

# 3

## Bonus Materials

### *Digital Auras and Authors*

As examined in chapter 2, Hollywood and its marketers often mobilize paratexts to proffer “proper interpretations,” some preceding the show’s arrival in the public sphere, thereby setting up pre-decodings, and some working in medias res to subtly inflect the public understanding of an ongoing and open text. Many such paratexts will aim to strike a balance between simile—insisting that a show is “just like X,” or “a mix of Y and Z”—and metonym—encapsulating in microcosm the fuller diegetic world that exists in the show. In doing so, as I have argued, they are not always successful or even uniform, sometimes employing similes or metonyms problematically, and thus setting up unrealistic expectations that cannot be met, and offering various versions of what therefore becomes only nominally the “same” text. In all cases, though, they allow the text to be created in part outside of its supposed borders, so that public understanding of the film or program is generated in multiple sites by multiple paratexts. However, while chapter 2 offered numerous examples of paratexts creating or maintaining frames through which we are invited to make sense of what a text is ostensibly “about,” who it addresses, what are its basic themes, and who populates its diegesis, paratextual frames can also prove remarkably important for how they assign *value* to a text, situating it as a product and/or as a work of art. Tony Bennett notes that “value is not something which the text has or possesses. It is not an attribute of the text; it is rather something that is produced for the text.”<sup>1</sup> This chapter argues that paratexts are the source of much of this production.

Here we reach a dilemma for hype, promos, and synergy. For on one hand, media producers have found them to be absolutely necessary to attract audiences and encourage them to enter their textual worlds. Given the considerable textual clutter and the easy availability of endless shows in multiplexes, in video stores and libraries, on television, and on a

mushrooming number of other devices and technologies, marketers must find ways to cut through the clutter to announce their show(s) as offering a better viewing experience than the thousands of other available options. Hype, promos, and synergy, with their pre-decoding scripts and either promises or reminders of diegetic pleasures, are thus imperative. However, on the other hand, hype, promos, and synergy contribute to the clutter that often bothers many a would-be audience member, thereby devaluing the show and losing would-be audiences with their mere presence. This dilemma proves particularly challenging for films' and television programs' claim to artistic status. Hype, promos, and synergy can easily remind us that a film or program is first and foremost a product of a studio machine, especially when their pitches start to look and sound remarkably similar. Many a film trailer, for example, "invites" one to "journey to a world where \_\_\_\_\_, and one man must fight for \_\_\_\_\_." But how do you succeed when all the odds are against you?" . . . and so on. If Hollywood itself often proves to be a paint-by-numbers industry, with recombination and outright copying behind much of its production,<sup>2</sup> the hype, promo, and synergy industries can be even more obviously standardized, as in the above instance of *Mad Lib* trailer-making. As I explained in the Introduction, one of the motivating factors in writing this book has been that too often we in media studies do not bother to look beyond paratexts as instances of crass consumerism that detract from a business that could and should be about art, not industry. The fact that work on paratexts has often stopped at this obstacle speaks to the degree to which many viewers, and not just media studies analysts, detest and/or resent many paratexts.

Nevertheless, if hype campaigns, advertising, and merchandising can engender such skepticism about paratexts as being meaningful, complex entities, and about their accompanying texts as being legitimate art, other forms of paratexts try to offset the damaging effect of their culturally suspect counterparts. Just as some paratexts label a film or program as yet another mindless industrial product that "if you only see one this summer" absolutely *must* be this one, other paratexts actively create artistic aura for their associated text. In an impressive act of alchemy, numerous paratexts create an author figure, surround the text with aura, and insist on its uniqueness, value, and authenticity in an otherwise standardized media environment, thereby taking a heretofore industrial entity and rendering it a work of art. It is to these paratexts that this chapter turns.

Before I examine how paratexts attempt to give artistic and aesthetic value to fictional texts, I will first explore how they can similarly attempt

to surround even nonfictional programming with greater aura and authenticity, thus attempting to increase such programs' moral and civic value. This process could be charted in the fetishistic invocation by any number of news programs of their websites or blogs, an act which draws attention to the supposed excess of facts, information, and opinion that they can marshal, and suggests a mastery of news and an overflowing concern for their citizen-viewers. Instead, though, in keeping with the book's interest in entertainment media, I will look at how makeover and improvement shows rely on their paratexts to battle pervasive critiques of reality television as exploitative, excessive, unreal, and pointless with an image of the shows as philanthropic, caring, and important.

If paratexts can change one's understanding of the authenticity of supposed reality programming, their powers to change one's appreciation of fictional, artistic texts are even starker. Hence, since I have spoken of paratexts as alchemists, I next turn to DVD "silver," "gold," and "platinum" editions, complete with their extensive bonus materials. Many of these bonus materials, such as "restored" scenes, interviews with creative personnel, commentary tracks, production stills, and making-of documentaries, stamp their texts with authenticity, insisting on that text's claim to the status of great art. While Walter Benjamin famously noted that "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art,"<sup>3</sup> today's DVD digital reproduction often proves constitutive in assigning a text a sense of aura. Thus, I will study how the *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* Platinum Series Special Extended Edition DVDs append aura, author, and authenticity to the text. Such is the success of DVDs in creating authenticity that they are regularly regarded as containing the true version of the film (the "Director's Cut"), the real work of art, and I will examine how DVDs have managed to lay discursive claim to the real text. Following my extended example of the *Two Towers* DVD, I will then examine how this discursive claim has proven particularly important for television programs. I will explore how television authors can be "born" in paratexts, and how they conduct their, the industry's, and the audience's bidding in this realm, working as signifiers of value for all in question.

Ultimately, though Benjamin declared the death of aura, and Roland Barthes declared the death of the author,<sup>4</sup> this chapter argues that, mixing alchemy with necromancy, various paratexts have resurrected both aura and author, becoming primary sites for the generation of both as discursive values in today's mediated environment. I do not mean to imply

that artistry, authenticity, aura, and authority exist *only* in paratexts, nor that such values will be acknowledged equally by all audience members: speaking personally, for example, I cannot imagine how any amount of paratextual pomp and pageantry could convince me that *Deuce Bigalow: European Gigolo* (2005) is anything other than a cinematic crime. Nevertheless, to a certain degree, paratexts can often determine what counts as cinematic and televisual art, aura, and authority, necessitating our close attention to them.

### *The Doctors' Rounds: Becoming the Real Deal*

Since reality television hit the American market in full force in the early 2000s, the genre has commanded little respect, more commonly spoken of as hurting society than helping it, and as appealing to escapist and devalued impulses, not reflective and valued ones. However, in recent years, a variety of shows dedicated to the improvement and “making over” of participants have sought to counter the image of reality television as contrived, exploitative, and a waste of televisual space by touting themselves as contributing to the bettering of the nation. In their recent book *Better Living through Reality TV*, Laurie Ouellette and James Hay link the expansion of shows promising to change the lives of guests, subjects, and viewers alike to a trend toward off-loading welfare, social services, and citizenship instruction to television. Through such programs as *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, *Supernanny* (2005–), and *The Biggest Loser* (2004–), reality television, they argue, is “being reinvented as an instructional template for taking care of oneself and becoming self-enterprising as a path to (among other things) ‘empowered’ citizenship.”<sup>5</sup> The shows in question stage “interventions” in order to give explicit and implicit instruction on issues as varied as how to dress, eat, decorate, exercise, and raise one’s children, taking as their premise the curing of bad personal behavior, style, and/or living environment. I argue that if the supposed bastard child that is reality television can muster the chutzpah to purport to be helping and educating Americans, its paratexts have often proven vital in making this rhetorical move possible. Makeover and improvement shows’ paratexts, in other words, have given their texts value.

Many of these shows, after all, risk collapsing at their supposedly warm and fuzzy centers due to four intrinsic dilemmas. The first, as noted above, is that reality television has a bad reputation, its shows being coded as a waste of time. The second is a result of their frequently hyperbolic mode



of address, which boasts of their supreme philanthropy. As networks and cable channels have realized the potential for makeover shows (broadly defined) to serve as sterling corporate public relations, their boasts regarding their shows' positive, transformative effects on society have become commonplace. However, most shows help a statistically insignificant number of people, while rejecting a statistically significant number of applicants for "help." Especially when the show's home network or channel is one of the world's more profitable companies, clearing millions or billions of dollars each year in profits, and when they have proven so resourceful in pawning off most fees to corporate sponsors and selfless volunteers, these shows run the risk of seeming callous, exploitative, and uncaring at worst, or irrelevant and inconsequential at best. A third dilemma centers on these shows' ethos of surveillance. As Ouellette and Hay note, a paradox exists when shows balance their message of civic education on the value of the free society, yet flagrantly violate personal freedoms by using Big Brother-like surveillance techniques to reach their goal.<sup>6</sup> Finally, and relatedly, they must assuage the viewers' potential guilt at being reduced to passive voyeurs of a spectacle, who are complicit with its surveillance, when the shows' call to improve oneself seemingly demands that audiences be more active and "do something."

