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A Tale of Two Trilogies: Severing the *Star Wars* Saga

Few if any popular culture phenomena are capable of outstripping George Lucas' *Star Wars* saga.

With the theatrical release of *Revenge of the Sith* on May 19th, 2005 – the final theatrical release, but the

third chronological entry – the series reached an apotheosis over thirty years in the making. Comprised of six

films split between two trilogies – the Original Trilogy (episodes four through six: *Star Wars* (which devotees

know as *A New Hope*) (1977), *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), and *The Return of the Jedi* (1983)); and the

Prequel Trilogy (episodes one through three: *The Phantom Menace* (1999), *Attack of the Clones* (2002), and

*Sith* (2005))[1] – the saga forms the "deep core" of an ever-burgeoning "expanded universe"[2] (Silvio and Vinci

1), and represents "one of the key cultural benchmarks of the last thirty years" (Brooker xv). Merchandise

notwithstanding, the "expanded universe" encompasses auxiliary theatrical releases (*The Clone Wars*),

television specials and movies of the week (*The Ewok Adventure, Battle For Endor*), hand drawn and CGI

animated programming (*Droids, Ewoks, Clone Wars*), professional and amateur parodies and spoofs

(*Spaceballs, T.R.O.O.P.S., Family Guy, Robot Chicken*), myriad video games (including a recently released

Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game), hundreds of novels and short stories, reams of fan

fiction, concerts, plays, radio dramas, board games, conventions and – an especial badge of honour –

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[1] Adjusted for inflation, the films place on the list of all time box office grosses as follows: *Clones* – 85, *Sith* – 58, *Menace* – 16, *Jedi* – 15, *Empire* – 12, and *Star Wars* sits at number two, second only to *Gone With the Wind* (http://boxofficemojo.com/alltime/adjusted.htm).

[2] Lucasfilm employs "arbiters" whose sole function it is to oversee and mediate disputes over "rubrics of canonicity that range from the simple and severe (feature films only) to the scrupulously calibrated (a hierarchy involving fourteen gradations of reliability)" (Kenny 151).

pornography; "all of which carry with them their own idiosyncratic part of the grand narrative" (Kenny 150).

Where *Star Wars* is concerned, superlatives fail. The films and their offshoots comprise a cultural colossus,

immense intertextual implications, and – it must go without saying – very big business.

As the *Star Wars* generation came of age, disciples infiltrated ivory towers and the saga was (and

continues to be) examined through a panoply of pedagogies.[3] Academic analysis spans the spectrum,

encompassing every available lens: Marxism,[4] feminism, structuralism, cultural studies, epistemology, post-

colonialism, psychoanalysis,[5] and the theories of philosophers such as Heidegger, Hume, and Hegel (Decker

and Eberl 145). By the standard of sheer volume alone, *Star Wars*-related writing constitutes a canon unto

itself.[6] Despite the efforts heretofore expended scrutinizing the protean facets of the franchise, the prevailing

interpretive/analytical strategy (but for a few scant examples)[7] entails engagement with the "deep core"

canon as one continuous set – six chapters comprising one novel – as Lucas (now) claims to have conceived

of his magnum opus from the outset.[8] This claim forms part of an elaborate mythos manufactured and erected

– fortress-like – around the series; a *Star Wars* "origin story" concocted and propagated by Lucas, and refined

and pullulated by fawning journalists, authors, allies, fervent fan communities, and the manifold, monolithic

corporations that Lucas owns and controls. Furthermore, this flourishing mythopoeia contends that the saga

was, from its inception, intended as modern-day "monomyth," and positions Lucas as – if not the *singular*,

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[3] "For many people...(*Star Wars*) is the single most important cultural text of our lives; it has meshed with memories of our childhoods...with our choices of career or education, and with our everyday experiences" (Brooker xii)

[4] "(T)he films express a conservative ideology that supports the American ideals of individualism, elitism, antistatism, agrarianism, and anti-rationalism" (Lyden 7).

[5] Jung is a recurrent reference, both independent of, and as corollary to, Joseph Campbell. For more, see *The Journey of Luke Skywalker* by Steven A. Galipeau.

[6] Lucas asserts that the academic world "will take a work and dissect it in so many different ways. Some of the ways are very profound, and some are very accurate. A lot of it, though, is just the person using their imagination to put things in there that really weren't there, which I don't mind either" (Lucas and Moyers 50).

[7] "(W)e can see the result as a double trilogy with a plot thread connected by characters – but a radically disjunctive approach to issues of power and the political order" (Kapell, Lawrence 31); "critics and fans have struggled to define the nature of the relationship between the original trilogy and the prequel trilogy" (Silvio and Vinci 12).

[8] "(E)ach film, while important in itself...is fitting into a larger mosaic, and the whole enterprise won't really be understood... until you can actually sit down and watch all six episodes" (Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999); "The films are designed to be one movie...I hope people think of it as...one large movie" (Lucas, *Sith* commentary, 2005).

then certainly the *preeminent* – imaginative/creative/executive catalyst and driving force behind the creative components, effects technologies, and the conglomerate that bears his imprimatur.[9] George Lucas: self-styled, multi-hyphenate artist (writer-director-producer-editor) and media mogul; contemporary cinema's *über*-auteur.

It is the purpose of the present paper to puncture these myths. I will argue that the Original Trilogy and the Prequel Trilogy – conceived, developed, produced, and distributed over three decades – are too aesthetically, narratively, and thematically incongruent to function as parts of a coherent whole. The two trilogies should, therefore, be decoupled and evaluated as separate texts. Perpetuating the precept of a preexisting, all-encompassing blueprint – with Lucas as omniscient architect – obfuscates a more accurate (and interesting) engagement with these films as products of the discrete time and place contexts in which they were created, and as multiauthored by collaborators participating in and informing the protracted and painstaking process of their development and production. Consequently, how do different multi-/pan-generational audience formations extrapolate, infer, and map meaning from the results?[10] As the only extant film series curated by the selfsame artist within/across disparate epochs, the *Star Wars* trilogies represent a unique opportunity to evaluate a "single" "self-contained" film text diachronically, and ascertain the impact of the divergent cultural contexts in which it was created.

In order to bisect the series and parse its constituent strands, I will employ a three-pronged interrogation of the respective trilogies: narrative, aesthetic, and contextual. Narratively, I will focus on a core diegetic component: the Force. Described in the Original Trilogy as a metaphysical "energy field created by all living things (that) surrounds us and penetrates us, (and) binds the galaxy together" (Lucas 1977), this first Force encompasses a set of intuitive and telekinetic abilities. In the Prequel Trilogy, the Force is re-

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[9] To wit: the corporate-eponym hybrid "Lucasfilm, Ltd."
[10] *Star Wars* producer Gary Kurtz affirms that "(w)hat you get out of it is what you bring to the cinema, and you read into the thing the things you want to read into it" (qtd. in Baxter 166).

conceived as generated by microscopic life-forms dubbed "midi-chlorians." A midi-chlorian "count" is obtained by administering a blood test, indicating a potential Jedi's Force aptitude. Thus, a central pillar of the pacifist and monk-like Jedi sect – a proxy religious order and galactic protectorate – is retroactively reconfigured from an amorphous, esoteric "energy field" into a bio-materialist agent.

Aesthetically, I will investigate crucial disparities in visual field and design: the transition from the practical "in-camera" special effects techniques deployed in the Original Trilogy to the near-ubiquitous computer generated imagery (henceforth: CGI) that saturates the Prequel Trilogy. The effects pioneered for the Original Trilogy were accomplished with preexisting technologies – models, stop-motion animation, puppetry, matte backgrounds, etc. – elaborated upon and refined through the integration of basic computerized components. The Prequel Trilogy, by contrast, eschews the palette of its predecessor in favour of fully-realized "photo-realistic" computer-generated elements, entities, and environments resulting in discordant visual arenas. Though Lucas' effects companies – Industrial Light and Magic in particular – still form the vanguard of the CGI revolution, the switch from practical to CGI effects alters the relationship between viewer and text necessitating asymmetrical interpretive strategies, and opening an unbridgeable rift between the trilogies' respective "realities."

Lastly, I will use a "circuit of culture" analytical model to investigate the extent to which divergent time/place contexts influenced the conception, creation, distribution, and reception of the *Star Wars* trilogies. Despite the dominance of "auteur theory" in the public perception of film authorship, filmmaking is a fundamentally collaborative enterprise. Moreover, a filmic text is the product of a "dynamic field of relationship" (Lynch 281); a "socio-politico-cultural matrix" of intersecting and interpenetrating channels including: writing, casting, crew, technology, financing, distribution, marketing, and audience consumption (Lynch 282). This "circuit of culture" analysis is key to assessing the values inscribed *by* and *onto* a film by

the cultural crucible in which it was created and distributed. The *Star Wars* trilogies are here decoupled and deciphered *sui generis*: as entities generated within (/by), and reflective of, distinct "historic moments."[11]

This is, however, a *tale*. Every saga, insofar as Lucas is concerned, has a beginning. We turn, therefore, to a galaxy slightly to the south, and a time not all that long ago: Modesto, California, 1944.


## A World Before *Star Wars* (1944-1973)

Born into an upper-middle-class Methodist family in bucolic rural Modesto, Lucas first garnered attention for his enviable comic book collection[12] and his insatiable television habit (Baxter 16, 24).[13] Lucas' father, George Sr., was both quintessential small-town American businessman and domineering, authoritarian figure who shaved his son's head every summer as a lesson in humility (a ritual so loathed by Lucas that he would populate his dystopic first feature – *THX:1138* – with similarly close-cropped denizens). The adolescent Lucas discovered a new love: cars and their attendant "mating ritual," cruising. "'It's a rite of passage," Lucas reminisced, "the cars, the machines, the cruising for girls'" (qtd. in Pollock 29). As American socio-cultural staple, Lucas considered cruising "more interesting than primitive Africa or ancient New Guinea – and much, much weirder" (Farber 6). Just shy of his high school graduation, Lucas was returning home from the library when – swerving to avoid an oncoming car on a blind curve – his souped-up "sewing machine" (a Fiat Bianchina) spun out of control and careened through the air. He survived by fluke – his safety harness snapped as the car pinwheeled, and Lucas was thrown clear moments before the vehicle

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[11] "A film...cannot be analyzed in a cultural vacuum. To observe the films without considering their historic moment would be to diminish their potential relevance and profundity" (Silvio and Vinci 29).

[12] "(C)omic strips were the fables and fairy tales of industrial society before television and science fiction wiped them out" (Kroll, quoted in Gordon 319).

[13] Biographer Dale Pollock identifies television and theme parks as two early formative influences, crediting Lucas' "attention to graphic design" and reliance on fast pace, action peaks, and visual excitement" to "years of watching TV commercials." As for Disneyland, "the sense of thrill...has never deserted Lucas" (17, 21). "'The way I see things, the way I interpret things, is influenced by television,'" Lucas recounts. "'Visual conception, fast pace, quick cuts. I can't help it. I'm a product of the television age'" (qtd. in Jenkins 2).

wrapped around a tree. A convalescing Lucas contemplated his future, and emerged from the hospital "much more academic-minded" (Farber 3). Lucas secured admission to the University of Southern California, where he joined the floundering film program. The collision thus proved a catalyst for Lucas' filmmaking career: "In a way movies replaced my love for cars" (Farber 3). Rather, the latter love would fuse with the former.

Film was a maligned and marginalized department (choice females reportedly gave the budding cineastes a wide berth), and the short, skinny, soft-spoken Lucas was swept into the convivial, collaborative atmosphere and "them-against-us" anti-establishment bunker mentality (Baxter 60). Lucas was, for the first time, exposed to Fellini, Bergman, Godard, and Kurosawa. "It wasn't until my junior year at college that I even knew anything about movies; that I sort of discovered film" (Rose, *Lucas*). Kurosawa in particular had a profound and lasting impact on the fledgeling filmmaker. "My introduction to Kurosawa's films were [sic] very powerful," Lucas recounted. "I had no idea what was going on. I could follow the human story, but the culture was completely complex and oblique, and I *liked* that" (Lucas, *Star Wars* commentary, 1977). Frequent screenings of National Film Board of Canada material – especially Claude Jutra's *21-87* – left Lucas enthralled (Silberman 4, 5).

Lucas' time at USC "coincided with the advent of the French auteur theory" (Pollock 46), which proposed that "directors are to movies what poets are to poems" (Biskind 16). Auteurism was an altar Lucas quickly came to worship: "(Film) is a director's medium… The writer provides a very important element, but the final product is ultimately left in the hands of the director" (Pollock 46).[14]

As he gained prominence as department wunderkind, Lucas earned a reputation for both mechanical

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[14] Coined by Francois Truffaut in a 1954 essay, the term "auteur" was initially invoked to denote "artisan" Hollywood directors: "critically unsung journeymen like Hitchcock and Hawks, toiling away within the studio system" – not outside of it – "but somehow...turning out work that no other director could have put his hand to" (Shone 84). Auteurism, therefore, was at first an attempt to retroactively identify "common threads" (Kurtz, qtd. in Plume "Interview") perceived telescopically over the span of a directorial career. "The leading American proponent of the auteur theory was (film critic) Andrew Sarris," who promoted "the then novel idea that the director is the sole author of his work, regardless of whatever contribution the writers, producers, or actors may make" (Biskind 16), which is the ideological spirit in which the "New Hollywood" movement of the 1970s adopted the term.

prowess (the erstwhile automobile enthusiast could "quickly master the technology of anything" and was the only student who could fix the arcane equipment (Baxter 53-54, 62)) and prodigious tenacity. Despite actual or perceived limitations of available time and/or resources, Lucas had a preternatural ability to procure scarce equipment and coveted film stock, and to rally colleagues to his cause (Baxter 58). Director/screenwriter John Milius remembers Lucas as "this guy who was this great mechanic... He was full of ambition and spirit and...taking on the modern world" (Bowser, 2003). His interests were also coming into focus: a preference for metal over flesh, and visual abstraction over narrative content. Lucas displayed an unparalleled skill at repurposing various technological elements into striking composite images (Pollock 51), and still refers to his penchant for abstract, graphically-oriented "tone poems" (Lucas, *Sith* commentary, 2005). "'I'm not that interested in narrative,'" Lucas asserts. "'The dialogue doesn't have much meaning in any of my movies. I'm very much of a visual filmmaker, and very much…going for emotions over ideas'" (qtd. in Biskind 343). Moreover, Lucas had divined the true formative phase of the filmmaking process: editing. "To Lucas, writing or shooting a film didn't control the final product – editing did" (Pollock 54).

Lucas parleyed acclaim into a scholarship that sent him to the Warner Brothers Studios lot, derelict and all but deserted but for a crazed, hirsute *enfant terrible* helming an ill-fated Fred Astaire vehicle, *Finian's Rainbow.* Lucas lurked, watching Francis Ford Coppola work until, two weeks later, Lucas decided that he'd had his fill. Coppola, however, had grown accustomed to Lucas' presence, and goaded him into staying. They became friends and collaborators, and part of a perceived movement gaining traction as the incipient American "film school" generation. Dubbed the "movie brats," the posse boasted representatives from both coasts: Scorsese and De Palma harkened from New York, and Coppola, Lucas, and Spielberg formed the California contingent (Biskind 15). These talented trailblazers happily brandished *stick-it-to-the-studio*

badges. "'We don't want to be part of the Establishment,'" Lucas declared, "'we don't want to make their kind of movies, we want to do something completely different'" (qtd. in Biskind 91).

In Coppola, Lucas found a kindred spirit, collaborator, and antithesis. Coppola was a delegator, "writing and acting" oriented (Biskind 92), and favoured psychologically motivated characters. Lucas, by contrast, was an avowed "control freak" (Farber 8), and a proponent of visceral, kinesthetic momentum over psychology: "action-adventure, chases, things blowing up" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 43). For a time, they were intensely collaborative – "'It works very well, because you really need somebody to test ideas on'" (Lucas, qtd. in Farber 5) – and copiously exchanged mutual recognition of their respective genius. Collaboration, however, was guiding principle and *modus operandi* for Coppola, but Lucas, given his druthers, would ideally do everything – "write, shoot, direct, produce, and edit" – himself. As their partnership proceeded, Coppola would take note of his compatriot's parsimony: "'No matter how much money George had, he always acted like a man with none'" (qtd. in Baxter 92).

