Digital Historiography and Performance

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On a recent trip to Frankfurt I had the opportunity to see the German artist Thomas Bayrle's 2015 digital image, *iPhone Meets Caravaggio*.[1] The image is based on Caravaggio's *The Inspiration of St. Matthew* (1602), which hangs in Rome's Contarelli Chapel.[2] Sometimes referred to as "The Calling of St. Matthew," Caravaggio's image articulates many themes, but most interesting to me is its function as a representation of writing history. Commissioned by the Cardinal Del Monte, the large canvas (almost three by two meters) depicts St. Matthew as he prepares to write his gospel (that is, the history) of Jesus Christ and is visited by the angel who provides him with divine textual inspiration. As a painting, the image is characteristic of Caravaggio's techniques with chiaroscuro lighting and his dense, layered brushwork. Rendered in the same size and scale as Caravaggio's canvas, Bayrle's image presents a significantly different vision (fig. 1).

In his digital image Bayrle deploys his signature technique of repeating patterns within a recognizable form to critique and refocus attention on new aspects in an iconic image. In his version of St. Matthew we see the integrity and density of Caravaggio's color fragmented into the individual phones. The viscosity of the original brush-

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[1] I am grateful to artist Martin Feldbauer, who introduced me to this image. Feldbauer is himself a compelling digital artist and painter who responds to the pressures of digital technology and culture in his work. See, for example, his series, "Almighty Algorithm," which is viewable through the Feld+Haus Gallery in Frankfurt (*http://feld-haus.com/artists/martin-feldbauer/*). Note that Bayrle's work is also known as *Caravaggio meets i-Phone.*

[2] Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *The Inspiration of St. Matthew*, oil on canvas (1602), Contarelli Chapel, Church of San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome. Digital reproductions of the painting are available at "Inspiration of Saint Matthew," *Caravaggio: Paintings, Quotes, Biography* (*http://www.caravaggio.org/inspiration-of-saint-matthew.jsp*).
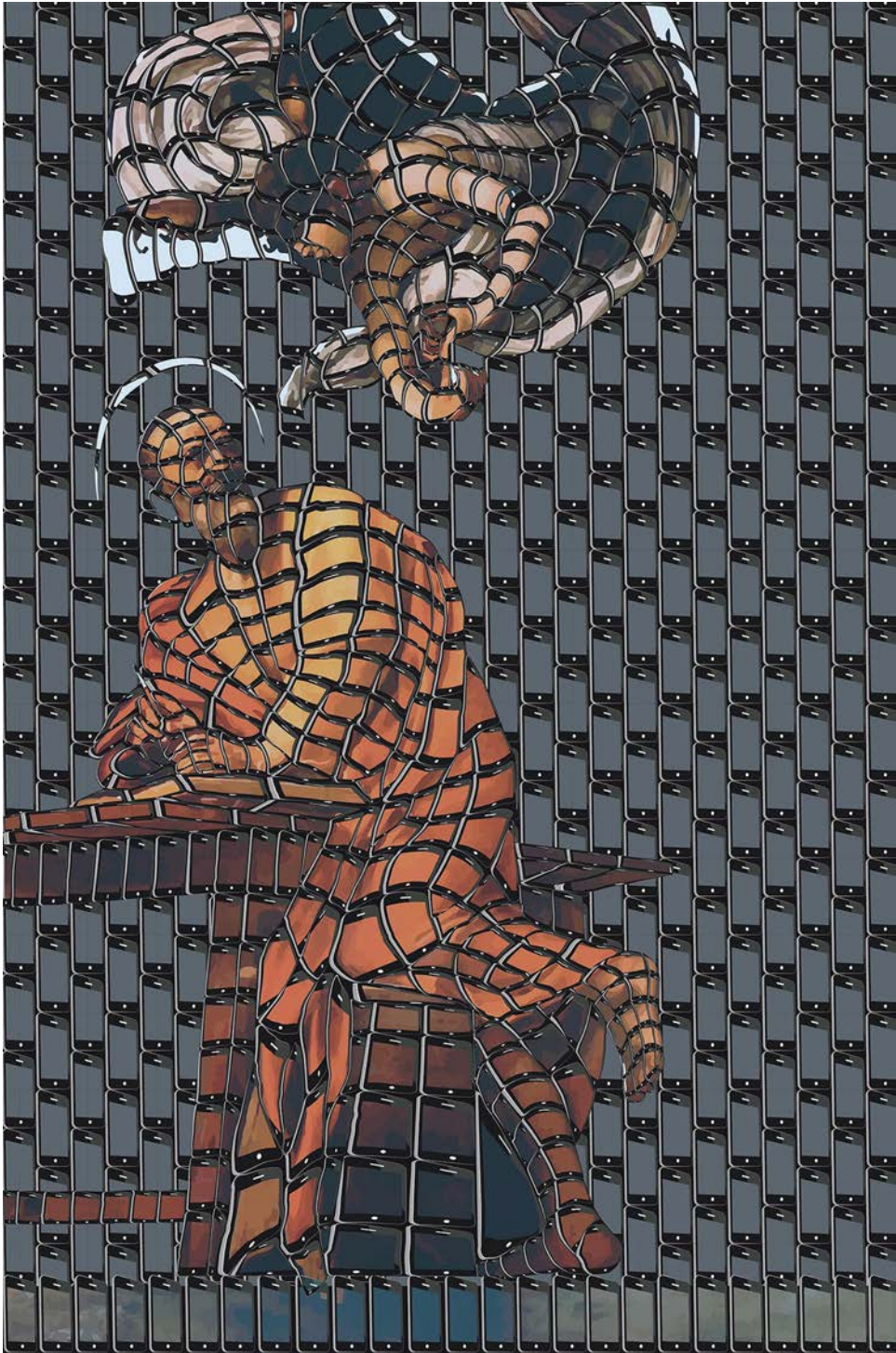
Figure 1. Thomas Bayrle, *iPhone Meets Caravaggio* (2015).
(Reprinted by permission of Thomas Bayrle.)

strokes is rendered in the flat, shiny, and ubiquitous smoothness of the contemporary mobile phone. Although labeled an "iPhone," the digital phone image used here is not exclusively the domain of Apple, but refers to any number of smart phones, as the digital reproduction of the phone is ingeniously distorted to follow the curves of St. Matthew's robes, the arc of his halo, and the enumeration on the angel's fingers. Bayrle's artwork speaks to a contemporary phenomenon of digital technologies, mass communication, and history. After all, if St. Matthew were to write his gospel today, he would likely target his message to an online, mobile audience. Not only would such digital technologies ensure that his message reached the widest possible audience, but computers and mobile phones allow for communication that is not unidirectional, but interactive. Given its ubiquity, perhaps we can consider the modern mobile phone akin to the religious experience of spiritual communion that the gospels proclaimed and that the early Church sought to inspire in its followers. (Looking at those walking and texting certainly suggests a posture of devotion, if not to spiritual meanings.) In fact, the catalyst for Bayrle's work was his visit to Rome, where he observed nearly all of the visitors to the city's sacred spaces obsessively taking photographs on their mobile phones. In this image, he invites us to compare a historiography of the past that is private, sacred, inspired, and solitary, with our modern historical and documentary practices that tend to be more public, profane, banal, and shared. Bayrle's image thus points to a condition of contemporary history writing and reception that has been profoundly altered by the emergence of digital technologies. He situates his image of St. Matthew within a larger experience of digital culture that points, as I argue here, to the theatre. Since mobile, digital technologies often function as documentary devices, public spaces become de facto theatre spaces. Marshall McLuhan identified a similar effect when he observed that mid-century satellites had turned the global village into the global theatre.[3] Now, when even our private spaces have become potential sites of both performance and its documentation, and when recording mobile devices function not only as principal forms of communication but also micro-history, it may make sense to understand digital historiography within the framework of theatre.