Of course, contradictions exist throughout television and televisual pleasures, and many other shows similarly promise a value, then undercut that same value. But central to reality television's attempts to solve the above dilemmas are its paratexts, as the interventions that the shows perform frequently overflow into web pages, mailing lists, books, merchandise, and other platforms. For instance, writing of NBC's weight-loss competition, *The Biggest Loser*, Ouellette and Hay observe:


The "text," in the old sense of broadcast media, is only one element in a network of cultural technologies that coalesced around the *Biggest Loser* concept. Viewers are invited to take part in its interventionist ethos by applying an array of technical suggestions and motivational strategies to their own weight-loss regimes. NBC has constructed an interactive website complete with nutritional guides, dieting tips, sample recipes and menus, customizable exercise regimes, and weight-loss tools, including a body mass index calculator. Tie-in merchandise—including workbooks and the *Biggest Loser* exercise DVD—is available for purchase, and participants are also urged to join the *Biggest Loser* email club and sign up for informative podcasts. Finally, for people on the go there is also the

much-promoted *Biggest Loser* wireless service. For only \$2.99 per month, anyone with a cell phone can sign up to receive a daily health tip, an exercise pointer, or inspirational message.<sup>7</sup>

The “old sense of broadcast media” they allude to is, I would pose, that of the show-based model. In the “new” model, the text is now dispersed across not only the show, but also its multiple paratexts. The website serves as a portal into various sites of *The Biggest Loser*, of which the television show is merely one (fig. 3.1). Similarly, ABC’s hit *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* lives on in its Better Community website; NBC’s short-lived *Three Wishes* (2005) tried to circulate dollar bills with *Three Wishes* stickers on them so that audiences would use them to help others’ dreams come true; and *Supernanny* Jo Frost wrote a best-selling book on raising children. All of these paratexts encourage viewers to act upon the messages learnt, to continue the process of learning and self-evaluation, and/or to extend the philanthropic ministry beyond the shows and across multiple spaces of everyday life.

Many of these paratexts, then, *broaden* the shows’ mission to countless others, asking for viewers to transform themselves into versions of the shows’ contestants and self-help gurus, revolutionizing their or others’ lives. Importantly, too, they also afford promoters the opportunity to boast of this broader mission. By doing so, they address the first and second dilemmas noted above by suggesting a huge, “nationwide” pool of prospective recipients of help, recoding the show as mere catalyst, not as the sum total, of a philanthropic endeavor that goes well beyond the television screen. As for the third dilemma, the paratexts recode the surveillance as necessary, and as a small cost, so that audiences can “participate” in the push to improve themselves and their surrounding communities. Also, since the paratexts prove constitutive in the attempt to mobilize a broad base of self- and world-improving viewers, the final dilemma is seemingly erased, as the paratexts both call upon audiences to “do something” and give them skills and resources for doing so, thereby allowing viewers the opportunity to feel part of the broader mission. The paratexts, as such, aim to “cure” the texts.

Across reality television, paratexts have frequently attempted to make texts more accessible, more welcoming, and hence more popular, but they have also worked to “solve,” or at least gloss over, seemingly inherent problems with the genre. It is at the level of the paratext where much improvement television attempts to refine its address. Importantly, no guarantee



**TUESDAYS 8/7c NBC**

## The Biggest Loser Club!

Drop Weight and Change Your Life.

Username:  Password:

[Forget Your Password?](#) [LOGIN](#)

### Free Profile

Enter information below to get started and get a free diet profile

Or, skip the profile and [go directly to sign up!](#)

Weight:  Lbs.

Height:  ft.  in.

Age:

Gender:  Female  Male


E-Mail:

[See Our Privacy Policy](#)

[GET YOUR FREE PROFILE](#)

**Mark lost 129 lbs!**

**Kelly lost 109 lbs!**



**Roger lost 164 lbs!**


**All Lost 112 lbs!**

**Be Part of the NBC Phenomenon!**

Get online access to the diet & fitness program used by the contestants - personalized to fit your goals and lifestyle.

[SIGN UP NOW](#)


[LEARN MORE](#)



"I am the Biggest Loser. I believed it when I said it, and I believe it now."

- Ali Vincent


Biggest Loser Contestant



"Thanks to the Biggest Loser Club I am celebrating a weight loss of 33 pounds and 4 dress sizes!"

- Johnna Zeigler


Biggest Loser Club Member



"Oh my god, I did it. I did it. I did it. This is amazing!"

- Kelly Fields

Biggest Loser Contestant









"I plan on remaining a Biggest Loser Club member for support, motivation and information!"

- Tommy Engel


Biggest Loser Club Member

#### What You Get:

-  **Lose Weight with The Biggest Loser**  
Use the diet and fitness program being followed on the show and interact with The Biggest Loser experts and Contestants.
-  **Daily Meal Plans & Recipes**  
Personalized plans featuring foods and recipes that helped the contestants lose weight and eat healthier. Plus get shopping lists and recipes.
-  **Customized Fitness Program**  
Burn calories with our circuit program you can do at home or at the gym. Our demonstrations show you how to exercise safely and effectively.
-  **Connect with Other Biggest Losers**  
Our message boards are full of tips, support and advice from other club members as well as contestants from the show.
-  **Personal Progress Journal**  
Share your experiences and success with other Club members, Contestants, and Trainers.
-  **Newsletter, Tips, and More**  
Get inspiration, motivation, and the information you need to succeed through e-mail and online.

#### Exclusive Video!

Say 'Basta' to Pasta!



00:00 00:47

▶ PLAY 🔊 🍽️ MENU

After you've whipped up an amazing low-cal spaghetti sauce for dinner with ground turkey and peppers and onions--do you reach for the pasta? NO! Ali Vincent has a better idea?

Fig. 3.1. *The Biggest Loser's* website offers multiple extensions and weight-loss tools, suggesting a *Biggest Loser* mission, not just a television program.

exists that these paratextual valuations will *work*. Moreover, as my liberal use of scare quotes suggests, we need not take the promotional, philanthropic rhetoric at face value; on the contrary, some such paratexts may increase some viewers' cynicism, as the attempt at halo-construction irks them more than the programs themselves. Hence, it is at the level of the paratext where much improvement television *aims* to complete its texts and to become "the real deal," illustrating in the process how paratexts can create value—moral, ethical, civic, and entertainment—for a text. But it is also at the level of the paratext where such shows can lose value and increase or seemingly justify viewers' and non-viewers' skepticism.

### *The Extra Texts, Bonus Texts, and Ideal Texts of DVDs*

If paratexts can brand and recode reality, fictional universes prove an even easier target for branding and recoding. And while fictional films and television shows frequently boast many of the same types of paratexts that makeover shows have, a particularly strong paratext has been the DVD, complete with bonus materials ranging from making-of documentaries to commentary tracks, deleted or alternate scenes, and interactive games. In the first half of 2008, DVD sales and rentals in the United States produced \$10.77 billion,<sup>8</sup> serving as further evidence of the market's strength. In an early article on DVDs, Robert Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus also note their near unique status as paratexts, or, as they call them, extra texts. Many other paratexts are spatially distanced from their film or program, meaning in turn that producers and marketers can never be sure that all audience members will have access to them. Thus, for instance, the *Six Degrees* ad campaign discussed in chapter 2 required a would-be audience member to see the subway ads or the webpage, or to have heard about them from others. By contrast, Brookey and Westerfelhaus observe that "by including such interrelated [para]texts in a self-contained package, the DVD turns this intertextual relationship into an intratextual relationship."<sup>9</sup> Barbara Klinger writes that DVDs have an "instant built-in and changeable intertextual surround that enter into [a film's] meaning and significance for viewers,"<sup>10</sup> but as Brookey and Westerfelhaus suggest, this "intertextual surround" can easily become part of the text itself, making the DVD "perhaps the ultimate example of media-industry synergy, in which the promotion of a media product is collapsed into the product itself."<sup>11</sup> Bonus materials' contributions to the text may only be seen by some, and Brookey and Westerfelhaus somewhat overestimate

the likelihood that all audience members will bother watching them.<sup>12</sup> But they are nevertheless correct in pointing to the ease with which DVDs bring all sorts of other paratexts—trailers, documentaries, interviews, ads for merchandise and videogames, and so forth—to those audiences who do watch bonus materials, rather than rely on happenstance or active exploration on the audience member's behalf.

Moreover, they note that these paratexts' appendage to the film or program through the DVD lends them and their meanings extra authority, precisely because they are now a digitally integrated part of the show itself. Brookey and Westerfelhaus exhibit particular interest in how this affects the status of the creative personnel's observations in commentary tracks and documentaries. "Individuals involved in the film's production," they argue, "are presented in the extra text as having privileged insights regarding a film's meaning and purpose, and, as such, they are used to articulate a 'proper' (i.e., sanctioned) interpretation."<sup>13</sup> Though DVDs promise the illusion of interactivity, and hence their add-ons and "Easter eggs" can seem like shreds of evidence discovered by the attentive forensic investigation of a given viewer, in fact little real interactivity exists, as instead viewers are given a carefully crafted set of meanings.<sup>14</sup> Using the example of *Fight Club's* (1999) DVD, Brookey and Westerfelhaus show how the bonus materials and commentary tracks add an authorial voice that instructs readers on how to make sense of scenes and themes, and that in particular downplays the film's obvious homoeroticism, thus constructing a clear "proper interpretation." But their research also examined reviews of the film, and while the movie's post-theatrical release reviews were a mixed bag, its post-DVD release reviews were overwhelmingly positive, with many reviewers turning to the commentary tracks to divine the "real" text and hence the real way to interpret it. Commentary tracks and documentaries were even able to provide retorts to negative post-theatrical release reviews, explicitly attempting to "delegitimate" unfavorable critiques.