Lucas and Coppola shared a dream: their very own studio, structurally and geographically independent of Hollywood. With signature charisma, Coppola secured an investment from Warner Brothers, founded American Zoetrope in San Francisco, and declared that Zoetrope's first feature film project would be an expanded version of Lucas's much-lauded student short *THX:1138 EB: Electronic Labyrinth,* concocted with fellow alumnus (now renowned sound and visual editor) Walter Murch.[15] Lucas wrote a "'terrible'" first draft, and showed it to Coppola. Coppola concurred: "'It is. You're absolutely right'" (qtd. in Kline 66).

No sooner had Lucas assumed directorial duties on *THX* than he found it "daily torture." Uncomfortable with actors, Lucas had difficulty coping with the noxious mix of "volatile personalities" (Baxter 102, 119). "'I spent all my time yelling and screaming at people, and I have never had to do that

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[15] In a promotional featurette, Coppola – the interviewer – asks Lucas from whence the concept for *THX* originally sprang. Lucas replies "It actually came from reading comic books when I was about ten years old" (Bowser, 2003).

before'" (Lucas, qtd. in Scanlon 7). Adding to the toxic atmosphere were severe restrictions of time and money. The perfectionistic Lucas soon decided he was ill-suited for command: "'I realized why directors are such horrible people...because you want things to be right, and people will just not listen to you and there is no time to be nice to people, no time to be delicate'" (qtd. in Scanlon 7). The stress caused adverse health effects in the increasingly dyspeptic director. "'Eventually I realized that directing simply wasn't healthy for me'" (Lucas, qtd. in Baxter 119).

From great adversity, however, springs innovation. Lucas embraced his shoestring budget and – as he and Murch had done at USC – made inventive and unmodified use of San Francisco's more "exotic" locations, generating a slew of "sophisticated graphics," and "(e)normous production value and an atmosphere of great scope" (Kline 10, Pollock 91, 95). In an aesthetic approach carried over into the "used universe" of *Star Wars,* Lucas decided against an immaculate future: "'I felt that the realism of the film's content would be enhanced by having the actors and their surroundings look slightly scruffy, even a little bit dirty.'" Furthermore, Lucas remained a proponent of the preeminence of editing in the creative hierarchy: "'I wanted to be able to "make" the film in the editing'" (qtd. in Kline 10, 12). The result was a "dazzling technical achievement" (Farber 5) that affirmed Lucas's mastery of all things compositional.[16]

Ignominy loomed. In a pageant that was to be remounted throughout Lucas' early career, no sooner had he finished the film than the suits swept in to impose their will. However common a part of the process (moreso considering he was a novice feature director), Lucas considered himself an *auteur*; the torch-bearer for a new and independent breed. "'He had to sit in the same room as one of the monsters,'" Murch recalls, "'one of the freaks, who had the power to tell him what to do'" (qtd. in Biskind 99). A latent trait was coming

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[16] Coppola fretted that *THX:1138* (its now-truncated title) would be either "'a masterpiece, or masturbation'" (qtd. in Biskind 98). Ultimately it was neither, but reception to Lucas' cut (as well as the film's short-lived theatrical run) was decidedly chilly. Pye and Miles consider Lucas's take on Orwell and Huxley a "shallow, tepid picture of...future society"; "rather stale...cold and arid," with "zombie characters" that fail to "stir our sympathy" (Kline 69, 38).

to the fore: Lucas bristled at attempts to curtail, elide, or otherwise adulterate the purity of his "vision." Even as an assistant editor-for-hire, Lucas couldn't abide top-down control: "'I really didn't like people telling me how to do this and how to do that – you know, carrying out someone else's ideas that I really didn't think were so great'" (qtd in Kline 111). Any perceived challenge to, or restriction of, his creative freedom became one of a score of psychic wounds that would forever fester. In the final analysis, Lucas believes cynicism to be the fundamental failing of *THX*. In a sense, the critique is self-directed – Lucas is, by his own admission, "'a very bad cynic'" (qtd. in Farber 8). Primarily, however, the fault is ours. *THX* demonstrated that "'people don't care about how the country's being ruined'" (Lucas, qtd. in Farber 8). Audiences, he concluded, "'preferred "positive stories" to "negative diatribes"'" (qtd. in Pollock 96). His "biggest commercial failure" was, however, his most satisfying experience as an auteur. "He was able to write, direct, edit, and control his vision, a total 'hands-on' experience that he loved" (Pollock 92). As with the blush of first love, one folds into rapture without the reluctance of one who has also lost. "'It's a thrill doing your first film because you haven't gone through the other end of it, all the criticism, anguish, and failure'" (Lucas, qtd. in Pollock 96).

Though *THX* landed with a thud, Lucas cobbled together a deal for a sophomore effort based on his latent love of cruising. Though one could infer a nostalgia for youthful passions, Lucas framed his follow-up as an effort to disabuse colleagues of common misconceptions of his character. Lucas sought to prove that he was not a "'cold and weird'" technocrat; an android "'devoid of...humor'" (qtd. in Jenkins 28). On the receiving end of "razz" from Coppola, Lucas conceived of *American Graffiti* as the retort to a double dog dare: "'If they want warm human comedy, I'll give them one, just to show that I can do it'" (Lucas, qtd. in Farber 5). After the *THX* debacle, Lucas embraced a newfound positivity, a groovy *joie de vivre* engendering tender feelings between fellow non-automatons. "'I decided I would make a more optimistic film that makes people feel positive about their fellow human beings. It's too easy to make films about Watergate...we've got

to regenerate optimism'" (Lucas, qtd. in Farber 42); "we all know what a terrible mess we have made of the world, we all know how wrong we were in Vietnam. ...what we really need is something more positive" (Lucas, qtd. in Scanlon 4). Optimism notwithstanding, Lucas was once again embarking upon his own road to Calvary, bearing a cross no less burdensome. As with directing, Lucas discovered another aspect of the filmmaking process that inspired disdain. "'I hate to write'" and "'only do it if I have to... I don't have a lot of confidence in my screen-writing ability... I don't have a natural talent for writing. When I sit down I bleed on the page, and it's just awful'" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 40, 18).

While *THX* had done nothing to buttress his authorial confidence, Lucas dutifully drafted a five-page synopsis of his cruising picture (Pollock 101). With the treatment approved by the studio, Lucas used his script fee to hire a scribe, but hated the results. With no money and no draft, he dragged himself to his desk "kicking and screaming" for three painful weeks spent churning out a preliminary draft (Kline 114). Caving to the futility, Lucas then called for backup. Lucas knew Howard Huyck from USC, and Howard and his wife, Gloria Katz, had set up shop as a screenwriting duo. Huyck and Katz fleshed out Lucas' characters, rewrote dialogue, and tweaked the narrative. Lucas was enthused: "'(The characters) were cardboard cutouts in my script, nonpeople... Bill and Gloria made it one hundred percent better with a combination of wit, charm, snappy one-liners, and punched-up characters'" (qtd. in Pollock 103, 105); "'(they) wrote all the scenes that I couldn't find my way to write...they added a lot more humor and fantasy to it, and improved it a great deal'" (qtd. in Kline 40-1). Structurally, however, the story was still what Lucas had originally conceived: "'The scenes are mine; the dialogue is theirs'" (qtd. in Kline 18).

As the *Graffiti* neared production, Gary Kurtz, whom Lucas had met during post-production on *THX*, was brought on board as producer (Kline 69). Kurtz proved a second kindred spirit and collaborator in Coppola's stead. Lucas recognized in Kurtz the tenacity and bullheadedness – and *by-your-bootstraps*

guerilla-style methodology – that Lucas saw as the key to his success thus far. According to Kurtz, he and

Lucas "'both came up in the school of doing everything ourselves'" (qtd. in Jenkins 26). With cameras

rolling, Lucas once again "displayed the same technical ability" evinced by *THX,* but the taxing nighttime-

only shoot quickly devolved into another ordeal. Ned Tanen, the Universal Studios executive in charge of the

picture, asked his beleaguered protégé, "'(y)ou really don't like doing this, do you?'" Lucas: "'I'll finish it,

but I don't ever want to have to go through this again.'" As with *THX*, the actual directing would take place

*post facto*. "'I'm really gonna direct it in the editing room. That's when I'm going to make my choices'" (qtd.

in Pollock 115, 116, 128).

A fraught shoot segued into a contentious post-production period. Despite ecstatic audience test

screenings, the Universal brass, Tanen foremost among them, hated the movie and assumed Lucas and

Coppola (who had lent the seal of his his post-*Godfather* prestige to help usher *Graffiti* to production) were

stacking the houses. After a post-screening showdown, Tanen forced Lucas to cut five minutes from the film.

Lucas was infuriated. Sure, some scenes might be self-indulgent, but shouldn't a filmmaker be granted a

certain degree of latitude? "'Five minutes in a movie is not going to make a difference,'" Lucas fulminated.

"'It was nothing more than an exercise in authority'" (qtd. in Kline 91); the *THX* nightmare redux.

Lucas saw this loss of control as a "moral issue" (Kline 77). Studio executives were nothing more

than "'agents and lawyers with no idea of dramatic flow,'" "'used-car dealers'" who "'knew nothing about

making movies.'" These stuffed shirts were a far cry from the "'independent entrepreneurs'" who had built

empires with spit and sealing wax, men of vision with whom Lucas identified (qtd. in Kline 77; Farber 9;

Jenkins 34). Katz contends that to Lucas' mind, "'the suits had no business other than writing the checks. He

didn't want to hear what they said, he didn't respect them... The idea that the suits actually made a profit on

his movie was just appalling to him'" (qtd. in Biskind 237). "'You can't fight them because they've got the

money," Lucas groused. "The terrible thing about this country is that the dollar is valued above the individual'" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 6). The studios were tormenting him for their own sadistic enjoyment, and in Lucas' "morally righteous world," being "trifled with and deceived...was unpardonable" (Pollock 121).

Over time, Lucas assembled a repertoire of analogies to convey the special pain of having his pristine portraits defaced by studio hands. The proverbial painter: "'It was like bringing an audience to the Mona Lisa and asking, "Do you know why she's smiling?" "Sorry, Leonardo, you'll have to make some changes"'" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 4). The painter refuses, so the studio "'(puts) a crayon mark on my painting and (says), "Hey, don't worry about it. It's just a crayon mark."'" The similes grew increasingly grotesque: "'It's like taking your little kid and cutting off one of her fingers. "It's only a finger, it's not that big a deal," they say. But to me, it's just an arbitrary exercise of power. And it irritates me enormously'" (qtd. in Pollock 116). Lucas' then-wife Marcia saw the conflict as a matter of status, Lucas simply lacked "'the power to make people listen to him'" (qtd. in Pollock 120). Lucas swore that he would never cede full control to a studio again. He would make his movies as he saw fit, or not at all (Pollock 121).

As with *THX*, Lucas was lauded as a technical virtuoso. Unlike *THX,* this time the accolades extended beyond editing and cinematography to performances and story. Critics and audiences agreed that *Graffiti* had captured and distilled the essence of an era that had evaporated almost unnoticed. Battered and beaten by years of scandals and dolorous headlines, consensus was that the national melancholy had metastasized. With the country stuck in neutral and grinding its gears in the frustration, "*Graffiti* touched a nerve in an America that had fallen out of love with itself...it took the country back to safer, somehow happier times" (Jenkins 47).[17] While *Graffiti* was, ostensibly, about the end of the 50s ("Where Were You in '62?" read the posters), it was more appropriately a pointed appraisal of the decade that had just come to a close: the 60s. A peppy,

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[17] *Graffiti* was a monster hit – on a cost-to-revenue ratio, it is still one of the most financially successful movies ever made. Availing himself of his newfound (and, as he saw it, temporary) leverage, Lucas harassed Universal to restore the five minutes of cuts. Universal obliged.

backwards-glancing dirge for an evanescent era, the soundtrack cycling through a playlist of dusty jukebox standards, *Graffiti* isn't about remembering a specific decade so much as it is about *remembering* itself – the passage of, and moving beyond, an "age of innocence," and the concomitant inauguration of adulthood. Lucas had discovered the power of nostalgia.

Lucas found "making a positive film...exhilarating" (Jenkins 149). His mind turned to a concept he had incubating for a science fiction film, "'a movie comic-book inspired by Edgar Rice Burroughs, the *Flash Gordon* serials and *Dune*, but shot in a style inspired by old Hollywood action films'" (Lucas, qtd. in Baxter 110). An optimistic action-adventure for a younger audience.[18] Lucas now had enough sway to kick the ball downfield. He clipped out a collage "with images...from comic books and science fiction magazines" (Baxter 110) and -- on April 17th, 1973 -- desk stocked with No.2 pencils and lined paper, he "began scrawling the first tentative outlines of what would eventually become *Star Wars*." Lucas would later say "that the first knots of anxiety he felt that day stayed with him for the next ten years" (Jenkins 35).


The Original Trilogy (1974-1985)

When it comes to his hatred for the script-writing process, Lucas is uncharacteristically loquacious. "'I think I'm a *terrible* writer. The whole writing thing is something I was very bad at... I can barely spell my own name, let alone form a sentence'" (qtd. in Kline 110, emphasis in original). Lucas is self-flagellating; his testimony often assumes the tenor of a confession, as if the author seeks absolution for his storytelling sins. "'I hated script writing. I hated stories, and I hated plot, and I wanted to make visual films that had nothing to do with telling a story'" (qtd. in Kline 110); "'I don't feel I have a natural talent for it... Writing just doesn't flow in a creative surge the way other things do'" (qtd. in Kline xi); "'I disdained story and character; I didn't

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[18] The sinister version has Lucas confide in his then-wife, Marcia, that "'(e)motionally involving the audience is easy. Anybody can do it blindfolded, get a little kitten and have some guy wring its neck'" (qtd. in Biskind 235).

want anything to do with them'" (qtd. in Pollock 54). Writing was "'painful, atrocious'" (qtd. in Kline 56) and "'mentally and physically exhausting'" (qtd. in Baxter 84). Coppola, however, prevailed upon the obstinate Lucas, and cajoled him into putting pen to paper. If Lucas wanted to "make it" in the movie business, then he had to learn how to write (Baxter 84). "'So they chained me to my desk and I wrote this screenplay. Agonizing experience! It always is'" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 112).

In January, 1973, Lucas sequestered himself away in an upstairs room and faced the "personal horror" of drafting the *Journal of the Whills*, the story of "Mace Windy, a revered Jedi Bendu of Ophuchi," as told by "C.J. Thorpe, Padawaan learner of the famed Jedi" (Jenkins 51; Bouzereau viii). He issued dialogue with the torment of passing kidney stones ("'They get dragged out kicking and screaming with a lot of pain'" (Lucas, qtd. in Jenkins 52)). Scribbling longhand on "carefully selected blue-and-green lined paper," Lucas maintained a work regimen of "eight hours a day, five days a week" (Gordon 316), interspersed with afternoon research sessions devoted to "fairy tales, mythology, and social psychology." Lucas recalls "'trying to get fairy tales, myths, and religion down to a distilled state, studying the pure form to see how and why it worked'" (qtd. in Pollock 134). With too many elements but not enough plot, Lucas struggled to contort the text into coherent shapes, agonizing over "just the right ingredients, characters and storyline" (Pollock 144; Gordon 316). First he was plagued by a surfeit of characters, then a dearth; blended characters together, split them apart. The complexity of the plot oscillated (Biskind 324). Han Solo was "a huge green-skinned monster with no nose and large gills," the Force of Others was channeled through a "Kiber crystal," Anakin Starkiller was a revered general, there was a planet called Kashyyyk with three Y's. (Bouzereau viii). "'You beat your head against the wall and say, "Why can't I make this work? Why aren't I smarter? Why can't I do what everybody else can do?"'" (Lucas, qtd. in Pollock 142). He snipped off hair when flustered, was assailed by "stomach and chest pains and headaches," and when hopelessly blocked – barely able to

remember how to spell his characters' names (Biskind 324)[19] – he grew so tense that his whole body seized

up (Pollock 143, 231).