This essay considers the effects of emerging technologies on the writing of history, specifically, the intersection of digital history with contemporary performance practices. There are two related rhetorical threads in this argument: that digital technologies change the ways in which we record, write, and recall the history of performance; and that such technologies also have the effect of transforming historical narratives from primarily written and visual forms into modes of performance. Here, I focus primarily on the latter; that is, how historical narratives are transformed into modes of performance by digital media. However, these two discussions are not fundamentally separate. Indeed, as I explore in a case study of the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum, digital media have the capacity to transform history and historiography into dynamic, interactive performances with significant implications not only for the past, but also for the present.

As I have written elsewhere, new methodologies broadly contextualized as the "digital humanities" have already significantly altered the relations of theatre, performance, and history. The last few years in particular have seen significant increases in digital

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[3] "Since Sputnik put the globe in a 'proscenium arch,' and the global village had been transformed into a global theater, the result, quite literally, is the use of public space for 'doing one's thing.'" See Marshall McLuhan, *From Cliché to Archetype* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), 12.

research and scholarship projects, as well as more official recognition throughout the field. Both *Theatre Journal* and *Theatre Topics* have introduced sections specifically dedicated to fostering digital methodologies in theatre and performance studies. *Theatre Journal* now includes a section reviewing new digital scholarship, a section inaugurated by Debra Caplan's review essay, "Notes from the Frontier: Digital Scholarship and the Future of Theatre Studies," in the May 2015 issue of the journal. Similarly, *Theatre Topics* recently announced a new online section edited by Peter Campbell.[4] Since 2014 *Contemporary Theatre Review* has featured the online addendum, "Interventions," described as "specially developed online features that add to and extend the themes and topics explored in the print journal."[5] Scholarly organizations have similarly supported the intersection of digital research in theatre. There is now a Digital Humanities in Theatre Research working group in the International Federation for Theatre Research and a members' group on Digital Research and Scholarship, sponsored through the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR) website.[6] In 2016 the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) and ASTR announced a new joint award to recognize excellence in digital scholarship.[7]

These developments respond to a larger trend in digital methods not only in academia, but also in culture outside the academy. In her essay "Post-Archive: The Humanities, the Archive, and the Database," Tara McPherson suggests that we are in the midst of what she calls the "post-archival moment."[8] This marks a shift from the archive as a collection of "real" objects to the database. In her argument, this transition to the database shifts attention from the objects themselves, to the relations among these objects. McPherson frames her argument, in part, as a response to Diana Taylor's 2010 keynote lecture, "Save As . . .: Knowledge and Transmission in the Age of Digital Technologies." There, Taylor revisits her earlier consideration of the tension between the archive and the repertoire in light of evolving digital technologies. She considers the ways in which the digital appropriates the term *archive* in a way that conceals the radical differences involved in digital archives. Citing the example of YouTube as an archive that simultaneously saves and destroys itself, Taylor concludes that the digital "can prove profoundly anti-archival."[9] By displacing the fixed and reified materiality of the concrete archive, the inherently unstable digital collection resists the colonial and hegemonic representations of history.

McPherson, however, positions the role of the digital somewhat differently, arguing not for an anti-archive, but for what she calls the "post-archive" in which the "database ingests, supersedes, and obsolesces the archive."[10] In this sense McPherson follows

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[4] See Gwendolyn Alker, "A Note from the Editor," *Theatre Topics* 25, no. 3 (2015): ix–xi.

[5] See *Contemporary Theatre Review*, *Interventions*, available at *http://www.contemporarytheatrereview.org/interventions/*.

[6] See International Federation for Theatre Research, "Digital Humanities in Theatre Research," available at *https://www.iftr.org/working-groups/digital-humanities-in-theatre-research*; and American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR), "Member Groups: Digital Research and Scholarship," available at *http://www.astr.org/members/group.aspx?id=156542*. I write a monthly blog for the ASTR DRS working group.

[7] See Association for Theatre in Higher Education, "Excellence in Digital Scholarship," available at *http://www.athe.org/?page=Excellence_Digital*.

[8] Tara McPherson, "Post-Archive: The Humanities, the Archive, and the Database," in *Between Humanities and the Digital*, ed. Patrik Svensson and David Theo Goldberg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 486.

[9] Diana Taylor, "Save As . . .: Knowledge and Transmission in the Age of Digital Technologies" (2010 keynote lecture at the Imagining America's national conference, Seattle), available at *http://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1011&context=ia*.

[10] McPherson, "Post-Archive," 487.

Lev Manovich's argument from 2001 in his *The Language of New Media*, which argued for the database as a "cultural form of its own."[11] "As a cultural form," he wrote, "the database represents the world as a list of items and it refuses to order this list." (Manovich described the database and narrative as "natural enemies.") Juxtaposed against narrative, the database claims "an exclusive right to make meaning out of the world."[12] Similarly, McPherson focuses on the logic of the database as a "normalizing" process that "privileges abstract relations among data while also stripping 'things' of context. Elements in a database," she contends, "get sorted by a set of structuring relations (like metadata) that radically limit what can be seen."[13] McPherson's attention to the "structuring relations" returns our consideration to the central problem of the archive that Taylor posed in her influential book, *The Archive and the Repertoire*: that is, how to negotiate the hegemonic representation of history.[14] Whereas representations of objects within museums and archives were once controlled solely by curators in physical spaces, audience engagement with digital collections may be organized algorithmically. McPherson's solution is to create new modes of scholarship that make visible the relations and connections within the collection, even as these respond to different viewers in real time.

McPherson's ideas are deployed through her online journal *Vectors: A Journal of Culture and Technology in a Dynamic Vernacular*.[15] As an online journal *Vectors* aligns with what digital humanist and historian Tom Scheinfeldt calls the "performative humanities."[16] Both Scheinfeldt and McPherson argue for using digital methods to create new models of scholarship that function more as performance than publication. As Scheinfeldt notes, "[i]ncreasingly digital humanities work is being conceived as much as *event* as product or project. With the rise of social media and with its ethic of transparency, digital humanities is [*sic*] increasingly being done in public and experienced by its audiences in real time."[17] Such engagements are not passively received, but derive their meaning, at least in part, from the participation of those who engage with these tools. Stephen Ramsay thus describes the process of the digital humanities as an environment in which "the artifacts of human culture" are being "radically transformed, reordered, disassembled, and reassembled."[18] Intriguingly, both Ramsay and Scheinfeldt contend that within this context, the function of criticism—the real "game-changer" in Scheinfeldt's analysis—is not to create new interpretations of existing works, but to make and remake the texts themselves and the process of reading/viewing/interpreting them into new objects of study. This is a conceptualization that has clear connections with theatre and performance historiography. Reading the digital humanities arguments regarding the reworking of existing texts in digital con-

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[11] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 194.