Brookey and Westerfelhaus's study of the *Fight Club* DVD once more suggests the potential for paratexts to establish proper interpretations, as well as the degree to which they can at least try to hide or overpower other interpretations (here, a homoerotic reading of the film). But it also suggests that DVDs can enrich the entire textual experience: if DVDs can be seen as offering the real text, then they can perform a quick sleight of hand, reducing the authenticity of the cinematic release or original television broadcast while elevating the paratext in status. P. David Marshall



similarly writes of DVDs' ability to "encircle, entice and deepen the significance of the film for the audience,"<sup>15</sup> foregrounding the degree to which DVDs add value and meaning to texts, not just interpretive frames. Elsewhere I have examined the peculiarity of *Blade Runner* (1982) fans who for more than twenty years held out for a "true" director's cut DVD of the film. The original "Director's Cut" DVD was notable for one particular added scene that suggested that the central character Deckard was himself a replicant, though this was known not to be director Ridley Scott's preferred cut, and so fans were often excited at the prospect of Scott finally releasing the film as he wanted it. A paradox therefore existed of individuals who had remained active fans of the film for years, posting about it online and basing friendships around the shared love of the film, yet who maintained that the true object of their fandom—the ideal, legitimate *Blade Runner*—had as yet been denied them. The DVD, as such, represented the real work of art.<sup>16</sup>

The DVD market has grown so strongly in recent years that proclamations of the DVD's contribution to the text should not seem peculiar. As Charles Acland puts it, after all, "film texts *grow old elsewhere*," living on in other venues and on other viewing platforms, and hence "the influence of individual texts can be truly gauged only via cross-media scrutiny."<sup>17</sup> Most prominently, Disney and other children's film producers often reap significantly more profits once a film becomes a DVD.<sup>18</sup> Independent films, too, Acland notes, regularly view the DVD as the centerpiece of the marketing strategy. He quotes *Playback's* description of the release strategy for Lars Von Trier's *The Kingdom* (1995): "It is [. . .] hoped that the rep release campaign will boost video sales, sort of like running a trailer for video." Acland also defends Canadian film's success against its many skeptics, arguing that "focusing on the space of the cinema ignores the fact that people see far more films in other locations. Indeed, Canadians see far more Canadian films at other locations. As David Ellis notes, a single broadcast of a Canadian film on television can expect to have an audience double those expected from theatrical release, pay-TV and home video combined."<sup>19</sup> While this last example points to the strength of Canadian broadcasting, not DVDs, in developing the value of Canadian film, Acland nevertheless reminds us that a film's value, both monetarily to its producers and popularly to its audience, will develop over time, with various platforms for re-release and various paratexts playing potentially constitutive roles in creating our understanding and valuation of the text.



Fig. 3.2. The stylishly designed *Lord of the Rings: Two Towers* Platinum Series Special Extended Edition DVD box immediately aestheticizes the films, suggesting something above the humdrum Hollywood film and/or DVD.

### *Fellowships of the Disc*

To examine further how DVDs assign value to a text, I delved into the four-DVD Platinum Series Special Extended Edition of *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. While director Peter Jackson's films had received countless accolades upon theatrical release, their DVDs were no less remarkable. Packaged in an attractive "Elven"-designed box set (see fig. 3.2), the discs offer not only approximately one hour of extra (previously deleted) film footage, with scenes worked seamlessly into the cinematic text, complete with visual and sound effects, scoring, and so forth, but also four full four-hour commentary tracks, thirteen documentaries with more than seven hours of material, 1,917 photographic stills (219 of which come with commentaries), and interactive split-screen, map-, and audio-based features. With a credited production crew of 163, and with a total of 113 members of the film's cast or crew interviewed, the *Two Towers* DVDs open up the film and its production to viewers as few other artistic works in history have, creating well over thirty hours of bonus textuality, just as the *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* DVDs did before them and as would the *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* DVDs after

them. In watching all this material, I saw numerous themes repeating themselves: the bonus materials seek to enrich the film's quest narrative; they actively construct an aura of supreme artistry around the films that harkens back to a mythical pre-culture industries vision of art; and in doing so, they create a fantasy realm of cinematic production and reception into which producers, cast, crew, and fans alike can enter. Effectively, they create a Middle Earth of artistic creation, with an author (or two), an aura, and authenticity. *The Lord of the Rings* is an epic tale of an unlikely group of heroes who, through comradeship, resilience, and compassion, manage to overcome the odds and triumph in the face of immense adversity. The DVD bonus material, meanwhile, replicates this narrative continuously, superimposing it onto the cast, crew, director, Tolkien, and New Zealand.

Lending the production of three films considerably more gravitas and mythic resonance, the DVDs' producers paint a picture of multiple other fellowships, innocent and struggling hobbits, charismatic rangers, and sage wizards. Most notably, the cast often transpose their filmic roles onto their own personages, or have the act performed by others. For instance, Orlando Bloom talks of what a privilege it was to come out of drama school and work with the likes of Ian McKellen, who, he notes, brought his "wise old wizard" ways to the cast, becoming a real-life Gandalf. Likewise, numerous cast and crew members discuss Viggo Mortensen's charisma and leadership as if he was his character, the ranger who becomes king, Aragorn. The stuntmen claim that his hard work and dedication on the gruelling Helm's Deep set inspired them. We learn of Mortensen's personal pull in convincing cast and crew alike to camp out the night before a dawn shoot. Colleagues talk of him as an earthy, nature-loving man. And Second Unit Director John Mahaffi even declares, "If I was going into battle and I needed someone to be on my right shoulder, it would be Viggo." Meanwhile, Dominic Monaghan and Billy Boyd provide much of the DVDs' comic relief, reprising their roles as the cheeky, prankster hobbits. In the cast commentary, they constantly toy with the film's register of reality, joking that a dreary, rocky scene looks just like Manchester, for instance, or that the film's huge dragon-like Balrog never bought a round when at the pub with them. Whereas most of the fifteen cast members contributing to the commentary were recorded individually, Monaghan and Boyd are recorded together, hence allowing their back-and-forth banter. Interestingly, too, while Elijah Wood and Sean Astin were recorded with them for the *Fellowship of the Ring* commentary, and similarly joked

around as carefree hobbits, the *Two Towers* commentary separates them from Monaghan and Boyd. Paralleling Frodo and Sam's path into darkness, Wood and Astin's commentary takes on a more pensive, reflective nature.

In the *Fellowship of the Ring* commentary, the cast repeatedly referred to their bond with each other as their own "Fellowship," and once again, the *Lord of the Rings* vocabulary is used in the *Two Towers* DVDs. Monaghan notes that it was strange to be split up from the others for *The Two Towers* filming, an act which Wood describes as a "literal breaking of the Fellowship." Yet they and the DVD producers are at pains to describe how much of a complete team they were. Frustrations are downplayed, laughed away, or (likely) cut, as instead we are offered the picture of a group who all respect each others' work incredibly, enjoyed and relished each other's company, and are now sad to be apart. Barbara Klinger notes that despite DVDs' exposé style, "viewers do not get the unvarnished truth about the production; they are instead presented with the 'promotable' facts, behind-the-scenes information that supports and enhances a sense of the 'movie magic' associated with Hollywood production."<sup>20</sup> Here, the script on offer is of a real-life Fellowship. We are even told of a bizarre habit that developed between the cast and stuntmen of headbutting one another and are shown footage of Mortensen and Sala Baker headbutting at a premier, hence suggesting an intimate, ritualistic bond shared by all. What is more, cast and crew remind us continuously of the hard work and dedication that all gave to the project. Bloom, Mortensen, and Brett Beattie suffered broken ligaments or bones and yet forged on, we are told; Andy Serkis braved a frozen river in only a lycra suit; many extras and cast worked countless nights under rain machines in damp prosthetics for the Helm's Deep scenes; Brad Dourif shaved his eyebrows off five times; and all faithfully returned to New Zealand months later for pickups. The bonus materials insist on the cast becoming their own Fellowship, united by compassion, respect, and dedication, and determined to succeed in their own gruelling quest.

