their book *The Gifts of Interpretation*, where they expand Tilden's six principles to fifteen "Gifts," the fourth one being the "Gift of Provocation."[60]

Beck and Cable begin their chapter on provocation by describing the purpose of any interpretive material, which is to "prompt the listener or reader to broaden his or her

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[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid, 45.

[60] Beck, Larry and Ted T. Cable. *The Gifts of Interpretation: Fifteen Guiding Principles for Interpreting Nature and Culture*. Third ed. (Urbana, IL: Sagamore Publishing, 2011), 31.

horizons and then act on that newfound breadth."[61] The final part of this description is the key point, for it is the actions of the audience member that are of primary concern to the provocative interpreter. As mentioned before, if the audience soaks up information or has an enjoyable experience learning about something like the importance of proper waste disposal at campsites, but do not change their habits to dispose of waste properly the next time they go camping, then the interpretive experience was ineffectual. If the interpretation was properly provocative and the audience member came to a new understanding, then their actions would have changed as much as their minds. At first, this seems like an idyllic path towards self-improvement. After all, why would anyone *not* want to become a better person? Beck and Cable mention how "At best, interpretation should encourage in visitors a sense of self-love, self-respect, and self-worth…" but just as the idea of something being "enjoyable" can mean it as being both pleasant and unpleasant, so too is this equally applicable to "provocation."

Just because someone changes their mind about something and they come to a broader understanding about the world, does not instantly mean that it was a pleasant experience. In the Reacting to the Past classes I discussed earlier in the Introduction, this was the first time most students had heard about the Trail of Tears or the kind of discrimination faced by Indigenous North Americans. The experience of learning about such dark times of American history and their repercussions to the present day may have broadened the students' horizons of understanding, but it was certainly not a light-hearted or humorous experience. Indeed, Beck and Cable assert that at times, the interpreter's craft can be almost confrontational as "Most interpreters believe that the role of the

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[61] Beck & Cable, *Gifts of Interpretation*, 31.

interpreter is to challenge the visitors' belief systems" rather than hold them in comfortable complacency.[62] The process of interpretation through provocation, though inspiring at times, also has the potential to be deeply discomforting. The discomfort that may be aroused through the process of provocation is elaborated on by Anthony Jackson as the feeling of "Unsettling."[63]

Discussed in his chapter titled *Engaging the Audience: Negotiating Performance in the Museum*, Jackson relates this idea in the context of feedback received from a piece of museum theatre dealing with slavery. The particular exchange audience members were responding to was a scenario in which slave traders were meeting to negotiate the terms of sale. Jackson and his team working on the interpretive performance came up with the term 'Unsettlement' in order to encompass recurring ideas of "having expectations overturned, assumptions about the subject matter challenged, of finding that they were personally being confronted with strong emotion or were expected to participate verbally or even physically."[64] Like Ham's idea of 'enjoyment,' Jackson asserts that an 'unsettling' experience has the potential to leave an audience member with positive or negative feelings. In the positive sense, 'unsettlement' may be "stimulating, surprising, generating a sense of dissonance that requires further thought, perhaps even a revision of closely held beliefs," while in the negative sense, audience members may feel "trapped inside an event they find exasperating, irritating, demanding more of them than they wish

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[62] Ibid, 35.

[63] Anthony Jackson, "Engaging the Audience: Negotiating Performance in a Museum," in *Performing Heritage*, ed. Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 18.

[64] Jackson, "Engaging the Audience," 18.

to give, but from which there is no escape."[65] In this way, Jackson describes how an 'unsettling' experience may be beneficial insofar as the discomfort it creates leads to personal growth, reflection, or as Tilden or Beck or Cable would describe it, a broadening of their horizon.

Insofar as 'provocation' and 'unsettlement' relate to living history interpretation, this is often demonstrated in how interpreters must not shy away from presenting controversial, discomforting, or unflattering moments from history. Historian Dora Apel makes the relationship between comforting and unsettling portrayals of history painfully clear in her chapter of *War Culture and the Contest of Images*, where she investigates reenactments and the way they portray the past. What she argues is that reenactments and living history interpretations can serve either to uphold "official memory" or subvert it through the portrayal of "counter-memory." According to Apel, "official memory" is defined as "… the memory encoded in the public archive of representations. […] Official memory is thus shaped by those who control the images and reports, while evidence to the contrary often becomes invisible to larger public view."[66]

This idea of "official memory" bears a striking resemblance to Brochu and Merriman's interpreganda, which in a living history setting may include a biased or overly idealized view of the past, often leaving out many diverse voices or complex issues. In contrast to this, however, Apel describes how counter-memory is "… the production of new memory that challenges official memory."[67] Generally, this relates to

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[65] Ibid, 18-19.

[66] Apel, *War Culture and the Contest of Images*, 62-63.

[67] Ibid, 63.

any manner of presenting history in such a way that complicates the code of archived images that makes up the popular understanding of history. Counter-memory, then is anything that is overlooked, unknown, or commonly disregarded by the masses. This in itself provides fertile ground for provocation as it serves to broaden peoples' understanding of history when those overlooked counter-memories are made known to them. The true value of staging reenactments of counter-memory, according to Apel, is that:

> Unlike historical war reenactment, which sacrifices broader interpretive questions about the memory and meaning of historical events in order to privilege intensified personal experience, reenactment that reframes official histories to produce counter-memories aspires to investigate the political over the self and to utilize the intensified personal experience of participants and witnesses to support a more critical political awareness of the past and its effects on the present.[68]

This can be seen in relation to that aspect of provocation which encourages changes in current behaviors, for ideally, once the audience member becomes aware of the political ramifications of the counter-memory being portrayed before them and how it is playing out in the present day, the audience member would change the way they behave in accordance with this new understanding.

The reenactment Apel lists as an example of this politically minded counter-memory is the Moore's Ford Quadruple Lynching reenactment. The reenactment, first started in 1964 and reinstated in 2005 by the Georgia Association of Black Elected

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[68] Ibid, 64.

Officials, stages the 1946 quadruple lynching of four African Americans, two men and two women, one of whom was pregnant, at Moore's Ford, Georgia. The purpose for staging such a reenactment was to "… keep the atrocity of this multiple lynching before the eyes of the public and to push for indictments against those responsible who are still living."[69] The reenactment has continued annually through 2020, and in that same year an appeal was made for evidence to be reexamined. Ultimately, a federal appeals court ruled that the evidence was to remain sealed on a cold case of 74 years and counting.[70] The lynching reenactment operates on a similar vein as *This Accursed Thing* in the UK, for it directly implicates the audience by challenging their understanding of the past. Taking it one step further, confrontations with the slave trade have been brought into other arenas within the US as well.

Living historians Stephen Gapps of Australia and Stacy F. Roth of the United States both describe how the decision was made by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in 1994 to include the depiction of a slave auction as part of their interpretive programming.[71] Roth describes how the purpose behind Williamsburg's decision to incorporate such a reenactment was to "… illustrate slavery in the lives of eighteenth-century Virginians as a matter-of-fact phenomenon, neither overemphasized nor avoided"

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[69] Ibid, 72.

[70] Neil Vigdor, "Records in 1946 Lynching Case Must Remain Sealed, Court Rules," *The New York Times*, March 30, 2020, accessed April 5, 2021 https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/30/us/Moores-ford-lynching-Georgia.html

[71] Gapps, "Mobile Monuments," 404.

Roth, *Past Into Present*, 169-171.

and thus prevent an oversimplification or idealization of history.[72] In accordance with this goal, much effort was put into the planning of the reenactment. In order to ground their work in historical fact, the staff picked carefully documented cases of four enslaved peoples to be depicted, namely "… the sale of a carpenter, the purchase of a laundress by her free black husband, and lastly, the more emotional situation of a husband and wife separated by sale to different masters."[73] Despite the careful research and preparation that went into the reenactment of a slave auction, these plans were met with protest for the humiliating portrayal of African Americans.

On the day of the performance, members of the NAACP, college students, and other protesters voiced their disapproval, even going so far as to hold a sit-in right in the middle of the performance space.[74] As the reenactment progressed, however, some members of the public came to change their minds. Rather than degrade or humiliate African Americans through depicting them as slaves in the midst of being traded, what the performance did, according to one spectator, was show how "Pain had a face, indignity had a body, and suffering had tears."[75] Like *This Accursed Thing* and the Moore's Ford Quadruple Lynching reenactment, the slave auction laid bare the heritage of America, for all to see, and forced the audience to give present recognition to the fact that racism, oppression, and exploitation has been a part of our earliest history, though it has been much overlooked. As far as official memory and counter memory are

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[72] Ibid, 169.

[73] Ibid, 169.

[74] Ibid, 170.

[75] Gapps, "Mobile Monuments," 404.

concerned, the slave auction reenactment functioned to bring to light the lived experience of an oppressed group of people whose stories had not been told, and brought these previously overlooked aspects of history to the forefront of public attention.

Of course, not everyone was fully convinced of the slave auction's purpose. Roth describes how one protestor went away commenting that "It's not showing the true story of what it was like to be a slave. Where is the story of the people who fought back?"[76] It would take another 25 years for this protester's criticism to be heeded in the realm of reenactment. In November of 2019, another event with equally provocative ambitions was staged to portray the 1811 German Coast Uprising, where nearly 500 enslaved peoples revolted against their plantation owners and marched on New Orleans.[77] Coordinated by New York artist Dread Scott, this event involved hundreds of African American reenactors and took nearly six years to coordinate. Like the Moore's Ford Quadruple Lynching reenactment, the German Coast Uprising reenactment had a similar purpose of provocation. Where the Quadruple Lynching reenactment is staged to draw attention to the history of black oppression that pervades the United States and push for social change in the present day, the German Coast Uprising reenactment was staged to provide a Counter-Memory that "undermined the notion of the "happy slave"."[78] The goal of the reenactment was to change people's minds by confronting their perceptions of enslaved peoples and connect them with a new way of understanding the past. Though the events being presented may be discomforting or shocking to audiences, especially

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[76] Roth, *Past Into Present* 171.

[77] Rick Rojas, "A Slave Rebellion Rises Again," in *The New York Times*, November 9, 2019, accessed April 5, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/09/us/a-slave-rebellion-rises-again.html

[78] Rojas, "Slave Rebellion."

those who were previously unaware of their history, these reenactments of unsettling

moments of history function as part of a greater provocation to broaden an audience's

understanding of the past and give voice to previously overlooked, underrepresented, or

unrecognized historical perspectives.

What I hope is evident from these examples is that the events dispel an easy

misconception about the ideas of provocation, unsettlement, and counter memory. When

first introduced to these ideas, the impression I got was that of confrontation, where

information is being presented and demonstrations are being enacted only for the sake of

shocking the audience; they are being provocative for the sake of being provocative.

Indeed, as mentioned by Jackson, discomfort can be experienced by the audience in

witnessing these events, but that ought not be the only reason for engaging in these

programs. Relating it back to Ham's idea of enjoyment, Jackson admits that it is a

delicate balance of challenging preconceptions without demoralizing or turning the

audience against what is being said. Furthermore, in relating Interpretation back to the

idea of it being a form of communication, the goal is to create a dialogue, not a

monologue. "That in a nut-shell," says Jackson, "is the main challenge for the performer

[or interpreter]: how to unsettle *and* take your audience with you" [author's italics].[79]

As such, if the audience brings one part of the conversation, and the interpreters

or reenactors are bringing another part of the conversation, the challenge is in presenting

the two sides in such a way that constructive dialogue is created. What has become

apparent is that the ideas of provocation, unsettlement and counter memory are not some

kind of agitational propaganda for the sake of furthering its own agenda, but a carefully

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[79] Jackson, "Engaging the Audience," 20.

considered and thoroughly coordinated programing designed to create new understanding. But how are these organizations to keep themselves from falling into the one-sided argumentation of interpreganda? How are they to create a balanced discussion that meets their interpretive goal? A key aspect that all four of these events, from *This Accursed Thing*, to the Moore's Ford Quadruple Lynching reenactment, to Colonial Williamsburg's slave auction, to the German Coast Slave Rebellion reenactment, is that they all demonstrate a connection and guidance by the goals set for themselves in an organization's mission. The relationship between an interpretive program and an organization's mission is something that has been alluded to in several of the definitions that have been stated earlier, and that idea is the final organizing principle of natural and cultural interpretation which I shall be discussing.

<u>Connection to Mission</u>

Recalling the definitions advanced by Ham and the NAI discussed above about what constitutes interpretation, I turn now to one final component put forward by Ham. When beginning his definition of interpretation, Ham asserts that "Interpretation is a *mission-based* approach to communication" [my italics] therefore making interpretation the core business of the organization, rather than just some tacked-on embellishment.[80] Of course Ham gives credit that this aspect of his definition was inspired by the NAI's definition, which itself begins with a similarly worded assertion that "Interpretation is a

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[80] Ham, *Making a Difference*, 8.

mission-based communication process" [my italics, again] which thereby links the interpretive process as an indelible aspect of the organization.[81]

Entwining interpretive techniques together with the organization's mission serves two functions. On the one hand, as Ham asserts, it heightens the importance of interpretation by making it all the more relevant to the organization and its goals. It gives the reenactments and interpretive programs a sense of purpose and reason for existing within that organization, and provides context for why the audience is witnessing what they are witnessing. When writing about suggested criteria for first-person programs, Stacy F. Roth cites Ken Yellis and Tom Vance when she says that programs ought to begin first and foremost with considerations of "*Appropriateness and purpose*. Programs should dovetail institutions' missions, educational and interpretive goals, and topical focus" [author's italics].[82] Therefore, if an organization does incorporate living history interpretation or reenactment, it ought to be for reasons that support their mission, and the mission ought to justify the presence of these interpretive practices.

In a later chapter of her book, Roth discusses the interpretation of "Special Situations: Conflict, Controversy, and Heightened Emotion" similar to the examples listed earlier, with the Colonial Williamsburg slave auction being one in particular she discusses. There are six points that Roth asks organizers to consider before approaching controversial material in their programs. First and foremost, what she asks for is that

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[81] Brochu and Merriman, *Personal Interpretation*, 17-18.

   Ham, *Making a Difference*, 7.

[82] Roth, *Past Into Present*, 43.

… sensitive materials should be meaningful within the purpose of a program and compliment sponsors' larger missions. What is the intended message and why should audiences learn about it? What attitudes do we want to change – and why? What public response is anticipated? What repercussions might result? Should ethnic, religious, descendant, or partisan organizations be involved to contribute to the planning process?[83]

Ultimately, making sure that the interpretive programming is inspired by, and in support of, the mission helps to ensure that the organization has sound reasoning behind their decision to present potentially controversial or offensive material, and have done their work so that the interpreters or reenactors carrying out the programming can avoid the profound offense that the programming could lead to if done without purpose or forethought.

When speaking about the Theme of an interpretive program, Ham says that the theme statement ought to answer the question of "So what."[84] Connecting the interpretive program to the organization's mission serves a similar function as a guiding principle. It answers the question of why this material is being presented, in this way, for this audience?