[12] Ibid., 199.

[13] McPherson, "Post-Archive," 487.

[14] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

[15] Tara McPherson, "Introduction," *Vectors Journal*, available at *http://vectors.usc.edu/journal/index.php?page=Introduction*.

[16] Tom Scheinfeldt, "Game Change: Digital Technology and Performative Humanities," *Found History*, February 15, 2012, available at *http://www.foundhistory.org/2012/02/15/game-change-digital-technology-and-performative-humanities/*.

[17] Ibid.; emphasis in original.

[18] Stephen Ramsay, *Reading Machines: Toward an Algorithmic Criticism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 85.

texts may remind us of publications addressing questions of reenactment, presence, and documentation in both theatre and performance art historiography. To cite only one example, Matthew Kirschenbaum's preface to his *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* contextualizes his study of digital literature within what he calls "the material matrix governing writing and inscription in all forms: erasure, variability, repeatability, and survivability."[19] Certainly, questions of erasure, visibility, repetition, and endurance can be found throughout many areas of theatre history. The more one reads in the area of digital history and historiography, the more familiar it all seems.

Theatre and, more broadly, performance history today thus are at a critical juncture. Increasingly, the social contexts for theatre and performance happen in digital environments, where innovative tools of the digital humanities create scholarship that may resemble performance. Simultaneously, new performance work continues to stage physical, material exchanges within digitally conditioned environments, where documentation may be produced simultaneously by both spectators and creators. Performance images and videos circulate almost endlessly through media networks, and the amount of data generated around a single event may be unfathomable, yet also available for new forms of analysis.[20] It is not an original idea to suggest that theatre histories should account for the complex relations among audiences and performance events, but I would submit that this context has changed with digital media, and that, as Kirschenbaum notes, the methods of analysis must necessarily change with it. An audience that is simultaneously observing, documenting, viewing, and creating as part of its engagement with performance requires new methods of historical analysis. Theatre and performance scholars have the opportunity within these new digital domains to create alternatives to canonical studies and to challenge constructions of history as singular linear narratives. These alternatives are facilitated (even dependent on) digital exchanges as found in wikis, collaborative databases, and social-media networks. Digital tools can democratize the process of documentation, reception, and future appropriation, thereby exposing in much more detail the role of both historians and audiences who function simultaneously as recorders, observers, and also as participants in the performance *and its historiography*. New digital records can take such evidence into historical account, presenting the data of any particular performance event not as singular, comprehensible, and unidirectional, but as embedded within a diffuse and multidirectional environment in which the final product is not only received, but endlessly manipulated and transformed by those who interact with it. These histories need not be only linear, narrative historiography, but can enable a conception of historiography that exists in multiple places at once, incorporates many voices (some contradictory), and is distributed, sometimes bodily, among many unique perspectives.

We need therefore to account for theatre and performance history and historiography within this new digital environment. This accounting may include how performance artists and theatre-makers integrate history and media into contemporary performances; and also how historians, museums, and cultural-heritage sites construct histories, and how all of these use digital technology to transform their collections into interactive

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[19] Matthew G. Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), xii–xiii.

[20] I am thinking here of tweets surrounding a particular show and reviews on social media, among others.

and performative experiences. This area of study, which I broadly refer to as "digital historiography and performance," occupies overlapping domains among digital technologies (computers, video recorders, and mobile media), new computational methodologies (for example, so-called big-data analyses, web-scraping, and online media mining), history, and a diverse range of performance practices, including theatre, performance art, and dance.

Digital Performance and Digital Humanities

At this point it may be helpful to delineate *digital performance* from *digital humanities* in theatre and performance studies. The former has become a fairly well-known, if dynamic field of study, including not only the wide array of performances such as those surveyed in Steve Dixon's *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*,[21] but also a robust collection of scholarship theorizing and analyzing the effects of digital media and culture in relation to theatre, live art, and performance—including, of course, the very use of the term *live*. We recognize these diverse perspectives through terminology that categorizes these performances variously as borders (Birringer), mediatized (Auslander), embedded (Causey), intermedial (Kattenbelt), cyborg (Parker-Starbuck), entangled (Salter), multimedia (Klich and Scheer), new media dramaturgy (Eckersall, Grehan, and Scheer), and most succinctly, what Lance Gharavi calls simply "this kind of work."[22] Distinct from artistic or cultural works that incorporate media technologies into the production and staging of performances (for instance, digital performance, pace Dixon) or that focus on aspects and characteristics of digital culture, the term *digital humanities* typically refers to research and publication methodologies that use computational methods and analysis to explore a range of topics within theatre and performance studies, including history, theory, and modes of performance outside the domain of mediated or digital art works. For example, so-called big data have been used to effectively study theatre history long before the advent of the first glowing screen.[23]

Digital methods in performance research generally fall within one of three categories: collection; analysis; or dissemination. Digital-collection methods typically include digital archives and databases, and may also encompass techniques of digital data-gathering

[21] Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

[22] Johannes Birringer, *Media and Performance: Along the Border* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008); Matthew Causey, *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture: From Simulation to Embeddedness* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Jennifer Parker-Starbuck, *Cyborg Theatre: Corporeal/Technological Intersections in Multimedia Performance* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Chris Salter, *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010); Rosemary Klich and Edward Scheer, *Multimedia Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Peter Eckersall, Helena Grehan, and Edward Scheer, "New Media Dramaturgy," in *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*, ed. Magda Romanska (New York: Routledge, 2015), 375–80; Lance Gharavi, "'These Three Things': Challenges, Models and Mad-Libs for Classifying 'this Kind of Work,'" in *Theatrical Histories* (paper presented at the 2012 ASTR conference, Nashville).

[23] As Pannill Camp reminds me, numerical analyses of theatre repertoire date at least to the eighteenth century (personal communication). Jeffrey Ravel has compared his The Comédie-Française Registers Project (CFRP) to analog studies of Comédie-Française records conducted manually—in particular, Charles de Fieux Mouhy's *Tablettes dramatiques, contenant l'abrégé de l'histoire du théâtre français, l'établissement des théâtres à Paris, un dictionnaire des pièces, et l'abrégé de l'histoire des auteurs* (Sébastien Jorry, 1752). For more on CFRP, see "The Comédie-Française Registers Project," available at *http://www.cfregisters.org/*.