The tale of the Little Hobbits Who Could plays out on multiple other levels, too, as Peter Jackson particularly is raised by all commentators to an amalgam of the sage Gandalf, the charismatic Aragorn, the bumbling Merry or Pippin, and the erstwhile Frodo. Elsewhere, writing of George Lucas's image and "role" as independent film producer, Steve Bebout writes of how Lucas "performs" this role by voicing discontent with Hollywood in interviews, but also by keeping public appearances to a minimum, by



talking about his work not his life, and by wearing the plaid-shirt-and-jeans “costume” of the American everyman.<sup>21</sup> The *Two Towers* bonus materials similarly assign Jackson the role of humble and unassuming geek next door, depicting a rather hobbit-like man with frizzy hair, no shoes, and no film school training, whose childlike simplicity left him open to practical jokes or the odd tumble into a bog, and yet whose energy, enthusiasm, easygoing and simple nature, and mastery of vision successfully helmed one of cinema’s boldest projects to completion.

The design team, meanwhile, is given the role of the rag-tag group of hobbits, dwarves, elves, and humans who make up the foot soldiers who repel Sauron. Conceptual designer John Howe, for instance, talks of how Weta Workshop’s creative supervisor Richard Taylor assembled a hardworking group who cared not for the fame, but who just loved the work and were dedicated to the cause. As one might imagine, much of the DVD bonus material studies the great feats of computer programming, set design, artwork, costuming, and other production details that made *The Lord of the Rings* such a lavishly rich project, and we are often hit with remarkable numbers and information: Edoras took eight months to build for eight days of filming, only to be completely dismantled afterwards, while Helm’s Deep’s set creation was preceded by three months of moving concrete and rock alone. True to *The Lord of the Rings*’ democratic interest in all the “little” people who make up the grand front, the DVDs introduce us to many of these crew members who contributed to making it all possible, as the entirety of the Fellowship is fleshed out. From groundskeeper to Foley artists, we are shown how huge this Army of the Ring is. Wood enthusiastically declares that “everyone put in everything they had” for the sake of the quest, and others on the DVDs repeat this assertion as if it is religious creed.

Throughout the documentaries, this multi-layering of quests is left not only to cast and crew discussion, as music from the trilogy’s soundtrack is also cleverly used to embed certain themes. It is illustrative to focus briefly on the “J. R. R. Tolkien: Origins of Middle Earth” documentary, whose producers use Howard Shore’s compositions to welcome Tolkien himself to this Fellowship and to depict his act of writing the trilogy as its own grand quest against publishing norms, academic suspicion, and historical obstacles. The documentary begins by telling us of Tolkien’s friendship with C. S. Lewis and their common commitment to a different mode of storytelling, while the soft, inspiring flute of Shore’s hobbit theme plays in the background. Then, we are told of these writers’ shared experience



of World War I, and as several stills of the war are shown, the harsh and throbbing warrior Uruk-Hai theme accompanies them. Later, after Brian Sibley grandiosely describes the completion of the trilogy and its delivery to the publisher as coming “like lightning out of a clear sky,” the trilogy’s Fellowship theme, or quest music, cues in the background. This piece is again utilized when Jude Fisher describes how the one book was divided into three. Thus, at these four points, musical themes are used to underline, respectively, the camaraderie and nostalgic traditionalism of Lewis and Tolkien, the cruelty and terror of war, and, in the last two instances, the birth of a great epic. At the same time, though, the music serves to *equate* Tolkien’s struggle to those of his characters, and in literal concert together, they parallel his life to the trilogy’s quest. As in countless other moments in the documentaries (as, for example, when any cast or crew tomfoolery is accompanied by the light and playful music from Shore’s “Concerning Hobbits”), the DVDs propose that we view all manner of events and characters associated with the film production predominantly through diegetic *Lord of the Rings* glasses, superimposing Frodo and company’s quest and ultimate victory onto Tolkien, Jackson, the cast, and the crew.

Even New Zealand and its inhabitants are painted with a *Lord of the Rings* brush. As the title on one feature, “New Zealand as Middle Earth,” suggests, the DVDs engage in a certain degree of conflation (fig. 3.3). Commentary track discussion often insists with awe, for instance, “That’s really there,” and New Zealand’s landscape is imbued with all of the magic of Middle Earth by cast and crew alike, only occasionally interrupted by the revelation that a location was actually constructed in a parking lot or is a matte painting. Meanwhile, from the notable presence of a local accent on many of the crew, combined with little information on their previous (if any) work, to the noted “discovery” of a local acting talent, such as Karl Urban, to the use of cricket fans to record Uruk-Hai chanting for Sauron’s Nuremberg-like rally, and to the relatively unknown director himself, regional content in the DVDs is often presented with considerable pride, almost with the suggestion of hobbit-like recluse in the world, mixed with remarkable resourcefulness. Finally, in the DVDs’ closing documentary, “The Battle for Helm’s Deep Is Over . . .,” Philippa Boyens solidifies the link between the cast, crew, New Zealand, and Middle Earth when she remarks that “anytime you get back together with the cast and other crew, it’s great and special . . . especially in Wellington.” Boyens thus declares New Zealand as the rightful home of this magic alliance between cast, crew, and diegetic world.



Fig. 3.3. The *Two Towers*' DVDs elide New Zealand and Middle Earth.

This multi-layering results in a formidable “stacking” of the narrative of the film, so that in addition to being a tale of Frodo, Aragorn, and Middle Earth, it is also one of the cast, the crew, Jackson, and Kiwis. Everyone, it seems, lived the movie. Remembering, too, that the *Two Towers* Platinum Edition was released prior to the cinematic release of *The Return of the King*, this stacking imbues the final chapter of the trilogy with significantly more meaning: no longer would we just be seeing Frodo’s victory, but also the cast and crew’s multi-year quest would come to an end, Jackson’s quest would end, and a (coded) Kiwi film would triumph in the almost Mordor-like world of Hollywood. For many who have seen the *Fellowship of the Ring* or *The Two Towers* DVDs, *The Return of the King*’s eventual Oscar monopoly would seem only just and deserved, since the DVDs (and other surrounding hype) added more mythic resonance than any of its competitors mustered. Of course, individual viewers may choose not to care about the multiple quests, and may refuse to actualize the DVDs’ proposed multi-layering. If primed to accept, though, this is also due to the DVDs’ masterful act of bathing the text in aura.

### *The Aura of the Ring*

The multi-layering of the *Two Towers* text by the DVD bonus materials contributes to the stepping of the text in a significance and richness that

tries to announce its difference from quotidian Hollywood fare. Taken as a whole, the bonus materials conduct a large-scale project to surround the text with aura. As Walter Benjamin famously declared, the age of mechanical reproduction supposedly killed aura. Benjamin's argument rests on the notion that mechanical reproduction "detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition," thereby depreciating its "presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be." "And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object."<sup>22</sup> Art, he notes, had aura because of its history, presence, and ritual value. Ultimately, then, his concern is about context and about how contexts of viewing, reading, and listening are created. But context, as I have argued, is created largely by paratexts, and this observation is as true for the original as for the reproduction. For instance, if a painting is widely regarded as a wonderful work of art, a testament to national character, and a landmark in a given family's history, such qualities are in large part figured by its framing, where it hangs, the glowing descriptions and accounts that precede it, and its cost. Or, to rephrase, its value is in large part paratextually constructed. If that same painting is now made into a mousepad and sold in tacky souvenir stores at a discount if three of the same item are purchased, if its aura, presence, and value to the art world plummet as a result, once again paratexts are responsible. Thus, while Benjamin writes of aura as though it is born with the text, aura must be assigned with paratexts; his concern lies with the degree to which aura and value can be reassigned with different paratexts. As Benjamin writes of close-ups or slow motion, they reveal "entirely new structural formations of the subject," so that "a different nature opens itself to the camera [that employs such techniques] than opens to the naked eye."<sup>23</sup> Again, we might rephrase this by saying that different contexts of delivery and the paratexts that often provide such contexts expand the text, in the process offering different possibilities for its valuation. If "aura" is the sense of a text's authenticity and authority—which, by nature, could never be an actual, uncontested quality of a text, only a discursively constructed value—while Benjamin focuses on how reproduction can *lessen* aura, surely we might explore ways in which reproduction might change the text, add context, "tradition," and "presence," and thereby *increase* aura.

The *Two Towers* DVDs wrap the film in aura; housed in an attractive, high-quality box, the discs are filled with explicit and implicit grabs at the title of "Work of Art." If anything, the sheer volume of information,

explanation, interpretation, and extra footage suggests an *excess* of artistry from the cinematic release, as if there was far too much to fit into a mere three hours. In the commentary track, for example, Wood explains how much work was put into one scene and yet, “as our luck always is [. . .] it didn’t end up in the theatrical edition.” At other points in the cast commentary, actors express delight at seeing a scene returned to the text, often expostulating at length the virtues of the scene. They also occasionally discuss the rewards of seeing certain (uncut) scenes in the theater, separating themselves and their involvement with the film to marvel at its artistry. Meanwhile, the cast and crew alike positively gush with praise for one another’s performances and work. Wood tells Serkis, for instance, “You’re an absolute blessing to that character [Gollum],” continuing, “It’s just, uh, it’s a marvel, Andy.” Similarly, the design team is credited with inspiring many a scene and with themselves being gifted artists.