While Lucas anguished over his cosmology, the world outside his walls was crumbling. After his

obligatory shift, Lucas hit the couch to watch Walter Cronkite. "Vietnam was seldom off the screen," writes

Baxter, "and Lucas watched with morbid interest" (155). America's ill-begotten Asiatic invasion was only

one in a cavalcade of "major eruptions in American culture" (Wood 44): the assassinations of Kennedy and

King (Kline 145), "energy crises, and international terrorism" (Smith 82), inflation, Opec, labour unrest,

recessions, "New York City's declaration of bankruptcy in 1975" (Silvio and Vinci 54), Kent State, Manson,

"love-ins, prison breaks, bombings, airplane hijackings" (Biskind 21, 198), "ghetto riots" (Wright 121), and,

"part counterpoint, part consequence, the growing force and cogency of radical protest and liberation

movements – black militancy, feminism, gay liberation" (Wood 44). President Carter characterized the

cumulative effect as "'a national crisis of spirit'" (qtd. in Self 6).

Though it is difficult to gauge the extent of Lucas' political activism,[20] the Vietnam debacle likely

loomed the largest, as it represented the most direct potential hazard. As the war ballooned "from a blip on

the map somewhere in Southeast Asia to a reality that might easily claim the life of the boy next door"

(Biskind 20), the threat to young men such as Lucas became all the more immediate and omnipresent; in

terms of his life and his livelihood. If, upon graduation, Lucas landed an industry gig, the draft could easily

sweep him off to Southeast Asia (Biskind 20; Baxter 42; Pollock 59). "We had all gone to film school

because we were interested in film," Murch recalls, "but it was also this bubble of refuge from being

drafted" (Biskind 36). "(The USC group) had to grow up in a different way than other students had...because

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[19] On the commentary track for *The Empire Strikes Back*, Lucas repeatedly refers to Lando Calrissian as "Clarissian" (Lucas, *Empire* commentary, 1981).

[20] Pollock writes that "Lucas considered himself politically active in the 1960s," but tables conflicting accounts: Lucas was either "angry at the time, getting involved in all the causes," or found filmmaking so all-consuming that he "didn't want the distraction of causes, much as (he) believed in them" (qtd. in Pollock 59, 56, 94).

this was the first time we were involved in an unpopular war... it influenced the kinds of films that they did

and the seriousness with which they approached what they were doing" (Sloan, qtd. in Pollock 57). Lucas

had, furthermore, been preparing to direct *Apocalypse Now*, a project he'd conceptualized with fellow USC

alum John Milius. As the war reached a climax, rumors of ceasefire and withdrawal whet Lucas's appetite:

"the very idea of an American surrender made the story even more attractive" (Baxter 140). Coppola,

however, who had claimed the project as his own while wrangling with Warner Brothers, opted to helm the

film himself (Baxter 140).[21] Murch believes that Lucas transposed *Apocalypse Now* "'out of Vietnam, (and)

to a galaxy far away and a long long time ago'" (qtd. Baxter 141). "When I first started making the film, it

was during the Vietnam War," Lucas recalls. "Nixon was going for a third term, or trying to get the

constitution changed to go for a third term, and it got me to thinking about how democracies turn into

dictatorships" (Lucas, *Sith* commentary, 2005).[22]

Many authors argue that this fog of national despondency crippled Americans' faith in their social and

political institutions (Silvio and Vinci 30). "(T)he period sent us spinning," says Sheff, and "changed our

course forever" (Kline 151). According to Wood "(t)he obvious monstrousness of the war definitely

undermined the credibility of 'the system'... The questioning of authority spread logically to a questioning of

the entire social structure that validated it" (44). Collective self-doubt and soul-searching prompted an era of

cultural fracture and fragmentation: Vietnam had "taken hold of the American psyche," eliciting a "myth of

collective guilt," dragging the nation "incoherently into the future from a past (it) no longer found

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[21] Lucas later commented that the *Apocalypse* he had in mind "was completely different than (Coppola's). It was really more of man against machine than anything else. Technology against humanity, and then how humanity won. It was to have been quite a positive film" (qtd. in Scanlon 3).

[22] Wood considers the "impingement of Vietnam on the national consciousness" key to "understanding the development of the Hollywood cinema in the 70s" (44), and Hellmann argues that the "secret subject of the *Star Wars* trilogy is the traumatic passage of the American self-concept through the self-discovery of the Vietnam horror" (212).[22] Biskind concurs that the Original Trilogy could be read as "a distanced, but nevertheless transparent allegory of the tumultuous decade in which the director had come of age" (342). Of the 60s, Lucas told Clouzot that "'the upheaval...will completely change things...that period tarnished a lot. It poked a lot of holes in seemingly invincible facades. Culturally and psychologically, we haven't even begun to feel the impact of that'" (qtd. in Kline 151). Though Lucas often asserted that the corrupt Emperor was based on Nixon, "some of his friends suggested that it was only later, after the picture became a hit, that Lucas claimed this" (Biskind 324).

intelligible" (Hellmann 205). "Our time is marked by a yearning for wholeness," noted Turner, "and we search for completion" (141). Modernity had undermined communal mores, leading to a "morally ambiguous" *mentalité* (Lyden, *Religon* 142); a "machine world...drained of spiritual values, a world in which we feel impotent and alien" (Gordon 324). Interviewing "monomyth" Svengali Joseph Campbell, Bill Moyers asserted that "(s)ociety has provided (young people) no rituals by which they become members of the tribe, of the community," to which Campbell responded, "(w)hat we have today is a demythologized world" (Campbell and Moyers 9, 10).

Where most saw malaise, Wood perceived a rare window of opportunity. From the ashes of the incinerated system – reflected in the rise of the "incoherent" film texts of the early-to-mid 70s – arose "(t)he possibility...that the whole world might have to be recreated." "What one can attribute to Vietnam is the sudden confidence and assertiveness of (radical) movements, as if they could suddenly believe, not merely in the rightness of their causes, but in the possibility of their realization" (Wood 44). For the majority, however, what was desperately needed was comfort food; "a renewal of faith in ourselves...as good guys on the world scene, as men and women, as human beings who count" (Gordon 324). In the interim, what they got was a shark. Lucas' friend and future collaborator, Steven Spielberg, gave America a "huge boost in the arm" when *Jaws* hit theatres on June 20th, 1975 (Shone 34). *Jaws*, furthermore, opened the studios' eyes to "blockbuster" business. "'*Jaws* changed the navigational stakes for financiers, producers and distributors... The upper limits of what a movie could do changed not just incrementally, but exponentially... You brought in a lot of money very fast'" (Guber, qtd. in Shone 69).

Lucas remained shackled to his desk. After over a year of work, Lucas finished the first draft in May, 1974, and it was a mess. (Pollock 144, 145; Baxter 160). "I had some good ideas in the first versions, but no solid storyline... The difficulty was managing to find an overarching theme. I always have a lot of trouble

finding a framework with an ultra-simple base that can captivate me and captivate the public" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 56). Even in its gestative stages – as collage, outline, synopsis, and treatment – the endlessly reconfigured conceptual girders drew reactions ranging from bemusement to perplexity to disdain. Colleagues reacted to a "bewildering thirteen-page plot summary" with "polite puzzlement," latter asserting that they "couldn't understand a word of it." Universal's Tanen admitted that he "had a very tough time understanding the treatment" (Pollock 134, 135, 136).[23] The "hard to fathom" summary was passed along to one of Universal's in-house script readers, whose polite but terse report concluded that "(a)ction and adventure abounds," but "(w)e still need more from the characters" (Jenkins 38, 40). One of Lucas' peers was more blunt: "'It started off in horrible shape... It was hard to discern if there was a movie there'" (Barwood, qtd. in Hearn 83). Cinematographer Haskell Wexler – a longstanding supporter who had served as cinematographer on *Graffiti* – counseled Lucas to "'get some humanity into this thing'" (qtd. in Shone 48).

America's "crisis of confidence" spread to the spiritual. The turbulence of the times – the erosion of the "traditional moral universe" (Smith 211) and disintegration of the "family unit" (Pollock 143) – left the country morally unmoored. The falling out of favour of institutional religion precipitated a flourishing of spiritual introspection as audiences exchanged the omniscient and all-powerful for the inward and individualized (Pollock 143). "The biblical was being replaced by the mystical and fanciful as the studios sought to concoct audience-satisfying stories." Films were "freed from the constraints of the industry's formal self-censorship," leading to productions that "undertook a radical redesign of religion in which uncertainty is acknowledged and individuals are remarkably free" (Smith 219, 192).

Rigid categories of right and wrong were disintegrating in the late 20th century. Religious standards increasingly rested on private decisions rather than absolute rules. Studies of public opinion showed

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[23] After the astonishing success of *Star Wars*, a defiant Tanen (who had passed on the film) would plead, "(how) do you explain a Wookie to a board of directors?" (paraphrased in Scanlon 5).

less willingness to follow elite leadership and more emphasis on quality of life, self-esteem, and self-

realization. ...institutions seemed less reliable as a route to the divine, and individual quests for

metaphysical meaning appeared to hold intriguing possibilities. (Smith 215)

Into this breach Lucas lodged his liturgical lynchpin: the Force. Lucas' colleagues had convinced him that his

convoluted story was in dire need of a spiritual nucleus – "a rhetoric, a philosophy, a creed" – and urged him

to err on the side of simplicity (Baxter 163, 165). Lucas variously offered that the Force was intended as

outreach to inspire the nation's increasingly secularized youth ("'I put the Force into the movie in order to try

to awaken a certain kind of spirituality in young people – more a belief in God than a belief in any particular

religious system'" (Lucas, qtd. in Moyers 50)); a denuded self-help ethos ("'Ultimately the Force is the larger

mystery of the universe. And to trust your feelings is your way into that'" (Lucas, qtd. in Moyers 51)) and an

ecumenical nerve center ("'I wanted to take all religions...and come up with something they might have in

common. It worked better as I got less specific'" (Lucas, qtd. in Bouzereau 36)). The result was

"nondenominational and undogmatic...fitting everybody" (Winkler 283). Gary Kurtz, returning as Lucas'

producer, said of the then-nascent theology: "'(I thought) this would be a good way to connect with this [sic],

since it's simple enough that you don't have to go through weeks and weeks of explanation trying to get

some sense of what the religious philosophy is'" (qtd. in Baxter 166). Others were skeptical; Huyck thought

the Force was "'the worst kind of gimcrack mysticism'" (qtd. in Baxter 229). For good or ill, "May the Force

be with you" first appeared in the third draft (Bouzereau 68).

The torture continued as Lucas began to solicit opinions from his inner circle. Marcia – on whom the

brunt of "propping up Lucas' frail ego" had fallen (Baxter 167) – "was at once George's most severe critic

and his most ardent supporter... 'I'm real hard...but I only tell him what he already knows,'" (qtd. in Pollock

147), and her suggestions were "among the few Lucas took seriously" (Pollock 147). Lucas then turned to

Huyck and Katz and, reluctantly, Coppola (who would ultimately read and comment on three separate drafts) (Baxter 161; Biskind 324; Kline 57).[24] The script's defects were obvious to all, and Lucas documented critiques with a tape recorder (Pollock 147). Lucas flew to LA every few weeks to share his latest rewrite with Huyck and Katz. "'We'd say, "George, this character doesn't work,"' says Willard Huyck, 'and George would say, "Uh-huh"'" (qtd. in Baxter 158).

Such was the collaborative *esprit de corps* amongst contemporaries: "Helping one another was a deeply ingrained habit among the New Hollywood filmmakers" (Biskind 243). Actress Margot Kidder testifies that "(w)e all really rooted for each other...went to each other's screenings, read each other's screenplays, offered suggestions...it was all in the pod...very much a communal experience" (Bowser 2003). "'I think this is the only way for us to keep from writing in a total void,'" Lucas relayed in a 1977 interview. "'I respect the opinions of these friends.'" Every writer experiences the stultifying effect of losing perspective on the text. "'Often, these are obvious things...you've worked on so long you can't see them objectively anymore'" (qtd. in Kline 56, 57). With the clock running down, Lucas once more turned to Huyck and Katz for an end-zone polish (Kline 56). "The Huycks added humor and bounce to the story," reports Pollock, "particularly in the repartee between Han and Leia." Pollock claims that Lucas kept "only 15%" (157) of what Huyck and Katz wrote into the screenplay, though Lucas told an archivist that "'(t)hey did about 30% of the dialogue'" (qtd. in Bouzereau 7).

After three years of "long and painful gestation" (Baxter 11) – a period he later described as "the worst of his life" (Jenkins 52; Pollock 138) – Lucas, at long last, went into labour. Which is not to imply that production marked the end of the pregnancy, as Lucas would continue "'doing various rewrites in the evenings after the day's (shooting)'" (qtd. in Gordon 315). If Lucas considered writing the worst creative

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[24] Lucas and Coppola had, by this time, fallen out over various disputes, including *Apocalypse Now*.

phase, it may have simply slipped his mind how much he hated directing: "I forget how impossible making movies really is." When nothing worked and everything went wrong, Lucas' response was: "'Typical'" (qtd. in Pollock 168, 132). As he suffered under the stifling heat of the (mercifully singular) desert sun, his misery had company: "The actors loathed Tunisia even more than Lucas did" (Baxter 205). Adding insult to the multiplicity of injuries, his cast mocked his stilted, convoluted, pseudo-technophilic dialogue.[25] The British crew was openly antagonistic toward their laconic American liege. Lucas bristled at the frequent union breaks, and sparred with his stately, old-school cinematographer, Gil Taylor. Everyone but the perpetually oppressed Lucas thought the movie was a joke. "Nobody rated the film, or Lucas, very highly" (Baxter 209).

The actors struggled to find their stride within the legion of special effects shots, leaving many confused and disoriented (Jenkins 100). For scenes shot against a blue-screen,

> (Peter) Cushing, (Alec) Guinness, and their American colleagues would routinely be asked to direct their dialogue at thin air, marker boards, or specific spots in the distance. Spacecraft, planets, star-filled swathes of hyperspace, and other special effects would be added at a later date, Lucas assured them. (Jenkins 100)

Peter Mayhew, the actor inside Chewbacca's sweltering yak-hair suit, complained that performers were positioned like so many chess pieces. "'We were told to do this, stand there. It was difficult to realize what it all meant. ... It was a very new way of filmmaking to us. One can honestly say it was the first film to use a completely new style of moviemaking.'" Mayhew noted that Lucas tended to direct by decree: "'he wanted everything done exactly as he wanted it'" (qtd. in Jenkins 101, 102).

Design-wise, Lucas imported one of the signature aesthetic traits of the *THX* topography: the "used universe." Director Joe Johnston, whose career began as one of Lucas first-string model-makers, recalls that

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[25] Harrison Ford famously remarked, "'(y)ou can type this shit, George, but you sure can't say it'" (qtd. in Pollock 164).

"'George kept emphasizing that he wanted the ships to look like hot rods; they needed to look used, greasy, maintained with spare parts, sort of held together with wires and chewing gum'" (qtd. in Bouzereau 102). Conceptually, the look was inspired both by his grease-monkeying in Modesto, and his idol Kurosawa's concept of a "lived-in world," what the celebrated Japanese director called "immaculate reality" (Lucas, *Star Wars* commentary, 1978). "(J)unk is everywhere in *Star Wars*. It fills its characters' garages and homes, their spaceships and speeders," notes Shone. "The good guys...tinker and solder, retrofit and weld. ... As Han Solo says proudly (of the *Millenium Falcon*), 'I made a few modifications to her myself'... Everything points back...to Lucas's most formative experience – souping up his Fiat Bianchina in his garage" (54).

In order to effect an "organic" atmosphere – "'not futuristic, not designy, and not noticeable'" (Lucas qtd. in Pollock 160) – Lucas ordered his technicians to "dirty everything up" (such as adding nicks, scrapes, scuffs, and scars to his squat droid, R2-D2) and asked that costumes be "functional, not flashy" (Pollock 160). Intuiting Lucas' intent, Guinness donned his monkish robe for the first time and immediately set about rolling around in the sand. A "used universe" implies a *naturalized* universe, which had the serendipitous side-effect of solving a slew of exegetical dilemmas; Lucas' convoluted narrative was instantly streamlined.

> We're just racing through the story, not explaining anything... This is just the life these people lead. We're not explaining technology, we're not explaining philosophy. We're not explaining religion...it was a way of not having to tell the audience everything. Whether they get it or not is immaterial to the story. (Kurtz, qtd. in Baxter 166) [26]

Baxter observes that by trimming the superfluous fat, "Lucas and Kurtz were obeying one of the oldest conventions of the epic: to commence *in media res*" (166). The key, thought Lucas, was

> taking hold of what's most realistic and possible inside the terms set by the fiction. ...it must be as

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[26] Lyden notes that fantastical heroes "show their virtue by battling and conquering inexplicable ('magical') powers, and *an attempt to explain the origin of those powers is unnecessary*; the world is simply viewed as a place where good and evil powers struggle" (*Religion* 202, emphasis mine).