such as data-mining, web-scraping, and interactive interfaces that allow individuals to submit information. Digital analysis refers to the use of digital media or computers to further explore characteristics of a particular performance, either contemporary or historical. This area of analysis includes statistical analysis of available records (so-called big-data projects in material and cultural histories), motion-capture analysis (a technique, of course, also used in production), multimodal video analysis and annotation, digital simulations or reenactments, and textual analyses of scripts, scores, or related manuscripts and materials, among others. Digital dissemination most simply describes digital presentations, publications, or scholarship; this would include sophisticated websites and new media publications, as well as blogs, wikis, and online forums. In her *Theatre Journal* review essay, Caplan (herself a partner investigator for the Digital Yiddish Theatre Project) outlines four types of digital scholarship: digital archives and editions; digital theatrical environments; digital visualizations; and digital databases.[24] In spite of attempts at clearly defined labels, categories in the digital humanities inevitably overlap. Digital archives, for instance, function both as collections and as portals for disseminating information and data to interested users. However, despite the lack of clear and definite boundaries (perhaps the digital sine qua non), these broad categories help us to understand digital methodologies in light of their salient functions and can provide a useful framework not only to appreciate and effectively access the range of research projects currently available, but also to understand how one can adapt these methods for her own purposes. Caplan's essay highlights a number of the growing array of such projects, as does Kalle Westerling in his blog roll of "Digital Humanities Projects in the Performing Arts."[25] As of the time of this writing in 2016, significant projects include: Anita Gonzalez's 19th Century Acts!; Erin Mee's Hearing the *Music of the Hemispheres*; Derek Miller's Visualizing Broadway; Amy Hughes, Naomi Stubbs, and Scott Dexter's Harry Watkins Diary; the consortium behind the Digital Yiddish Theatre Project; a digital version of Lessing's Hamburg Dramaturgy; and Jennifer Roberts-Smith's Simulated Environment for Theatre, among many others. Academic publishers are now more frequently offering companion websites to new publications, and Diana Taylor and Marcos Steuernagel have launched the Scalar site "What is Performance Studies? An Introduction."[26] As scholarship changes, so too is doctoral publication offering new models for dissertation research. In 2015 Miguel Escobar submitted his research on Javanese puppet theatre, "Wayang Kontemporer," to the National University of Singapore as an entirely web-based dissertation.[27]

[24] Debra Caplan, "Notes from the Frontier: Digital Scholarship and the Future of Theatre Studies," *Theatre Journal* 67, no. 2 (2015):, 347–59 (quote on 351).

[25] See ibid., 347–59; and Kalle Westerling, "Digital Humanities Projects in the Performing Arts | Kalle Westerling," September 28, 2014, available at *http://www.westerling.nu/blog/digital-humanities-projects-in-the-performing-arts/*.

[26] Anita Gonzalez, "19th Century Acts," available at *http://19thcenturyacts.com/*; Erin B. Mee, "Hearing the *Music of the Hemispheres*," available at *http://scalar.usc.edu/anvc/music-of-the-hemispheres/read-the-article*; Derek Miller, "Visualizing Broadway: A Research Project in the Digital Humanities," available at *http://www.visualizingbroadway.com/*; Amy Hughes, Naomi Stubbs, and Scott Dexter, "The Diary of Harry Watkins," available at *http://www.harrywatkinsdiary.org/*; "Lessing's Hamburg Dramaturgy: A New and Complete Translation," in *Hamburg Dramaturgy*, trans. Wendy Arons and Sara Figal, ed. Natayla Baldyga, available at *http://mcpress.media-commons.org/hamburg/*; Jennifer Roberts-Smith, "Simulated Environment for Theatre (SET)," available at *http://www.arts.uwaterloo.ca/~j33rober/set.html*; Diana Taylor and Marcos Steuernagel, "Introduction," in *What Is Performance Studies?*, available at *http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/wips/what-is-performance-studies-introduction*. Caplan outlines many of these in her 2015 essay, but new projects emerge frequently. The list presented here is far from comprehensive.

[27] Miguel Escobar, "Wayang Kontemporer: Innovations in Javanese Wayang Kulit" (PhD diss., National University of Singapore, 2015), available at *http://cwa-web.org/dissertation/wayang-dis/index.php*.

Many of these projects align with what William Thomas III outlines as digital history in the 2008 forum, "Interchange: The Promise of Digital History." Published in the *Journal of American History*, Thomas outlines the scope of digital history:

> Digital history is an approach to examining and representing the past that works with the new communication technologies of the computer, the Internet network, and software systems. On one level, digital history is an open arena of scholarly production and communication, encompassing the development of new course materials and scholarly data collections. On another, it is a methodological approach framed by the hypertextual power of these technologies to make, define, query, and annotate associations in the human record of the past. To do digital history, then, is to create a framework, an ontology, through the technology for people to experience, read, and follow an argument about a historical problem.[28]

As he describes it, emerging technologies fundamentally shift both how we do history and how others understand and even participate in what we do. Significantly, many born-digital projects are created with critical engagement integrated within the project design. Thus the emergence of such projects changes the relations among scholars and their readers. Much like videogames and interactive performances are changing the ways that scholars think about audiences and reception, so too do these new forms of digital publishing and interactive scholarship suggest the need for new critical vocabularies and modes of analysis. Caplan notes that "[s]uch productions not only require scholar-spectators to engage with new theoretical questions about liveness and performance, but they also ask us to reconsider the tools we use to examine and analyze them."[29] The question of the digital humanities in theatre, dance, and performance studies is not simply a question of new tools and technologies, but may also invite new conceptual frameworks to make sense of both the work and our critical approaches.

As resources become available through the so-called digital humanities—large dataset analysis, for instance—they alter the kinds of questions that historians can ask about the past and our contemporary relations to it; they also change our modes of reading, as Kirschenbaum argued. With specific reference to history and historiography, Gerben Zaagsma has argued that the challenge of digital technology in history "is to apply our critical faculties to digital resources, as we are used to do when dealing with 'traditional' archival materials, [and to] be aware of the ways in which they differ and in which they affect historical analysis."[30] In his inaugural speech as chair of New Media and Digital Culture at the University of Amsterdam in 2009, Richard Rogers called for a recognition of "a new era in Internet research, which no longer concerns itself with the divide between the real and the virtual."[31] Breaking away from prior theorists' notions of media specificity, Rogers advanced what he called "Web epistemology," which would consider the ways that specific digital artifacts, such as URLs, pagerank, threads, timestamps, and so on, are used in online research contexts. His argument echoes Charlie Gere's contention from his oft-cited *Digital Culture* that the "[d]igital refers not just to the effects and possibilities of a particular technology. It defines and encompasses the ways of thinking and doing that are embodied within that technology, and which make its development possible."[32] Gere's reference to embodiment within technology highlights a significant intersection among performance, history, bodies, and media.

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[28] William G. Thomas III, cited in Daniel J. Cohen et al., "Interchange: The Promise of Digital History," *Journal of American History* 95, no. 2 (2008), 452–91 (quote on 454).

[29] Caplan, "Notes from the Frontier," 350.

[30] Gerben Zaagsma, "On Digital History," *BMGN: Low Countries Historical Review* 128, no. 4 (2013), 3–29 (quote on 25).

[31] Richard Rogers, *The End of the Virtual: Digital Methods* (Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA, 2009), 8.

[32] Charlie Gere, *Digital Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2008), 17.

The doing of theatre and performance history may begin in the body, as Susan Leigh Foster noted in her introduction to *Choreographing History*: "[t]he act of writing about bodies thereby originates in the assumption that verbal discourse cannot speak *for* bodily discourse, but must enter into 'dialogue' *with* that bodily discourse."[33] Written in 1995, on the cusp of what became "the digital revolution,"[34] Foster's assertion echoes in media historian Lisa Gitelman's 2006 statement that "media are reflexive historical subjects."[35] Like Foster's notion of the performance scholar's historical engagement within a bodily discourse, Gitelman argues that the contemporary historian is similarly embedded within a media discourse:

> Inscriptive media in particular are so bound up in the operations of history that historicizing *them* is devilishly difficult. There's no getting all of the way "outside" them to perform the work of historical description or analysis. Our sense of history—of facticity in relation to the past—is inextricable from our experience of inscription, of writing, print, photography, sound recording, cinema, and now (one must wonder) digital media that save text, image, and sound.[36]

When digital culture turns the world into alternating experiences of documenting and performing, then perhaps the only theoretical framework that makes sense to understand it *is* the theatre. And, conversely, amid the dynamics of ever-changing, shifting digital culture, the theatre remains a key site to write the alternative histories that cannot be told or heard in other venues. Such arguments lead back to Taylor's notion of the archive and the repertoire. For her, the danger of written, historical archives is that they only record one kind of history, written in the language of the victors and used to subjugate those they conquer. As hard copies, written histories and archives are easy to defend and hard to subvert. As Derrida reminds us, "the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event."[37] So, how then do we understand digital history and archives in and as performances?