Beyond merely *telling* us how great the work is in an entertaining if exhaustive manner, the galleries and documentaries *show* us how superb a job everyone did. Revealing painstaking attention to detail in every portion of the film, and the immense amount of work put into getting any one element “right,” for example, the galleries present hundreds of stills of sculptures, paintings, and sketches, many with accompanying genealogies by their artists. While allowing the viewer to slow down the film to study its minutiae, these galleries become filmic versions of art galleries with audio tours, rendering the individual works—and, by extension, the entire film—as gallery-*worthy* art. At the same time, the documentaries include film of all of the artists at work and information on the technologies and artwork, how they work, and how the crew revolutionized the forms. The DVDs teach a significant amount of production literacy, familiarizing audiences with the vocabulary of pickups, foley work, mime passes, second units, matte painting, and key frames, even while creating new phrases, such as Big-atures. Much as an art gallery’s audio tour or an art history class may, then, the DVDs work to give us the information and teach us to appreciate the work. They also aim to impress with tales of individual artists’ creation values. Howe in particular is depicted as a lifelong Tolkien fan dedicated to getting everything as authentically Middle Earth-ish as possible, whether this meant working from archaeological finds from Sutton Hoo to closely approximate a suitably Tolkienesque culture, or placing the stables at the top of the Edoras set to reflect Rohan’s love of horses. Klinger notes that DVDs are “in the process of expanding the notion of aesthete [. . .] to include more mainstream consumers,”<sup>24</sup> and true

to form, the *Two Towers* bonus materials teach us how and why to admire the film, thereby suggesting the degree to which that film definitively is an object of art deserving of appreciation.

Interestingly, and almost surprisingly, for all the big-budget effects that in many ways characterize the film, neither the documentaries nor the commentaries paint the film as an effects bonanza. Rather, commentators often hold up as sacrosanct the primacy of “the story” and “the way Tolkien wrote it,” frequently with a flourish of Shore’s Fellowship theme underscoring the sentiment. As described above, the DVDs liken the movie to Frodo’s quest, and given the nostalgic simple English countryside ethos this valorizes, especially in the face of Sauron and his dark post-industrial world ethos, the cast and crew often highlight the human’s presence in, and placement above, the film’s effects. The Gollum documentaries and discussion, for instance, talk at length of how all the computers and programs at Weta could not bring life to the character until Serkis arrived, and a split-screen feature shows how closely the animators based the CGI performance on Serkis’s (fig. 3.4). Similarly, we are frequently told of how production staff used “simple” and more “natural” answers for design dilemmas instead of technical, CGI ones. And, of course, the aforementioned narrative of the three-year cast and crew Fellowship suggests its own adherence to an “older, better” way of doing things. In other words, with nostalgic hobbit music in hand, the DVDs depict *The Two Towers* as an organic project, natural in all possible ways, and utterly human. This too, then, contributes to setting it apart from other Hollywood films, and to its obvious desire to be seen as Art with a sense of tradition, Art with ritual value, Art with aura.

### *The Return to Celluloid Hobbiton*

As part and parcel of this construction of aura, the DVDs are keen to offer us an author. To a certain degree, they actually offer two, as Tolkien and his intentions are used as a mantra of sorts. All cast and crew pledge enormous fealty to Tolkien and his wishes, and Christopher Lee and Sean Astin in particular talk of wanting to capture specific scenes’ Tolkienesque essence. All diversions from Tolkien’s text are met with apology, in which it is usually explained that the diversion was necessary to remain true to the “spirit” of the books. Beyond Tolkien, though, Jackson is lionized as a true director. Most cast and crew at some time or another glow about how he kept “his own vision” throughout, as Wood states. We are shown and





Fig. 3.4. A split-screen feature shows how Andy Serkis's performance determined the CGI Gollum's performance, further suggesting that special effects followed human ability, not vice versa.

told how Jackson would maintain last say on seemingly everything, checking in on second units or post-production via phone or satellite, acting as final judge on all artwork, set design, and costuming, and finding time to discuss important decisions with all cast and crew. Almost paradoxically, at the same time, the DVDs' act of introducing viewers to the many artists behind the film, including many of those traditionally labeled "below the line" workers, and hence regarded by Hollywood as non-creative by nature, serves to expand our understanding of who "counts" as an author, potentially undercutting the myth of the single author. Ultimately, however, all of these mini-authors are shown to report back to, and serve at the pleasure of, Jackson, the real Author.

As for Jackson's intentions, the DVDs often offer them to us, an act that is itself a powerful sign of the medium's adherence to a pre-Death of the Author world. As Peter Lunenfeld notes—and as Brookey and Westerfelhaus note of the *Fight Club* DVD—the medium fosters the intentionalist fallacy, calcifying the director's version of how to read a film.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Jackson's stated intentions are all artistic, as neither he nor others (even the producers) violate this claim to authority by framing him as a man with a set "job" in yet another product of the money-seeking culture industries. Likewise, the DVD bonus material is happy and keen to make the film Jackson's, not New Line's or Time Warner's.

Once again, then, the DVDs engage in a nostalgic layering of the text, whereby even their production process claims to suggest a return to a mythic golden age of artistic creation. Pushing against the studio, for instance, the DVDs include several moments when Jackson or others describe clashes between New Line's narrow-mindedness and Jackson's bold vision, such as when Jackson says of New Line's early desire to have less of Gollum, "It's tough to deal with that, really, because they don't quite have the imagination or vision of what's going to be there that we do, so you just have to ignore it simply." Meanwhile, the simple act of including extra scenes, and the general happiness with which cast and crew commentary welcomes them back, implies dissatisfaction with the way New Line "made" Jackson cut the film. Many of the additional or extended scenes are from the books, too, and so the DVDs not only allow Jackson as author to overcome the studio system's desires, but seemingly allow Tolkien as author more presence as well. Characters that were missing from the theatrical version rejoin the film, scenes return, and Jackson's, Lee's, and Howe's Tolkien scholarship is offered in commentaries to fill in gaps with Middle Earth lore and legend. In many ways, the DVDs suggest that, as good as the theatrical version may have been, the DVDs offer the Real Work of Art as ordained by Jackson and Tolkien. Certainly, *The Two Towers* was in a unique position in film history, seeing that the *Fellowship of the Ring* DVDs had conditioned viewers to know that the Real, full-length, Author's version of *The Two Towers* was to be found in the DVDs, not in the cinematic release. One might also note that this division of textuality is in keeping with the nostalgic picture of artistic creation that DVDs revel in, for whereas a cinematic release is an event and an experience,<sup>26</sup> DVDs allow personal *ownership* of the text. Much as an art collector can hang an acquisition in his or her own living room, DVDs better suit this

image of austere art in allowing the freedom to see them whenever and wherever their “owner” would like.

We could be amply justified if we regarded cynically this maneuver of conjuring aura, seeing in it and the multi-layerings of the text a deft yet sly move of the culture industries. After all, with few exceptions, film budgets and big-bucks Hollywood visual extravaganzas come no bigger than *The Lord of the Rings*. Jackson may have been a reasonably unknown director handed a huge and daring project, but he was hardly forced to produce it as he did his first picture, *Bad Taste* (1987), baking effects in his parents’ oven and starring in it with friends to deal with a tiny budget. *The Lord of the Rings* fits comfortably in a long line of effects-driven blockbusters with big-name actors and the full force of one of the world’s richest industries firmly behind it. Thus, to coyly pretend that it is a film from yesteryear, an old-style artistic work (even if this construction of pre-industrial filmmaking is mythological and ahistorical) aligning itself with the simplicity and wholesomeness of Hobbiton and Frodo Baggins, seems a garish ploy to efface its production history, and, pre-eminently, to act as if it is something it is not. From a marketing standpoint, this is a coup: with the *Two Towers* DVDs acting simultaneously upon release as an ad for the then-upcoming *Return of the King*, they offer the viewer multiple sentimental and nostalgic reasons to “support” the trilogy and its supposedly humble quest by going to the cinema, maybe even multiple times. Likewise, the DVDs’ suggestion that *The Lord of the Rings* represents a return to Real and Authentic Art, and to a respect for the craft as it was meant to be practiced, would be a reading its marketers no doubt hoped would attach itself to other *Lord of the Rings* products. On one level, then, the DVDs fully illustrate how multimedia corporations can employ networks of paratextuality to brand their products and increase the salience and depth of their meanings across the synergistic spectrum. Doubtlessly, studio executives have discovered of late the powers that DVDs hold.