*credible* as possible. The film has to make us believe it really existed... The success of the imaginary,

it's to make something totally fabricated seem *real*. ... *That everything be credible and totally*

*fantastic at the same time.* (Kline 58, emphasis in original)

As if on cue, nearly everyone succumbed to dysentery, and makeup/costume/creature designer Stuart

Freeborn contracted pneumonia (Jenkins 97, 98). David Prowse, the physical performer inside Vader's outfit,

remembers Lucas as "forever ill" (Jenkins 104). Lucas was diagnosed with "hypertension and exhaustion"

(Pollock 173), and confined to the hospital. "'I've never seen him so depressed,'" Katz recalls. "'So much of

what George visualized he was not able to achieve. He was in a state of constant frustration'" (qtd. in Baxter

207). "'That's when I really confirmed to myself I was going to change,'" Lucas asserted, "'that I wasn't

going to make more films'" (qtd. in Pollock 173).

"He was sort of a control freak," says Huyck, "and directing is out of control" (Bowser 2003).  Kurtz

agrees that Lucas exhausted himself "'worrying about all the details. He was afraid that if he let anything go

it wouldn't be right'" (qtd. in Jenkins 118). *Star Wars* may have been the first time Lucas truly saw

circumstances spiraling beyond his fastidious control. If details were razor blades then *Star Wars* was death

by a thousand cuts, and Lucas fixated on every single edge (Pollock 169). Upon his release from the hospital,

a revitalized Lucas tapped into his inner *go-for-broke* USC student filmmaker, he tore through the schedule

"at breakneck speed." Observers recall the startling vision of "the sweaty, bearded figure furiously pedaling

his bicycle as he raced from one sound stage to the next" (Jenkins 118). With his movie in the can, Lucas,

"(p)hysically exhausted...never wanted to sit in the director's chair again," and "resolved that *Star Wars*

would be the last film he directed" (Baxter 241). The toll the process took on him was too much to bear. A

now-familiar refrain, Lucas called the shoot "'one of the worst periods of my life'" (qtd. in Baxter 216).

As Lucas was leading his tribe through one desert, back in another (i.e., California), what was to

become the world's premiere special effects house *nonpareil* was being assembled piecemeal out of a warehouse by a rag-tag team of bohemians. Lucas had long been consumed by the phantasmagoria playing out in his mind: "'I have an overwhelming drive to get that great shot of the two spaceships, one firing at the other as they dive through the space fortress. By God I want to see it. ... I won't rest until I see it on the screen'" (qtd. in Farber 9). Lucas and Kurtz believed that their epic would fly or fall on the strength of the realization of these images (Jenkins 62), and had canvassed the "existing remnants" of the industrial effects houses. Lucas would describe his cherished sequences, and be duly informed that the technology simply didn't exist (Kline 158).

Pioneered by French filmmaker George Méliès (Nagl and Clayton 264), the science fiction film had been "a lively genre in the 1950s but had faded somewhat in the '60s and early '70s" (Rider 33). By 1975, sci-fi lay "dead in the water," and concomitant with the decline, special effects practitioners had scattered (Baxter 169). If he hired one of the few extant houses staffed with industry veterans, Lucas feared he would be forced to cede too much control. His new creed was writ in binary code: "'either you do it yourself, or you don't get a say'" (qtd. in Kline 50). Thus, "(i)f there were no effects facilities in Hollywood willing or able to deliver the footage they wanted they would build one themselves – from scratch" (Baxter 182).

"From scratch" became a mantra at Industrial Light and Magic, as Lucas christened his warehouse. "'We had to build rooms, buy equipment, make equipment, because the equipment that made that film didn't exist'" (Nelson, qtd. in Biskind 326). The only recent sci-fi film of any note had been Kubrik's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Kurtz tracked down and hired a touted effects assistant and camera specialist from *2001,* John Dykstra (Pollock 154). ILM was soon a homing beacon for a generation of disaffected effects hobbyists, nursed at the teat of stop-motion virtuoso Ray Harryhausen. "Dykstra's philosophy was to create a community of like-minded problem-solver artists" (Jenkins 84), and as word spread, an "extraordinary group

of sci-fi freaks, computer nerds, and technobrats" (Pollock 171); "artists and technicians, new model-builders and make up wizards" (Baxter 170); "sculptors and sci-fi enthusiasts" (Shone 46), congregated at the church of ILM with *Star Wars* as their object of worship; a "labor of love, fueled by communal energy, creative electricity, and Lucas's money" (Pollock 171). Joe Johnston recalls no stodgy industry stalwarts, but a fraternity brimful with "artists, machinists, and so on. They didn't know what they were doing. I don't think that I knew what I was doing half the time" (qtd. in Hearn 91). If this rogues gallery of neophyte effects practitioners was young and lacked experience, then all the better to control them. Every flock needs a shepherd, and Lucas held the crook.

The "breakthrough" Lucas required, and Dykstra designed and built (from scratch) was a "motion control camera." The "Dykstraflex" could be controlled via computer allowing its movements – pans and tilts, as well as turns, swivels, tracks, and dollies (Shone 47) – to be replicated *ad infinitum*, delivering precision-matched shots then composited in layers (Biskind 326). The resulting illusion was credulous movement across multiple vectors – several model spacecraft traveling independent but synchronized trajectories – a complexity of effects shot never before accomplished in a feature film (Pollock 171). "After six months of around-the-clock work, ILM had its first Dykstraflex camera" (Pollock 172), "an impressive computer-controlled, crane-mounted camera, able to make the complex, corkscrew movements Lucas had asked for" (Jenkins 122).

ILM didn't stop there. Availing themselves of "all the technological and cinematic innovations of the past thirty years" (Gordon 315), the team retrofitted and transmogrified (from scratch) "optical cameras (and) moviolas" (Scanlon 14), and hard-wired a CGI progenitor – "vector graphic effects" – that prefigured the future of the entire industry. Lucas edited assemblages of aerial dogfighting clips from World War II films to demonstrate how he envisioned spaceship skirmishes – a prototype for now-ubiquitous "animatics"

(Muren qtd. in Lucas, commentary track, *Star Wars* 1978).[27] In other respects, ILM simply retrofitted

preexisting techniques: holes punched in black plexiglass for a field of stars; pieces pilfered from assorted

model kits "jumbled together in new and arresting configurations" (Baxter 215). These bricolage spacecraft

featured "astonishing detail work" such as motorized miniature laser cannons that could "swivel and tilt by

remote control." The soon-to-be-revered lightsabers were "four-sided blades coated with reflective aluminum

attached to a small motor" (Pollock 172). "'(Model-maker) Rick (Baker) just threw together a shop, taken

from a bunch of things that he already had sitting on his shelf'" (Tippet, qtd. in Baxter 220).[28]

Through a former USC professor, Kurtz recruited sound designer Ben Burtt,[29] who set about

composing multi-layered ambient soundscapes, and polyphonic natural and mechanized "languages."

Essential to the believability of each "voice" is what Burtt deems "worldizing" – "that is, taking the sounds

and playing them back and re-recording them in real places where you get a sense of the reflections of sound

in the environment." Vietnam surfaced as an inspiration for merging aural and visual "used universe"

topographies: "The idea must have come from...actual documentary sounds of helicopter fights, things in

Vietnam, things that the public was hearing over the years, rather than having pristine studio recordings

where everything was clean and absolutely intelligible" (Burtt qtd. in Lucas, *Star Wars* commentary, 1977).

The *Star Wars maravaglia* – an unprecedented (at the time) "365 separate shots" – were a turning

point in the history of the science fiction genre, setting a standard "against which all future space-fiction

films (would) be judged" (Scanlon 3). When Lucas returned from principal photography, however, he was

aghast to discover a "deteriorating situation" at ILM." Dykstra, "still experimenting with new camera

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[27] "Lucas...left Johnston with a ten-minute black-and-white sequence of aerial battles, which he had constructed from war movies like *Battle of Britain* and *The Bridges of Toko-Ri* ... Lucas essentially preshot and edited the climactic sequence of *Star Wars* months before he began filming the movie" (Pollock 172).

[28] "When I was very young I loved make-believe. But it was the kind of make-believe that used all the technological toys I could come by, like model airplanes and cars" (Lucas, qtd. in Rider 34).

[29] "Kurtz...called Ken Mura, Lucas's former sound instructor at USC. He asked if there were any sound geniuses at USC, and it turned out one was just graduating" (Pollock 178).

techniques," had only churned out three usable shots (Pollock 169). "'It was terrible. I knew it wasn't going to work... We couldn't use any of it'" (Lucas, qtd. in Pollock 173). Effects imply "a gap between intention and execution, between conception and realization" (Kline 52), but Lucas had no patience for results that fell short of expectations.[30] His instinct to micromanage was soon manifest. "George looked upon the people that he hired as people to facilitate what he wanted. He did not think of them interpreting things in a creative way" (Kurtz, qtd. in Jenkins 104).

In an interview conducted shortly after the release of *Star Wars,* Lucas struck a conciliatory tone:

Well, we weren't so much at odds as much as I was more interested in the shots. I didn't care how we got the shots...we had difficulty with what was actually technically possible with the time laid out to accomplish it... These are problems that have never really been coped with before. (Scanlon 14)

In actuality, Lucas was incensed. His righteous "Old Testament" indignation reared its head when he passed over the effects crew in distributing profit points and bonuses,[31] a move the ILM staff saw as obvious and iniquitous punishment for their perceived apostasy (Biskind 340). Dykstra and his followers had lost the battle of button-down vs. button-up. After Dykstra's ouster, Lucas assumed the reins at ILM, and any staff whose loyalties lay with their former leader knew where to find the door (Jenkins 124). Still, Lucas and Dykstra had broken new ground, crafting and deploying the next generation of special effects equipment and techniques. "'All the prototype stuff is done now,'" Lucas reported, "'everything is there. And now people will start building on it'" (qtd. in Hearn 8).

Lucas occasionally expressed concern that the effects had usurped the story: "we spent a year experimenting with new cameras and various apparatus [sic], and it's like the film became a test for them" (Kline 61). He was especially vocal regarding how far short the finished film had fallen of his

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[30] "George had what he wanted in his brain…he had this fabulous picture of the end effect in his mind. The problem was that none of us knew what that was" (Wayne, qtd. in Jenkins 102).

[31] Pollock reports that Lucas gave bonuses even to his janitors (222).

"vision." "'The fact is that we didn't have the money...and the key to special effects is time and money. I had to cut corners like crazy. I cut scenes left and right. And I cut out over one hundred special effects shots. The film is about 25% of what I wanted it to be'" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 82). The 25% figure would be revised upward. In 1999, Lucas told Charlie Rose that, in retrospect, "it was probably 75% of what I wanted it to be, but it felt, emotionally, like it was only 25%" (Rose, *Lucas*). Lucas was reluctant to reconcile the script as conceived and the movie as shot: "'The script is what you've dreamed up – this is what it should be. The film is what you end up with'" (qtd. in Pollock 138).[32] His contrite, self-effacing posture, however, came packaged with suggestions of shared blame: "I made the movie I wanted to make. It is not as good by a long shot as it should have been. I take half the responsibility myself and the other half is some of the unfortunate decisions I made in hiring people. I could have written a better script...I could have directed it better" (qtd. in Scanlon 7).[33] As per the groundbreaking special effects, Lucas was unequivocal: "'I can see nothing but seams'" (qtd. in Scanlon 8).

To say that *Star Wars* struck a chord with the zeitgeist is to do a disservice to volume, to vibration, to the elicitation of sound itself. *Star Wars* erupted into the public sphere in a cacophonous, megawatt wall of sound that has yet to dissipate. Initially, however, *Star Wars* was not an easy sell to to the curators of America's movie houses. As with the studios, theatre owners were "leery of science-fiction films" (Pollock 184), and considered *Star Wars* "barely worth releasing at all." Financier and distributor 20th Century Fox secured bookings at only forty theatres, and no cinema in Hollywood proper would screen it (Jenkins 145, 146).[34] If Fox was deferential, it was likely because executives were convinced they had a giant turkey on their hands. Early screenings had been notoriously bad, and portentous rumors were circulating concerning

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[32] Later, Lucas would acknowledge "'that a script and a movie are two different things'" (qtd. in Bouzereau 319).

[33] Tanen stated that what fascinates him about Lucas is "'the fact that *Star Wars* is the biggest hit ever made and that he doesn't think it is very good'" (qtd. in Kline 86).

[34] "Fox received (advance booking fees) of around $1.5 million, a fraction of the normal $10 million a major movie could expect" (Jenkins 146).

the magnitude of the disaster. "(T)he directors, captains of industry and commerce drawn from boardrooms across America, thought it was simply a catastrophe" (Jenkins 149). Needless to say, Fox's marketing efforts were apathetic. Kurtz, however, had been tirelessly tilling the soil, diligently visiting science fiction and comic book conventions (at the time regarded as obscure sub-culture gatherings) to drum up interest.[35]

As *Star Wars* started smashing records, Kurtz was demure ("'(t)here was so little competition that summer'" (qtd. in Jenkins 175)), Marcia was "astonished" (Pollock 186), and Lucas, though publicly dismissive ("'(i)t just has to do with people happening to like dumb movies'" (qtd. in Pollock 183)) was personally flabbergasted. With a popular culture phenomenon unfolding around him – and he himself at the epicenter – Lucas credited luck and being one with the *hoi polloi*: "'Whatever talent I have is...being in tune with a mass sensibility'" (qtd. in Pollock 227); "'(t)he fact that my particular talent connects on a level that a lot of people can relate to is just luck'" (qtd. in Kline 152). Reviews ranged from dismissive to effusive, with egalitarian critics conceding that, at the very least, Lucas possessed a common touch: "He is simply one of the lucky ones...whose vision, however lightweight, coincides with the inner needs and unspoken desires of his customers" (Kline 138).

If Lucas was lucky, it was that he and Spielberg were to be the primary benefactors of a lucrative new demographic: a "twelve-to-twenty-five-year-old audience...raised on comic books and television," who enthused over "sensational stories and gaudy special effects" (Baxter 67) was elbowing its way to the front of the queue.[36] By 1973, nearly 75% of box office receipts came from this coveted bracket (Smith 219). *Star Wars*, however, both fell flush with *and* bucked the trend, defying demographic delimitations. Lucas seemed genuinely surprised that as many adults attended screenings as children; "'I thought it was primarily for kids

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[35] The 'round-the-block lineups were there "'because Gary...went to a sci-fi convention every goddamn weekend'" (J. Friedkin, qtd. in Jenkins 159).

[36] A sneering *Variety* contributor would submit that "(w)hen the causes of the decline of Western civilization are finally writ... Hollywood will surely have to answer why it turned one of man's most significant art forms over the the gratification of high-schoolers" (Shone 155).

and families'" (qtd. in Pollock 186).[37] Biskind credits Lucas with recognizing that "Hollywood was ignoring a big part of its potential audience, one that was tiring of the steady diet of sex, violence, and pessimism doled out by the New Hollywood, and was nostalgic for the upbeat values of the Old Hollywood" (235). For mainstream audiences, aspiring cinéastes, and neophyte filmmakers alike, *Star Wars* "'was the movie we had all been waiting to see. It was the movie we had hoped somebody was gonna make. It's the movie we'd have loved to make ourselves'" (Davison, qtd. in Baxter 241).