New technologies both challenge the distinctions between recorded and archival histories, and affect how those histories are reenacted in public spaces or restaged in theatres. One key shift is that the distinction between historical spaces (for instance, museums) and the fictional space of the theatre is no longer so easily understood. In his 2000 *Performing History*, for example, Freddie Rokem could convincingly argue that "the notion of performing history can clearly be distinguished from documents exhibited in a museum, where something from the past, instead of being reenacted

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[33] Susan Leigh Foster, ed., "Choreographing History," in *Choreographing History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 3–23, quote on 9 (emphasis in original).

[34] The date of 1995 is certainly not the origin of the internet and the changes that resulted. Most media historians note the emergence of computing in the wake of World War II, and the digital humanities routinely cite Father Roberto Busa, an Italian Jesuit priest, and his work on an IBM to create a concordance on every word published by Thomas Aquinas. See Matthew K. Gold, ed., *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

[35] Lisa Gitelman, *Always Already New: Media, History and the Data of Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 20.

[36] Ibid., 20–21 (emphasis in original).

[37] Jacques Derrida, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression" (trans. Eric Prenowitz), *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (1995): 17 (emphasis in original).

on the stage, is preserved, displayed, and perhaps even reconstructed like an archaeo-logical site."[38] But as Scott Magelssen argues in *Simming: Participatory Performance and the Making of Meaning*, digital environments now undermine the clear divisions upon which Rokem relies. As Magelssen considers the role of performance in living history museums, he also notes the ways in which the viewer's engagement with a historical reenactor in an online chat room challenges his definition of *simming* as living history created within live, simulated performances: "I found by the end that the chat room experience offered new angles on existing discussions of living history programs and posed some new dilemmas for theater and performance studies, as well as museum studies, to consider. Is the chat room a 'living history' simming?"[39]

Because the encounter is conducted in real time and with an actual person, Ma-gelssen considers his class's online chat with the reenactor a form of simming, but he also notes disagreement with this definition. The examples in his chapter on virtual simming point out that digital technologies often blur the distinctions between a his-torical artifact and a performative reenactment. In a blog post on May 7, 2015, Jacco Ouwerkerk describes this conflation from his perspective as a designer at the Dutch company IN10, "a creative agency for design, interaction and innovation."[40] Attending the international conference MuseumNext, Ouwerkerk notes "[t]he disappearing divid-ing line between theatre and museums," and he highlights a trend from new displays that he calls "'Real Virtuality': storytelling at the cutting edge between live performance and digital experience."[41] Such conflations, particularly in the realm of museums and other venues that make claims to present historical documentation and facts, offer a new way of looking at the nexus of history, performance, and digital technologies.

Documenting History Digitally

As digital technologies and interactive displays permeate within historical museums and archives, one has no trouble finding evidence of this combination of history, me-dia, and performance. For example, in "A Theatre of History: 12 Principles," Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett describes the creation of the POLIN Museum of the History of the Polish Jews and the rationale behind its distinctive, interactive exhibits. Although she focuses on the concepts behind the museum's design, the presence of digital tech-nologies and interactive displays enable what she identifies as the eighth of her twelve principles: the desire to "[k]eep open questions that seem to beg for definition."[42] The POLIN's interactive displays allow the visitors to negotiate their own paths through the history, constructing knowledge on a "need-to-know basis" as they move through the exhibits. Tellingly, the museum's design emphasizes the questions posed for mu-seum visitors rather than the system of providing answers. Instead of articulating a single historical perspective or sequential list of causal events, the POLIN makes full

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[38] Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 6.

[39] Scott Magelssen, *Simming: Participatory Performance and the Making of Meaning* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 55.

[40] Headquarters Kratonkade 7 Rotterdam et al., "IN10: Overview," available at *https://www.linkedin.com/company/in10-communicatie*.

[41] Jacco Ouwerkerk, "The Real Virtuality of MuseumNext," *IN10 Communicatie*, available at *http://www.in10.nl/weblog/2015/05/the-real-virtuality-of-museumnext/*.

[42] Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, "A Theatre of History: 12 Principles," *TDR: The Drama Review* 59, no. 3 (2015), 49–59 (quote on 55). Kirschenblatt-Gimblett serves as the chief curator of the Core Exhibition at the museum.

use of the opportunities of digital interactivity to create histories and historiography as a collaborative, dynamic, and perhaps always unfinished project among collections, scholars, and visitors. The POLIN is distinctive though not unique, as museums worldwide rethink their collections in terms of digital and mobile technologies and foster greater interaction among visitors, staff, scholars, students, and the collections themselves. As museum consultant Eleanor Appleby wrote in early 2016, museums of the future need to enable "co-creation, dialogue and participation with audiences and stakeholders" and become "nimble and dynamic so you can respond to new developments and thinking."[43] As museums follow Appleby's advice, it is not surprising that they turn increasingly to digital displays.[44]

However, the convergence among history, digital technology, and theatre is rarely more overt than what one finds at the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum in Dallas. Although the library, which opened on the Southern Methodist University campus in April 2013, features many of the usual exhibits of memorabilia and archival collections, such as campaign paraphernalia and propaganda of the period, more than other presidential libraries it deploys digital interactive displays as its primary presentation mode. Designed by Cortina Productions, the interactive displays demonstrate the kind of "real virtuality" that Ouwerkerk's blog post highlights and follow Appleby's advice to become "nimble and dynamic." Engaging the museum's visitors in a variety of display interfaces, the museum facilitates an interactive, collective historiography that reminded me of Scheinfeldt's reference to digital scholarship as the "performative humanities." Of course, increasingly one comes to expect this in contemporary museum collections. What is perhaps most surprising is the extent to which the Bush Presidential Library and Museum relies upon *theatre* as central to its mission and function.

From the moment one enters, opportunities for digital interaction dominate the museum's environment. Visitors are met with the invitation to download the museum's designated app, which promptly requires the user to authorize the app's location access to enable all of the features in the museum. Before anything else can be accessed the user is directed to the privacy policy. In keeping with the conventions of most museums, visitors can use the mobile app to access additional information throughout the museum, including an audio tour (activated by GPS detection of one's physical location in the museum's galleries) and a series of films related to different aspects of the Bush presidency, including "Road to the White House," "War on Terror," and "Oval Office Video Tour." The app also includes social-media integration with Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and Foursquare, and "My Gallery"—an opportunity to record one's visit to the museum and "Record Your 9/11 Story" (fig. 2). (Interestingly, the option to record a 9/11 story receives special language in the stated privacy policy, excluding the content from other privacy protections.)[45]

[43] Eleanor Appleby, "In the Future Museums Will Be," *MuseumNext*, March 14, 2016, available at *http://www.museumnext.com/conference/in-the-future-museums-will-be/*.