Nevertheless, to chalk up the *Lord of the Rings* DVDs solely as marketing tools or ammunition would be to crudely posit multimedia corporations as Sauron-like all-seeing eyes calling to their directors, cast, crew and viewers as the Palantir to Pippin, or the ring of power to Frodo. While this level of analysis tells part of our tale, it does not tell it all. Rather, we must also recognize the utility and attraction of the *Two Towers* DVDs’ artistic creation myth to the creative personnel and to the viewers. If *The Lord of the Rings* risks being just another Hollywood item fresh off the conveyor belt, not only does the studio want us to believe it truly stands

above and beyond other films, but the entire cast and crew would surely also like to believe that they are involved in something special, and the audience would surely like to believe that they are more than the supposedly average, spectacle-awed, bread-and-circuses crowd. To this end, the DVDs often play with notions of different audiences and posit their own audience as a more knowing, savvy, aesthetically attuned, and sensible lot. At multiple points in the commentaries, cast or crew refer to being aware of Tolkien fans' high standards, but never shirk these off, instead speaking of them with great respect. Sean Astin, for instance, recounts how important it was for him to capture Sam's reaction to seeing oliphants after reading a fan letter that spoke of how much meaning that scene in the book had to the writer. Even the inclusion of Jackson's extended explanations of why he removed certain scenes from the books assume that DVD watchers will be aware of their exclusion; and the insistence on how much attention to detail went into the project, along with the declarations and "outings" of Tolkien fandom amongst the cast and crew, could be read as presentation of credentials to Tolkien fans and discerning cinephiles.

The last and arguably most important Fellowship, then, is forged as the cast and crew ally themselves with the viewers against other filmmakers and audiences (including some theatrical version audiences) as members of a small, elite band. Frequently, the DVDs share intimate "secrets" of the filming as well as jokes, pranks, and gossip from the set. For example, we learn that Howe would sword-fight other designers at lunch, or that Mortensen fell for a beard-wearing stunt woman, and we see most of the cast and crew playing around in the various documentaries. Hence, the DVDs welcome us as viewers into the Fellowship, even to the point of adding a final track to the credits that lists all of *The Lord of the Rings* official fan club's members. The DVDs foster an intimate bond between cast, crew, and audience, one that combines with their construction of the film as Work of Art, and with their construction of the DVD audience as discerning and requiring art aficionados, cloaking the entire circuit of production, text, and consumption in an aura of artistry and excellence. The DVDs allow director, cast, crew, and audience to participate in an elaborate role-play in which they are transporting themselves back in time to an age of true art, pre-mechanical or digital reproduction, and thus pre-loss of aura—or better yet, that this age has been recovered.

It would be easy to see this role-play as a ruse, ironically befitting its fantasy text's genre. We should by no means underplay or underestimate the political and economic ramifications of such DVD branding, nor

should we forget the industry's control over the rings of power that are the *Lord of the Rings* DVDs. However, this role-play also shows us the degree to which both aura and author are not necessarily dead. Granted, as Benjamin and Barthes have detailed, aura and author have changed.<sup>27</sup> But perhaps in a digital era, and under the rubric of new media, we are witnessing an earnest struggle to create a new variety of aura and author and to return (at least symbolically) to "older" models of creation and viewership. Here, I have illustrated how the *Two Towers* DVDs layer the text, so that *The Lord of the Rings* is an even more epic tale, and so that a blockbuster trilogy could be recontextualized as true art created by a rag-tag, hobbit-like group that set out to challenge Hollywood and its logic of production, and that magically found a way to do so.

My focus has been on one particular set of discs, but just as the *Two Towers* DVDs tell their central story multiple times over, so too does this story exist across a range of DVDs and other forms of bonus materials that insist upon their artistry, aura, authenticity, and author. Thus, for example, writing of a *Cinescape Insider* interview between George Lucas and Rick McCallum about their *Star Wars: Episode 1—The Phantom Menace* (1999), Robert Delaney notes Lucas and McCallum's heavy use of "metaphysical codes like 'spiritual' and 'soul' [to] elevate their product to another plane of existence, a level which, according to them, one will find in no other film."<sup>28</sup> Or, Daniel Mackay writes of how a Smithsonian "*Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*" exhibit—bonus materials in lived space—actively creates cultural capital for the trilogy, insisting on its mythological, "timeless" value. Since the Smithsonian is an austere Protector of Culture, Mackay observes that "they must increase the cultural worth of their object [here, a trilogy of popular films] before they use that object." Hence, they are determined to "change the phenomenological experience of the film," and to reveal it as possessing deeper, hidden meanings and cultural value.<sup>29</sup> Albeit to different degrees, many bonus materials claim that their films are from celluloid Hobbiton.

### *The 4.7-Inch Diameter Canvas: DVDs and Televisual Art*

Above, I have discussed the paratextual resurrection of aura and author in terms of film, but if anything, the necromancy of the paratext becomes even more evident when we turn to television. After all, film has now long held considerable aura as a bona fide art form, and film scholarship and audiences have long upheld the value of the author or auteur. With



film, then, the industry, cast and crew, and audiences have often needed to mobilize paratexts simply to *restore* or *maintain* aura, authenticity, and authorship where it has been at risk of perishing. Big blockbusters such as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy risk seeming wholly the products of mass production, necessitating discursive moves to rescue aura, authenticity, and author, while special edition DVDs for “art house” films (the Criterion Collection, for instance) discursively reaffirm a claim to artistry and aura<sup>30</sup> that has already been staked in theatrical release, and through the paratexts of the independent theater playing the film, the high-end magazines or newspaper articles discussing the film, and the academic essays surrounding it. By contrast, since its first days, television has been considered a “lower” form of culture, derided by many, and often regarded as the ultimate exemplar of the accuracy of the Frankfurt School’s damning assessment of the culture industries as producing standardized, factory-line mulch.<sup>31</sup> Heavily influenced by this assessment, Todd Gitlin argued, “Although executives may not be allergic to what they deem quality, the networks as a whole aim to create not purposeful or coherent or true or beautiful shows, but audiences. Any other purpose is subordinated to the larger design of keeping a sufficient number of people tuned in.”<sup>32</sup> With such criticisms being commonplace regarding television, its surrounding paratexts have often been charged with the task of outright *creating* value and the semblance of art, aura, authenticity, and authorship.

As Derek Kompare notes, a huge obstacle to television being considered truly artistic and meaningful has been its ephemeral nature.<sup>33</sup> Large amounts of early television simply do not exist any longer because they were never recorded, and stories still abound of how little value many networks place on archiving their work. Television has often broadcast programs and then moved on, losing the shows to time and memory. This process also long restricted the development of a vibrant study of television’s meanings, for whereas film critics and scholars could obtain copies of the film to study at length and in detail, television scholars were often forced to work with memory alone. And, of course, if scholars and critics had little to hold onto, so did audiences, thereby restricting the degree to which serial television could develop as an art form. As Kompare shows, reruns and the industry’s warm embrace of the logic of repetition in the 1970s and beyond therefore did wonders to establish television as something beyond the trivial. Through reruns, television became “a cultural and historical resource for all generations,” “a cultural touchstone,”<sup>34</sup> and its programs were recast as classics, as our “television heritage,” thereby

“validat[ing] the medium in ways that it had never been before, giving it an acknowledged role in the recent life and memory of the nation, and thus an assured place in American cultural history.”<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, the impact of the DVD on television would prove equally monumental in the medium’s attempt to raise its cultural status.

Kompare observes that DVDs do not just record television, they reconceptualize it.<sup>36</sup> Once television is available on DVD, several changes occur. First, one can now archive television, having it available on command, rather than relying on the vagaries of local scheduling. Admittedly, VHS allowed the same, but issues of relative software size, quality, and ease of use made the recording, storing, and watching of VHS more tricky. DVD availability now encourages viewers to think about which shows they would like to *own*, rather than simply what they would like to watch this week, or what they must remember to record and watch on the weekend. With this comes an increase in the value of television: that which is worth recording, worth keeping, and worth purchasing takes on more artistic value. Second, as Barbara Klinger points out, a “hardware aesthetic” develops among audio-visual aficionados, as some DVDs become valued for their superior sound-editing, picture quality, and bonus materials, independently of the quality of the story recorded on them.<sup>37</sup> Hence, along with HDTVs and home theater systems, DVDs have helped to aesthetically revolutionize the look and sound of television.

Third, pricing issues allow television in some cases to leapfrog over film in stores or in personal DVD collections, in terms of cultural value. Foreign imports and Criterion Collection versions of films are expensive, but most other films can be purchased for about ten to twenty-five dollars, and for as low as five dollars in bargain bins, or even less when pirated. By contrast, a season of a television series regularly costs about thirty to sixty dollars. In other words, TV DVDs are often the ones one must save up to buy, that need to go on wish lists, and/or that are bought as special treats for oneself, while film DVDs—especially at Wal-Mart, Target, or Amazon bargain prices—become more quotidian purchases. At the same time as HBO was staking its claim to high cultural status with the slogan that “it’s not TV, it’s HBO,” ads in the New York transit system around Christmas insisted that DVDs of HBO shows were “the gift they really want.” Perhaps it’s not TV, it’s DVD TV? Box set pricing alone has made television more valuable, even to those who remain true to their VCR or DVD burner, recording off television, since they are now aware that their labor and recording efforts are saving them, for instance, sixty dollars’ worth of

DVD purchase. That said, box sets have themselves been aestheticized.<sup>38</sup> *Northern Exposure* (1990–95) comes wrapped in a parka, the original edition of *Battlestar Galactica* (1978–80) comes in a Cylon-head-shaped case, and one can buy the entire *West Wing* (1999–2006) in a portfolio-style design. Meanwhile, external packaging aside, DVD internal packaging is often intricate, as menus open up to yet more menus with original artwork, Easter eggs, and all manner of other goodies adorning the entire viewing experience. And since the average television season takes five or six discs, producers have often had to provide yet more bonus materials, which in turn—as this chapter has already suggested—results in a heightened claim to artistic status and aura. When the Season 1 box set for *Lost*, for instance, includes a series of set photos by actor Matthew Fox, their inclusion demands simultaneously that the show and the set design are true art, and that the actor is a true artist. Or when a DVD of an older show is released brimming with bonus materials, it reframes a show that was likely relegated to daytime television on obscure cable channels as something worth studying closely. In multiple ways, then, DVDs up television's aesthetic ante, surrounding their programs with significant aura and value.