Business did not continue apace, it *grew.* As ever-longer lines threaded through city blocks nation-wide, *Star Wars* "made the quantum leap from trade paper headline to national news story" (Jenkins 162). References were soon widely insinuated into the "cultural vocabulary," and the press diverted from gushing over the film to gushing over the gushing over the film. "There were nightly reports on the network news programs, and newspapers and magazines were filled with stories" (Pollock 186). Kurtz claimed that theatre owners were forced to eject customers from their seats to make space for new patrons (Jenkins 153). As *Star Wars* dilated into "a celebration, a social affair, a collective dream" (Jenkins 167), even those, *especially* those, who had worked on the film were stunned. This is partly attributable to the tunnel vision symptomatic of being one cog in a large machine, but moreover because *Star Wars* didn't cohere until the moment before it hit the screen. The giddy performances, the inventive editing, the razzle-dazzle (and mercifully complete) effects – concurrently quaint *and* startlingly new – and John William's swooning and bombastic score all somehow *congealed.* Every independent element synthesized into a transcendent, triumphant gestalt so much more than the sum of its parts. "George is the visionary," remarked one ILM model-maker. "It was all in George's head, how it was going to come together...we were just shocked" (Ralston, qtd. in Shone 51). Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, who were to soon to shellac the *Star Wars* mythos, framed these events in

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[37] Browne descries an Oz behind the curtain: "Many of the hits that emerged as blockbusters or high concept successes in the 1970s and 1980s stuck closely to genre conventions, in part to facilitate the strategy of marketing films to children as something new but selling those same films to parents as nostalgia" (228).

grandiloquent terms: "(E)very generation someone comes along to inspire the imagination for the journey each of us takes," said Moyers. "(W)hen a fortunate rhythm has been struck by the artist," Campbell confirms, "you experience a radiance. ... That is the epiphany" (Campbell and Moyers, 177, 277).

As it turned out, epiphanies sprang from the wallet as well as the soul. Come August, nearly three months after the "biggest opening in history," *Star Wars* bolted through the $100 million ribbon "faster than any film in Hollywood's eighty-year history" (Jenkins 249, 175; Pollock 186). Cold hard cash told only one side of the statistical story: "(5%) of those who saw the film watched it at least twice...(and) weekly audiences in America exceeded 20 million people for the first time since 1963" (Jenkins 167). Owing "more to the box-office performance of *Star Wars* than to any other event" (Rider 33), the ailing science fiction genre was revivified. The exiled Dykstra found a home at Universal's *Battlestar Galactica*, and *Star Trek* was taken down from the shelf and thoroughly dusted off (Jenkins 185, 186).

At a time of shifting centers of religious gravity, the Force filled a "vacuum in meaning" for moviegoers yearning for mysticism to call their own (Baxter 224).[38] Cinematic congregations craved messiahs who prevailed through "mastering their feelings" (Smith 223), and the Force spoke to their communal desire to shed "sheer reverence for divine power" (as in the biblical epics of DeMille) and adopt "cinematic avatars" that "exalted the human spirit over inhuman inventions" (Smith 200-201), thus promoting a "cosmic confidence in reality as governed by a higher power in which we can all share" (Lyden, *Commend* 7). This "energy field created by all living things," writes Lawler, is "our own energy, infinitely magnified for the one who knows how to connect consciously with all living things" (Kapell and Lawrence 153). "What was an interesting fusion of Eastern religion and mythic structure by Lucas," writes Wetmore, Jr., "may become something of a genuine philosophy or life path, if not a real religion" (79).

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[38] Baxter notes that "(t)ongue in cheek, Coppola would suggest to Lucas that he launch a religion based on *Star Wars* and settle down like (founder of Scientology L. Ron) Hubbard to bask in his godhood" (244).

As it served as a salve for spiritual sores, so too did *Star Wars* become a "balm for the bruised

national ego" (Smith 200) in exorcising the ghosts of Vietnam. Hollywood had long been one barometer of

societal anxiety: "in the 50s, with the cold war and the fear of Communist infiltration, everyone saw hostile

flying saucers, and Hollywood duly produced movies about them; at a period when...we need reassurance,

Hollywood produces *nice* extraterrestrials" (*à la E.T.*) (Wood 160). The films of the 60s and 70s were

suffused not only with social, political, and economic anxieties, but tensions within generic rubrics. "(T)he

intrusion of social tremors into cinematic representations" had "(rendered) traditional genre icons

unsatisfying and incomplete" (Browne 216). Movies had become a masochistic affair, a surrender to

"(h)elplessness, dread, cynicism, and random cruelty," and morality was of a savage, Darwinian strain:

"Victory is beyond us... Survival is the most we can expect. ... Today, movies say that the system is corrupt,

that the whole thing stinks...it's hardly surprising that people go out of the theatres drained, numbly

convinced that...nothing can be done" (Jenkins 166). Biskind agrees that audiences were "exhausted by the

Sturm und Drang of the '60s, tired of being actors on a historical stage" (341). Once "(t)he pain of Vietnam

had finally come home" (Jenkins 166), and filtered into the collective unconscious by way of the culture, "the

most optimistic nation on earth" (Jenkins 166) found itself the global village's preeminent cynic.

Along comes *Star Wars* to sell sure-fire relief for the American identity crisis, perfectly calibrated to

capitalize on a market hungry for "the recognizable clash of good and evil...to be reminded of idealism, to

see a romance based upon selflessness rather than selfishness" (Campbell and Moyers 177). *Star Wars* gave

voice to "our deepest longings...our hopes about the future of our society and of ourselves" (Gordon 325),

and was both "an expression of, and an attempt to imaginarily resolve, the contradictions evoked by this time

of historical transition" (Silvio and Vinci 56). Here was the fortifying "cultural tonic" (Geraghty 197) the

country thirsted for, the proverbial spinach to inflate its sagging biceps: "virtual patriotism...pomp without

the circumstance – a chance for the country's pent-up triumphalism to play out in the harmless vacuum of space" (Shone 56). An "optimistic, Norman Rockwellish vision of the future" (Lev 34) – grandpa on the veranda gumming an ice-cold glass of lemonade and dispensing "timeless wisdom" (Geraghty 197); wistful, genteel counsel to "return to heroism and traditional morality" (Lev 36). For others, *Star Wars* would resonate much deeper: a multivalent prelapsarian fever-dream probing the fault-lines of the (irreparably?) damaged national ego. American citizens wandering the ruins of "a fallen mythic landscape" saw an oasis – "a comforting and representationally stable version of our own contemporary moment" (Silvio and Vinci 63) – whereby they could reconceive of and reclaim their "character and destiny" by reasserting control over the "national consciousness" (Hellmann 208). *Star Wars* was a mythio-semiotic bridge that "(affirmed) continuity in an era of rupture and change" (Browne 215). For Hellmann, *Star Wars* was

> the first significant step in moving beyond the purgation of our old myths to the synthesizing of an energizing new myth of America, a dream in which Americans may secretly – even to themselves – re-experience the horror of their Vietnam self-discovery and emerge from it not only regenerated but transfigured. (208)

"(M)etaphorical cure for America's post-Vietnam trauma," "fairy-tale projection of how Americans view the world and their own role in it," and reaffirmation of neo-manifest destiny (an expression of "this country's most cherished conceptions of itself...endorsing American exceptionalism in all its ahistorical innocence and sense of virtuous, sanctified mission" (Kenny 170, 171)) in one coruscating package, Lucas gave a despondent nation a firm, filmic pat on the back. America may have spent the last twenty-odd years gouging out its own eyes, but *Star Wars* was an invitation "for all of us hollow-eyed Oedipuses (to) go back and enjoy the fun of our pre-guilt stage" (Gordon 325). Pre-guilt *and* pre-pubescent. Said Spielberg, "*Star Wars* was a seminal moment when the entire industry changed...it's when the world recognized the value of childhood"

(Jenkins 265).

Every silver lining, however, has a cloud. One person's innocence is another's infantilization, and Wood is not alone in consternation over the implications of the sheer scale of *Star Wars'* success, a success he considered "only comprehensible when one assumes a widespread *desire* for regression to infantilism, a populace who wants to be constructed as mock children. Crucial here…is the urge to evade responsibility – responsibility for actions, decisions, thought, responsibility for changing things" (Wood 147, emphasis in original). Wood perceives Lucas' escapism as a flight from "an adult world perceived as irredeemably corrupt, or at least bewilderingly problematic" (156). Browne concluded that "incoherent" 70s-era film texts were a healthy mimetic exploration of modern entropy – splintering genres mirroring a frayed society – and saw *Star Wars* as a retrograde "renewal of genre conventions" that bespoke the "uncertainty and self-doubt of a society unable to face the political and social inequalities generated by the new economic realities of deindustrialization and economic restructuring" (Browne 231).

As with *Graffiti*, Lucas had tapped a lucrative vein, but where *Graffiti*'s nostalgia is rooted in a desire to remember, the *Star Wars* breed stemmed from the need to forget; a delving not into the "actual" past – an era worth revisiting – but into an abstracted inversion of events best left buried. In this alternate reality, the mighty American military and "primitive" Viet Cong trade places as the rag-tag team of technologically inferior (and "conspicuously American" (Wood 150)) rebels combat the faceless, ultra-mechanized, sleek and sophisticated Empire. Nostalgia is a form of self-imposed ignorance; a (consciously?) false comparison between the experience of "now" and the memory of "then." *Star Wars* collapses the "perennial American distrust of politics" (i.e., "empire") and desire "for an unconditioned, unalloyed past" (Browne 296) into a "mythic memory of its pre-Vietnam time" (Hellmann 215). The judicious and strategic deployment of nostalgia in *Star Wars* is an act of imperial amnesia, of conscience-laundering, a reversion to a pre-(/pro-?)

colonial mindset, and invitation to both forget the war and win it. As mass-market postmodern myth, *Star Wars* represents "a milestone in the process of cultural forgetfulness by which damaged goods become undamaged – that is, innocuous – again" (Kenny 164). "Myth," writes Barthes, "does not deny things...it purifies them, it makes them innocent" (169). Furthermore, myth "abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics...it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth...a blissful clarity" (Barthes 170). The drug-averse Lucas had created a potent narcotic; one hit off the *Star Wars* bong broadened spacial perception *and* induced welcome short-term memory loss. Thus, the most enduring interrelationship between *Star Wars* and Vietnam was both the expurgation and transubstantiation of that war from/in the public consciousness. *Star Wars* sandblasted the patina of doubt and discontent off of the contemporary *mentalité,* allowing nationalistic pride to beam like newly burnished brass. Here was the end of the 70s and its attendant *ennui*, that rare window unambiguously (if ceremoniously) shuttering.[39] "(W)e can already look back to Hollywood in the 70s as the period when the dominant ideology *almost* disintegrated" (Wood 62, emphasis in original).

Lucas, as indicated earlier, was confused. "'I'm sort of baffled by the (success of the) movie'" (qtd. in Kline 104). His bafflement, however, did not preclude wielding his newfound success as a cudgel; the studios that had wronged him in the past were now due for their comeuppance. "'I got screwed in the beginning and now I'm able to do it to them'" (qtd. in Biskind 341). Lucas proposed "stingingly punitive" terms to Fox (in order to secure the sequel).  Now was the time to extract his pound of flesh. "'I do not forgive. And I do not forget'" (qtd. in Pollock 247). He did not forget the cuts inflicted upon *THX* and *Graffiti*, nor Fox "hounding him at every step of making *Star Wars*" (Pollock 247).

The embers of Lucas' enmity toward the Hollywood system and studio regime continued to smolder,

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[39] "So maybe the seventies are over and the first movie of the 1980s has begun" (Jenkins 166).

and interviews often sparked conflagrations. "Lucas rehashes over and over the anecdotes of how studio types violated him by slightly trimming parts of both (*THX* and *Graffiti*) against his wishes" (Kline xiii). After Warner Brothers trimmed *THX*, Lucas "held a grudge for ten years." Subsequent to "cutting the fingers off" *Graffiti*, Universal tried to make amends, but Lucas remained recalcitrant: "'I was really angry and I remain angry to this day'" (qtd. in Kline 95).[40] As is often the case with Lucas, it all seemingly comes down to control: "'I didn't want other people telling me how to cut a film. I wanted to decide. I really wanted to be responsible for what was being said in a movie'" (qtd. in Baxter 66). The system, Lucas had concluded, was designed to "tear you down and destroy everything you're doing and push it off to the side" (Rose, *Lucas*). His contempt crystallized into an obsessive "insistence on protecting his films against any interference in the cutting room," and refuge in self-imposed exile.

Whether or not the hyperbolic heights of Lucas' animus were warranted, that the studios were long overdue for a shakeup was obvious to all. The two preceding decades had seen a precipitous decline in attendance. "In 1946, 90 million Americans attended the movies each week. That figure dropped to 47 million per week in 1956, and by 1967 attendance fell to a mere 17.8 million." In the 1960s, the studios "recorded their worst financial losses in history" (Berliner 107). The anachronistic "old guard" had sat idle while the generational plates drifted into new tectonic configurations, only to find themselves stranded, clueless as to where the continents now lay. "'(T)he vast baby boom audience...was coming of age in the '60s, (and) was rapidly becoming radicalized and disaffected from its elders,'" Tanen recalls. "'It was frightening. These were aging gentlemen who did not remotely understand where their audience had gone. They looked at (*Easy Rider*) and they said, "What in the hell is this?"'" (qtd. in Biskind 20, 125). Having run off the cliff, Hollywood hit bottom in 1971, when "a paltry 15.8 million people passed through the turnstiles"

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[40] In order to bid on future projects, such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Lucas demanded, and received, an apology from Ned Tanen and Universal, then gave *Raiders* to Paramount.

– the nadir of Hollywood's "terminal slump" (Jenkins 43). Lucas pronounced the industry dead already: "From my point of view, the film industry died in 1965" (Kline 136). One could hear the rancor of the "New Hollywood" auteur metastasizing: "'What is Hollywood? An antiquated, out-of-date distribution apparatus, a monopoly, a system designed to exploit the filmmaker'" (qtd in Kline 144). The studios, Fox among them, cried out for a saviour. Ironically, it was the TV generation that heeded the call (Jenkins 49).

To the mind of the movie brat, perhaps, it was less that they rode in to rescue Hollywood than to lay siege to the last few crumbling edifices of a sacked city before razing the wreckage to erect a gleaming new citadel. For these young Turks sallying forth from fledgling film schools across the country, the studios were the enemy (Biskind 200). While Lucas sounded the clarion call – "'What we're striving for is total freedom'" (qtd. in Kline 7) – "freedom," as for any intervening army, meant not just liberation or occupation, "but a form of revenge" (Pollock 247).

Despite the success of *Graffiti*, Fox considered *Star Wars* a risky venture. The budget was modest, but according to Alan Ladd, Jr. – the Fox executive who ushered *Star Wars* through the hostile studio gauntlet – not only was sci-fi anathema to the suits ("Market research said you just didn't do films like that" (Ladd, qtd. in Jenkins 72)), but Fox itself was in dire financial straits, teetering on the brink of insolvency. It was intimated to Lucas that "the future of Fox hinged" on the fate of his film (Pollock 158). Internal panic escalated when Fox laid eyes on a rough assemblage. "'(Fox) didn't understand the movie at all'" (Lipincott, qtd. in Baxter 231). The bad blood surrounding *Star Wars* coursed through Hollywood's arteries, and the movie was soon "an object of scandal and concern" (Baxter 211). If the film turned out to be the calamity now expected, Fox itself would "be on the block" (Jenkins 150).[41]

Thus, *Star Wars* was not only a windfall, but a *minute-to-midnight* reprieve. The *Wall Street Journal*

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[41] DeMille once remarked that "he heard predictions of disaster every time he made a biblical movie because the devout would find it irreverent and the indifferent would dislike a film in which 'sanctimonious characters would walk around in long robes'" (Smith 198).

calculated that if *Star Wars* lived up to expectations "some analysts believe it could provide the financial

ingredients for the possible transformation of Fox into an entertainment conglomerate like MCA Inc. or

Warner Communications" (Jenkins 164). *Star Wars* marked "the beginning of a lasting renaissance in

filmgoing," and heralded a long-overdue changing of the guard. "Business was never the same after

that" (Jenkins 167, 168). As if to chisel an epigraph onto "Old Hollywood's" tombstone, a senior Fox exec

emerged from a *Star Wars* screening bewildered: "'I don't understand it. There's no stars, there's no love

story, what are they clapping at?'" (qtd. in Baxter 243). Writing in 1983, one author mused that the "ultimate

irony" would be if Lucas, "who argues fiercely for Hollywood's obsolescence, should be the mogul to

replace it" (Kline 144).

To the unanimous shock of all involved, *Star Wars* received ten Academy Award nominations, and

won five, with Marcia and her co-editors taking home statuettes. (Pollock 187, 188).[42] Lucas thumbed his

nose at the ceremony, dismissing the spectacle as "offensive and meaningless...Hollywood pageantry –

nothing to do with filmmaking, everything to do with cold-eyed commerce" (Jenkins 183). Moreover, it was

by now abundantly clear who the real breakout star of *Star Wars* was: George Lucas himself.