[44] For a good overview of this shift in digital museum collections, see Suzanne Keene, *Digital Collections: Museums and the Information Age*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011). Originally published in 1998, Keene's book is one of the first to explore the impact of digital collections and technology on museum conventions and practices.

[45] The George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum policy states: "During your visit to the George W. Bush Presidential Center or the Site, or during your use of Center Devices, you may be
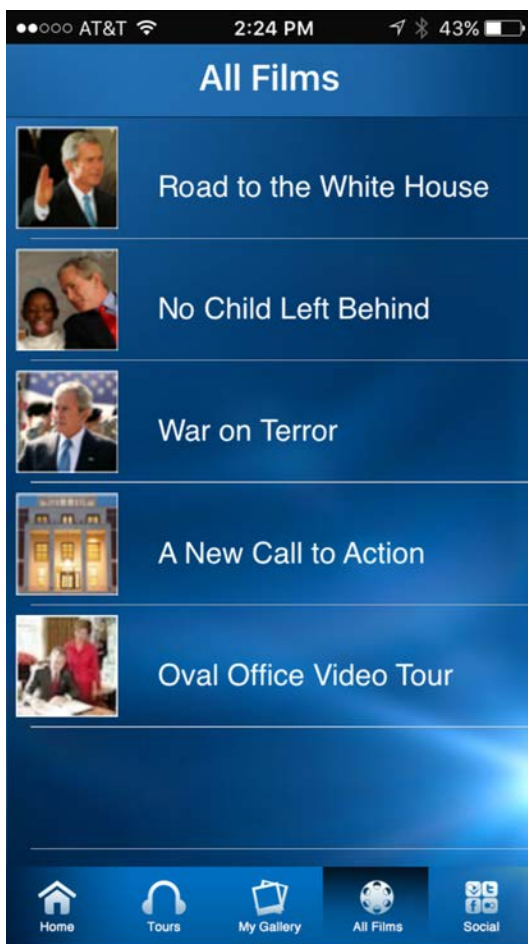
Figure 2. Screenshot image of the George W. Bush
Presidential Library and Museum mobile app
interface. (Photo: Author.)

The museum's digital engagement is not confined to the mobile app, but informs much of the designed space as well. Just past the ticket counters is a sixty-seven-foot-tall atrium named "Freedom Hall." Elevated above the atrium are four twenty-by fifty-foot LED screens in 360 degrees that project an eight-minute digital art piece by David Niles called "The People." These overhead projections include images central to the Bush mythos: western landscapes with animated clouds and computer-generated tumbleweeds; time-lapse photography of Washington, D.C. in soaring aerial shots;

invited to provide information about your experiences relating to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Such September 11 experience-related information is not subject to the terms of this Privacy Policy. Your September 11 experience-related information may be disclosed to the National Archives and Records Administration and further used or disclosed consistent with their policies and procedures; in addition, we may use your September 11 experience-related information in future displays or programs at our sole discretion." See "Privacy Policy," *George W. Bush Presidential Center: Home of the Bush Library and Museum and Bush Institute,* last modified April 2, 2013, available at *http://www. bushcenter.org/about-the-center/privacy-policy.html.*

and animations of ordinary people like crossing guards, college graduates in their robes, bouncing school children, and a slow-motion gymnast tumbling across the length of the screen. The culmination of this work is a collection of individual digital portraits animated together with a "We the People" title and text from the Constitution that gradually dissolves the individual figures' images. According to the Fox News broadcast commentary on April 17, 2013, these pictures "are designed to point out that any person in the United States of America could become president of the United States."[46] Throughout his presidency Bush fostered a populist rhetoric, and certainly the museum's digital interactions continue that philosophy.

Beyond the atrium, nearly all of the exhibits embed digital technologies within their displays. For example, in an exhibit dedicated to 9/11, beams of twisted steel are surrounded by footage from news reports of the attack, played continuously on video monitors mounted on curved walls that bear the names of those who died in the tragic events (fig. 3). Just beyond this area, video footage of Bush with the New York Fire Department plays alongside physical artifacts, such as the bullhorn he used to address the first responders at ground zero. As one moves further into the exhibits the technology becomes increasingly interactive. The 9/11 exhibits play their videos on preprogrammed loops, but an exhibit on Bush's faith-based initiatives allows a visitor to select from a range of video case studies. Elsewhere, in a section dedicated to the War on Terror and the Bush Doctrine, a large touch-screen table gives viewers the opportunity to select and manipulate documents related to the invasion of Iraq and the search for Saddam Hussein. Users can examine different pieces of evidence related to the invasion, including videos, photos, documents, and maps, as they retrace the various decisions that made up the Bush administration's foreign policy during the invasion of Iraq and afterward. Although the interactive table functions like a giant computer tablet, the interactivity is limited to the order in which the user views specific documents, and the ability to move these documents across the expanse of the large screen. Although one screen claims to allow the user to "Evaluate Results," the documents available merely reinforce the policy decisions. The visitor can alter the sequence of information, but not necessarily in ways that would affect the individual experience or allow for multiple responses to what is presented (fig. 4).

The museum expands its level of engagement in its central exhibit, the Decision Points Theater (DPT). At the literal and figurative center of the museum, this interactive display offers visitors the opportunity to revisit four key decisions of the Bush presidency: the invasion of Iraq; the response to Hurricane Katrina; the "surge" of additional troops into Iraq; and the government intervention after the financial crisis. Audience members experiment with different counterfactual scenarios, recording their responses in real time to diverse information about the event. Explicitly titled a "theatre," the exhibit reminded me of Raphael Samuel's description of historiography in his *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, where he noted that memory, "so far from being merely a passive receptacle or storage system, an image bank of the past, is rather an active, shaping force; that it is dynamic—what it contrives symptomatically to forget is as important as what it remembers—and that it is dialectically related to historical thought, rather than being some kind of negative other to it."[47]

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[46] "GW Bush Library Freedom Hall," YouTube video, 2:48, posted by David Niles, May 1, 2013, available at *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFa9sXx1F4U.*

[47] Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture,* rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2012), xxiii.

Figure 3. Exhibit on 9/11 featuring metal remnants from the World Trade Center towers and video recordings of the attack in the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum (2013). (Photo: Author.)

Figure 4. The interactive touch screens featured in the exhibit on the Bush Doctrine and invasion of Iraq in the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum (2013). (Photo: Author.)

As a theatre of recent history, the DPT is perhaps best understood as taking an active, even ideological role in reshaping the events of the Bush presidency. Given the contentiousness of Bush's term in American history—including two ongoing wars, the emergence of global insurgent resistance throughout the Middle East, and the abuses of Abu Ghraib and the US detention center at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as well as domestic events like the failed response to Hurricane Katrina—the Bush Presidential Library and Museum and its efforts to represent and, arguably, reshape this history merit sustained critical attention. To understand the DPT, we need to consider the project not only as a form of history and propaganda (an inevitable feature of presidential libraries and museums), but also as harnessing the power of digital historiography not only to deploy history in service to an ideological agenda, but also to engage the spectator in a kind of new historiographical practice as, perhaps surprisingly, theatre.