The Colonial Williamsburg slave auction could be interpreted as asserting that Africans are nothing more than commodities to be bought and sold like any other item. But, when the reenactment is tied to the organization's mission "To feed the human spirit by sharing America's enduring story," it then becomes a portrayal of the endurance of

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[83] Ibid, 161-162.

[84] Ham, *Making a Difference*, 24.

enslaved Africans in the early American colonies, and a depiction of the human spirit of these peoples who are often overlooked in the story of America.[85] The other examples cited had similar ties between the material being presented and the goals for the organization. The German Coast Slave Rebellion reenactment had a mission to bring attention to a suppressed history and empower audiences and participants by connecting them with that history. The Moore's Ford Quadruple Lynching had a similar mission of connecting present audiences with an overlooked past, but with the added impetus to push for social change in the present day. Finally, *This Accursed Thing* was staged at the Manchester Museum in order to open discussion about England's role in the slave trade and its eventual abolition.

By connecting their interpretive programming to their missions, the organizations were able to stage living history interpretations and reenactments that were thoroughly considered in the goals they were setting out to achieve and the means they were using to achieve them. This is all an example of what may occur when a mission is woven into and supported by the interpretive programming.

Of course, I realize that merely saying that "it's part of our mission" does not immediately absolve an organization from being offensive. And indeed, not every program has to present material as jarring as a slave auction to their audiences. Adherence to an organization's mission does not mean that it has to go out of its way to create a provocative atmosphere. It could serve to create dialogue about the past and its relation to the present day, or it could have more affable and idealized portrayals of

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[85] "Mission," Colonial Williamsburg, accessed 1 February, 2021.
https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/learn/about-colonial-williamsburg/

history *depending on whether it is the organization's mission to do so*. If the organization has a mission to teach history and portray the past as it was, then they owe it to themselves and their audiences to portray the past both for what is familiar and comforting *and* what is shameful and unsettling. If the organization has a mission to entertain and celebrate, then the depiction of a lynching or slave auction may be out of place in the tone or atmosphere the organization and their mission seeks to create.

However, what is it that happens to the organization when they embrace an interpretive program such as living history interpretation? If influence can flow from one entity to another, our earlier discussion being the movement from organization to interpretive programming via the mission, then what influence does the interpretive programming have over the organization? By taking on interpretive programs such as living history and reenactment, an organization, by extension, takes on the interpretive principles that go along with it. This makes the techniques that are a part of interpretation (the balance of information and engagement, relating material to an audience, and provoking new understanding) a necessary part of the material being presented. This constitutes the second function of intwining an organization's mission with the interpretive programming. By incorporating interpretation, it brings with it the other principles that are a part of its practice. If these are not present, then can a program truly call itself interpretive?

If it is the mission of a particular organization to portray one particular group or perspective, then they are well within their rights to do so. If it is part of their mission to hold the event privately for their own purposes, then that is fully in alignment with the goals they have set out for themselves. However, if it is their mission to encompass a

general representation of daily life and attitudes, and present it in an interpretive manner to the public, then they have an obligation to live up to the interpretive goals set down by their own mission. They have an obligation to engage in provocation, unsettling, and counter memory as part of the general representation they encompass. They have an obligation to create dialogue between these new or unfamiliar ideas and the audience which they serve. And they have an obligation to serve the goals set down by their mission, in all of its breadth and depth, or revise it to better define what they intend to accomplish.

As evident from what I have laid out in this chapter, living history interpretation specifically, and reenacting generally, has the potential to re-shape and re-define the audience's understanding about history and the way they think; both with regards to the past and its implications in the present. As such, an enormous amount of responsibility is placed on the shoulders of living history interpreters and reenactors. Brochu and Merriman remind the prospective interpreter that "… you hold a certain amount of power and influence over what the audience is led to believe. But interpretation is not your personal soapbox. Those of you who interpret nature and history owe your audience a *balanced presentation*" [my italics].[86] The authors even go on to describe how Civil War battles are a perfect example of how this ought to be honored, for the battles "… had at least two distinct factions represented, each with its own point of view. […] Each of these stories must be told in a manner that balances all of them."[87] Here again, the purpose of the interpretive experience is not for the interpreter to pontificate some foregone

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[86] Brochu and Merriman, *Personal Interpretation*, 18.

[87] Ibid, 19.

conclusion, but sow the seeds for the audience member to come to their own conclusion or make up their own mind about what is being presented. Brochu and Merriman remind us to keep the audience in mind, for "Respecting their diverse opinions and beliefs ensures that they will judge the interpretive experience on its own merits, not its support of any partisan view of environmental issues or cultural controversies."[88] Rather than devolve into interpreganda by cutting off conversation and presenting only one perspective, the audience is allowed to come to their own conclusions and engage in conversation as multiple perspectives are offered for them to consider.

That does not immediately imply, however, that the interpreter ought to remain completely ambivalent on every subject. Beck and Cable mention that part of what may be a cause for confrontation or discomfort between interpreters and audience is that "Interpreters are obliged to tell the truth. They must acknowledge issues that have not yet been resolved and those with conflicting evidence. Yet when it is clear that, as Leopold admonished, "a thing is right" or "it is wrong," then it must be logically and forcefully presented as such."[89] Though an interpretive program may present ideas that are new and unsettling to some people, there is always a reason behind it. Those reasons, as I have shown are linked to focusing on the audience's experience, insofar as it leads to a provocation of new understanding, as guided by an organization's mission and goals. With that being the case, let us now turn our attention to the practice of Civil War reenacting and examine how these ideas coincide or deviate from each other.

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[88] Ibid.

[89] Beck and Cable, *Gifts of Interpretation*, 39.

CHAPTER III

AMERICAN CIVIL WAR REENACTING

Perhaps it is appropriate to begin a discussion about American Civil War reenacting, a tradition that asserts its ability to examine the past, by investigating the history and early origins of the pastime itself. In doing so, this will give an idea of the trajectory it set for itself, as well as the values, habits and practices that it was founded on and evolved along with it. By getting a sense of the foundational ideas that have persisted throughout its existence, this will inform us as to how closely it does or does not fit with the principles of interpretation as discussed in the previous chapter. Again, there are many different practitioners of American Civil War reenacting, and many different ways of practicing it. However, the history and patterns discussed in this chapter are in reference to the practices of American Civil War reenactors as mainstream hobbyists and the ideas they generally, and Confederate reenactors specifically, convey to the public.

Author and reenactor R. Lee Hadden wrote what may be considered the most comprehensive history of American Civil War reenacting in the first chapter of his book *Reliving the Civil War: A Reenactor's Handbook*. He points to the war's centennial from 1961-1965 as being the major time in which the hobby of American Civil War reenacting was popularized en masse. He describes the events that were organized around this time as being mostly "… an attempt to entertain an audience of fifty thousand on temporary football bleachers," though he points to military schools visiting battle fields and walking through the maneuvers as part of reenacting's origins as well.[90] What distinguished it as an organized hobby instead of a random converging of enthusiasts came with the

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[90] Hadden, *Reliving the Civil War*, 3.

establishment of the *North-South Skirmish Association* (N-SSA) in the mid-20th-century, which operated itself as a shooting club that specialized in black-powder firearms of the American Civil War era. As Hadden explains, this organization "… produced a lucrative market for equipment and uniforms that sparked the modern reenactment hobby," and established a firm connection between American Civil War reenacting and the material culture of the era they present.[91]

Even today, these hobbyists meet together and demonstrate how the weaponry and equipment would be used. According to the mission statement of the N-SSA, their purpose is to promote "… the competitive shooting of Civil War firearms and artillery while encouraging the preservation of battlefields, artifacts, clothing and education of the period."[92] This links organizations such as the N-SSA with at least a few key aspects of interpretive techniques we discussed previously. From the key words used in their mission statement such as "artifacts" and "education," this would put an organization like the N-SSA firmly in the teacher endgame described by Ham. Clearly they intend to pass information to their audience about the weaponry and how they are used. One could even say that an element of the entertainer endgame is included, for the attention of the audience as well as the participants may be held through the enjoyment of watching a competitive sporting event.

The *About* section of the website conveniently breaks down the two major aspects of what they do as being skirmishing and uniforms. The skirmishing aspect relates to the

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[91] Ibid.

[92] "Home Page," North-South Skirmish Association, accessed February 15, 2021. http://www.n-ssa.org/

competitive nature of their events, with different teams showing off their skills in marksmanship, while the uniforms section highlights their "lively interest in Civil War era clothing and display of artifacts."[93] These dual priorities, one focusing on camaraderie and marksmanship while the other concerns itself with information and material culture, fits itself comfortably in at least two of Ham's three endgames.

These two elements of education and entertainment are spoken for in the N-SSA, but what about the final, all-important endgame of provocation? What new understanding or way of seeing are the members of the N-SSA trying to provoke in their audience? Well, if one looks at the language around these topics on the organization's website, a third element stands out which they do not immediately talk about as part of their mission, but is still present nonetheless.

Returning to their early history and foundation, the *About* page describes itself as being "… formed in 1950 to commemorate the heroism of the men, of both sides, who fought in the American Civil War."[94] Not only are they an educational organization, but they also have a subtle function as a commemorative organization. Not only do they educate about the past, but they shape the memory-making of the American Civil War in the present day. The spirit of recreating the past and shaping the memory of the American Civil War through commemorative practices has precedents going back much further than the 1950s, even as far back as the years immediately after the American Civil War, and is what informs the manner in which Confederate reenactors carry out their hobby.

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[93] "About the N-SSA." North-South Skirmish Association, accessed February 15, 2021. http://www.n-ssa.org/about-nssa

[94] Ibid.

Shortly after the war ended, and indeed, even during the war, a concerted effort was made both in the North and the South to memorialize the soldiers both living and dead who had fought in the conflict. What is worth noting with regards to the Confederacy is that these efforts were championed primarily by women.[95] Throughout the conflict, women formed a pivotal backbone to the Southern cause, providing supplies as part of Relief Societies and taking up jobs in hospitals and administration that were left vacant by men who went to fight.[96] After the war, the women shifted their focus from supporting the troops to commemorating them. Local organizations were established for the care and keep of Confederate cemeteries, including the Ladies' Memorial Association of Raleigh, North Carolina, which would go on to inter Confederate soldiers at Gettysburg and Arlington, as well as the Hollywood Memorial Association in Richmond, Virginia.[97] Perhaps one of the most significant and longest lasting legacies of these memorial organizations was the establishment of Confederate Memorial Day.

Though the specifics of how this day was founded are uncertain since local organizations had their own variations that began independently of each other, the epicenter of this movement seems to have been the state of Georgia. In 1866, Elizabeth Rutherford recommended an "annual observance for the decoration of the soldier's

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[95] Jennifer L. Gross, "The United Daughters of the Confederacy, Confederate Widows, and the Lost Cause," in *Women On Their Own: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Being Single*, ed. Rudolph M. Bell and Virginia Yans (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 180-200.

[96] Gross, "The United Daughters of the Confederacy," 181.

Lloyd A. Hunter, "The Immortal Confederacy: Another Look at the Cause Religion," in *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* ed. Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press), 2000. 189-190.

[97] Gross, "The United Daughters of the Confederacy," 182.

resting places" which was swiftly approved by the Columbus Memorial Association and set the date for April 26th, the day that General Joseph E. Johnston surrendered to General Sherman.[98] In that same year, 1866, the widow of Georgian soldier Charles J. Williams published an appeal for a day "to be handed down through time as a religious custom of the South to wreathe the graves of our martyred dead with flowers."[99] It was not until 1900 that an effort was made to unify their grieving practices when the Confederate Southern Memorial Association brought together representatives of memorial groups to establish an official Confederate Memorial Day on June 3rd; Jefferson Davis's birthday.[100] These events grew to a monumental scale, at times attracting up to 1500 veterans, and involved much pomp and circumstance.[101] The drills, marches, speeches, prayers, and dances culminated with a visit to the Confederate graveyard, all calling to mind the glory days of the Southern cause. Through this concerted effort to re-unite and re-create the days when the Confederacy was in its prime, it gave the participants a chance to re-live the values they fought for. One veteran in Memphis in 1909 felt as though he himself were back in the thick of battle fighting for the Southern cause, where he "could hear Jackson's legions thundering down the slope and catch the dust of Forrest's brigade clattering by."[102] These annual gatherings and rituals of remembrance

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[98] Hunter, "The Immortal Confederacy," 190.

[99] Gross, "The United Daughters of the Confederacy," 182.

[100] Gross, "The United Daughters of the Confederacy," 183.

Hunter, "The Immortal Confederacy," 190.

[101] Hunter, "The Immortal Confederacy," 201-203

[102] Ibid, 202.

allowed Southerners to keep the past, and the loved ones who died in the war, ever present in their lives. However, these occasions of remembrance served a dual purpose. Not only did they allow Southerners to process their grief and honor their dead, but, according to a statement by the Georgia Ladies' Memorial Association, they would "serve to preserve the 'lost cause' of their men's economic and political position."[103]

By joining in a process of collective grieving, Southerners also joined in a process of collective memory-making whereby the idea of the South having fought a 'Lost Cause' emerged as a way for them to cope with defeat. In Lloyd Hunter's analysis of the religious fervor behind Confederate iconography, he establishes the 'Lost Cause' as having been founded "as the Southerner's normative response to the trauma of culture shock and its related suffering."[104] The relationship between ideology and iconography is expanded upon by Mitchell D. Strauss as he relates how the 'Lost Cause' was created "as a defense mechanism to cope with or rationalize the devastating physical and psychological trauma visited upon the south by the war."[105] According to Gross, the reason why this was instigated by women during the reconstruction era was that it "reassured still-living Southern men of their masculinity by reinforcing the masculinity involved in fighting for the Cause—despite loss of the war to the North."[106] Through the process of coming to terms with Union victory, a new Southern identity was forged to give a sense of pride and dignity in the face of defeat. What emerged were a number of

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[103] Gross, "The United Daughters of the Confederacy," 183.

[104] Hunter, "The Immortal Confederacy," 187.

[105] Strauss, "Identity Construction," 151.

[106] Gross, "The United Daughters of the Confederacy," 180.

beliefs that came to be shared among Southerners as an essential part of their redemptive 'Lost Cause' narrative.

In Volume 4 of the *New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, aptly titled "Myth, Manners, and Memory," a brief section is included describing the 'Lost Cause' as a belief that the Confederate forces during the war were ultimately doomed to fail. "[The 'Lost Cause'] attributed the South's defeat not to failings by its soldiers or disunity within the Confederacy, but to the overwhelming numbers and resources of the North. Defeat therefore became the inevitable result of Northern power, not a judgment on the South."[107] The passage then goes on to say how a sense of righteousness and moral vindication emerged out of this. If a victory for the South was impossible from the start, then God allowed their defeat "only to prepare the South for an eventual triumph through a vindication of its principles."[108] Such an idea lends itself to the notion that the Confederacy was fighting in a just war and had a right to defend itself from the Northerners who were unjustly invading their land.