### *Resurrecting the Television Author*

In this regard, however, DVDs are not alone in the paratextual world, for much of what can be found on them are paratexts available in other forms elsewhere. DVDs often present multiple interviews or making-of/behind-the-scenes specials, but versions of these can also be found on television as filler material or as “On Demand” items from premium cable channels, as well as in the programming that plays before movies in the theater. Similarly, the 7 to 8 p.m. time slot on American television is often full of entertainment news programs such as *Entertainment Tonight*, *Extra* (1994–), and *Access Hollywood* (1996–) that give “sneak peaks” and “exclusive” interviews, and these programs have multiple counterparts in the magazine world (*Premiere*, *Variety*, *Entertainment Weekly*), in the entertainment news sections of most major newspapers, and in the ever-increasing number of websites that specialize in entertainment news (such as *ComingSoon.net*). Late-night and daytime talk shows regularly invite stars and directors on to discuss their work, too, making the celebrity interview one of the more common forms of content on television. Moreover, numerous television shows are now experimenting with offering

podcasts, as cast and crew record weekly versions of DVD bonus materials, commenting on a range of issues, from production minutiae to their intentions and hopes for various scenes, sometimes fielding fan questions, and releasing extra information. In short, one does not need either to buy, rent, or rip a DVD to be able to access an extensive amount of information made available by cast and crew.

For television in particular, the explosion of websites, the increase in entertainment news magazines and programs, and the advent of DVD bonus materials and podcasting have made executive producers/showrunners considerably more visible than in earlier years of the medium. With this visibility, these individuals are more and more able to add their voice to the audience's understanding of their products, and thus are increasingly able to construct themselves as authors, televisual counterparts to Peter "Frodo" Jackson.

In this light, it is worth returning to Roland Barthes's famous declaration of the "death of the author," especially since it would appear to preclude the existence of authors, even when our media environment seems to be giving us yet more authors. Importantly, Barthes's essay was more of a strategic, rhetorical killing than an actual obituary. He saw the study of texts "tyrannically centred on the author, his [*sic*] person, his life, his tastes, his passions," thereby neglecting the fact that "it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality [. . .] to reach a point where only language 'performs,' and not 'me.'"<sup>39</sup> As discussed in chapter 1, Barthes believed in the need to separate the "work" from the "text" in analysis, yet found the specter of the author to be an impediment to this move, since his or her authority risked presiding over the work, denying audience members the right to create a text. To Barthes, if textual studies were to adequately study language and how it works, how meaning comes to be, and the full range of a text's semiotic and social relevance, the author would forever remain an obstacle, and so, Barthes closed his article, "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author."<sup>40</sup>

However, writing on the heels of Barthes's pronouncement, Michel Foucault noted that readers themselves often have multiple uses for the author as concept. Authors, as such, are not solely external authorities; rather, they are texts that audiences utilize to make meaning and to situate themselves in relation to other texts. He argues that "it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author)."<sup>41</sup> People still talk about authors, he notes, not necessarily as real people, but as projections of our

hopes, expectations, and established reading strategies for texts. In particular, the author—or “author function,” as Foucault calls it—takes on the role of being classificatory, indicating “a constant level of value,” “a field of conceptual or theoretical coherence,” “a stylistic unity,” and “a historical figure at the crossroads of a certain number of events.”<sup>42</sup> Henry Jenkins uses Foucault’s schema to analyze the ways in which *Star Trek* “author” Gene Roddenberry is used and discussed. Roddenberry as concept helps classify what is *Star Trek* and what isn’t.<sup>43</sup> He also serves as shorthand for a set of values, themes, and aesthetic moves that are seen to be consistent across his work. And to make him an author is to demand that *Star Trek* is of a certain quality: “Seeing *Star Trek* as reflecting the artistic vision of a single creator, Gene Roddenberry, thus allows fans to distinguish it from the bulk of commercial television which they see as faceless and formulaic, lacking aesthetic and ideological integrity.”<sup>44</sup> Playing off this last use for the “author function,” and following from the above discussions of DVDs, aura, and value, we could add that the value function of authorship can more generally lend weight and substance to an entire medium.

In many ways, we can read Foucault’s notion of the author function as responding not only to Barthes’s act of murder, but also to the Frankfurt School’s own killing of the author. Barthes “killed” the author so that the reader might live, yet Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno simply declared that industry had killed art altogether. In other words, while Barthes wanted the author dead, the Frankfurt School would rather s/he was alive, but saw no signs of life. Foucault’s concept of the author function allows a middle ground, wherein the author is denied outright authority, but exists as a discursive entity that channels and networks notions of value, identity, coherency, skill, and unity. This is an alternative to believing in Horkheimer and Adorno’s faceless “iron system” in which “there is the agreement—or at least the determination—of all executive authorities not to produce or sanction anything that in any way differs from their own rules, their own ideas about consumers, or above all themselves.”<sup>45</sup>

Especially when we consider television authors, moreover, Barthes’s key objections to the author become less relevant. His complaint about book authors was ultimately one of temporality, as he argued that “book and author stand automatically on a single line divided into a *before* and an *after*. The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he [*sic*] exists before it, thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child.” He proposes and prefers a situation whereby we consider that “the scriptor is born simultaneously



with the text [. . . and] there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*.”<sup>46</sup> However, throughout the run of a television series, its author(s) and the text can only exist at the same time: unlike literature (or film), the author rarely writes the material then exits the scene. Instead, a television author or authorial team writes one or more episodes, which are broadcast, then they return to the job, these in turn are watched, and so on. The dichotomy of antecedent author and active text rarely exists with television series, and so the rhetorical importance of Barthes’s argument diminishes. Barthes killed the author in order to open the text, but a television series is nearly always already open.

Writing of fan fiction and Barthes’s killing of the author, Francesca Coppa notes that “the author [of the source fan object] may be dead, but the writer [of the fan fiction]—that actively scribbling, embodied woman—is very much alive. You can talk to her; you can write to her and ask her questions about her work, and she will probably write back to you and answer them.”<sup>47</sup> Film and television still like their *authors*, and interacting with them is rarely as easy as the situation that Coppa describes with fan fiction writers, as authors and readers are separated by PR departments, personal assistants, legalities that ask that television writers not listen to unsolicited ideas, and their own constructed auras. Nevertheless, albeit in the often heavily mediated form of interviews, podcasts, bonus materials, and visits to fan sites or conferences, television authors (and some film authors) engage in significantly more interaction with audiences than did Barthes’s “death-worthy” authors.

Television authors still try to exert authority and control over “their” texts, for as I have argued, producer-end paratexts hold significant power in inflecting audiences’ interpretive frameworks. When creators try to exert control, the paratexts of interviews, podcasts, DVD bonus materials, and making-of specials are their preferred means of speaking—their textual body and corporeal form—as they will try to use paratexts to assert authority and to maintain the role of author. But rather than serve as gospel, as soon as a show has begun, television authors’ words become in medias res paratexts that must compete with all manner of other paratexts, including audience-created paratexts (see chapter 5). Jurij Lotman wrote of reading and interpreting as a “game” between writer and reader, whereby, as one reads, “The audience takes in part of the text and then ‘finishes’ or ‘constructs’ the rest. The author’s next ‘move’ may confirm the guess [. . .] or it may disprove the guess and require a new construction

from the reader.” However, Lotman sees this process inevitably ending in the same way: “the author wins; he [*sic*] outplays the artistic experience, aesthetic norms and prejudices of the reader, and thrusts his model of the world and concept of the structure of reality upon [the reader].”<sup>48</sup> Television texts, by contrast, are continuing “games,” with no such easy predictability of outcome. Within these games, each paratext is a move; but whereas in a book or film, most of the author’s moves have already occurred, meaning that s/he does not truly “respond” to the reader or viewer’s “moves” at all, in television, authors both can and must respond to moves, meaning in turn that audience moves have more importance. With perhaps the lone exception of retrospective commentary offered by a writer after a show has finished, to an audience member who has watched the entire show, the game continues.