Reenacting Digital History in the DPT

Every several minutes or so the DPT resets itself and welcomes a new group of visitors into the space. Arranged in semi-circular rows, with two people per interactive touch screen, the audience is initially welcomed by figures on a large curved screen at the front of the room. Video of Bush's two chiefs of staff, Andrew Card and Joshua Bolton, addresses the audience and explains the process to follow: as an audience, we will collectively consider one of Bush's four major "decision points" during his presidency (also the title of his memoirs). The options are presented on our touch screens, where each person votes on the scenario to consider. Once an option is chosen, audience members have seven minutes to review the available evidence, hear from "experts" and "advisors," and render a decision. Each audience member gets to revisit a critical moment in the Bush presidency and, most importantly, have the opportunity to be "the decider" (sort of). Within each scenario only three to four options are provided for consideration—a multiple-choice decision process without a write-in option. In the Hurricane Katrina scenario, for example, the audience can vote to: 1) "Rely on Local Forces"; 2) use "Troops without Police Power"; or 3) "Use [The] Insurrection Act." Thus the scenario exercise begins.

On the touch-screen monitors we can choose to hear from different advisors who present opposing opinions and perspectives on the options at hand. The expert reports are periodically interrupted by "breaking news reports" that appear on the main screen at the front of the room. In these, archival footage from the events in question is shown with a recreated voiceover highlighting the new development. Unlike the recognizable archival news footage that plays on the main screen, these experts appear in industrial videos portrayed by a range of bland actors of more diverse gender and racial demographics than we usually see either on television or in the Bush White House.[48] As we watch the staged videos we can record agreement or disagreement with the statements presented through a virtual slider that each viewer manipulates independently (fig. 5).

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[48] Industrial videos are typically made for corporate purposes aimed at so-called industry audiences. Designed to be accessible to a broad audience, they typically display flat lighting, bland scenography and costumes, and require a style of acting characterized by clearly, often slowly enunciated speech, minimal gestures, and a lack of overt characterization. Performers in an industrial video could portray any of the available characters. Even within the explicitly historicized space of the DPT, these videos convey a sense of timelessness and an ahistorical quality. They thus turn a specific time and event into a bland "every time" and allow viewers to project themselves more fully into the historical construction of the DPT rather than engage with history itself.
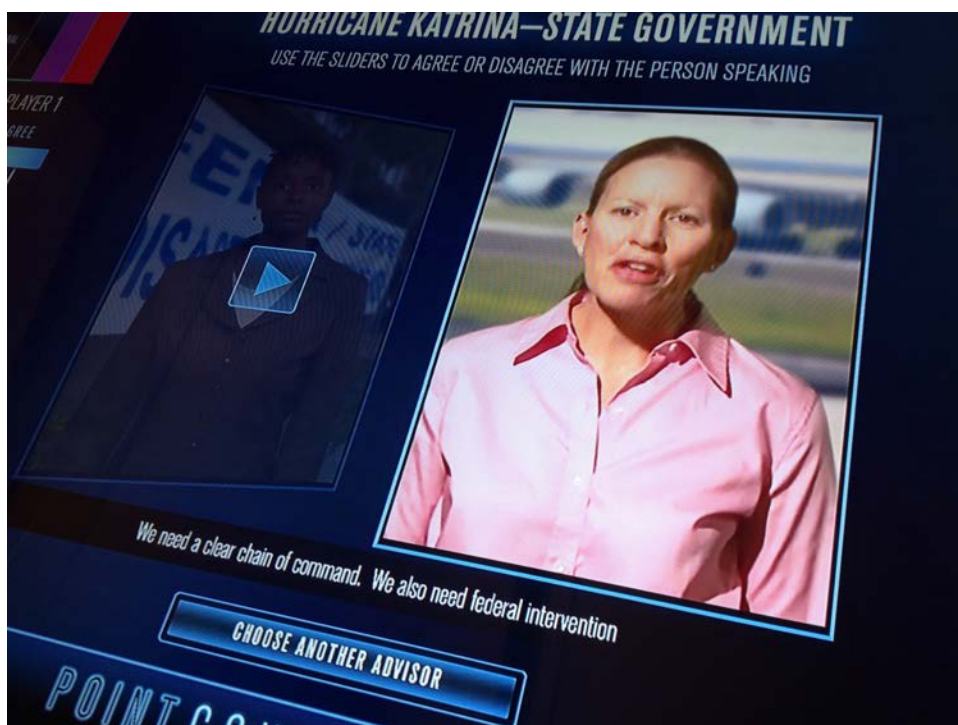
Figure 5. "Advisors" played by actors appeal directly to users through shared video touch-screen monitors. Users can individually respond using graphical sliders on the screen. George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum (2013). (Photo: Author.)

As we record our agreement, our responses appear to be tracked in real time on the overhead monitor and also to correspond with one of the available options. Although the correlation between audience agreement with the experts and the available options is unclear, the moving trend lines suggest that our decisions are affecting the pending outcome in real time. A sense of urgency is enforced by a countdown timer that begins flashing red when it hits the ten-second mark. Abruptly, the scenario ends; the audience has reached the time limit and must record a decision. Each audience member selects one of the options on the touch screen and the collective vote is displayed. Regardless of the choice, a video address from President Bush explains to the audience the choice he made (fig. 6).

Although scholars and critics usually discuss technology in terms of the myriad changes to the present and the implications for the future, the Bush Library and its DPT suggest that emerging technologies not only impact our collective experiences of the present and how we live in the day-to-day, but also may have a significant effect on how we view the past and historiography. Particularly striking is just how essential audience interaction is to these historical formations. Unlike other museum displays, the DPT requires an audience to animate its archive. While other exhibits repetitiously play video to an empty room, like a videogame the DPT only works when engaged by an audience and is most effective with a full crowd, in contrast to those aimed at the individual viewer. It thus provides a model of the "real virtuality" and public history as performance described at the 2015 MuseumNext conference. Troubling, however, is the deliberate elision of archival footage and reenactments that real virtuality engenders.

Figure 6. Countdown screen at the conclusion of the Hurricane Katrina scenario, Decision Points Theater, in the George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum (2013). (Photo: Author.)

Perhaps unexpectedly, there is little that is overtly coercive about this presentation.[49] Certainly, the "facts" are skewed (as has been detailed in a multipart report on the *Rachel Maddow Show*, *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, and in left-wing political blogs like "Daily Kos," among others), but in the more than three hours I spent in the DPT I did not notice that the bias of the exhibit affected the assembled audiences and their choices.[50] The people with me in the theatre tended to disagree with the former president about as often as they agreed with him, with the responses ranging across

[49] Compare this to descriptions of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum interactive experience of his 1983 invasion of Grenada. Here, school children reenact Reagan's decision-making procedure within a process that is structured to reinforce his decisions as the best choices. A description of the experience was originally broadcast in an episode of "This American Life," and it opens Magelssen's introduction to *Simming*. See Ira Glass, "Kid Politics," *This American Life*, National Public Radio, January 14, 2011, available at *http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/424/kid-politics*; and Magelssen, *Simming*, 1–2.