In the post-war years of reconstruction, many Southerners vociferously advocated for the justness of their war. In 1896, Confederate Brigadier General Bradley T. Johnson stated that "the war waged up on the South was an unjust and causeless war of invasion and rapine, of plunder and murder, not for patriotism or high motives, but to gratify ambition and lust for power in the promoters of it. […] the war of the South was a war of self-defense justified by all laws sacred and divine, of nature or of man."[109] To put a

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[107] Gaines M. Foster, "Lost Cause Myth," in *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 4: Myth, Manners, and Memory*, ed. Charles Regan Wilson (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 240.

[108] Foster, "Lost Cause Myth," 240.

[109] Hunter, "The Immortal Confederacy," 206-207.

specific name on it, these "laws sacred and divine" would be the rights to secede from the Union. In 1900, Benjamin Morgan Palmer asserted that "Whatever may have been the occasion of the war […] the hinge on which it turned, was the old question of state sovereignty as against national supremacy."[110] This notion that the South fought for states' rights is a pervasive idea throughout the 'Lost Cause' mythology. However, what this view of history side-steps, or outright denies, is the role that slavery played in leading to secession.

The source most all critics of the Confederacy point to in demonstrating the link between Southern secession and the retention of slavery is the infamous Cornerstone Speech given in 1861 by Alexander Hamilton Stephens shortly after he became Vice President of the new Confederate States of America. In it, Stephens explains how the Confederate government differs from that of the Union. One of the "last but not least" points he brings up is that of slavery, and while he says that the Union advocated for racial equality, Stephens assures his Confederate audience that:

> Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its
> foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests upon the great truth, that the
> Negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery – subordination to the
> superior race – is his natural and normal condition…. This, our new
> government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great
> physical, philosophical, and moral truth.[111]

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[110] Ibid, 207.

[111] Stanley Harrold, *The Civil War and Reconstruction: A Documentary Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 61.

This makes it unavoidably obvious that the South seceded from the Union and formed its own government precisely for the purpose of preserving the institution of slavery and White racial supremacy. What's more is that the Ordinances of Secession for the state of Mississippi declares in its second sentence that "Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery.[112]" Texas included such positions in their Declaration of Causes, saying that they were seceding because the federal government was "destroying the institutions of Texas and her sister slave-holding States.[113]" The institution the article refers to is explained in foregoing chapters as the "institution known as negro slavery."[114] The guarantee of the institution of slavery, the article explains, was the reason why Texas entered the Union as a state in the first place, and now that the institution is under threat, Texas declares it as enough of a reason to leave.

All of these are evidence to how strong a role the preservation of slavery had in the formation of the Confederacy. Yet, the 'Lost Cause' myth would have us believe this was not the case at all, but rather that it was states' rights, and not the preservation of slavery that led to secession. The *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* admits that the 'Lost Cause' asserted the "legality of secession and the centrality of constitutional issues, not slavery, to the coming of war."[115] Similarly, in Dora Apel's chapter of *War Culture and*

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[112] "A Declaration of the Immediate Causes which Induce and Justify the Secession of the State of Mississippi from the Federal Union," The Yale School of Law, accessed 15 May, 2021. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_missec.asp

[113] "Declaration of Causes: February 2, 1861: A declaration of the causes which impel the State of Texas to secede from the Federal Union," Texas State Library and Archives Commission, accessed 15 May, 2021. https://www.tsl.texas.gov/ref/abouttx/secession/2feb1861.html

[114] Ibid.

[115] Foster, "Lost Cause Myth," 240.

the Contest of Images in which she critiques the practice of historical reenactment, she makes plain that there is a "long tradition of Civil War revisionism that attempts to erase slavery from the war narrative and to reimagine the Civil War and the lost Southern cause as a noble battle for state's rights against an oppressive federal government."[116] Some say that the victors write the history books, but in this case, the vindication of the Southern cause came not in battlefield prowess, but in shaping the narratives surrounding those battles.

By advocating for the virtue of the Southern cause, while at the same time denying the attitudes of racial supremacy that were foundational cornerstones of that cause, a dangerous double-standard is created in which people can say the Confederacy has nothing to do with race, while at the same time taking actions in support of the Confederate South that have everything to do with race. What makes it disturbing as far as the link between the 'Lost Cause' and Civil War reenactments are concerned is when looking at the chronology of when reenactments became popularized across the US. Often, these coincided with particular historic or social movements to which the 'Lost Cause' narrative acts against.

When looking at the Southern Poverty Law Center's chart depicting the years in which Confederate monuments were erected, they reach their peak at the early turn-of-the-20th-century, right as Confederate Memorial Day gained its official bearings.[117] At this time, not only were many of the veterans who fought for the Confederacy beginning

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[116] Apel, *War Culture and the Contest of Images,* 59.

[117] Miles Parks, "Confederate Statues were Built to Further a White Supremacist Future," *National Public Radio*, August 20, 2017, accessed March 23, 2021.
file:///C:/Users/Mica%20One/Documents/U%20of%20O/Theatre%20Arts/TA%20607.%20Thtr%20&%20
War/Research/Why%20Were%20Confederate%20Monuments%20Built_%20_%20NPR.html

to die off, but it also marked a time when Jim Crow laws were being enacted against southern Blacks. The rise of Confederate monuments and 'Lost Cause' sympathies would not resurge again until the 1950s and '60s, aptly enough during the centennial of the American Civil War, but also during increased upheaval over the Civil Rights movement. It was also during this time that American Civil War reenactments and organizations such as the N-SSA started to be organized, and the presence of these living reminders of days-gone-by served much the same function as the monuments.[118]

When speaking to NPR, Jane Daily, an associate professor of History at the University of Chicago, stated that "Most of the people who were involved in erecting the monuments were not necessarily erecting a monument to the past, but were rather, erecting them toward a white supremacist future."[119] The purpose of erecting such monuments and portraying such history through reenactment was not just to commemorate an idealized past, but to send a message to African Americans during a time when the White hegemony was being destabilized. It served to remind Black Americans of their "proper place" when Whites were superior and Blacks were inferior. This idea of reenactment and Confederate iconography being used to send a message of racial superiority forms the thesis behind Apel's idea of why American Civil War Reenacting took off during the 1950s and '60s. To her, American Civil War

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[118] Dunning, "Civil War Re-Enactments," 65.

Foster, "Lost Cause Myth," 241.

Turner, "Bloodless Battles," 123-124.

[119] Parks, "Confederate Statues."

Reenactments at this time may be seen as "a form of symbolic defiance against the era of affirmative action and the challenge to the white patriarchy."[120]

This, together with the prolific use of confederate iconography such as the battle flag and image of the rebel soldier by segregationists defies the belief that the Confederacy and what it stood for had nothing to do with race.[121] Though the inception of modern Civil War reenacting was as a counter-action to the Civil Rights Movement and often falls into interpreganda by operating as a ritualistic perpetuation of 'Lost Cause' commemorations, many reenactors would return to the artifact-based nature of their interpreting the past to argue for the educational value of bringing the past to life. Though the tradition of American Civil War reenacting may make claims to 'historical authenticity' to justify its existence, I will use the next section of this chapter to elaborate on what their idea of 'authenticity' entails, and just how far reenactors are willing to go in pursuit of it.

Let's Do the Time Warp Again

The notion of 'Historical Authenticity' with regards to reenacting has been studied and criticized by a number of scholars, both from within and outside the circles of reenacting. Public historian and founder of Australia's first History Events Management

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[120] Apel, "War Culture and the Contest of Images," 49.

[121] Foster, "Lost Cause Myth," 241.

A brief note about the flags of the Confederacy, the one commonly seen with the blue 'X' bordered in white on a field of red with thirteen white five-pointed stars is not the national flag used for government purposes, but the battle flag. The national flag went through various incarnations, but the original 'stars and bars' consisted of three horizontal stripes or 'bars of red, white, and red, with a field of blue in the upper left containing a circle of thirteen white stars. This was the flag used as the Confederate national flag up to 1863, but fell into disuse on the battlefield due to its similarity to the 'stars and stripes' of the Union army.

Company, Stephen Gapps, cites the historical accuracy of reenacting's accoutrements as being the reenactor's claim to legitimacy. In comparing the reenactor to the historian, he states that "Like historians, reenactors not only tell stories but also cite evidence: the footnote for the historian is the authentic (recreated) costume to the reenactor."[122] Just as a historian is nothing without their research, so too is a reenactor nothing without the recreated material culture of the era they are representing.

Indeed, this material sense of authenticity is what grounds reenactors in a sense of accurately portraying the past. Rory Turner, perhaps one of the earliest scholars to write about the practice of American Civil War reenacting, describes authenticity as a "token isomorphism" where it is "an aesthetic of painstaking detail and accuracy" with everything being the same materials as what soldiers would have handled back in the 1860s.[123] When speaking with another reenactor, Turner was told what constitutes a 'good' reenactor and what constitutes a 'bad' one. "You're seeing the cream of the crop" says the good, authentic reenactor. "All our stuff is either original or wool" while for the bad, inauthentic reenactor, "Their reaps and belts aren't right, their shoes are wrong, and they get sloppy because they don't have a set uniform."[124] It becomes evident that the credibility of reenactors is closely associated with being as materially faithful as possible to what they would have had in the past.

While studying World War II reenactors in Denmark, Anne Braedder, et. al. list three criteria to what constitutes their ideas of 'authenticity.' To begin with, her and her

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[122] Gapps, "Mobile Monuments," 398.

[123] Turner, "Bloodless Battles," 127.

[124] Turner, "Bloodless Battles," 127. Interview with Michael J. Krause and Unidentified Soldier in 1985, New Market, Virginia.

team decide that "how the reenactor looks plays an essential role" towards creating a sense of authenticity. Second is the relationship of the reenactors among each other as part of a group, since "this collective will more genuinely resemble a unit from the war." Finally, they make an interesting turn to say that the "authentic experience is also created as an embodied practice […] used to give the reenactor a similar bodily experience to a soldier during World War II."[125] This is an interesting shift, for now the focus is placed, not only on the external trappings of how the reenactor is dressed, but a bodily experience, where the reenactor's own self is made the site of practices to achieve 'authenticity.'

Within the realm of reenacting, jargon has developed in order to describe the spectrum of participants and the degree to which they strive for 'authenticity.' Stephen Gapps gives a very efficient breakdown of this hierarchy, but the extreme ends of the spectrum are commonly understood almost universally by most all scholars in the field through the two terms described in the Introduction.[126] To remind you, this is the distinction between the "farbs" and the "hard-core" reenactors.[127] The farbs may be seen as the 'bad reenactors' as mentioned in Turner's interview who arrive with polyester uniforms and plastic buttons and modern boots. Recreating history is less so their focus,

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[125] Anne Braedder, et.al. "Doing Past: Authenticity from the Reenactors' Perspective," *Rethinking History*, 21, no. 2 (2017): 175. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2017.1315969

[126] Gapps, "Mobile Monuments," 400.

[127] Randall Allred, "Catharsis, Revision, and Re-enactment: Negotiating Meaning of the American Civil War," *Journal of American Culture*, 19, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 3.

Dunning, "Civil War Re-Enactments: Performance as a Cultural Practice," 67.

Gapps, "Mobile Monuments," 400.

Turner, "Bloodless Battles," 127.

but they're at the reenactment to have a good time. Meanwhile, at the opposite end of the spectrum are those who are willing to go to extremes for the sake of historical 'authenticity.' These are the "Hard-Core" reenactors.[128]

Within this group, they attempt not only to dress the same as their historical counterparts, but to engage in the same embodied lived experience as them. Recall the description of Tony Horowitz where hard-core reenactors replicate the living and eating habits of Civil War soldiers, even so far as to go on crash diets to re-create the emaciated look of soldiers who have been marching for months on end.[129] To explain why reenactors would go to such punishing lengths for the sake of a weekend battle being so totally 'authentic,' Gapps states that "physical pain is proof of an authentic experience and often works as a form of penance for playing at being soldiers: it reminds reenactors how hard it was 'back then.' Moreover, it can be used to bolster the serious aspect of their activities, namely remembering the historical participants."[130]

From this, we get the sense that putting the body through such punishing lengths for the sake of 'historical authenticity' signals that the work reenactors are doing is more than just 'playing pretend,' but that they are themselves undergoing the same punishing conditions as their historical predecessors. In a manual written in 1997 by Kent Courtney on how to become a Civil War Reenactor, he describes this method of 'Hard-Core' reenacting as being a "process of 'getting into it' that transforms a twentieth-century

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[128] Dunning, "Civil War Re-Enactments: Performance as a Cultural Practice," 67.

Gapps, "Mobile Monuments," 400.

[129] Dunning, "Civil War Re-Enactments: Performance as a Cultural Practice," 67.

[130] Gapps, "Mobile Monuments," 400.

resident into that other time period. Maybe a drama student would call it 'method reenacting'."[131] Of course, Method Acting as it is practiced by theatre and Hollywood actors today has received criticism, much of which is applicable to the dangers of this "method reenacting" that Courtney calls for.

In a 2016 article published in *The Atlantic*, Angelica Jade Bastién centers her criticism of method acting around its use as a marketing ploy by Hollywood studios and its effort to try to masculinize the perceived femininity of acting for a living. What Bastién claims is that through method acting, men were able to "signal that he works for his art; he can make his labor visible" rather than have their work be perceived as the "sissy" job of coming in, getting their makeup done, and playing pretend.[132] This correlates directly to what Gapps was describing, where physical suffering acts as proof of their work. The masculine identity associated with Civil War reenacting becomes even more apparent when seeing that the demographics of those reenactments are almost exclusively male.

As of 2012, women made up only 3% of Civil War reenactors, while people of color made up even less.[133] Because of this, the atmosphere of Civil War reenactments have become what Patrick McCarthy describes as "primary arenas for men and masculinity" where "traditional masculine ideals – power, dominance, strength,

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[131] Kent Courtney, *Returning to the Civil War: Grand Reenactments of an Anguished Time*, (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith Publisher, 1997), 20.

[132] Angelica Jade Bastién, "Hollywood has Ruined Method Acting: Jared Leto's Turn in *Suicide Squad* is the Latest Reminder that the Technique has Become More About Ego and Marketing than Good Performances," *The Atlantic*, August 11, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/08/hollywood-has-ruined-method-acting/494777/

[133] Apel, "War Culture and the Contest of Images," 48.

invulnerability, and toughness – rank highest among the male characteristics, which must be developed in order to accept, enjoy, or tolerate these experiences."[134] From this, the performance of masculine ideals exemplified in such displays of strength and endurance as 'hard-core' 'method reenacting' makes the reenactment event less so about historical authenticity than it is about living out some fantasy of a masculine, almost Aryan, ideal.

Obviously, there are other methods available to create a sense of the past and educate about history without putting people's health and safety at risk, but this does not seem to be the only concern to 'hard-core' reenactors. What is of primary importance to them is not necessarily the experiences other people will have when being taught about the Civil War, but the subjective experience of the reenactors themselves as they eat, sleep, and breathe the past. All of these efforts are claimed to be done for the sake of creating a bodily experience which the reenactor feels is similar to, if not the same as, the bodily experience of their historical counterparts. What makes it even more worrisome is when the reenactor's mind is brought into this process of embodiment as well.