Marcia took umbrage at the suggestion that her husband, the auteur filmmaker, "created every aspect

of his films" (Baxter 167). If Lucas is now considered singular cosmologist and reigning deity, it is partly

because auteur theory – "(presupposing) a unity of meaning and of authorial style and theme" (Self 3) – had

taken root in public perception of how films are authored; sole credit was not simply claimed by Lucas, but

also granted to him. "The success of the auteur theory," writes Self, "is everywhere apparent – in the public

media, in the university classroom, in academic publishing, in film festival retrospectives, (and) in

professional film conferences" (3). That a director is not a poet seems obvious – even the most low-fi films

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[42] The film won for original score, film editing, art/set decoration, costume design, visual effects, sound, and special achievement award for sound effects, and was nominated for best picture, director, screenplay, and supporting actor (Guiness) (Kline xviii).

are "multiauthored," a "mix of many crafts" contributed by a "plurality of producers" (Self 4).[43] Auteurism,

in one regard, is an attempt to avoid atomizing the amalgam; if successfully composited, the bounded whole

is both total and "impossible to totalize" (Suleiman, qtd. in Self 3); both nucleus *and* nexus. A film is a body

comprised of sutured appendages – some organic, some prosthetic – whose seams are ideally hidden and

hopefully moves with nary a hint of disjunction. To give prominence to one limb over another is to throw the

gait off balance. "Really, when you're looking at the *Star Wars* films," says Dennis Muren, visual effects

supervisor, "you're looking at the work of a good dozen groups of people that are real experts at what they're

doing and focusing on their skill set and contributing" (qtd. in Lucas, *Jedi* commentary, 1985). *Star Wars* is

not the product of the vacuum of a single mind, but of collaborators and conditions: Lucas' stable of

colleagues, artists, and performers, the financial fetters imposed by Fox, and environmental constraints as

dictated by weather, location, and circumstance.

When Lucas first made the rounds to pitch the project, he recognized his script was "dense and

difficult to visualize" (Jenkins 60), and hired visual artist Ralph McQuarrie to draft a set of images depicting

"how (Lucas') creations would look on screen" (Pollock 149). McQuarrie meditated on safe passage between

spacecraft: "'We realized some of the air would escape.'" The stormtroopers were given "breath masks," and,

"'(f)rom the earliest drawings, Darth Vader was masked for the same reason'" (qtd. in Jenkins 61). Vader's

ominous helmet and pulsing breath "'all came to pass because I thought he needed a mask to breathe'"

(McQuarrie, qtd. in Baxter 196).[44] Costume designer John Mollo cobbled together Vader's outfit from a

"German World War II steel helmet, a set of motorcycle leathers, a monk's cloak and a gasmask" located

while rummaging around in the "Middle Ages department" of a costume warehouse in Britain (Baxter 201;

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[43] Wollen contends that auteur theory is the expression of coherence out of intersection and interpenetration: "a network of different statements, crossing and contradicting each other, elaborated into a final 'coherent' version" (qtd. in Self 9). Self agrees, framing the "author" as metonym for the "heterogeneity of authorial hands" (8).
[44] "Ultimately the McQuarrie paintings (were) the key to unlocking the purse strings at Fox" (Jenkins 61).

Pollock 160). The joints of the carapace in which Anthony Daniels (C-3PO) was encased would stiffen and seize up due to the dry heat and sand. When attempts at lubrication and loosening failed, Daniels developed, out of necessity, the droid's "arm twitches" and distinctive mincing stride (Baxter 207; Jenkins 97). Lucas had also conceived C-3PO as an "acid-tongued" "used-car dealer from Brooklyn" (Jenkins 89; Pollock 177), but widespread affinity for Daniels' prim British accent forced Lucas to concede that Daniels' physical and vocal performance had cast the droid in a new mold. R2-D2's agitated wobble arose when performer Kenny Baker "lost patience" with the perpetually broken-down and unwieldy robot, and "'rocked it out of anger and frustration'" (qtd. in Jenkins 96). Ford claimed that Lucas welcomed the ideas of his actors: "He knew the movie was based so strongly on the relationship between the three of us that he encouraged our contributions" (Pollock 164). An avid improviser, Ford invented two beloved Solo moments on the spot (Jenkins 115, 116).

Sound designer Ben Burtt "walked around his apartment, recording his blender, refrigerator, and stereo turntable" to source is polyphonic soundscapes. He blended the hum of an old USC movie projector with the static from his TV set to create lightsaber sound effects. He layered a "four-month-old cinnamon bear" with "bears, and a walrus, seal, and badger" to generate Chewbacca's effusive growling. R2-D2's mechanical vocabulary was supplied by "flexible pipe being squeezed and metal scraps rustling around in dry ice." Burtt manipulated known languages (such as Zulu and Swahili) to composing alien speech, believing that such speech should "'mimic a known language to succeed on screen'" (qtd. in Pollock 179). "'The sounds of the real world are complicated and kind of dirty. They simply cannot be duplicated on a synthesizer'" (Burtt, qtd. in Lev 31).

Director Carol Ballard (*The Black Stallion*) parachuted in to assist with second unit photography (Pollock 176). To ratchet up the tension as the story neared its climax, editor Richard Chew suggested that

the film intercut between "'Princess Leia and the Rebels on their station with Luke making the run to destroy the Death Star. ... That was all created in the editing'" (qtd. in Bouzereau 104). Lucas screened footage for Coppola, Spielberg, DePalma, Scorsese, and director Philip Kaufman, all of whom chimed in with suggestions and "precious opinions" (Scanlon 20; Kline 57). "'We serve each other as sounding boards to help at two crucial times in film creation: the first version of the script and the film editing. That's when you need a friend whom you have total confidence in'" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 57).

Katz, who had worked with Huyck to rejig Lucas' "leaden and often humourless" dialogue, foresaw a weakness in the third act: after the heroes' escape from the Death Star, Obi-Wan was stranded on a spaceship thumb-twiddling (Jenkins 111, 109). It was Marcia who alighted on a solution: kill Kenobi. "'I was struggling with that plot problem when my wife suggested I kill off Ben, which she thought was a pretty outrageous idea...the more I thought about Ben getting killed the more I liked the idea'" (Lucas, qtd. in Scanlon 17). An initially irate Guinness capitulated and mapped out Kenobi merging with the Force and returning as Luke's Jedi spirit guide. Marcia would later join the editing team – with Chew and Paul Hirsch – to salvage what an inconsolable Lucas believed to be an unmitigated disaster. Scrapping a prior cut and starting a new edit from scratch, Marcia split her time between *Star Wars* and Scorcese's *New York New York,* working tirelessly with the trio to rescue the movie (Pollock 170; Jenkins 121, viii).

Pollock portrays Marcia as Lucas' "counselor and confidante" and "secret weapon" (234, 229). As an editor, Marcia had a gift for discerning "how a movie can be made warmer, how the characters can be given depth and resonance," and weighed in with suggestions on *Empire* and *Raiders* (Pollock 228, 274). Furthermore, Marcia was a firm and forthright sounding board: "only Marcia is brave enough to take Lucas on in a head-to-head dispute and occasionally emerge victorious" (Pollock 65-66). Marcia was spouse, artistic partner, and shareholder; "'I think people sometimes forget that Marcia Lucas owns half this company

and is a very important part of it'" (Lucas, qtd. in Pollock 240). The play of tides in any long-term

relationship will inevitably expose jagged edges, and, according to Biskind, Marcia could be cutting. During

post-production on *Star Wars*, Marcia supposedly told Lucas that "*New York, New York* is a film for grown-

ups, yours is just a kids' movie, and nobody's going to take it seriously" (316)). Marcia worried that she

wouldn't be taken seriously as a professional if she worked primarily on her husband's films: "'If I'm ever

going to get any real credit, I'm going to have to cut a movie for somebody besides George. 'Cause if I'm

cutting for my husband, they're going to think, George lets his wife play around in the cutting room'"

(Marcia, qtd. in Biskind 253). After *Star Wars*, Marcia "'swore she would never edit another film with

George... If she ever had to work with him again, she felt it would be the end of their marriage'" (Lippincott,

qtd. in Biskind 254).

Marcia, of course, was not Lucas' only intimate. As Lucas roasted under the Tunisian heat, Producer

Gary Kurtz toiled away behind the scenes. An amateur still photographer, Quaker, and ex-Marine ("I spent

three years...as a cameraman, a director of documentaries – even though I was actually a conscientious

objector and I never carried a weapon" (Plume, "Interview")), Kurtz formed the backbone of the

production.[45] In 1977, Zito described Kurtz as Lucas' "old and trusted friend" and "unofficial consigliere –

limiting access to Don Lucas, granting favors and interviews, fixing messes, pouring oil on the troubled

waters. He is friend, confidant, interpreter, hatchet man... 'I also function as a sounding board to discuss

everything that comes up'" (Kurtz, qtd. in Kline 50, 51).

In an on-line interview conducted in 2000, a candid Kurtz shaded a fraught and confrontational

relationship. "(W)e had lots, lots of confrontations. I think that one of the problems that Lucas has now…is

the fact that he doesn't have more people around him who really challenge him. We had lots of arguments

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[45] Lucas' ex-secretary asserted that "(i)f George ever really knew what Gary did behind the scenes for him, he'd be on his knees. Because he took care of everything, everything... Everything was kept away from George so he could be creative" (Jenkins 129, 130).

and discussions; heated discussions about the way things were going" (Gore, "Original"). "Film is always a collaborative effort," Kurtz continued. "No film that I've ever made, when you sit down and see the finished film, could we parcel out who did what" (Gore, "Original"). Ideally, the cost of relinquishing control is outweighed by the benefits of shared reins; of inspiring the artisanship of an assembly, of allowing a team of skilled wrights the freedom and latitude to create. Collaboration is compromise, a trust placed in alchemy, a faith that the best idea will out. "What happens with a lot of scenes, especially if you let the actors play with it, is that you get something different from what you think that you're going to get." Something different and perhaps surpassing what was originally intended.[46]

During the production of *Empire*, Lucas loosened his iron grip and embraced his collaborative side in earnest. Resolved to step away from directing,[47] he also forswore the Sisyphean task of screenwriting (Jenkins 192). Kurtz counseled him to "find a writer, and do a proper job on this treatment material" (Plume, "Interview"), and Lucas set his sights on Leigh Brackett, a popular novelist and screenwriter (*The Big Sleep*). Lucas thought Brackett's ease with snappy banter was a natural fit for "pulp science fiction" (Baxter 254), and gave her a "ring binder full of notes" that Brackett – unprepared for Lucas' micromanagement – discovered "amounted to a scene-by-scene synopsis of what would be her finished story" (Jenkins 193). If this was Lucas' idea of delegation, it was a precarious first step. Sadly, Brackett passed away from cancer a few days after delivering her first draft (Pollock 170; Baxter 270).

Thus, Lucas set himself back in the stocks and spent the first half of 1978 hammering out a draft. Then Lawrence Kasdan arrived with a script for *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and Lucas saw his out (Pollock

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[46] Kurtz is dismissive of auteur theory: "It's really difficult for a director...to have the final say on every single little minute detail, so all the films are pretty much a group effort. It can be pretty much assumed that most of the aspiring directors...had no illusions about the fact that they could become like French directors were" (qtd. in Plume "Interview").

[47] In 1977, Lucas told Clouzot that "'I'm more of a technician or 'artisan-cameraman' or editor, than a *producer-director*'" (qtd. in Kline 63, emphasis in original). "'Directing is emotional frustration, anger, and tremendously hard work,'" he told Harmetz in 1983. "'Eventually, I realized that directing wasn't healthy for me'" (qtd. in Kline 138).

206). Lucas had first considered Kasdan ("young, hungry, and cheap") to write the ill-fated *Graffiti* follow-up*, More American Graffiti* (Baxter 258). Spielberg, however, thought Kasdan's stylish updating of "classic characters and situations of forties cinema" was the perfect fit for the freshman Indiana Jones adventure, and secured him for *Raiders*. Lucas dropped *Empire* into Kasdan's lap. Kasdan was startled – what if Lucas didn't like his *Raiders* draft? Lucas assured him that he'd read the script that evening and, if it wasn't to his liking, he would call and cancel the *Empire* deal. "As Spielberg had intuited, Kasdan was the screenwriter they'd been waiting for" (Baxter 270-1). Kasdan set to work, adding much-needed depth to the love triangle that was intended as *Empire*'s emotional thrust (Jenkins 194).

Lucas saw the screenplay as a shared burden. "'So Larry rewrote the script, but we sort of all worked on it. No matter how much I wanted to get out of writing, I was somehow always forced to sit down and work on the script'" (qtd. in Bouzereau 145). Kasdan was under no illusions as to who was in control – "'I always feel I'm serving George – this is his stuff'" – but put stock in Lucas' mainstream sensibilities: "I trust (Lucas') instincts as to what is satisfying to an audience" (qtd. in Pollock 211, 209). Less helpful, however were Lucas' textual interventions: "'There were sections in the script which, when I read (Lucas' rewrites), made me say to myself, "I can't believe that George wrote this scene. It's terrible"'" (qtd. in Baxter 271). In Kurtz' view, Lucas worked best as "a collaborative writer, where other writers came in and had some say in adding certain things so you'd get a variety of point of view. ... I think he did chafe a bit under the idea of someone saying 'that's not a good idea,' some of the time" (Plume, "Interview").[48]

Kurtz hired Irvin Kershner to direct *Empire*. "Kersh," as he was affectionately known, "made it clear he couldn't function without creative freedom," and Lucas was eager "to prove that he could pull away from *Empire*" (Pollock 208, 207). "'George said that this would be my picture. He would stay in California with

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[48] *Empire* director Irvin Kershner approved of Kasdan's efforts: "'Larry is a good dialogue writer because he has a sense of rhythm. You know if the dialogue is good when you're working with the actors. If the rhythm is right, they have no problems with the lines; if it's bad, they have problems learning the dialogue'" (qtd. in Bouzereau 172).

the special effects'" while *Empire* was managed by Kurtz (Kershner, qtd. in Jenkins 202).[49] A vegetarian and

former musician, Kersh considered *Empire* the middle movement of a symphony, "a contrast to the fast pace

of the opening allegro." Furthermore, as a Zen Buddhist, he was intrigued by the philosophical implications

of the Force" (Pollock 215). Initially stymied by the Norwegian weather – "the constant threat of new

blizzards and the biting 40 mph winds" – Kersh gradually found his groove. "'It was kind of an adventure'"

(Kershner qtd. in Jenkins 199, 200))

Kershner's directorial instincts were "more performance-minded than Lucas," and he encouraged

"debate and discussion" amongst the cast. Not surprisingly, "no one responded to his style more willingly

than (Ford)" (Jenkins 202, 203). The collaborative atmosphere yielded some of the most revered moments

and exchanges in the series: Solo slicing open a dead Tauntaun's belly before muttering "I thought they

smelled bad...on the outside"; Chewbacca's anguished cry as the blaster doors clang shut, consigning his

closest friend to certain death in the tundra;[50] the toolbox falling on Solo's head; Solo hitting the control

panel to revive the sputtering *Falcon* (Kersh: "I finally said, 'Come on, this is fun, let's do it!"). All of these

elements were improvised *in situ* (Lucas, *Empire* commentary, 1983; Bouzereau 159).

Then there is the cherished declaration of love between Solo and Leia: "I love you." / "I know" –

moments before Solo is frozen in carbonite. Early versions of the script contained: Leia: "I love you. I was

afraid to tell you before, but it's true." / Han: "I'll be back. (or) "Just remember that, 'cause I'll be back." (or)

"I love you too." Kersh considered the lines "stinky" and thought they could do better (Bouzereau 207, 208).

That the new line survived, Kershner credits to Lucas' pliability: "'(Lucas) knows what he wants, but he is

flexible, and that's why I like him so much'" (qtd. in Bouzereau 208).

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[49] Lucas asserts that, as with the screenplay, shooting *Empire* "turned out be a real collaborative endeavour" (Lucas, *Empire* commentary 1981).

[50] "(Chewbacca) is like a dog, he is hurt, the one he loves is out there in the snow. So as the doors slam shut, I had him scream in agony. That wasn't in the original script; that was a decision I made during filming" (Kershner, qtd. in Lucas, *Empire* commentary, 1983).