[50] For more on the popular left-wing media response, see "Rachel Maddow: Bending the Truth about Hurricane Katrina at the Bush Library," *Rachel Maddow Show*, MSNBC, May 2, 2013, available at *http://www.nbcnews.com/video/rachel-maddow/51756885*; Frank Vyan Walton, "Maddow: Bush Library 'Decision Points Theater Is a National Scandal,'" *Daily Kos* blog, May 3, 2013, available at *http://www.dailykos.com/story/2013/05/02/1206392/-Maddow-Bush-Library-Decision-Points-Theater-is-a-National-Scandal*, and "Decision Points Theater II: It Gets Worse, Katrina Edition," *Daily Kos* blog, May 4, 2013, *http://www.dailykos.com/story/2013/05/03/1206619/-Decision-Points-Theater-II-It-gets-worse-Katrina-Edition*; and Jon Stewart, "Library Accomplished—Disasterpiece Theater," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, Comedy Central, New York City, April 25, 2013, available at *http://thedailyshow.cc.com/videos/j7fsdf/library-accomplished—disasterpiece-theater*.

most of the available options at some point (for myself, I voted early and often across all the available options). The crowd assembled on a Sunday afternoon in November 2013 seemed mostly favorable to Bush. Many wore American flags or other similar symbols of national pride, and nearly everyone assembled was busy taking photos of themselves in the exhibit. For all its manipulative framing (for example, there is no option to "help" or "rescue" the victims of Hurricane Katrina), the DPT focuses our attention on what were arguably the greatest flaws in the Bush presidency: key decisions that in retrospect have been often viewed as strategic failures. His presidency, particularly at its conclusion in 2008, was remarkable in many ways, but certainly one of its most salient features was the emergence of the historical counterfactual in popular American discourse. What if Bush had made different decisions at these key moments? What if the country had pursued Osama Bin Laden and not invaded Iraq? What if the response to Katrina had been swift and humane with a mission to rescue rather than impose police action and military force? On its surface, the display does not overtly attempt to change public opinion nor does it shy away from the disastrous effects. If trying to justify Bush's decisions, certainly other areas of the museum can be more clearly understood as praise for the accomplishments of his presidency. Within an otherwise celebratory exhibit of his presidency, why invite the audience to reconsider and reenact four key decisions that are widely (although not universally) regarded as failures? Such questions force us to consider more deeply the function of the DPT and the motivation behind an entirely digital, counterfactual display. Beyond its function within a specific presidential history, I argue further that the DPT provides an exceptional, if not unique manifestation of digital historiography. The question of the user-participant-creator audience has been a major focus in both videogame research and intermedial performance more broadly, and we find a similar structuring principle in examples from participatory and nomadic performances, many of which seem to echo the logic of digital spaces in real-world environments. In other words, when encountering an object, collection, or experience mediated by technology, the perception for the user is both one of necessity and control. To understand the historical operations of the DPT we need to turn our attention to its use of the digital interface that functions theatrically.

Like the theatre, the information presented (or text), including the seemingly spontaneous interruptions, is clearly predetermined, but each screen station can order an array of information in numerous configurations available within the presented options. This means that, like a videogame, one could play repeatedly and never see it in the same way twice. Of course, the outcomes of history within the game are never changed. Indeed, Bush's concluding recordings, like the other video presentations, were always exactly the same and, not coincidentally, the dullest part of the DPT's engagement. However, the process of reaching that conclusion did change because the audience selected different options over the course of each iteration. These changes within the imaginative exercise of the counterfactual instill a sense of autonomy and control, even as they lead us inevitably to the same conclusions. To play the game of the DPT is to experience participation in the reconstruction of the past within an illusion of control.

This digital theatre environment creates an experience of history as paradoxically both malleable and inevitable. That the audiences' various decisions inevitably return to the same point over time confirms not necessarily the rightness of Bush's decisions nor any deeper historical understanding or appreciation for how or why these

decisions were made. As history itself, it is a weak exercise. Rather than considering the implications of the historical narrative itself, one can get caught up in the *process* of deciding, in the *performance* of decision-making. All of which highlights a vulnerability in digital history: that our engagement with historical records not only shapes our understanding of historical events, but may also change the archive itself. Luke Tredinnick cautions that the speed of digital technologies

> have collapsed the distinction between the present, and the truly historical, such that we begin to interpret, frame and understand events as already historicized at the very moment that we experience them. They have allowed anachronism to emerge as a productive source of human understanding. And they have perhaps altered the nature of history, from something vested in the scholarly activities of an elite cultural group, to a living and mutable, political and personal part of the wider social matrix.[51]

Participating in digital reconstructions changes our sense of what history is, making it both more personal and distorting our agentic role within it. With its populist rhetoric and collective structures, the DPT attempts to activate the potential of the social matrix here, emphasizing the individual's "choice" within a set of preconditions, while also directing these choices to inevitable ends. As we play the game we also experience the audience's collective choices as the (only) historical records available to us. Significantly, we are never allowed to consider the different outcomes from the alternative choices we may select. To paraphrase Alain de Lille and Chaucer, all roads lead back to Rome.

Such is the real power of the DPT. To play the game, we must accept its technological parameters and therefore the specific ideological vision of the events as predetermined. From the beginning of our engagement, the negotiation of history is clearly constrained and shaped within a narrow scope of conceptual language, as if the options for Bush were similarly limited to what we in the audience experience. Although the ability to disagree is an option frequently exercised by the audience, this mode of engagement forecloses our agency, even as it appears to open it. The DPT thus provides useful warnings for the wider implications of digital history as performance. One is that the software parameters need to be visible, not just to those who create the archive or records, but to those who engage with the materials, and that theatre history will increasingly require familiarity, if not facility, with various software environments, both in our reading and writing of history. Since few exhibits make the data and specific software available to viewers, at the very least we need to consider carefully the choices in the graphical, digital interface—visually, aurally, and gesturally. The Bush Presidential Library and Museum reinforces Lev Manovich's argument in *Software Takes Command* that we need to attend to software as cultural products that reflect ideologies of conception and representation.[52] The DPT is itself a profound historical document that locates a particular idea of participatory politics and shared experience within the construction of the theatre. More than anything else, I left the DPT with a sense of historical, theatrical *déjà vu*. I was reminded of other circular, semi-enclosed spaces where crowds gathered to watch flawed, fated leaders journey on to their inevitable, inescapable tragedies. In these scenarios the audience knew the endings, yet became fascinated by the particular details of the process, watching in suspense to see how

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[51] Luke Tredinnick, "The Making of History: Remediating Historicized Experience," in *History in the Digital Age*, ed. Toni Weller (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013), 39–60 (quote on 41).
[52] Lev Manovich, *Software Takes Command* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

tragic leaders would fall. Looking back on Bush as a tragic hero might not make for better history, but over time it just might make him and his legacy better theatre.

The Bush museum reminds us that in an age of digital technologies, history is increasingly being recorded, projected, and experienced as theatre. We see this performance echoing throughout contemporary digital culture in which millions of people document, every day, the world around them on mobile phones, and where the historical past is being newly written on interfaces that blur the line between fiction and reality. Certainly in the domain of politics—history in the making—digital media conflate political theatre and performance in ways that threaten to undermine existing political processes. Whatever our ultimate conclusions, it seems clear that to understand contemporary culture we need to bring the analyses and dramaturgy of theatre and performance to bear on these dynamic historical artifacts; and conversely, that it is in the theatre where we most clearly see the consequences for new digital historiography.