Assistant Professor of English Randal Allred quotes reenactor Patrick McDermott when he says that "The real pure hobby is not just looking right; it's thinking right."[135] It would be easy enough to assume that this could just be the views of one particularly die-hard reenactor, to go so far as to manipulate his own mind just as the 'hard-core' reenactors manipulate their bodies. But, Courtney's manual of reenacting directly links this mental manipulation with the quest for historical authenticity. What Courtney

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[134] Patrick McCarthy, "'Living History' as the 'Real Thing': A Comparative Analysis of the Modern Mountain Man Rendezvous, Renaissance Fairs, and Civil War Reenactments," *A Review of General Semantics*, 71, no. 2 (April 2014): 117.

[135] Allred, "Catharsis, Revision, and Re-enactment" 4.

instructs is that "Period […] refers to the recreation of all the outside attire associated with the 1860s *as well as the inside attitudes and feelings of the individuals and groups living at this time*" [my italics].[136] Here again the dangerous corruptions of method acting are brought into play as the actor (or in this case, reenactor) gets so deep into the psychological space of their character that they are not able to leave the fantasy and return to reality.

What is especially troubling with regards to what Courtney advocates is that he asks reenactors to practice being in character even outside of the reenacting environment. He describes this practice as a simple "meditation or mind experiments," giving the example of one reenactor who "imagines how Grant or Sherman would have handled the same situation. Sometimes mentally calling a conference of great leaders helps to tackle a difficult problem."[137] If an actor were describing how they imagined embodying their characters out in the ordinary world, they would be labeled as delusional. But here in the reenacting world, it is seen as completely ordinary and even encouraged to blur the line between fantasy and reality. And if this process involves calling to mind leaders of the Union army, it can only be imagined how many reenactors look to Confederate leaders such as Lee, Jackson, and Davis for guidance.

When analyzing the habits of members within the Reenacting community, Patrick McCarthy describes this process of venerating Civil War heroes as being "dark impulses disguised as ritual," going on to say how "These semitrance states involve the

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[136] Courtney, *Returning to the Civil War*, 8.

[137] Courtney, *Returning to the Civil War*, 35-8.

identification (consciously or unconsciously) with a cult god."[138] As if Courtney's 'thought experiments' weren't enough, this ritualistic dimension of reenactment is further advocated for, even within the first few pages of his manual. When describing what they as reenactors do, Courtney gives none too subtle of a hint as to what he believes by titling that section "Creating a Spiritual Experience."[139] He then elaborates on this by saying within the first few sentences that "a reenactment is a large-scale séance held in broad daylight with dozens or thousands of other people. The spiritual experience comes like a flash in a time warp wherein the window has opened up and the reenactor has seen a former life."[140] Thus the entire reenactment becomes a massive theurgic ritual done in order to draw forth the presence, not of some divinity, but of the ghosts of American history who for those reenactors are venerated as deities.

It is in these moments of "time warp" that the true 'authenticity' of a Civil War reenactment lies, for here, the past and the present are seen to have merged together and become indistinguishable. This penultimate moment of reenacting is described by most every reenactor and scholar who has studied these kinds of performances, and many use different words to describe it, ranging from "Magic Moments," "Time Machine," and "Time Travel" to "Period Rush" which is the thrill of feeling as though one has been transported back in time to be in the past.[141] The ritualistic value of bringing the past to

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[138] McCarthy, "'Living History' as the 'Real Thing,'" 115.

[139] Courtney, *Returning to the Civil War*, 8

[140] Courtney, *Returning to the Civil War*, 8.

[141] Allred, "Catharsis, Revision, and Re-enactment" 6. Who describes it as "Time Travel."

   Apel, "War Culture and the Contest of Images," 51. Who describes it as "Period Rush."

the present to feel as though one is actually in that historic period is not something that came about only with modern reenactments. Going back to the Confederate Memorial Day celebrations, the soldier mentioned earlier in the paper felt as though he were actually back in the thick of battle during those celebrations.[142] Yet another veteran put his feelings more poetically as he wished that:

"Backwards, turn Backwards, O Time, in your flight.

Make me a Reb again just for tonight."[143]

Through these ritualistic overtones of the reenactment event, the truly 'Authentic' experience of the past is not made out to be a material reconstruction of a bygone era, but a psychological embodiment of the manners, thoughts, and beliefs that made it up. In the next section, I will discuss how this extreme subjectivity is actually a false representation of the Civil War that interrupts valuable discourse on history because it provides a vehicle for the reenactor's personal values to take precedence over historical criticism.

Braedder, et.al. "Doing Past: Authenticity from the Reenactors' Perspective," 175. Who describes it as "Time Machine."

Courtney, *Returning to the Civil War*, 8. Who describes it as "Time Warp."

Dunning, "Civil War Re-Enactments: Performance as a Cultural Practice," 64. Who describes it as "Period Rush."

Gapps, "Mobile Monuments," 397. Who describes it as "Holy Grail."

McCatrthy, "'Living History' as the 'Real Thing,'" 112. Who describes it as "Magic Moments."

Turner, "Bloodless Battles," 126. Who describes it as "Time Warp."

[142] See pg 50.

[143] Hunter, "The Immortal Confederacy," 202.

Naturally, within the oeuvre of reenactment scholarship, plenty of criticism has been lobbied against the 'Time Warp' as a source of authenticity. When examining the practices of reenactment as a form of historical investigation, Alexander Cook defines three key issues with which it is to be analyzed. Though his essay focuses more so on reenactments in the form of reality television series, where 21st-century volunteers are made to live within simulations of the past, the first and last points of criticism are applicable to reenactments outside of the context of television. These include "a problem of analogy" and "a persistent tendency to privilege a visceral, emotional engagement with the past at the expense of a more analytical treatment."[144] The first point of criticism directly opposes the 'Time Warp' notion of authenticity, where the reenactor encounters "moments when the "as if" of reenacting becomes "this is"," and they have an experience where they believe for a moment that they are actually living, breathing, thinking, and feeling within the past.[145] The assumption here is that the thoughts and emotions of ourselves in the here-and-now can be taken as analogous for the thoughts and emotions of people within another completely different historical period. Cook directly opposes this idea by stating that "it would be folly to expect any direct equivalence between the psychological experience of modern lab rats [i.e. the reenactors and volunteers] and that of the original historical actors whose situations are being mimicked. *We* can never be

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[144] Alexander Cook, "The Use and Abuse of Reenactment: Thoughts on Recent Trends in Public History," *Criticism*, 46, no. 3 (Summer 2004): 489.

[145] Turner, "Bloodless Battles," 126.

them" [author's italics].[146] Thus, unlike method reenacting, there is always some degree of separation between reenactor and character.

The basic idea Cook proposes is that it is impossible to assume the mentality of an historical person from a completely different time, having grown up with a completely different set of values and social conditions, after we ourselves have spent our entire lives growing up with a completely different mentality and living among a wholly different set of conditioning forces. To further elaborate on this idea, I turn to 21st century philosopher Thomas Nagle and his work *What Is It Like to Be a Bat?*

Nagle's work sinks its teeth into this idea of the phenomenology of consciousness, and uses the example of a bat to illustrate the uniqueness and incommensurability of two separate consciences. The example Nagle makes use of is to describe how bats and humans have two completely separate ways of perceiving the world around them, with bats experiencing the world through sonar, while humans experience it through sight and sound. The point Nagle makes is that, even if he were to *imagine* what it is like to be a bat and navigate by use of echolocation, such a thought experiment "tells me only what it would be like for *me* to behave as a bat behaves."[147] Ultimately, we can never escape the limitations of our own experiences. We can never truly enter the mind of another because it will always be interpreted through the mind we already have, always have had, and can never be rid of.

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[146] Cook, "The Use and Abuse of Reenactment," 489.

[147] Thomas Nagel, "What is it Like to Be a Bat?" in *Fifty Readings in Philosophy*, Fourth ed. Ed. by Donald C. Abel. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 222.

Cook relates this idea of the unknowable consciousness of the historical other as a "lost mental universe" which we are attempting to reconstruct through the use of reenactment.[148] Though it is a mistake to assert that the experiences of modern day people are analogous to the experiences of historical figures, Cook does not believe that reenactment should be abandoned because of it. What he calls for instead is a "belief that no historical explanation is possible without some understanding of the perspective of the actors involved," where it is fully recognized that the experiences of the reenactors are their own and are informed by their personal phenomenology.[149] We may still engage in the activity of reenacting, but we must be cognizant of the fact that our experiences are our own, and what we do in the here and now can never exactly match the thoughts and feelings of the past.

The reason why emotional engagement is to be avoided is because it has the potential to undercut any educational benefit that comes from looking at the material objectively. According to Cook, it becomes a "question of whether such an objective stands in tension with the critical distance that can be one of the greatest tools of historical education."[150] With Civil War reenactors focusing so deeply on their own subjective experiences, that undercuts any educational value the experience may have for them. Especially if the reenactors come to be always 'in character' even outside the reenactment environment as Courtney advocated, then there is no space to objectively distance one's self from the material in order to look at it critically. This concept of

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[148] Cook, "The Use and Abuse of Reenactment," 491.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ibid, 490.

emotional investment versus emotional distance is described by Michael Mark Chemers in his book *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy* as Aesthetic Distance. Typically, this is defined in terms of the audience's emotional investment, but it is useful for looking at the emotional investment of the participants and reenactors as well.

According to Chemers, "when the audience's connection to the action onstage is extremely intense and emotional, we say that there is little aesthetic distance between the action and the audience."[151] On the other hand, "When the audience is in a more critical frame of mind, evaluating the action more dispassionately, we say there is greater aesthetic distance."[152] Most often, Brecht is cited as the paragon of a great amount of aesthetic distance as he sought to prioritize intellectual engagement in the audience as he employed methods to heighten the aesthetic distance needed for them to be critical. If this is on the end of the spectrum that exhibits a great amount of aesthetic distance, then Civil War reenacting would be as far away on the opposite end of the scale towards no aesthetic distance, especially when looking back to how reenactments are described as rituals to bring themselves into presence with the past.

That's not to say that all forms of reenactment and 'Living History' tip the scales in favor of a limited amount of aesthetic distance. Museum theatre practitioner and scholar Catherine Hughes fully recognizes what she describes as the "delicate balancing act" living history interpreters must walk as they bear in mind how "the audience must be

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[151] Michael Mark Chemers, *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 2010) 87.

[152] Chemers, *Ghost Light*, 87.

aware of the theatrical form while also actively believing in the fiction we create."[153]

This is where the real talent of actors comes in and their ability to respond to the situation

as it unfolds, for they must maintain the balance between emotional investment as part of

the performance, yet also be aware of maintaining enough aesthetic distance so that the

audience is able to be critical of the material and learn from it.

But what about Hughes herself? Does she believe that she actually becomes the

historical person she is portraying as though she has just stepped through a hole in the

fabric of time and space? Tellingly, Hughes asserts that "It was never my intention to fool

anyone. I never sought to have them lose their grip on the reality that they were watching

a performance by an actor, but I really enjoyed the challenge of playing someone or

something that is far from who I am as a person."[154] Obviously Hughes is quite content

with staying within the phenomenology of her own consciousness, no matter how much

of an acting challenge it is to imagine that she is another historical person. This careful

management of critical distance is something that defines the living history interpreter as

opposed to the depictions of reenactors we have seen. The management of how the

experience is interpreted is understood by living historians to be that of 'Framing,' and is

a process which Anthony Jackson speaks about in his chapter of *Performing Heritage*.

Drawing on Goffman, Jackson explains that it is crucial to properly frame a living

history event, as it is "the invisible frames constructed around social events that influence

how we 'read' them, make sense of them, draw meaningful connections with other

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[153] Catherine Hughes, "Mirror Neurons and Simulation: The Role of the Spectator in Museum Theatre," in *Performing Heritage*, ed. by Anthony Jackson and Jenny Kidd, 191-203. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011) 192-3.

[154] Hughes, "Mirror Neurons and Simulation," 191.

aspects of social life."[155] Thus, it is the way the experience is structured that allows an audience member to gain a sense of meaning. Though there are many framing devices that can be employed to create a certain effect, Jackson pays particular attention to three, which are the *institutional frame*, the *outer performance frame*, and the *inner performance frame*.

For Jackson, the institutional frame is "the institutional context within which the performance event is located and within which it will be read and understood – for our purposes, the museum or historic site."[156] He elaborates on this from a practical standpoint, for the architecture of the building or geography of the site determines what and how the performances will take place. However, another aspect of an event created within an institutional frame is that it is "largely conditioned by, the much wider social, political, intellectual and economic climate within which any cultural institution has to function."[64] Therefore, the performance that takes place is largely framed and determined by the values of whatever institution, community, or organization is putting it on.

This can be directly related to the definition of interpretation as a mission-driven form of communication. The institutional frame of the organization is brought down to the interpretive programming by means of the mission that influences both of them. The decisions that are made with regards to how the institution frames the interpretive programming has a huge impact on whether the audience is going to have an emotional, aesthetically intimate experience, or an intellectually critical, aesthetically distanced experience. With many of the early Civil War reenactments being organized by

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[155] Jackson, "Engaging the Audience," 16.

[156] Jackson, "Engaging the Audience," 16-17.

Confederate commemorative groups, we can easily see how they serve to uphold the official memory that Dora Apel's counter memory seeks to redress. assume what kind of experience they would choose to frame.

<u>Reenactors and Provocation</u>

What has become apparent is that, rather than provoke their audiences into a new understanding of the world around them, mainstream reenactors and the events they create tend to assert a comforting view of the past that disregards any sense of conflict or complexity. Even by looking at the early origins of Civil War reenactments, they have served to create their own 'official memory' right from the start. Through the actions of Confederate memorial organizations, such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans who supported Courtney in the writing of his manual, reenactors such as the kind he would advocate for seek to "control the images and reports, while evidence to the contrary often becomes invisible to a larger public view."[157] In fact, when talking specifically about Civil War reenactments and its relationship to the issue of race, Apel says that "Reenactment of the Civil War never seems to challenge the racism on which it is based; on the contrary, it thrives on it," and points to an occurrence documented by Turner in which the operations of framing broke down.[158]

The instance they both refer to happened at Gettysburg in 1988. It was a Saturday evening as Turner wandered about the Confederate camp when he "stumbled across the end of a reenacted minstrel show. A large rowdy crowd was gathered in the darkness. In

[157] Apel, "War Culture and the Contest of Images," 62-63.