While Kersh was on sure footing with actors, he found the special effects opaque and tricky to conceptualize: "'I direct the actors, and then [the footage] goes to California and then I find out what the scene is about'" (qtd. in Biskind 380). Each of the thousands of effects seemed to represent "'a little time bomb...and if you don't catch one, it could do you in'" (Lucas, qtd. in Jenkins 201). For the most part Lucas remained in California, supervising the ILM contingent in the defusing of those thousand-odd time bombs. If he visited the set, it was for a specific visual purpose. Lucas understood that at this stage, given the finicky nature of effects technology, there was little room for error. "This was really hard stuff at the time we were doing it," says Muren. "Blue screen photography has never been very easy... Putting the scenes together and getting rid of the blue lines around things was always incredibly difficult to do" (qtd. in Lucas, *Empire* commentary, 1983). "One thing for the actors in this film," adds Lucas, "they all look very cold because they all were very cold" (Lucas, *Empire* commentary, 1983).

The creative team agreed that the success or failure of *Empire* hinged on one effect in particular, their "mischievous little toad... Without that character he's just nothing, he's a puppet" (Kershner, qtd. in Lucas, *Empire* commentary, 1983). Built by Jim Henson's Puppet Workshop, Yoda was voiced by longtime Henson creative partner Frank Oz, who controlled the complicated foam-and-rubber integument with a team of four other puppeteers. "'We had a few Yodas on the set, and when they were lying there, they were just plastic and rubber and wires,'" Kersh remembers. "'But when (Oz) was underneath the floor holding it up and it was talking, I related to it as an individual'" (qtd. in Bouzereau 199). "That was a real leap...if that puppet had not worked, the whole film would have been down the tubes" (Lucas, qtd. in Hearn 125).

Filming the "munchkin Methuselah" proved the production's most arduous endeavour. Synchronizing movements to achieve a naturalized, holistic performance – so that Yoda "looked alive" (Lucas, *Empire* commentary, 1983) – was so painstaking that "it took an average of four hours to film every two lines of

dialogue" (Jenkins 206, 207). Once more, Lucas fixated on seams; every limitation a hindrance to his vision: "'I can't tell that part of the story' was sort of a daily ritual with *Star Wars* and myself"; "frustrated, frustrated, frustrated"; "the story was way beyond the technology's ability to do it"; "(a)rt is saying 'I want to be able to do this,' and it's not possible at that point." That frustration sowed the seeds of Lucas' future fealty to the CGI banner:

> it takes a lot of work to get (Yoda) to go anywhere. That was really what started me on the idea of creating digital characters that could actually move freely on a set without having to have the whole scene blocked around the puppeteer. ... Now with digital technology we'd probably just have him bouncing along next to him. (Lucas, *Empire* commentary, 1983).

As with *Star Wars*, the contours of *Empire* were indelibly molded by the creative team assembled by Lucas and Kurtz. During a story conference between Lucas and Brackett, "they decided that the Emperor and the Force had to be the two main concerns in the film." Brackett and Lucas had lengthy discussions about the nature of the Force, and "Luke's training with Yoda and decided to turn the lessons into proverbs and commandments" (Bouzereau 173, 181). McQuarrie and Johnston continued to flesh out the visual field, collaborating on designs for probe droids and the surprisingly popular Boba Fett.[51] Though Yoda was meant to be modeled on Albert Einstein, most saw Stuart Freeborn's design as something akin to a "self-portrait" (Bouzereau 188). Kersh shot a scene "showing the new hand being fitted on Luke with a probe touching his fingers and his fingers reacting," to humanize the bionic appendage, and reassure the young audience that Luke, though scathed, would recover (Bouzereau 225).

Recused from writing and directing duties, Lucas emerged less scarified by artistic blows, but found himself staunching a new wound: the flow of cash. In his drive to circumvent, as much as possible, studio

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[51] Fett, who became the most popular ancillary character in the *Star Wars* universe, "was conceived by...art director Joe Johnston and concept artist Ralph McQuarrie as the prototype of a counterinsurgency force called Super Troopers. Some of Boba Fett's other elements were salvaged from early, rejected Darth Vader concepts" (Kenny 15).

interference, Lucas was financing *Empire* with personal proceeds from *Star Wars* (though he still required a

distributor for the theatrical run). This was his money, and the strain was starting to show. Despite his

magnanimity with bonuses and profit points, Lucas had inherited his father's pecuniary instincts: "'(m)y

father provided me with a lot of business principles...a small-town retail-business ethic, and I guess I learned

it'" (qtd. in Kline 199). He grew increasingly perturbed by Kershner's meditative, meandering shooting style

and indulgent improvisational habits, which ground production to a halt, beaching Lucas' otherwise efficient

ship. Late into principal photography, Lucas realized that the picture was at least $5 million over budget, with

six unanticipated weeks to go. Lucas "was apoplectic" (Biskind 380).

> I'm faced with a situation where everything I own, everything I ever earned, is wrapped up in this
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> picture... If it isn't a success, not only could I lose everything but I could also end up being millions
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> of dollars in debt... It has to be the biggest grossing sequel of all time for me to break even. (Lucas,
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> qtd. in Hearn 124)[52]

To make matters worse, Lucas found Kershner's concept of a "legato second movement...utterly

alien" (Jenkins 212), and hated the lackadaisical pace and relationship-centric plotting. There was a heated

confrontation between Lucas, Kurtz, and Kershner (Baxter 293) after which Lucas locked himself inside an

editing suite and spent two days recutting the film to his liking. "'It was awful...It was chopped into tiny

pieces, and everything was fast,'" Kurtz recalls (qtd. in Baxter 293). "He tried to pull a power number

basically" (Kurtz, qtd. in Jenkins 212).

Publicly, Lucas embraced the pan-demographic appeal of his movies – *Star Wars* had done brisk

business with adults, and the sequel was widely perceived as a far more mature installment – but privately

came to the conclusion that *Empire* was "too adult" (Baxter 328). Lucas frames their disputes in fiscal terms.

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[52] Kurtz considers pleading penury a diversionary tactic: "there was no way (*Empire*) was ever going to lose money" (Plume, "Interview").

"'(*Empire*) looks pretty because Kersh took a lot of time to do it," said Lucas. "It was just a lot better than I wanted to make it... And I was paying for it. ... It's my money, it's my film, and I'm going to do it the way I want to do it'" (qtd. in Pollock 218). Now that Lucas was his own bank, aspirations to artistic excellence were subservient to how much those aspirations might cost. Lucas instituted his own set of creative cost-benefit checks and balances. "'There's a difference between magic and perfection. Magic is sleight-of-hand, and so is moviemaking'" (qtd. in Shone 106).

Shooting *Empire*, Guinness noticed an unfortunate development: a sheath had begun to knit around the burgeoning impresario. Guinness recalls "a different, more self-important personage emerging" in Lucas (Baxter 305), who had "'a great entourage around him'" (qtd. in Jenkins 217). "'These guys got too good for everyone. Everybody got very, very distant. George had this entourage around him. Could do no wrong. Everything was for George'" (Milius, qtd. in Biskind 340). The official story was that by dint of *Empire*, Lucas had seen the collaborative light. In a deferential passage, Pollock writes that *Empire* "demonstrated that Lucas could produce a film that still reflected his vision, while enjoying a creative relationship with a director. Lucas learned from Kershner that pace wasn't everything and that more attention should be paid to character and idea development" (222).

Someone had to be held accountable for the cash overruns, however, and Lucas trained his sights on Kurtz. To many of their colleagues, Lucas and Kurtz were indivisible, a creative dyad, but after a series of unpardonable transgressions – Gil Taylor's antagonism on *Star Wars*, Kersh's loose and lackadaisical generalship on *Empire*, and fomenting disagreements over the narrative direction of *Return of the Jedi* – Kurtz, "like so many other of Lucas's associates...had to pay the price for failing to fall into line with Lucas'

views" (Jenkins 217, 219). Lucas and Kurtz would never work together again (Biskind 380).[53]

Without Kurtz, Lucas' will was ever-harder to curb. "'You couldn't argue with him, he didn't want to hear no, he didn't want to hear, "You're wrong, George"'" (Nelson, qtd. in Biskind 327). *Raiders* opened – Spielberg had brought the film in under budget and ahead of schedule – and was enthusiastically lapped up. Lucas concluded that Kershner's dramaturgical digressions had been pointless indulgences. In an argument with Lucas during *Empire*, Kurtz recalls Lucas asserting that they could have spent less time and money making the film – "it doesn't have to be complicated, doesn't have to tell as difficult a story" – and business would have been just as brisk (Plume, "Interview"). "I think the most unfortunate thing that happened was... (*Raiders*) had come out...(and Lucas) became convinced that all the audience was interested in was the roller-coaster ride, and so the story and the script didn't matter anymore" (Plume, "Interview"). Lucas decided that the codas – "the first five minutes and the last twenty" – were actually the centerpiece, and "'(e)verything in between is filler'" (qtd. in Biskind 237). Lucas wanted junkies after a quick fix. "'(Spielberg) and I come from the visceral generation... We enjoyed the emotional highs we got from movies and realized that you could crank up the adrenaline to a level way beyond what people were doing'" (Lucas, qtd. in Shone 12). If the product could be manufactured as specified – on time, under budget, as Spielberg had done – then the cost-benefit on Kershner's "pondering over every line and camera angle" (Jenkins 234) was crystal clear. Collaboration, once again, meant doing what the boss tells you to (Baxter 324, 322).

Not that Lucas would direct *Jedi* himself. The chair and bullhorn were mere ornaments, empty symbols of power truly concentrated elsewhere. "The Executive Producer pretty much is the...creative overseer of the project and comes up with the ideas for the scripts, and works on the scripts and the directors"

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[53] Alsup remembers Lucas and Kurtz as "an incredible team... Everything was hard for (Lucas). It was hard for him to direct, hard for him to write. Gary was always there helping him to get the scripts done and so on. They are both very individual and creative and they know all aspects of film together. They both know how to edit, how to direct, how to be photographers, they both know everything. That comes along so rarely" (qtd. in Jenkins 218). Over the years, Alsup would take umbrage at Kurtz's fading light in the *Star Wars* constellation, feeling that "Kurtz's contribution to the *Star Wars* story had been overlooked both inside and outside Hollywood. ... 'I don't think George will ever make another *Star Wars* until he gets another Gary'" (qtd. in Jenkins 219).

(Lucas, *Jedi* commentary, 1985). Kurtz believes that on *Empire,* Lucas secretly thought of the director as a placeholder, "that he could phone (Kersh) up every night and tell him what to do and kind of direct vicariously over the telephone" (Plume, "Interview"). This round, Lucas was determined to recruit a surrogate, a director who thought like him: young, unknown, non-union, creative, but "prepared to do as he was told" (Baxter 326; Kline 152; Plume "Interview"). Lucas found his "malleable talent" in Richard Marquand (Jenkins 242). "Lucas would be on the set every day; Marquand agreed. Lucas would also edit the film, and have final cut; Marquand didn't object." Presto! Director by proxy. Kurtz thinks Marquand was bowdlerized by Lucas, who "'harassed him into...doing what he wanted...and I think the film suffered because of that'" (qtd. in Baxter 327, 332).

From Lucas' vantage, he was simply streamlining a lumbering but necessary bureaucracy, oiling the gears of a machine already chugging away and – as one of the original designers, mechanics, and operators – he considered himself extremely well-suited to the task. "'(U)ltimately it's...easier for me to do these things than to farm them out... (*Jedi*) was even more complex than the last one, I (ended) up being there every day...and working very closely with Richard, and shooting second unit'" (Lucas, qtd. in Hearn 140). Nor was Lucas unduly strict – "'If there was a disagreement, I let Richard have his way.'" Marquand dutifully sided with his employer: "'(H)e's not involved in the boring details like directing intimate dialogue with actors, because he trusts me to do that'" (qtd. in Pollock 7, 8). [54] "Just as on (*Empire*), I was there to assist and help and sort of give my expertise. These films are so huge that it's really hard to do it by yourself and you really need to have a lot of people to support you in all the areas" (Lucas, *Jedi* commentary, 1985). According to Kurtz's replacement, Howard Kazanjian, Lucas "'never went home. He was there riding in the car with me at 5am and going home at night with me at 7pm'" (qtd. in Jenkins 241). *Star Wars* was still the "consuming

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[54] According to Pollock, who was writing *Skywalking* as *Jedi* was shooting, "Lucas seems resigned to seeing his vision compromised by the realities of movie making" (8).

obsession" of George Lucas' life (Jenkins 241).

Lucas spent four weeks hammering out a first draft of *Jedi*, then handed the keys over to Kasdan (Pollock 276). Kasdan considered *Jedi* "a thankless task." As he had done with Brackett, Lucas submitted a rigid outline; a prohibitive fence-line restricted the property Kasdan was allowed to roam. "'He has ideas about every detail of this film'" (Kadsan, qtd. in Pollock 8).[55] Lucas' *Jedi* workforce still put their stamp on the finished product. Kasdan suggested that Leia choke Jabba the Hut using the very chain with which the garrulous slug had clamped her to his dais (Bouzereau 259). Marquand insisted that Yoda reappear to close the circle with Luke: "'I felt we needed to see the conversation'" (qtd. in Jenkins 242).

ILM continued to refine equipment and techniques built and implemented during the Dykstra regime – the dogfights and space battles were "more complex" with "more ships and more complicated moves" – but despite the quality of the breeds, the animals themselves had reached their evolutionary peak. "We've used just about every possible special effects technique you can imagine over the years in these movies, and almost everything that is doable and has been done is represented someplace" (Lucas, *Jedi* commentary, 1985). On the CGI front, despite housing "the most sophisticated computers anywhere within the industry," and R&D expenditures of over $3 million per annum, insofar as generating usable effects, ILM made baby steps in place of strides (Jenkins 239). As filigree for a rehashed plot point – a second attack on a second Death Star – Lucas engineered a rehashed effect: a three-dimensional CGI rendering of the Death Star schematics. "(W)e pretty much have the same scene, but the computer animation has advanced quite a bit" (Lucas, *Jedi* commentary, 1985).

As with *Empire*, Lucas felt hopelessly handicapped by puppets: "(T)he difficulty of these scenes... with Jabba is that Jabba can't move. ...whenever I had to do a scene, I had to plop him down somewhere, and

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[55] In 1981, Lucas complained that writing the screenplays "'never (gets) easier. They only get harder'" (qtd. in Kline 106). He was only finishing *Jedi,* he said, because he had started it. "'The next trilogy will be someone else's vision." However, "nobody came forward to pick up the *Star Wars* saga" (Baxter 387).

then stage the scene around him." Masks were similarly problematic. Actors couldn't wear the masks too long, had difficulty breathing, and "some people get claustrophobic." Every masked character, furthermore, required "two or three people with remote controls moving the eyes...there's probably three or four other people standing on the sidelines, trying to operate them" (Lucas, *Jedi* commentary, 1985). Masks, therefore, added personnel in unwieldy multiples.