Take, for instance, Joss Whedon’s response, in a *Science Fiction Weekly* interview, to a question about whether fan commentary influenced how he wrote *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*:

To an extent it does. For example, when I saw that people were rejecting the Oz character when he was first introduced, I realized how carefully I had to place him. I wrote scenes where Willow falls in love with him in a way where fans would fall in love with him too. You learn that people don’t take things at face value; you have to earn them.<sup>49</sup>

Alongside this example, we might add several others, such as Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof’s reflection on how *Lost* audience reactions have at times shifted their scripting of the show, most notably when Michael Emerson became a quick fan favorite for his portrayal of Benjamin Linus, leading Cuse and Lindelof to write him into the core of the story.<sup>50</sup> *Babylon 5* (1994–98) creator Joe Straczynski posted more than 17,000 replies to fans,<sup>51</sup> illustrating a clear interest in (some might say obsession with) his fans’ opinions. Or, most curiously, responding to widespread criticism of the opening episodes of Season 2 of *Heroes*, showrunner Tim Kring apologized to viewers via *Entertainment Weekly*, insisting that “we’ve heard the [fans’] complaints—and we’re doing something about it,”<sup>52</sup> and promising that he and his writing staff would henceforth work on addressing the multiple criticisms of the show. Meanwhile, several writers are popping up on fan boards, and each passing year seems to bring yet more writers to Comic-Con. While both trends are no doubt motivated by a need to solicit fans in a niche broadcasting, post-network era, some

writers' presence on fan boards and at fan conventions shows (and is read by some fans as) an earnest interest in fans' opinions. Writers rarely prove wholly responsive to their fans, in part due to issues of chronology (once the fans are watching any given episode, numerous subsequent episodes have already been filmed), in part due to conflicting fan desires, and in part due to personal creative intuition and impulses,<sup>53</sup> but many nevertheless realize the importance of interaction and dialogue.

Whether through posting online, contacting production personnel directly, or simply watching or not watching, audience members and communities regularly play "moves" in the game of television, and any savvy author must now know how to react to these moves, how to counter.<sup>54</sup> Yet far from seeing this necessarily in the framework of "winners" and "losers" that Lotman provides, we might also note that many authors and fans regard the productive act as more communal and participatory. Responding to a question about fan adulation, Whedon notes in an interview with *The Onion AV Club*, "It doesn't feel like they're reacting to me. [. . .] I feel like there's a religion in narrative, and I feel the same way they do. I feel like we're both paying homage to something else; they're not paying homage to me."<sup>55</sup> If we take him at his word, Whedon has internalized the "practical collaboration" of reader with text that Barthes asks for as expected practice.<sup>56</sup> Later in the same interview, Whedon states:

I wanted [*Buffy*] to be a cultural phenomenon. [. . .] I wanted people to embrace [the show] in a way that exists beyond, "Oh, that was a wonderful show about lawyers, let's have dinner." I wanted people to internalize it, and make up fantasies where they were in the story, to take it home with them, for it to exist beyond the TV show.<sup>57</sup>

Interestingly, then, Whedon positions himself as working toward the same goal as his readers, not "competing" with them. In doing so, he deliberately confuses author and reader roles by adopting part of the reader role himself, and yielding part of the author role to the reader. Admittedly, one might regard this as a discursive move, an attempt to fashion himself as "just one of the fans," when he is decidedly privileged in the relationship. But he both steps away from the author as antecedent role to which Barthes objected, and he reflects on the degree to which, as a public figure, he is an author function, a text/paratext authored by audience members and their uses for him, and a way for people to talk about the artistry of *Buffy* more than he is a specific individual to *Buffy* fans.

Joss Whedon is one of a brand of television authors who have realized the importance of engaging with their fan bases, and *Buffy's* success arguably was all the greater for this realization, and for his eagerness to at least partly, in Barthesian terms, kill himself as author. As is only fitting for the author of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Whedon was an undead author. But he is by no means alone, joined by others such as Cuse and Lindelof, Straczynski, Kring, Doris Egan, Aaron Sorkin, Jane Espenson, Jason Katims, Toni Graphia, Erik Kripke, Rob Thomas, Josh Schwartz, and others, and preceded by *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry's strong rapport with his fans. All of these figures are known to most audiences only through paratexts. Whether they are "really like that" becomes as much a question for them as it is for Hollywood stars, though, because they and their studios' marketing teams are often able to author them as paratexts, and author some of the paratexts in which they appear, with significant care. They are authored by audiences, too, with their own paratexts. Like Foucault, then, I have little interest (as a scholar) in the "real" Whedon, Cuse and Lindelof, Kring, or so forth, realizing that they are discursive constructions. But as author functions, as signifiers of value, as messages to or from the network and/or to or from the fan, and as paratextual entities that frame both value and textual meaning (see chapter 4 on the latter), they are considerably important. As such, we might regard television authors as mediators between the industry and audiences, and the author function as a discursive entity used by the industry to communicate messages about its texts to audiences, by the creative personnel often conflated into the image of the author(s) to communicate their own messages about these texts to audiences, and by audiences to communicate messages both to each other and to the industry. A considerable danger exists of romanticizing the degree to which *actual* writers mediate effectively between production and audiences, but producers and audiences alike often use them as *discursive* constructions and mediators. Paratexts carry these messages, and thus frequently serve as both the words and the content of discussions among text, audience, and industry.

### *Paratextual Turn-Offs and Turn-Ons*

At the outset of the chapter, I noted that hype, promos, and synergy turn off many a would-be viewer. Thus, while the chapter has examined the role that paratexts play in adding or restoring value, often their mere existence devalues a text. Much hype betrays a text's industrial roots too

obviously for some audiences, thereby disqualifying it for consideration as art. Meanwhile, the presence of many in medias res paratexts codes a text as a fan text, thereby invoking the high-cultural critique of the popular that hounds all fan texts. As such, some would-be viewers cling to a heavily romanticized notion of the singular Work of Art that neither needs nor has a paratext, the noble cowboy text riding across the prairies and fighting the elements all on its lonesome. Ultimately, though, paratext-less shows simply do not exist. Granted, some texts claim more paratexts than others, with, for instance, blockbusters and cult texts often sporting sizeable posses. But all shows have paratexts. In discussing paratexts and value, then, we might realize how any would-be audience member or community gives value to certain forms of paratexts in and of themselves, yet is turned off by others in and of themselves. Since genres often address specific communities of viewers, moreover, film and television producers tend to surround their shows only with those paratexts that are likely to add value to their desired audience.

For instance, foreign and independent films often rely upon upscale audiences who flatter themselves as being discerning, (high-)“cultured” viewers. A vigorous hype campaign centered on subways, ad slots during reality television shows, and a videogame could thus harm a foreign film’s chances more than help them. But it still requires paratexts to offer value, whether in the form of awards from film festivals, an evocative poster, a director’s talk before the film, and/or a positive review in the *New York Times* or other high-end publications. With more than half of the average foreign film’s domestic box office coming from New York City alone, as Michael Wilmington has noted, the *New York Times* has “veto power” over a foreign film’s future.<sup>58</sup> Or, television procedurals have significant appeal as contained stories that do not require devoted viewing, and thus podcasts or alternate-reality games might ruin some of their seemingly pared-down appeal. But procedurals often rely on special event advertising both for renewing a claim to value and for a sense of realism upon which that value may be based. *Law and Order* (1990–) ads, for example, tout “ripped from the headlines” stories with considerable enthusiasm, as do those for *JAG* (1995–2005) and *NCIS* (2003–). Conversely, favorable *New York Times* reviews or “ripped from the headlines” ads will likely prove relatively unimportant for other genres, such as sitcoms or sci-fi series. Over and above the specific meanings on offer by any given paratext, then, and over and above any given paratext’s specific claims to art, aura, and authenticity, sometimes the type of paratext sends its own messages.



All shows have paratexts, and all require their paratexts to create frames of value around them, but different genres will favor or disfavor different types of paratextuality.

Throughout this chapter, I have illustrated the degree to which new media such as webpages, DVDs, and podcasts surround texts with a paratextual veneer of artistry, aura, and authority that aims to be decidedly “old school.” Paratexts, and various forms of bonus materials in particular, aim to play a constitutive role in creating value for a film or television show, even if in practice this value is not created equally for all audiences. Some audiences will seek out such paratexts precisely in order to reaffirm their sense of the film or program’s value. Others will regard the mere existence of paratexts and hype as the clearest example of the lack of artistic integrity, seeing them as akin to a painter selling his or her work in a shopping mall storefront with a gaudy neon sign. In either situation, the paratext helps create a sense of value (whether positive or negative).

Authority, value, and meanings, however, do not simply circulate via the film and television industries, their stars and directors, and their marketing teams alone. Chapters 4 and 5 therefore turn to other modes of paratextual circulation and function. Chapter 4 explores how films and television shows themselves can come to serve paratextual roles, whether by design or by happenstance. It also explores how, paratextually, audience discussion creates both intertextual networks of understanding that render certain shows as paratexts to other texts, and understandings of the author function that inflect readings of other texts. Then, chapter 5 examines viewer-created paratexts and the ways in which they either challenge industry-created paratexts’ “proper” interpretations or otherwise carve out space for personal or communal readings of film and television shows.

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