[158] Ibid, 58.

the middle several performers mimicked 'negroes' with scatological routines. Dancing and singing, they really had their crowd in stitches about old Bo who believed that 'the blue mass' would cure constipation. When the skit was over they passed the hat and everyone sang 'Dixie.'"[159] Turner himself notes that it was obviously an overtly racist depiction of African Americans by the white performers, and yet there was no effort to criticize this tradition through which stereotypes have been perpetuated. There was no sense of unsettling on the part of the audience by witnessing such a performance, nor was it framed in such a way to allow for critical discourse. Indeed, the performance ended with the self-affirmation of the Southern cause by passing the hat and singing its 'Lost Cause' anthem, "Dixie." What Turner ultimately, and troublingly, settles on is that, rather than recreate the past to be critical of it, or even learn from it; instead, Reenacting becomes "an important celebration of each person's identity."[160]

Serious analysis of identity in Civil War Reenacting was taken up by the aforementioned Mitchell Strauss in his article *Identity Construction among Confederate Civil War Reenactors: A study of Dress, Stage Props, and Discourse*. There is distinct overlap between the three areas that Strauss studies and the three emblems that Hunter views as being sacred expressions of the 'Lost Cause.' The codifying of these emblems goes back to the post-war commemorations of Confederate veterans, and are described by Hunter as first appearing in a speech given by Brigadier General Clement A. Evans in 1896. In that speech, Evans stated that "… our mementoes […] they are many and they

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[159] Ibid.

Turner, "Bloodless Battles," 133.

[160] Turner, "Bloodless Battles," 134.

are sacred; but I will mention only three, each of which deserves our perpetual commemorations […] "Dixie," the battle flag, and the old soldier's grey jacket."[161] Strauss examines how these are utilized in present day Civil War reenactments, namely the uniforms and the battle flag. What is particularly revealing in Strauss's article is just how closely these emblems are tied to the reenactors' identities and personal values.

Ultimately, Strauss found that "Respondents to my queries fell into two basic groupings. On the one hand, there were reenactors who denied any underlying symbolism involved with their uniforms; […] the uniform was solely an historical artifact."[162] It is unnerving enough to think that there are people out there who turn a blind eye to how Confederate iconography is used in the present day for strongly symbolic purposes by groups of white supremacists such as the Ku Klux Klan, but the other group he describes are those "who openly discussed the symbolic nature of their uniforms," especially in so far as they relate to their own personal views on government.[163] One reenactor he interviewed described how his uniform "allows me to, oh, show some of my own political views, and I do agree with a lot of what the South was saying" which when asked to elaborate on what exactly these beliefs include, he not only explains the 'Lost Cause' belief of state's rights, but goes on to claim that "Affirmative action is nothing more than hidden racism."[164] Here again the arena of the Civil War reenactment is used as a platform from which predominantly white male Americans may console themselves

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[161] Hunter, "The Immortal Confederacy," 193.

[162] Strauss, "Identity Construction," 155.

[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid.

and their existential dread over their waning status in the midst of social change. Another reenactor interviewed by Strauss even goes so far as to say that he has formed such a close personal connection between his Confederate uniform and what it stands for that if ever he were to change into a Union uniform as the event needed, "the good Lord above shall have to zap [my uniform] off of me."[165] Thus, only an act of God would be able to separate him from such Confederate iconography and what it represents.

Not only is it in Strauss's study that such a deeply rooted connection to Confederate iconography and personal ideology appear, but Courtney's own manual includes a few passages where some cracks in the façade of historical education begin to show. When opening his section describing the Confederate side of Civil War reenacting, he quotes a passage that he seems to take as so ubiquitous among all Confederate reenactors that he doesn't even attribute it to a particular person as having said it. This phrase plainly states that "We're fighting for our rights: states' rights, the right to secession, the right of citizens to determine their own future," thus reaffirming the 'Lost Cause' position of the Confederacy and excising any connection that cause would have with slavery.[166] In a later section, Courtney describes one event in which there were not enough Union soldiers and several Confederate reenactors were asked to put on a different uniform for the sake of having an even battle.

Not wanting to abandon his personal Southern sympathies despite him being asked to put on a Northern uniform, one particular Mississippi reenactor takes somewhat of an educational stance when talking to the public, saying that he was drafted in order to

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[165] Ibid.

[166] Courtney, *Returning to the Civil War*, 20.

explain why he believes so strongly for the South even though he's fighting for the North. This seems to be a good hearted attempt in the direction of educational value as the reenactor remains in character and talks about the Enrollment Act of 1863.[167] However, the note that Courtney ends on with this reenactor and the situation he is in is that he "breaks out of character and confides to the spectators listening, "Actually they didn't have enough Federals for the weekend, so our whole unit is wearing the blue suit. Everybody's got to take turns. Nobody *wants* to be a Yankee."[168] With that, a concerning double-standard is brought to light. Not only is it a startling break from the 'method reenacting' notion of being in character which Courtney lauded earlier in his book, but he appears to be saying that a reenactor must get utterly and completely into character, even going so far as to change how they think and feel, unless they're portraying a Union soldier, in which case, they can forget getting into character and hang on to their Southern allegiance.

With that, determining what kind of soldier one portrays on the battlefield is essentially bound up in his or her own personal values, and surrenders to those values on a whim. The educational or critical potential of portraying someone with differing opinions is sacrificed for the sake of maintaining, or even asserting, one's own social and political views. Compare this to Colonial Williamsburg's Programming Lead and Actor Interpreter Emma Doherty, who spoke in an interview on May 20th 2020 about her living

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[167] Also known as 'The Conscription Act', this was signed by President Lincoln on March 3rd, 1863, where any man between the ages of 25 and 45 were drafted into the US army. A fee could be paid to avoid the draft, but the disparity of wealth resulted in demonstrations of outrage including the New York Draft Riots. Since the Emancipation Proclamation was seen as a contributing factor for prolonging the war, the Black population of New York City was disproportionately affected as victims of the riots.

[168] Courtney, *Returning to the Civil War*, 42.

history experiences and the distinctions she creates between herself and her character. Doherty states that:

> There are times when I have to say things in character that as a 21st-century person, I deeply disagree with. For example, two out of the three characters I portray owned slaves, and I have no indication that they eschewed the 18th-century norm of looking at their enslaved people as property, not people. Despite the fact that I may disagree with their opinions, when I become my character it's my job to accurately represent the world they lived in, warts and all.[169]

From this, the distinction between actor and character becomes definitively clear. It directly opposes the 'method reenacting' advocated by Courtney, and clearly distinguishes between personal opinion and historical representation. Even though the living history interpreters are acting on subjective methods as they embody a character to bring history to life, there is still an objective critical distance as they do not conflate their own personal views with the views of their historical counterparts. Rather than glossing over aspects of the past in favor of an idealized representation, or breaking critical frameworks for the sake of espousing personal values, or favoring subjective personal experiences rather than objective critical ones, the living history interpreter does the exact opposite of the Civil War Reenactor in order to portray the past, as Doherty says, "warts and all."

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[169] Emily Doherty, "5 Things You Didn't Know About Character Interpretation," Colonial Williamsburg, May 20, 2020, accessed March 23, 2021. https://www.colonialwilliamsburg.org/learn/living-history/5-things-you-didnt-know-about-character-interpretation/

By placing an emphasis on the reenactor's subjective experience as an expression of their own personality, rather than the experience of the audience as an outgrowth of historical research, this is the point at which American Civil War reenacting departs from interpretation and becomes something else entirely. There may be elements of education and entertainment, but they can easily devolve into the inferior forms of interpretation such as interpredata and interpreganda. Two of the clearest breaks from the interpretive techniques discussed in Chapter 1 are when American Civil War reenactors do not engage in provocation, and divorce themselves from any interest in connecting with their audience by focusing instead on the experience of the reenactor alone. When this is the case, the reenactment fails to be interpretive and instead becomes something else. Something that prioritizes the connection between individual personality and the character being portrayed. When this happens, it is much more akin to the traditions of Live Action Roleplaying games, which forms the third and final chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER IV

ROLEPLAYING GAMES

The scholar often credited with originating the study of role-playing games is
Gary Allan Fine, whose 1983 book *Shared Fantasy* was the first work to critically
examine the practice of roleplay gaming specifically, rather than games in general. The
significance Fine places on roleplaying games is to define them in terms of social worlds
created by the players. The groundwork Fine seeks to establish is the age-old dynamic of
'Fantasy' versus 'Reality' as it concerns the players and their relationship to the social
worlds created in the games they play. "Like many social worlds," Fine argues, citing
acting and storytelling as examples, "fantasy games produce a "make believe" world set
apart from the everyday world."[170] Similarities can already be seen in American Civil
War reenactors and the transportive quality they seek to capture in the events they create.
As shown in the preceding chapter, attention is paid to creating a sense of authenticity
and accuracy to heighten the "time-warp" effect of separating the historical reenacting
environment from the present-day environment of reality outside of it.

However, what Fine realizes is that what separates fantasy gaming from other
games such as backgammon is that the player's own actions hold meaning both inside the
game and outside the game. In a non-roleplaying game such as backgammon, the action
of moving stones from one cup to another holds no meaning outside of the game. In a
roleplaying game, however, the action of striking someone with a weapon has meaning
both in a roleplaying game and outside of the roleplaying game, the latter most often

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[170] Fine, Gary Alan. *Shared Fantasy: Role-Playing Games as Social Worlds*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), 183.

leading to medical attention or legal prosecution. A similar instance can be seen in the minstrel show encountered in the American Civil War reenactment. Though the reenacting event was set apart from reality, the racist stereotypes enacted as part of the minstrel show has meaning both inside and outside the reenacting environment. What complicates this dynamic even further is that unlike a game such as backgammon, where the stones or tiles are markers for action, the role-playing game uses the player's own person as the marker for action and site, or often source, for gameplay.

The proximity that reenactors have with their character is what separates them from the living history interpreter and places them in the realm of Live Action Roleplaying gamers (LARPers). Though reenactors and LARPers separate themselves from reality in the social worlds they create, what demarcation or separation exists in the psychological worlds created between their characters and the players' own personalities? Of course, there are many different LARPers and ways of engaging in roleplaying games, just as there are many different kinds of reenactors and ways they engage with history. However, let us examine how most theorists describe the psychological component of a player's character and the relationship it has with the player's own personality. Though separations may be made in LARP and reenactments from the physical world of reality, what designations have been created in the psychological realm of the player and their character?

In analyzing how it is that players demarcate the world of fantasy gaming from the world of reality, Fine employs Erving Goffman's theories of frame analysis. Though he touches on the role of the player and their character as the point at which the two worlds interface, Fine considers this more so on a technical level in terms of gameplay,

rather than a psychological level of how it relates to identity. In doing so, this allowed

subsequent theorists such as Sarah Lynne Bowman, Nathan Hook, and others to expand

on the framework Fine established and go beyond Goffman to conceptualize roleplaying

games not only in terms of the geography for how those social worlds are structured, but

how it is that players navigate that geography on a personal, psychological level.

Theories of bleed and immersion, discussing how the players' own personalities

and everyday lives interface with the game world by means of the characters they create,

are all key subjects that will be discussed in turn. Each of these inform, not only how

role-playing games are practiced, but as will be described throughout this chapter, how

they apply to the practice of American Civil War reenacting. To begin, let us examine the

foundational frameworks for how the social world of roleplaying games are laid out;

namely, Fine's chapter on *Frames and Games* wherein he explains his application of

Goffman's frame analysis.

Circles and Frames

When approaching the fantasy roleplaying game, Fine breaks down the practice

into three levels of frames between which the players operate and shift at any point in the

gaming process. First Fine establishes that "Gaming, like all activity, is grounded in the

'primary framework,' the commonsense understandings that *people* have of the real

world" [author's italics].[171] As we noted above, roleplaying games are still connected

with and conditioned by the bounds of reality found as it exists even outside of the game.

It is still bound by the laws of physics and legal codes of whatever place in which the

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[171] Fine, *Shared Fantasy*, 186.

game is being hosted. Beneath that, the secondary frame is where "… players must deal with the game context, they are *players* whose actions are governed by a complicated set of rules and constraints" [author's italics].[172] These are the bounds and limitations as prescribed by the rules of the game itself; how the pieces move on a chessboard, for example, or what the number of a dice-roll corresponds to.

Third is the *fantasy frame*, which Fine describes as being the in-character part of gameplay. Again, Fine highlights how this level is unique from other games in that "… this gaming world is keyed in that the players not only manipulate characters; they *are* characters." [author's italics].[173] Here again, rather than externalizing the gameplay onto other pieces, such as a deck of cards or pieces of a chess set, the player embodies the thoughts and actions of the character. However, Fine makes an interesting distinction in the very next sentence by saying how "The *character* identity is separate from the *player* identity" [author's italics].[174] This seems to be a contradiction. He says at first that players and characters are the same, but immediately follows it up by saying that they are different. Fine elaborates on this in the following chapter *Role-Playing and Person-Playing* by saying how "the first two [frames] are directly connected to the person, while the third is in an important sense a role sharply distinguished from the person."[175] This implies a sharp separation between character and actor, delineating where the player ends and the character begins. Since it is a character that is being played in the game, the third

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[172] Ibid.

[173] Ibid.

[174] Ibid.

[175] Ibid, 205.

frame is the one that deals strictly with the fantasy realm of gaming, whereas the first two remain tethered to reality. The first two are tied to the player since they deal with the world of reality in which the players themselves live in. The third frame, however, deals with the fantasy realm of gameplay and is something distinct and separate from the player. But where is that separation made?

Just as the game world cannot be fully dissociated from the world of reality, so too can the player not be fully dissociated from the character, or vice versa. Author Daniel Mackay elaborates on these three frames which Fine established by breaking down the third Fantasy frame into three other subsequent levels. Each of these, according to Mackay, are distinguished by what point of view the player uses when referring to their character. The first level of the gaming-world frame Mackay distinguishes is what he calls the "performative" frame, where the player speaks in first-person as their character.[176] This is the deepest and most intimate level of roleplaying, for the player and character are speaking as one and the same. Next from this is the "constative frame" occupied by second-person point of view and is most often utilized by the narrator or game master when describing to the other players what is occurring as it unfolds.[177] The last and highest level is the "narrative frame," when players refer to their characters in the third person, though still from within the context of gameplay rather than outside of it.[178]

Examples of these levels of frames have already been observed in earlier chapters when referencing the work of living history interpreters and reenactors. As detailed in the

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[176] Mackay, Daniel. *The Fantasy Roleplaying Game: A New Performing Art*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc.), 2001. 55.

[177] Mackay, *The Fantasy Roleplaying Game*, 55.

[178] Ibid, 55-56.

Introduction, both living history interpreters and reenactors commonly engage with the public from first- or third-person points of view when speaking about history. Similar as these may be, if we return to Fine's original three levels or frames of roleplaying (the primary framework, the gaming frame, and the fantasy frame) these bear a distinct similarity with the three frames identified by Anthony Jackson to describe approaches to how museum performances may be structured. As described in the second chapter, the three frames Jackson describes are the "institutional" frame, the "outer performance" frame, and the "inner performance" frame.[179]

Taking the first level that each of these authors describe, the focus is on the world at large as it exists in the widest circle from the performance or game taking place. For Jackson, it is the institutional context that is the major conditioning force, while in Fine's it is the societal norms and restrictions that exist outside of the gameplay. Secondly, the outer performance frame of Jackson aligns with the gaming frame of Fine in that each of these lay the ground-rules for how the game or performance is to be approached. It identifies to audience members of an interpretive program where and how the performance is to begin, while it identifies the rules of engagement for LARPers. The third and final frame for both Jackson and Fine deals with what occurs after the performance or game has begun. With Jackson, these are the inner frames to carry the audience between changes in time and location, or even signal how the audience is to interact with the performers, while Fine describes the fantasy frame as everything that occurs in terms of character within gameplay.

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[179] Jackson, "Engaging the Audience," 16-17.

Though there is a certain amount of overlap between interpretive techniques and roleplaying in how they are structured, it still does not explain where the character ends and the player begins, and how the two have become conflated with each other as the case has been with some American Civil War reenactors. In truth, the distinction between the different frames may not be something so clear that it can be separated as though they were circles on a Venn diagram. Instead, it is something more porous through which people or players can pass freely, or even unknowingly. Perhaps it is a mistake to see them as concentric circles nested within each other, or levels stacked one on top of the other, only being able to transition into one after having passed through the realm of another. If a hierarchy is not a suitable way to organize these, then perhaps another way of looking at these frames is necessary to sort out the contradiction of Fine's third frame.

What needs to be reconciled is what Fine means when he says that "[players] *are* the characters," with what he means when he says that "The *character* identity is separate from *player* identity."[180] To exemplify this third circle, Fine uses a chess player and the pieces of a chessboard. Fine describes the chess piece as being the same as the chess player, for the chess piece does not have any knowledge outside of what the player knows, and vice versa.[181] This would imply that traditional games are the same as roleplaying games, but here again there is a contradiction, for just previously he described roleplaying gamers as being different from traditional games because the player *is* the game piece. What is not at first apparent is that Fine subtly distinguishes between the physical and psychological identities of players and characters. Physically,

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[180] Fine, *Shared Fantasy*," 186.

[181] Ibid.

the player is the same as the character in a roleplaying game. But psychologically, the player and character are two distinct and separate entities. With regards to the chess player, the piece only knows as much as the player manipulating it. But in roleplaying games, the character's awareness does not extend to anything outside of the fantasy world created in the game. This psychological difference between player and character is distinguished by Fine in terms of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss's *Awareness Contexts and Social Interaction*.[182] The player has an open awareness because they know what their character thinks, feels, and does. The character, by contrast, operates under a closed awareness, for the character does not have the meta-awareness of what exists outside the in-game fantasy.

This describes the ideal arrangement where player and character are separated into two entities like a puppeteer and marionette. The only thing that interrupts this clear separation, as Fine goes on to recognize, is realizing that "Because player, person, and character share a brain, this separation of knowledge on occasion is ignored."[183] It is easier to physically determine when someone is in the game because they enter the physical space chosen for that purpose. Whether it is an open field or a stage or a kitchen table, we do not carry those around with us everywhere we go, and players can understand the boundaries beyond which the game does not apply. Psychologically, however, the distinctions between the reality of the player and the fantasy of the character requires more effort to maintain because we carry our psychology around with us everywhere we go.

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[182] Ibid, 187.

[183] Ibid, 188.

The implication Fine presents is that influence moves unilaterally from reality into fantasy. But as we have seen with the 'method reenactors' who consider being in character even outside the reenacting environment, influence can move from character to player as well. The game frame may exist within the constraints of the primary frame, but the psychological component of the fantasy frame breaks up the concentric nature of Fine's arrangement. Rather than sliding one-dimensionally from the primary frame to the fantasy frame only after passing through the game frame, the arrangement ought to be thought of in two dimensions instead. The psychological component of the fantasy frame runs alongside, rather than beneath, the primary frame and the game frame. Even though someone may be in-game or out-of-game, whether they are engaging in those two arenas as themselves or as their character depends on how strongly those psychological distinctions are enforced by the player.

These two dimensions along which the LARPer positions themselves, the psychological and the social, is reflected in the analysis Nathan Hook makes of experiments given by social scientists such as the Stanford Prison Experiment and its reproduction in 2001 for the BBC. To distinguish how strongly the environments of the experiments set themselves apart from daily reality and how much the participants in the experiments distinguish between them playing a character versus being themselves, Hook utilizes two concepts found in psychology that are often applied to roleplaying gamers. These would be the ideas of a *protective frame* and the *magic circle*.

The magic circle stems from the work of Michael J. Apter, and is described by Hook as being something that "…psychologically shields players from the 'real world.' […] This frame empowers players of any game by creating a feeling of safety, which

allows them to engage in play behavior that might be 'silly,' shameful or otherwise inappropriate if done outside of play."[184] This is the same idea that prompts the famous quip by Oscar Wilde about people only feeling comfortable telling the truth if they are given a mask. Once the person feels psychologically shielded or justified in what they are doing, then they are free to do it. The second concept Hook works from is that of the "Magic Circle." Postulated by Johan Huizinga in his 1939 book *Homo Ludens*, the magic circle is "… a *social*, rather than psychological, barrier that separates the activity from everyday life" [author's italics].[185] This is the same mechanism that distinguishes the primary frame from the game frame. It is the socially agreed upon convention that marks out the tennis court as the place for playing tennis, the kitchen table as the place where the roleplaying game is to be played, or the field as the place where the reenactment is to occur. It sets the physical boundaries for where the game is to take place, but also the rules by which the game is to be played. Hook finishes by asserting how "They operate on different levels however, with the frame being personal and the circle interpersonal."[186] This directly reflects the personal nature of the third fantasy frame as well as the interpersonal nature of the game frame. The key difference is that Hook's conception of frames and circles allows room for them to intersect and overlap with each other, rather than being ordered concentrically.

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[184] Nathan Hook, "Circles and Frames: The Games Social Scientists Play." In *Immersive Gameplay: Essays on Participatory Media and Role-Playing*. Edited by Evan Torner and William J. White. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc. 2012), 52.

[185] Ibid, 53.

[186] Ibid.

The conclusions he reaches are that the levels to which people become either immersed in the situation or immersed in a particular character depends on the strength of the protective frame.[187] If there is a weak frame and a weak circle, then this is the player portraying their own personality in an environment outside of the game context. In other words, this is "the status quo in everyday life."[188] We are not pretending to be anyone other than who we are, and we are not playing by any rules that are not also applicable to ordinary life. If there is a strong frame and a strong circle, then that is an individual stepping into the psychological space of a particular character from within the socially agreed context of a game. These are the clearest separations of fantasy and reality, where the weak frame and weak circle is nothing but pure reality (acting as ourselves in everyday life) while the other is pure fantasy (acting as our characters in a game), the line between the two gets muddled when one element is strong while the other element is weak.

This is where the reality of personal identity seeps into the fantasy of the game world, or the fantasy of character identity seeps into the real world. It is the regulation of this porous exchange that determines how much the players or reenactors see themselves and their characters as being different, or conflating them as one and the same. The porous movement across these two areas is identified by Hook and others as the concept of *bleed*, and should the boundary between the two dissolve to such an extent that one cannot be perceived from the other, then that is the point at which the researched

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[187] Ibid, 68.

[188] Ibid.

historical interpretation to which the reenactment aspires becomes easily conflated with the personal political opinions of the reenactor.

<div align="center">Bleeding Hearts</div>

In the aforementioned chapter *The Games Social Scientists Play*, Hook cites game theorist Markus Montola's description of *bleed play*. With this, "the boundary between the real world (player) and play (character) become even more porous" and allows for in-game character attributes to effect aspects of personal identity outside of the gaming environment, while aspects of individual personality can have an effect on the character created inside the game.[189] When influence is moving from the game to reality, this is known as *Bleed-out*, when "the effects of play effect the player," while movement from reality into the gaming environment is *Bleed-in*, as elements of the player him/herself seep into their gameplay."[190] Similarly, in the writings of Sarah Lynne Bowman draws on the world of Montola, as well as writer and game designer Whitney Strix Beltrán to discuss what she terms *Ego-bleed*. In her chapter on *Psychology and Roleplaying Games* co-authored with Andreas Lieberoth, Bowman and Lieberoth describe the dynamics of bleed as being that "*Bleed-in* occurs when aspects cross over from player to character, while *bleed-out* happens when a character's actions and experiences affect the player" [authors' italics].[191]

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[189] Ibid, 54-55.

[190] Ibid, 55.

[191] Sarah Lynn Bowman and Andreas Lieberoth, "Psychology and Roleplaying Games," *Roleplaying Game Studies: A Transmedia Approach*, Ed. José P. Zagal and Sebastian Deterding, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 254.

It may seem at first that bleed is an anomaly that occurs in the midst of gameplay, almost as though it is a temporary lapse as the player catches themselves breaking from character during the game. However, according to Bowman's archetypes for the different kinds of roleplaying characters that can be created, the character identity and the personal identity can never be fully dissociated from the other, since the character is essentially built off of, and created in reference to, the player's own identity.

The nine archetypes identified by Bowman are identified by the different ways the character relates to the players own personality. For example, the first archetype is that of the "Doppelganger Self" which is "a character that behaves and thinks almost identically to the player's primary identity," thought of in some circumstances as being "identical to the self in fictional circumstances."[192] This is almost a direct self-insertion, where the player and character are essentially one and the same, only acting within a different context of the gaming environment. The second archetype, the "Devoid Self," is "a character similar to the primary identity that lacks an essential trait or quality."[193] The pattern continues of basing characters off of the player's own personality, for the opposite of the Devoid Self is the "Augmented Self, which is the player's personality with another quality added to it, rather than taken away. The case is similar for the Fragmented Self, which is one minor quality of the player's identity that is made into a primary one, the Repressed Self, which is the regression into an earlier life stage of the player, and the

[192] Bowman, Sarah Lynn and Karen Schrier, "Players and their Characters in Roleplaying Games," *Roleplaying Game Studies: A Transmedia Approach*, Ed. by José P. Zagal and Sebastian Deterding, (New York: Routledge, 2018), 403-404.

[193] Bowman and Schrier, "Players and their Characters," 404.

Idealized and Oppositional Self act as either the perfected form of the player's personality, or the complete opposite of who the player is as a person.[194]

About the only ones that could be thought of as being created from something other than the player's personality are the Experimental and Taboo selves, which may be determined by the game master and created to experiment with a theme or explore a social taboo within the game. In such a case as this, the needs of the game mechanics are the foundation from which the character is created, however, the possibility still remains for them to be based off of the player's personality. For an Experimental character Bowman describes the possibility for it to be created in order to "challenge the participant's roleplaying abilities," therefore, the player's personal skill is the foundation from which the character is created.[195] For the Taboo Self, characters such as these may be created to satisfy the needs of the game itself, but they often serve to "reaffirm the player's moral stance on these topics after the game rather than subvert it," or use the game environment as an opportunity to embrace an aspect of their personality that the rest of society has deemed taboo, such as transgenderism or homosexuality.[196]

Each of these might be seen as examples of bleed-in, since the player's own personality outside of the gaming environment is being incorporated into the character as it exists within the gaming environment. Examples of both bleed-in and bleed-out have already been seen in the reenacting context. Bleed-in was demonstrated by the reenactors Strauss spoke with, who saw the accoutrements of reenacting as expressions or

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[194] Ibid.

[195] Ibid.

[196] Ibid.

extensions of their own personal political beliefs. This would be a situation of the reenactor's own personality from outside the reenacting environment moving in and having an effect on how they perceive elements inside the reenactment, such as the uniforms they gravitate towards and the meaning it is imbued with. Similarly, the use of 'method reenacting' Courtney advocates, where reenactors are to think in-character even outside of the reenactments, is an example of bleed-out, since character attributes from within the reenactment are being brought into life outside of the event.

But how do these instances of bleed-out and bleed-in relate to the frames and circles described by Hook? In the conclusion to his chapter, he addresses the amount and kind of bleed as being a result of the relative strength or weakness of the circle or frame put in place. Namely, Hook concludes that "The weaker the circle, the stronger the bleed-in effect" whereas "The weaker the frame, the stronger the bleed-out effect."[197] As such, a weak frame and a weak circle means that there is a stronger amount of bleed-in and bleed-out, since there is no social nor psychological protection surrounding what we are doing. As the status-quo, we are going about everyday life as ourselves and are therefore able to freely take in or let out what we will. Conversely, a strong frame and strong circle means there is a greater amount of psychological and social protection in playing a clearly delineated character within the context of a gaming environment, therefore, there is no bleed either in or out, since the realms of reality and fantasy, personal identity and character, are so clearly delineated.

If there is a weak frame, but a strong circle, then this means social protections have been established for the environment, but psychological boundaries have not been

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[197] Hook, "Circles and Frames," 69.

established. This would be an instance of Bowman's Doppelganger, where the player merely inserts their own personality within the context of the game environment. Hook identifies moments such as this as resulting in a bleed-out effect, where occurrences in the game-world have the possibility to alter one's personality and bring it back out into reality outside the game, as though what occurs inside the game are learning experiences which we react to as ourselves and bring back out into the real world. On the other hand, a strong frame and a weak circle means that there is no social protection, but there is psychological protection for what is being done. Hook correlates this with a Bleed-in tendency, though he has a difficult time thinking of examples of where this would occur.

At first he considers private prayer as a moment of weak circle/strong frame, but reasons that privacy is a form of circle that gives social permission to engage in prayer. Ultimately, he concludes that "the circle is [a] necessary prerequisite of the frame. To put another way, to feel psychologically safe, a person must feel socially safe."[198] By determining that a circle is a necessary prerequisite for a frame, or to put it differently, that "we are ourselves unless we have a social alibi to not be so," Hook essentially does away with the quadrant of weak-circle/strong-frame.[199] This, however, does not account for moments when roleplaying gamers think in character even outside the social protection of the gaming environment.

Bowman even has a specific term used to describe such out-of-game instances of thinking in character as *if-game thinking*. In situations such as this, "a player's daydreaming is fixated upon the game. If-game thinking can include actions the player

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[198] Ibid, 68.

[199] Ibid, 69.

fantasizes about taking as their character, scenes they wish to orchestrate, ways in which they might optimize their character's abilities, relationships they desire to explore, etc."[200] She describes this as being a natural part of the gaming process, and may be considered as a form of preparation before entering the game. It even has some resonance to Stanislavski's "Magic If" where the actor is to imagine "What would I do if my fiction became fact?"[201] Bowman even explains how imagining 'what would my character do' can be used in constructive ways "to enact certain character traits in mundane contexts or how they might use a character to help them practice social skills, such as leadership, courtship, or teamwork."[202] This is an example of bleed-out being used constructively to bring someone into an improved state of being after having used the controlled environment of the game to test out alternative ways of behaving.

However, the effects of if-game thinking and bleed are not always positive. Just as gameplay may allow opportunities for acting ideal attributes, so too may the gaming environment allow what Beltrán describes as "enacting the Shadow, meaning playing with content normally repressed or considered socially unacceptable."[203] This is similar, to an extent, with Bowman's Oppositional Self archetype, and may help to differentiate between attributes the player does *not* wish to take on in ordinary life, however Beltrán determines that "extended immersion into shadow play runs the risk of ego-bleed of negative characteristics from the characters, including deception, destructive competition,

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[200] Bowman and Lieberoth, "Psychology and Roleplaying Games," 255.

[201] Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work,* Trans. and Ed. by Jean Benedetti. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 84.

[202] Bowman and Schrier, "Players and their Characters," 405.

[203] Ibid, 406.

and status jockeying," though I would also contend that racism, sexism, and violence are equally probable. The constructive nature of bleed can be seen in the Moor's Ford reenactment, for audience members and witnesses take a new understanding of oppression and racial violence away from the event to enact social change in their everyday lives. On the other hand, the negative version of bleed may be seen in the reenactors who internalize the lost-cause ideology of the historical persons they portray and trivialize or normalize the kinds of stereotyping or racial prejudices seen in instances like the minstrel show.

The danger Bowman and Fine warn about is when if-game thinking starts to take over and become a greater priority than ordinary life as it exists outside of the gaming context. Or, to think of it in terms of Stanislavski, then the given circumstances of our character start to take on a greater priority and level of meaning than the given circumstances of our everyday lives. Instances such as this leads to a state which Fine terms *Overinvolvement*.

<div align="center">Overinvolvement</div>

Halfway through his chapter on *Role-Playing and Self Playing*, Fine begins a section on identification between self and character. In opening the section, he asserts that "Players must identify with their characters in order for the game to be a success. Put differently, players must invest their characters with meaning."[204] The kind of meaning Fine encourages are ways in which the character and player may share similar traits. This bears some similarity to what some reenactors and first-person interpreters encourage,

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[204] Fine, "Shared Fantasy," 214.

which is to look for similarities in personality between the performers and their characters. Stacy F. Roth mentions how "some interpreters choose a character who appeals to their personality," while Courtney praises the strong ties American Civil War reenactors have to family members who served in the conflict.[205] Important as this may be for all three groups, living historians, reenactors, and LARPers, to have some personal connection with the characters they portray, Fine makes sure to say that "this identification is only partial; players are not expected to combine their role and their person totally. Role distance is necessary to combat overinvolvement."[206] If such a distance does not exist, then the overinvolvement Fine describes is when players form too close a personal attachment to the characters they create.

It is interesting to note that Fine's conception of Overinvolvement has consequences both inside of the game and outside of the game. The amount of close identification that leads to overinvolvement, according to Fine, "… may get out of hand when it merges too much with real-life activities or when it interferes with the game."[207] The game interferences Fine describes in excerpts from conversations with other roleplaying gamers is when the players hold their characters as something so precious that the players go out of their way to keep their character alive. I have witnessed similar instances on the battlefield of American Civil War reenactments in the form of soldiers (or even entire units) who refuse to take imaginary hits in battle, even when faced with an

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[205] Roth, *Past into Present*, 61-62.

Courtney, *Returning to the Civil War*, 16.

[206] Fine, *Shared Fantasy*, 217.

[207] Ibid.

entire volley of canon fire, preferring instead to retort with a sardonic "You missed!"

Black powder weapons were notorious for being inaccurate, but surely they wouldn't

have been *that* inaccurate. Even Hadden refers to reenactors such as these as "Ironclads"

or "Hitless Wonders".[208]

With regards to overinvolvement as it exists in the world of reality outside of

gaming, Fine describes it as players who cannot disentangle fantasy from reality. Players

who fall into this remain in character outside of the gaming context, even going so far as

to sign letters with their character's name or pretend to cast spells or engage in other in-

game antics outside of the gaming circle.[209] Bowman describes overinvolvement in

similar terms, where players place a higher priority on the fantasy frame of the game

world, even when it occurs outside of the gaming context. Particularly, Bowman

describes it as something more akin to a gaming addiction, where an overinvolved player

"may neglect existing social relationships or personal responsibilities" in favor of

preparation or engagement in gameplay.[210] Though they may not be so delusional as to

think that they and their character are one and the same, the prioritization that is given to

gaming causes a severe social detriment in their everyday life. For reenactors, it would

not be an extraordinary thing for the wife of a particular infantryman to complain that her

husband spends more time with his guns than he does with her.

Nevertheless, what Fine reminds us is that there is a need for balance. If there is a

way of getting into character, then there must be a way of getting out of character. Being

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[208] Hadden, *Reliving the Civil War*, 114.

[209] Ibid, 217-218.

[210] Bowman and Lieberoth, "Psychology and Roleplaying Games," 255.

able to identify with the character being played is an important part of a satisfying roleplaying experience, if not built into the mechanics of how the game is played itself, "Yet," he asserts, "as identification is part of the rhetoric and behavior of players, so is role distance."[211] To preserve the psychological, and even social, wellbeing of players, a distinction must be made between who they are in the game, and who they are in real life. If not just by the fact that the two occur within different contexts, with the LARPer being within the context of a roleplaying game, the reenactor being within the context of an American Civil War reenactment, and the first-person interpreter being within the context of a living history interpretation, the in-game character will always be separated from the identity of the player due to the two different realities in which they stand.

<u>Where We Stand</u>

With the four quadrants we are left with, where does that put living history interpreters and American Civil War reenactors? Since reenactors claim the same agenda as living history interpreters, then it would be assumed that they occupy the same position as each other with regards to frames and circles. With most living history interpreters, they occupy an area of strong frames and strong circles They act as researched personas or characters in situations set aside from everyday life. Reenactors and living historians, as we have seen, may occupy strong circles by immersing themselves in situations or environments that are designated as being "transported" or "time-warped" apart from the ordinary world of the present day. However, the weak frame demonstrated by most reenactors allow their own personalities and biases to bleed

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[211] Fine, *Shared Fantasy*, 222.

into the work they do; or even worse, allow parts of history that ought to be confronted and interrogated, such as discrimination and racial oppression, to bleed into their everyday lives. As evidenced by Strauss who notes how reenactors form strong connections with the trappings of their persona, and the advocation of people like Kent Courtney who call for the complete removal of any separation between an in-game mentality and an out-of-game mentality, most hobbyist reenactors have little in the way of psychological delineations between who they are inside of the reenacting environment and who they are outside of it.

Living historians on the other hand, such as Emily Doherty and Catherine Hughes, emphasize the distance between their own personality and the historical actions they engage in. This distance is principally achieved through the protective frame of playing an historically researched character. This remains true whether the interpreter is performing in first-person or third-person, for the first-person interpreter may point to and be critically engaged with the non-self of their historical character, while the third-person interpreter may point to and be critically engaged with the non-self of the historical persons about whom they discuss with visitors.

Even though reenactors and LARPers share similarities in that their characters are based off of some relation to the player's personalities, even roleplaying gamers have mechanisms to socially and psychologically protect themselves from bleeding fantasy and reality together; a tendency which, though disregarded by reenactors, is willingly upheld by living history interpreters who make clear distinctions between character and self. Not only does the protective frame of playing a researched character protect living history interpreters psychologically, but they are further shielded socially by a protective

circle which not only sets the environment of the living history interpretation apart from everyday life, but justifies it as part of the "primary framework" and "game context" described by Fine. This in itself further aligns with interpretive techniques, for these frames are synonymous with the "outer performance frame" described by Jackson, and the "institutional framework" which is informed by the mission-driven nature of interpretive programs detailed in Chapter 1.

Though reenactors claim the same status as living history interpreters in teaching history and offering educational programming, the mechanics behind what living history interpreters do sets their relationship to their work on another level of rigor and preparation beyond knowledge of material culture, encompassing areas that few hobbyist reenactors consider, let alone achieve.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In a 2018 video essay, living historian and reenactor of color Cheyney McKnight addresses the question "Why don't Black people reenact?" She confronts this by saying that Black people *do* reenact, and cites herself as an example. What she explains is that people ought not to disregard reenactors of color because they do not conform to the expectations or preconceptions other reenactors have of how they think people of color *should* reenact. In short, just because reenactors of color do not reenact the way others want them to, does not make them any less valid as reenactors. McKnight then goes on to describe the different kinds of reenactors and reenactments. Some reenactments, she explains, are privately curated events. Others are open to the public. Some reenactors are weekend hobbyists, while others, like McKnight herself, make a profession out of it. Still more fall somewhere in between and work as living history interpreters at museums or other organizations while also taking part in non-professional events. Some have a love for one specific area of history such as 19th century farming technology, while others are interested in the social and political context. All of this highlights the fact that reenacting cannot be treated as a monolith. There are many different forms of practice and niches into which some reenactors may fall.

To all these different kinds of reenacting, McKnight says that each of them have an equal right to do what they love. She asserts how these practices "should not be banned or taken away" from the people who choose to participate in them.[212] As I write

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[212] Cheyney McKnight, "Why Don't Black People Reenact?" YouTube.com, November 29, 2018, accessed March 10, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxQqDYUCCW4

the conclusion to this paper, I reflect on the way I approach reenacting and the treatment I am giving those who engage in it as opposed to those who engage in living history interpretation. Am I being excessively critical of American Civil War reenactors because, as McKnight describes, they are not reenacting in the way I want them to? Am I approaching this from too much of a gate-keeper mentality, where they must meet the criteria I lay out for them, or else be disregarded? And am I setting up a false dichotomy between reenactors and living history interpreters? These thoughts have been present as I come to the end of this thesis, and now, as I review and tie together the ideas broached in the preceding pages, this is the best of opportunities to address these questions.

<center>Reenactor Vs. Interpreter: Identity Crisis</center>

For the dichotomy between reenactor and interpreter, initially, I did set them up as two different groups. This, at the very least, was to distinguish in terms of semantics how the terms would be applied, and to whom they would apply. In the Introduction, I designate the reenactor and living history interpreter as being different, for the reenactor is the non-professional hobbyist, while the living history interpreter is the career professional. With this as our starting point, is it necessarily fair that I hold them to the same standards of practice? In some ways, assessing the two of them based on similar criteria is fair, since there are many ways that the two practices are similar. Both share a common goal to create a personal connection with history, rather than relegate it to some abstract record in a book.

Hadden explains the value of reenacting in that "The dramatization of past events is often used to define a common heritage and to give a sense of origin and

<center>105</center>

community."[213] Thus, reenacting may connect people to the past by creating new understandings about history, and connect people to each other by creating a sense of shared history. In a section titled *Why Reenact?*, Kent Courtney makes an even more personal connection to reenacting by linking it to the family lineages of those who participate. "The heritage," he describes, "that is kept alive at a reenactment is an important one. The act of preserving history in a living way fulfills an obligation that many feel."[214] These ideas of "heritage" and "preservation" are ideas that recur over and over again in the realms of both reenactors and living history interpreters. Even Tilden, the famed father of interpretation, asserted that when interpreting history and bringing the past into the present, "the ideal interpretation implies: recreation of the past, and kinship with it."[215] Thus, in keeping with his six principles of interpretation, the tendency to make the past relatable and humanize those historical persons in our present understanding is a goal shared by both reenactors and living history interpreters. Still more is that in the very first sentence of Roth's second chapter, the chapter whose title announces the "Goals, Benefits, and Drawbacks" of first-person living history interpretation, declares that "The goal of first-person interpretation is to relate the past and relate *to* the past in a way that personalizes and humanizes it."[216] The echoes of Tilden can be heard reverberating throughout this sentence, as they do throughout the rest of the chapter and the rest of the book. This love of history and forming personal

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[213] Hadden,, *Reliving the Civil War*, 2.

[214] Courtney, *Returning to the Civil War*, 16.

[215] Tilden, *Interpreting our Heritage*, 103.

[216] Roth, *Past Into Present*, 20.

connections with the past is something that is shared by reenactors and living history interpreters alike.

Both parties, reenacting and interpretation, share a common tool of living history. However, what makes interpreters unique, Roth explains, is not only their love of history, but their desire to share that love with others. She calls this quality the "Interpretive Impetus" to share what they know with others, and this is where reenactors and interpreters, for all they have in common, deviate. "… not all teachers, museum personnel, volunteers, or reenactors automatically possess this quality [of the Interpretive Impetus]. Those affected have transcended their own clamor for private revelation and are on a mission to translate – or interpret – what they have learned."[217] Therefore, it may be best to describe one as a living history *reenactor* while the other is a living history *interpreter*. Both the reenactor and the interpreter engage in living history, but only the interpreter feels the interpretive impetus to do their work for the good of others rather than for themselves. Though reenactors and interpreters may share the technique of living history, a distinction between them can be found in who they are reenacting or interpreting history for.

<u>Similarity of Means, Difference of Ends</u>

One acquaintance McKnight describes became involved in American Civil War reenacting for "educational purposes."[218] They wanted to learn and teach others about American history. But as time went by, and that individual engaged in more research,

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[217] Ibid, 3.

[218] McKnight, "Why Don't Black People Reenact?"

they came to have a moment of clarity. Their intention to engage in reenacting for educational purposes was not entirely benign. What this individual realized was that their true intention for getting started in Civil War reenacting was that they wanted to live out some fantasy of *Gone With the Wind*.

Is that to say that just by being a reenactor, they are automatically not being interpretive? Absolutely not. I know many people who engage in reenactments of different kinds who put a great amount of diligence into both acquiring and sharing knowledge. Within the US medical unit I reenacted with, the lead surgeon coordinated medical demonstrations that were incredibly interpretive and demonstrated an exceptional ability to connect the audience with history and relate the past to their present experience. He did not merely give out information about the surgical implements laid out at his table. He explained how they related to evolutions in medical technology leading up to the last time one of the audience members might have been to the dentist. What I am saying is that anyone can be a reenactor. But it takes something more to be an interpreter.

It is in prioritizing the audience's experience that interpreters find their motivation and passion for doing what they do. It is in connecting audiences with natural and cultural resources that sparks the Interpretive Impetus of Roth and allows them to follow Ham in making a difference on purpose. It is by focusing on the audience's experience over their own personal experience that designates the living history reenactor from the living history interpreter. As asserted in Chapter 1, Interpretation is a form of communication. It takes two people, an interpreter and an audience, to have a dialogue. If one of those is removed, it being the audience in this case, then is there any dialogue? Is it truly a

conversation? And is it truly interpretive? Living history interpreters cannot imagine going about their work without some audience, some member of the general public to engage with. But with reenactors, this does not always seem to be the case.

In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, a group of reenactors decided their love of the hobby and each-other's company was too great for any amount of social distancing to keep apart. So, on June 1st, 2020, a little more than two and a half months after the pandemic was declared, an e-mail was sent out to other reenactors for a potential opportunity to "wool-up."[219] The e-mail was clear that its contents were not endorsed by any Civil War organization, and asserted that "In these troubling times, we wouldn't dare invite folks over for a visit."[220] Although, the authors give a none too subtle hint that "[…] if you were to show up on our property July 3rd-7th, you would be doing so of your own accord."[221] Of course, the property owners would not want to be accused of hosting a private gathering in breach of stay-at-home orders, so they give an admonition where "If folks do show up here, we will insist you depart....by noon-ish on the 7th."[222] Even the list of resources and program of activities sought to replicate a public event, with everything from latrines to fire wood being available, and offering to have a skirmish if enough people arrive. However, the only thing that is conspicuously absent from this is the public. Clearly the intended audience for this is one group and one group alone; themselves.

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[219] Gene Black and Sheena Black, private e-mail forwarded by Michael Inman. Original message sent, June 1st, 2020. Forwarded June 2nd, 2020.

[220] Ibid.

[221] Ibid.

[222] Ibid.

Another similar communication was sent less than a year later on March 14th, 2021. By then the pandemic had both significantly improved and significantly worsened. Three vaccines had become available to immunize people from COVID-19, but the daily infection rate had almost tripled to 65,000 cases from where it had been in June of 2020.[223] Some governors were lifting mask mandates, but events such as concerts and other large public gatherings were still unheard of for over a year. Nevertheless, another e-mail was sent out, again not officially sanctioned by any Civil War organization, inviting members to an impromptu "School of the Soldier" where interested members could learn about safety procedures and regulations for firing black powder weaponry during a reenactment.[224] Again, the way this event was organized bore many similarities to that of an actual event, latrines and all, but without the public.

In contrast to this, only a few days later on the 17th of March, the Northwest region of the NAI hosted their spring workshop via Zoom. The theme of the workshop: "Creating Virtual Programming that is Compelling and Makes Audiences Want to Visit."[225] Here the difference becomes stark. One is concerned with the participants while the other is concerned with the spectators. One is more than willing to abandon the dual nature of dialogue while the other is doing all they can to preserve it. Though what is

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[223] "Coronavirus In the US: Latest Map and Case Count," The New York Times, accessed March 31, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-us-cases.html?campaign_id=9&emc=edit_nn_20210331&instance_id=28676&nl=the-morning&regi_id=132555863&segment_id=54559&te=1&user_id=563a721b0c11063be4292e842b776aef

[224] Rich Bright, Private e-mail forwarded by Michael Inman. Original message sent March 14, 2021. Forwarded March 15, 2021.

[225] "NAI Community Workshops," National Association for Interpretation, accessed March 20, 2021. https://www.interpnet.com/NAI/interp/Events/NAI_Regional_Workshops/nai/_events/NAI_Regional_Workshops.aspx

most troubling is that one group is willing to disregard the state of the world outside the constructed event, while the other recognizes the state of the world in which the event exists and is willing to negotiate a way to work best within it.

The impetus for the first event to be hosted was given by the author as being "With the various restrictions in place, our ability to reenact is greatly reduced, which has merely increased our desire to get together and pretend it is the simpler times of the 1860s."[226] The reasoning behind this message and the event that it invites is that 'Because we don't like the state of the world we are in now, that is justification for us to take steps to try and leave it behind.' It is a logic that is detached from reality. The priority is placed on the subjective transportive quality of the individual experience rather than the interpretive or provocative quality of an audience's experience. Rather than being interpretive, the impetus is placed on prioritizing a "Time Warp" experience for the participants as described in Chapter 2 where the present is left behind in favor of an idealized vision of the past. What makes it particularly hair-raising is that the world outside and the world inside the reenactment cannot be so easily separated. Whether the reenactors invited to this event intend it or not, the real-world outside of the event bleeds into and out of the boundaries they create. A virus cannot be barricaded merely by burying their heads in the sand and claiming that it's the 1860s. However, just as this is the case with diseases, so too is this the case with ideas.

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[226] Gene Black and Sheena Black, Private e-mail.

<u>Bandaging the Bleeds</u>

As described in Chapter 3, the roleplaying environment has the potential to bleed back and forth between reality as it exists out of character outside of the roleplaying environment, and the fantasy of being in character within the roleplaying environment. The audience takes what they learn in the living history environment out into everyday life. Chapter 3 elaborated on the idea that reenactors and interpreters differ in how close a connection they form to the historical roles they portray, with mainstream reenactors being more like roleplaying gamers due to the intimate connections they have with characters instead of the critical distance found with interpreters. The conclusion reached earlier in this section was that both living history reenactors and living history interpreters share elements of roleplaying in how they assume characters and engage in some amount of pretense through their portrayal of history. The difference is that mainstream reenacting has a propensity for being more like a roleplaying game due to its focus on the personal enjoyment of the participants rather than incorporation of interpretive techniques for the good of the public.

What was uncovered over the course of Chapter 3, however, was that even though roleplaying gamers share similar struggles with reenactors in the area of overinvolvement, even roleplaying gamers have developed matrixes to separate out and protect themselves psychologically, physically, and even emotionally by regulating what crosses over in-game and out-of-game. A simple conclusion would be to say that mainstream reenactors, given their close similarity to the practice of roleplaying gamers in addition to interpreters, must follow suit and incorporate the same protective designations of social circles and psychological frames into the work they do. But is this

too simplistic of an answer? Is it enough to say that, if interpretive techniques are not going to be prioritized and the focus is going to be on the enjoyment of the participants, then it is acceptable as long as it is separated out and away from the public and everyday life? Can such actions be excused because they are for private enjoyment of the reenactors rather than for the public edification of the audience? If a public audience is not even present, then does that give reenactors free rein to indulge in a 'Lost Cause' *Gone with the Wind* fantasy or subjective 'Time Warp' experience?

McKnight takes a moment to address this in her video essay, and to my admitted surprise, says that events which are purely a *Gone With the Wind* fantasy world are not inherently bad. She looks with grace on her acquaintance who wanted to live out the fantasy, and accepts it as a kind of reenacting which people may or may not choose to participate in. The only reason why McKnight is able to excuse events such as these and the reenactors who take part in them is because they are doing so in private. According to her views, what makes it acceptable in private but not in public is because they are "continuing myths and not really educating."[227] If the event is to be brought into the public, then effort must be taken to educate and interpret. Given mainstream reenacting's penchant for portraying a version of the past that skews in favor of nationalism and an idyllic return to "simpler times," educating the public, or consistently creating a provocative interpretive experience, is seldom given priority. Yet, due to their shared use of living history, many reenactors, such as McKnight's associate, see themselves as being on parr with, if not equal to, the interpreter, just by the nature of that shared use of living history. What I argue in the writing of this paper is that this is not the case.

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[227] McKnight, "Why Don't Black People Reenact?"

The thing about private events, however, is that when the focus shifts from audience to actor being the primary recipient or beneficiary of the event, the dynamic changes to where the reenactors themselves become their own audience. The reenactors themselves become the producers and the consumers of the event. They take part in it, perhaps for the edification and enjoyment of each other, but also for the edification and enjoyment of themselves, regardless of any outside party. In situations like these, the bleeding of personal views into and out of the living history environment become even more pronounced when there is a higher amount of identification and self-insertion into the scenario. This is where the uniform becomes an expression of personal political views, as the case was with the reenactors Strauss interviewed, rather than an intervention to demonstrate the social and political repercussions of past events down to the present day. This is where "Lost Cause" rhetoric is perpetuated without care of the consequences that resulted and are still playing out today. Even though the public is not present, misinformation can still be spread to themselves and to each other, just as easily and sometimes just as harmfully the spread of a disease.

Reenactors may utilize and incorporate interpretive techniques when dealing with the public and each other, but doing so is hampered by tendencies to favor information and entertainment over provocation. Furthermore, giving priority to the reenactor's own 'Time Warp' experience as opposed to the experience of the audience members and what they learn does two things that preclude a living history reenactment from becoming a living history interpretation. First, if the reenactor forms too strong a connection to the role they portray, then it devolves into interpreganda as the reenactor's own personal views and biases bleed into and out of the role they play, thus outweighing the

conversation of perspectives between living historian and audience. Secondly, too strong a personal connection with the material or persona being presented inhibits the aesthetic distance needed for one to critically examine and interpret the past in a meaningful and provocative way. Does this mean that the reenactor or interpreter ought to be filled with an overwhelming sense of apathy towards the role they play? Not at all. One may find their role to be deeply fascinating or even have a personal connection to that persona through family lineage or even similar life experience such as having served in the armed forces, having a common profession, or sharing an interest in a particular skill. But as Fine admonished, distance is necessary so that one does not become overinvolved in the role they play and lose sight of the importance of reality in favor of fantasy. As the case is with roleplaying gamers and LARPers, participants must be clear on the frames and circles that are in place so as to carefully negotiate what bleeds into and out of the experience.

Honesty and Responsibility

Ultimately, what I ask is that reenactors be honest with themselves and to others about what they are doing, why they are doing it, and who they are doing it for. If reenactors wish to salvage the reputation they are saddled with in the media, then they must make efforts to rectify the practices they act on with the standards they claim to make for themselves. Just as the gathering of reenactors that was announced in June of 2020 had the potential to become a super-spreader event of disease, so too do living history reenactments and living history interpretations have the potential to become super-spreaders of ideas. As such, event coordinators must make responsible efforts to

ensure the safety of their participants and the public, both physically and intellectually. If mainstream reenactors wish to redeem their reputation in the eyes of the media and in the opinion of the general public, then they must reconsider their practices in three ways:

1. Make a concerted effort to fulfill the educational missions they set for themselves and act on interpretive principles.

The Mission Statement of the Washington Civil War Association given in the Introduction of this thesis provides clear assertions to the educational and interpretive goals of that reenacting organization and others like them. As outlines in the first chapter, reenacting organizations must act on the principles of interpretation and demonstrate the integrity to lay claim to such ambitions. In keeping with the belief that an interpretive program is a conversation of ideas, the reenactors ought to give as much priority to what the audience experiences as much as what the reenactors experience within the event. In terms of the quality of that experience, it may be entertaining to see who is defeated or emerges victorious from the battle reenactments, and it may be educational to talk with the various members about the materials they have at hand. However, the most important quality as described by Sam Hams excellences is the ability to provoke thought. History must be presented in all its complexity, not only what is worth honoring and paying respect to, but also for the unsettling counter-memories which, though discomforting and often overlooked, are nonetheless an equally important part of the history that is still playing out in the present day. It is in the hands of a heritage interpreter that the audience is able to form personal connections with this historical material.

Finally, the reenacting event ought to be guided by the mission statement it has in place for itself. Which, if that is where the organization's interpretive goals are stated,

then the organization's members must make doubly sure they are living up to the standards they set for themselves. It would be a mistake to call someone a chef if they do not know how to cook. It is by acting on their mission and following through with the interpretive principles they lay claim to that the reenactors demonstrate their integrity.

Even if the events take place in private, only for personal enjoyment, then, like Live Action Roleplaying gamers, living history reenactors must:

2. Establish and maintain a system of circles and frames so as to designate what is acceptable within the realm of fantasy and what is unacceptable within the realm of reality.

The distinguishing factor brought to light in Chapter 2 is that hiving history reenactors differ from living history interpreters in how strongly they identify with the characters they portray. In the case of living history interpreters, aesthetic distance is maintained, and the characters are alienated from any sense of who the interpreter is as a person. For many a mainstream living history reenactor, there is often little to no aesthetic distance, and the reenactors often identify to such an extent with their historical characters that the beliefs of the reenactor and the beliefs of the historical counterpart become conflated and mistaken for each other. In situations like these, provoking thought is laid aside in favor of personal enjoyment. When the source of the living history being presented is the reenactors own personality and beliefs, then the value of historical research becomes replaced with personal thoughts and opinions of the participants, which often, and unfortunately, skew in favor of a Confederate 'Lost Cause' narrative.

To the reenactor who is engrossed in their character and has little aesthetic distance between their own personality and their historical character, there is no

difference between the reality of who they are and the fantasy they are reading into history. Though such tendencies are shared by LARPers who become overinvolved in their roles and prioritize their fictional characters over historical reality, Chapter 3 revealed that even LARPers have methods to separate out fantasy from reality so that one does not merge with the other in unintended ways.

It is in taking the subjectivity of personal experience as an absolute of historical fact that makes the 'method reenacting' of Courtney a fool's errand. The aura of authenticity aspired to by reenactors outlined in Chapter 2 presupposes an absolute, complete, knowable past we are able to gain access to. However, what this treatment of the past misses is that the gaps in the historical record will always be incomplete, and our understanding of the past will always be limited, one step removed from the thing itself by virtue of the very thing authentic reenactors use as their claim to authenticity; their own subjective experience. To assert this misses the point of where living history finds its true potency and closes off the potential for new information, new learning, and new ways of seeing. To remain viable, mainstream reenactors would have to:

3. Admit both to themselves and to their audiences that what they do is clearly an *interpretation* of the past.

Research may allow us to draw close to the past, but it is a mistake to correlate the past and the present as one and the same, especially when that assertion is based on the subjective 'time warp' experience. That experience itself is built within an environment that is ever changing and inseparable from the present day. Our understanding of the past changes as new information and research is brought to light, and that mainstream living

history reenactors, or any living historian, can no more claim to be a representation of historical reality than they can claim to be actual soldiers fighting in the Civil War.

If mainstream reenactors claim to do what they do for the edification of an audience, then, in keeping with the first point, they must follow through with that commitment. The real affective component of reenacting is to be found, not in how the reenactor experiences the past in a 'time warp', but in what the audience learns after having witnessed the reenactment. It is the audience to whom we owe our responsibility as reenactors, and it is to them whom we must be held accountable. If the coordinators and participants wish to have it be a *Gone With The Wind* fantasy event with the intent on having fun in period clothing rather than provoke thought about history, then in keeping with the second point, they must frame the experience and establish circles in which the fantasy portrayed in the event does not apply to perceptions of reality outside the event. They must be honest to themselves and others that what they are doing has little to no bearing in history outside of surface level aesthetics, and take responsible actions to clarify the circles and frames that separate their fantasy from reality. If, as is the case for some private campaign reenactors who use the reenacting environment to get a better idea of the lived experience of historical persons, then not only would they have to follow the second point, but they will have to make good on the third point, especially when they start asserting claims of "authenticity," which is a contentious notion as evidenced by Chapter 2. Though the event is informed by research, the core of the event and understanding of the experience of historical persons gained by the participants is still mediated through the participants' own subjective experiences in a present-day facsimile.

Reenactors often get incensed at the idea that people insinuate they are "acting." That all they are doing is merely "pretend." By asserting the "reality" or "authenticity" of what they are doing, reenactors place themselves within the quadrant that makes up a weak-circle/weak-frame section of being themselves in everyday life. Though doing so grants them a claim to reality and thus the "authenticity" of what they are doing, it also results in freely bleeding in and out aspects of roleplay with aspects of their own identity, and conflating the thoughts and actions of historical persons with the thoughts and actions of their own person. If they are not putting on some kind of character, or admitting some level of pretense, then they embrace their own ahistorical, anachronistic self into the performance. This itself destroys any sense of 'authenticity' they might claim, though this is exactly what they mean to assert. Of course, all of this could be avoided if, in keeping with the third point, their portrayal of history is not absolute, but is an approximate interpretation of the past based on what evidence is available for their understanding and within their abilities at that time. Though living history may being us infinitely close to walking in the footsteps of history, there is always that temporal degree of separation from which the two will never fully meet.

As Cook and Nagle remind us, we can never be them. As Fine, Hook, and Bowman remind us, we need to maintain distance to have healthy gameplay. And as Tilden, Ham, and other interpreters remind us, we need to be clear on what we are doing, why we are doing it, and to whom we are doing it. If it is to provoke the thoughts of others, then that is what makes it interpretive. If it is done with a clear distinction between character and self, then that is what makes it roleplaying. From what I have found, the reputation of American Civil War reenacting is destroyed when it does neither.

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