The absence of Kershner's playful ethos was most keenly felt by Ford. In *Jedi*, Ford's sardonic Solo is noticeably muted. With no outlet for his input, Ford submitted to the drudgery of "effects reaction" acting, and "made little effort to hide his unease at what he regarded as his enslavement to (Lucas's) dark Empire" (Jenkins 246). Hamill griped that "(s)pecial-effects movies are hard on actors... You find yourself giving an impassioned speech to a big lobster in a flight suit," and Johnston paraphrased a concern expressed by Lucas on *Star Wars*: "'We were never sure whether the film was a vehicle for the effects or for the story'" (qtd. in Jenkins 246, 240). Marquand, however, was unequivocal:

If there is one thing that I have learned from working on (*Jedi*) it is simply that the story is what really counts. There have been a lot of directors and studios who have been misled by the success of *Star Wars* into thinking that special effects are everything. They're not. Special effects have their place – a very special place... But first and foremost comes the story. (qtd. in Galipeau 5).[56]

The single most bizarre addendum to *Jedi* was marginalia imported from an early draft of *Star Wars*. Lucas had envisioned an arc culminating in a gladiatorial grudge-match between his hero and one of a tribe of "noble savages" called Wookiees. "'The Wookiee planet that I created for *Star Wars* was eventually turned into the Ewok planet in *Jedi*. I basically cut the Wookiees in half and called them Ewoks!'" (Lucas, qtd. in Bouzereau 281). Lucas maintains that because *Star Wars* was a product of the Vietnam era, the overarching

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[56] Kurtz considers *Jedi* a "merchandise-driven project...they knew that the money from the merchandising would make a lot more money than the money from the film" (Plume, "Interview").

statement of his opus was "a small group of ill-equipped people...overcome a mighty power." The downfall

of the indomitable Empire is secured by "humanity in the form of cute little teddy bears" (Lucas, *Jedi*

commentary, 1985).[57] Browne notes that

> even though (the terms natural, innocent, primitive) may have markedly different  meanings for those
>
> who invoke them, they have nevertheless become the common vocabulary of a protest against the
>
> technology, reason, and order that since the industrial revolution...have sustained a belief in
>
> civilization and progress. (279)

The primitive/civilized diametric surfaces as a corollary to disaffection with the "dilemmas history has forced

upon us." The crisis of modernity elicits a root desire for reacquaintance with the "primitive"; a drive to

regress/digress to the "natural" – i.e., to a "simpler" (nostalgic?) time/place context reified through a

mythologized history – in order to "reconnect" with a once (presumably) pure/unalloyed, but now lost/

dissipated/hopelessly compromised "vitality" (verdant jungles, tilled soil, the heat of a fresh kill, etc.). *Star*

*Wars* represents a remarkable triple-inversion: first, reverse the America/Vietnam military poles, allowing

exculpated Americans to assume the role of beleaguered "rebel forces"; second, have those forces identify

and collude with with a "primitivized" counterpart – Ewoks as "imaginary Other" (Silvio and Vinci 65) –

through which the hegemonic oppressor (the Empire) is obliterated; third, indulge in "object fetish"

admiration for that selfsame Empire.[58] We are, after all, sitting in a well-equipped theatre, or before a

sophisticated home entertainment system, or with a computer, sampling the very fruits of the industrial

enterprise now displaying their celebrated destruction. Rider concedes that "what is being marketed is the

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[57] Speaking of "infantilizing intrusions," constructing a science fiction series around the conflict between "a primitive society confronting a technologically-advanced society" (Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999) is not, in itself, lacking in inspirational overtones. Anthropomorphizing the victims of imperial conquest – insurgent, civilian, or otherwise – into "cute little teddy bears," however, rankles as precisely the kind of facile, patriarchal, condescending and dangerously myopic mindset that gives technologically-advanced societies the bright idea to invade "primitive" societies in the first place.

[58] "On the one hand, people living in the twenty-first century typically exhibit a knee-jerk sympathy for colorful aboriginals with their primitive weapons, garish attire, and unsophisticated economic systems. On the other hand, these same modernites secretly admire efficient, ruthless, well-dressed leaders with cutting-edge technology and terrific organizational skills" (Kenny 122).

*fantasy* of rebellion." After all, "the market for Viet Cong dolls is small" (34). Kenny concludes that Ewoks must be "the oddest cinematic tribute that the Vietcong are ever likely to get" (170).

Line-ups started eight days before *Jedi* opened.[59] The film stood at the apex of over a decade of toil: revolutionary technologies, a market awash with merchandise, refurbished theatres, a ranch under construction, a flourishing corporate empire removed from the odious Hollywood fishmongers, and ever-expanding throngs of fans with seemingly bottomless pockets. The exterior glow, however, masked some interior rot. Marcia had been having an affair with a worker on Skywalker ranch. "For Lucas the loss was almost too much to bear. Having poured every ounce of his being into making *Star Wars* successful...he had lost the only person he had been interested in sharing it with" (Jenkins 254). So dizzying a degree of success, in such a short time, is "'very difficult to deal with, very disruptive to one's personal life'" (Lucas, qtd. in Jenkins 255). With *Jedi* still in post-production, George and Marcia, hands entwined, announced to their staff that they were seeking a divorce.

Interlude (1986 -1995)

In *The Power of* Myth*, Joseph Campbell contends that "when you come to the end of one time and the beginning of a new one, it's a period of tremendous pain and turmoil" (Campbell and Moyers 21). The *Star Wars* trilogy was complete, a triumph, and Lucas was reeling, devastated by divorce (Kline 223). Lucas is notoriously tight-lipped about his breakup – "Lucas either hasn't been asked or doesn't answer questions about his 1983 divorce" – and most interviewers are content to "pull their punches" when it comes to his personal drama (Kline x, ix). In a *60 Minutes* segment that aired prior to the release of *Menace*, Lucas gave reporter Leslie Stahl a terse single-sentence reply regarding his cuckolding: "Well, he was much younger

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[59] Thanks to Lucas, all movie houses were no longer made equal. *Jedi* was the "perfect showcase" for THX Sound, marketed by Skywalker Sound, the company Lucas had founded to promote it. (Jenkins 249).

than I was" (Stahl, *Last Star Wars*). These were to be "dark and destructive" years (Jenkins 256). Left to speculate, *Temple of Doom* serves as a possible porthole into Lucas' psychological state subsequent to the split. There is a recurring motif of still-beating hearts torn out of rib-cages and displayed to their erstwhile owners, *grand guignol* feasts of abhorrent foodstuffs, and many a child in chains. Baxter believes that *Temple* "clearly reflected the dislocation taking place in the private lives of both Lucas and Spielberg" (343), and Lucas himself allowed that "(w)e decided to go darker. Part of it, I guess, is that I was going through a divorce at the time and I wasn't in a good mood" (Stoklasa "Skull").

Naturally, there had been cracks in the dam all along: Marcia claims Lucas considered himself her intellectual superior ("'When the studio didn't like (*THX*), I wasn't surprised. But George just said to me, I was stupid and knew nothing. Because I was just a Valley Girl. He was the intellectual'" (qtd. in Biskind 100)); wars of attrition over Lucas' workaholism and evanescent vacation time ("'So I *promised* her (Marcia) that after *Star Wars* every year we'd take two vacations... That lasted for one year'" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 105, emphasis in original)).[60] Marcia suggests that every leisure moment was potential grist for Lucas' media mill ("'Even when he's silly...nothing is simply a fun moment. Everything gets logged'" (qtd. in Kline 137)).

> For me, the bottom line was just that he was all work and no play... I wanted to stop and smell the
> flowers. I wanted joy in my life. And George just didn't. ... He wanted to stay on that workaholic
> track. The empire builder, the dynamo. And I couldn't see myself living that way for the rest of my
> life. (Marcia, qtd. in Biskind 415)

According to Murch, Lucas' success was feeding his workaholism, and workaholism was fueling his control-driven nature: "(Marcia) thought that this was destructive, which it probably is in the long run" (Murch, qtd. in Biskind 423). The opulence and isolation of the dilating Skywalker Ranch rubbed the

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[60] "'Some people are nine-to-fivers... George is a five-to-niner. He leaves home at five-thirty in the morning and returns at eight-thirty at night'" (Marcia, qtd. in Kline 141).

modest, middle-class Marcia the wrong way. If Lucas wanted to be Hearst, however, he needed a Xanadu (Biskind 423). Because Marcia and Lucas were partners in all things, any imbalances present in their partnership were brought to bear on both personal and professional levels. She wanted to be seen as his artistic equal, a core collaborator, the emotional yin balancing off his technical/intellectual/visual yang, "'but George would never acknowledge that to me. I think he resented my criticisms, felt that all I ever did was put him down... He never felt I had any talent, he never felt I was very smart, he never gave me much credit'" (Marcia, qtd. in Biskind 422). Marcia withdrew, and "suggested a trial separation," which Lucas rejected. When the divorce was final, the settlement was reported to be $50 million (Biskind 423).

Need we be reminded of Lucas' self-admitted "Old Testament code of justice"? Lucas was "tolerant and peace-loving until wronged," then all righteous fury and "deep rages" (Pollock 247, 121; Baxter 9, 150): "'I bear grudges'" (Lucas, qtd. in Baxter 9). Marcia was expunged not only from Lucas' life, but from the *Star Wars* mythos as well. Lucas now says, regarding the decision to kill off Obi-Wan, which Marcia had suggested, "'(s)o it was really in the last draft, the one I wrote before I shot the movie, that I finally came to the decision that I had to do what I had to do... In a way, I knew I would have to do it from the beginning, but I went back and forth about it'" (qtd. in Bouzereau 82), or "I was rewriting the script as I was shooting the movie, and...I came up with this idea of having him not be in the end of the movie" (Lucas, *Star Wars* commentary, 1977). Of the inspiration for Chewbacca, Lucas recalls: "My dog Indiana used to ride on the front seat of my car" (Bouzereau 36); except that Indiana was Marcia's dog and he used to ride on her lap beside Lucas; his co-pilots. "It's like I never existed," says Marcia (Biskind 423).[61]

Nor is Marcia the only plot point in the *Star Wars* story that has proven retroactively malleable.

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[61] Actress Ellyn Burstyn opines, of Peter Bogdanovich and Robert Altman, that "their best movies were made in partnership with their wives. And when the marriages ended, their work was not ever up to that same level" (Biskind 273). Subsequent to the release of the first two entries in the *Star Wars* Prequel Trilogy, Kenny argues that Lucas "really needs a good editor, and his first one...whose cutaways, timing, and deft touch with pacing and suspense lent so much of the excitement to the original, isn't with him...anymore" (179).

Marcia's successful effacement from the archives marked the first salvo in a campaign of revisionism that would reach its zenith a decade hence. "Having control of an empire gives Lucas the privilege that only emperors can enjoy: the privilege of rewriting history" (Kenny xxiv). In his 1977 profile, Gordon noted that the underlying structure of *Star Wars* echoed "what Joseph Campbell...calls 'the monomyth'" (314) – the first published suggestion of a link between *Star Wars* and Campbell's "Hero's Journey" template.

The affiliation between Campbell and Lucas is the saga's most prominent and enduring. Silvio and Vinci attest that "(i)n the public's imagination, the terms 'Myth' and '*Star Wars*' are very closely linked" (2).[62] *Star Wars* is widely – perhaps *primarily* – perceived as the preeminent cinematic instantiation of the monomyth, the pan-cultural narrative macro-structure codified by Campbell in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. The Original Trilogy famously received Campbell's seal of approval after a marathon screening at Skywalker Ranch in 1983, from which Campbell emerged an acolyte (Kapell and Lawrence 23).[63] Campbell "reveled in the ancient themes and motifs of mythology unfolding on the wide screen in powerful contemporary images" (Campbell and Moyers xiii), and would subsequently champion Lucas and his trilogy through Moyers' celebrated PBS television special *The Power of Myth*. Lucas was so smitten with Campbell that he began to refer to him as "'my Yoda'" (qtd. in Baxter 354).

"It is well-known," Lyden states, "that George Lucas self-consciously constructed the screenplay for the first film under the influence of popular mythologist Joseph Campbell" (1). In an interview preceding the release of *Menace* in 1999, Lucas corroborated this claim: "With *Star Wars* I consciously set about to re-create myths and the classical mythological motifs. I wanted to use those motifs to deal with issues that exist

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[62] In the introduction to *Culture, Identities, and Technology in the* Star Wars *Films*, Silvio and Vinci argue that *Star Wars* scholarship should outgrow "myth-oriented" and "ideological analysis and identity politics" and adopt "a cultural studies model that analyzes it as a culturally and historically specific phenomenon, that is, as a site of ideological investment that both reflects and shapes late twentieth and early twenty-first century global culture" (3).

[63] "Joseph Campbell once said all the great myths, the ancient great stories, have to be regenerated in every generation. He said that's what you are doing with *Star Wars*" (Lucas and Moyers 48).

today" (Lucas and Moyers 48). That *Star Wars* cleaves to monomythic contours is not in dispute; the film reads almost as a play-by-play of *Thousand Faces* chapter headings. What is curious is the extent to which this was Lucas' original intent, as he now claims, or was a retroactively-conferred connection intended to garb the saga in rarefied robes; i.e., a "monomyth myth." For several years, "(Lucas) made no mention of (Campbell's writing)," and only later would he "declare that the writings of Campbell had rescued him during his attempts to create his first *Star Wars* script" (Kapell and Lawrence 22). There is nary a mention of Campbell in Pollock's 1983 biography, *Skywalking.* Baxter notes that: "though (Lucas) has been credited, retrospectively, with a near-lifelong interest in cultural studies and science fiction...nobody can remember him being interested in anything but television and cars until long after he left Modesto" (43).

While grinding out early drafts of *Star Wars*, Lucas claims to have undertaken a self-administered "crash course in mythology." Struggling with the script, Lucas turned to the archetypes outlined in Campbell's signature monograph: "It was very eerie, because in reading *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* I realized that I was following on classical motifs" (Kapell and Lawrence 21). Jenkins transcribes: "No book would be as influential as Campbell's *The Hero With a Thousand Faces.* Throughout the *Star Wars* era the book...remained stacked on his desk at all times." Lucas, however, did not study mythology alone, his syllabus was overtly interdisciplinary, including: "anthropology, and psychology...classical epics, folk tales, the Arthurian cycle, *chansons de geste*, tales of all the ancient heroes, mythic or legendary" (Grenier, qtd. in Sammons 366); Lucas delved into "*Grimm's Fairy Tales* and C.S. Lewis's *Narnia Chronicles,* J.R.R. Tolkien and Frazer's *The Golden Bough*" (Jenkins 37).

If Lucas was an apostle when *Star Wars* was in post-production, it was not a devotion he shared with his fellowship. According to composer John Williams:

Until (Campbell) told us what *Star Wars* meant – started talking about collective memory and cross-

cultural shared history – the things that rattle around in our brains and predate language, the real

resonance of how the whole thing can be explained – we regarded it as a Saturday-morning space

movie. (qtd. in Baxter 245)

Even when Lucas did situate *Star Wars* in a Campbellian constellation, he could be *blasé* or ambiguous:

"Most civilizations, whole cultures and religions were built on the 'science fiction' of their day. ... Now we

call it science fiction. Before they called it religion or myths or whatever they wanted to call it" (Scanlon 21).

As enthusiastically as Lucas later sought to lay claim to Campbell's cause, his original (and oft-

professed) intent was to make a "serialized"-style adventure film: "I wanted to make an action movie – a

movie in outer space like *Flash Gordon* used to be" (Gordon 315). Rooted in "the late 19th-century dime

novel and serial novel," the "typological model" for early generations of the serialized film featured "the

athletic heroine who had to contend for her inheritance – the latter often a fabulous invention or discovery –

with a gang of crooks armed with magic, occult, or futuristic-technical weapons." The incipient "innovation"

of the serials was "the space-travel adventures of the 1930s, which recent...critics treat as the beginning of the

'real,' or 'pure,' SF film: *Flash Gordon* (Universal, 1936-40), and *Buck Rogers* (Universal, 1939)" (Nagl and

Clayton 265, 266).[64] Lucas clearly had a soft spot for the serials, and considered them "just as valid as Arthur

C. Clarke" (Scanlon 21).[65]

When Lucas did invoke "myth," it was often in the same breath as "fairy tale," and it is unclear if

Lucas differentiated between the two. In 1981, he told O'Quinn that *Empire* was "'the kind of movie we

need. There needs to be a kind of film that expresses the mythological realities of life – the deeper

psychological movements[66] of the way we conduct our lives that are evident in fairy tales'" (qtd. in Kline

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[64] "The slogan used by (producer) Republic Pictures for its serials in 1942 (was): "ACTION speaks louder than WORDS" (Nagl and Clayton 266).

[65] Sammons contends that Lucas clearly "knows more about film than about literature" (355).

[66] Coppola would be proud.

116). Kurtz concurred: "'A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away was our version of once upon a time... We felt it was essentially a fairytale'" (qtd. in Jenkins 36). Stung, perhaps, by Campbell's statement that "(f)airy tales are for children" (Silvio and Vinci 168), Lucas dropped the comparison. In a 1987 interview, he established that *Star Wars* had "'more in common with stories from mythology that go back to the Greeks and beyond. Most of the ideas came from ancient, timeworn tales'" (qtd. in Kline 149). Campbell had now "been a major influence on Lucas since his college days... Lucas carefully constructed his screenplay for *Star Wars* as a cinematic expression of mythological archetypes that could be traced back thousands of years" (Hearn 87). Lucas would later reduce *Flash Gordon* to a delivery device, a chassis for the sophisticated narrative engine: "My original inspiration on this film was really to use mythological motifs to create a whole new kind of myth that was very updated and contemporary, so I used the Saturday matinee serial as my vessel, to put this barrel of mythological motifs together" (Lucas, *Star Wars* commentary, 1977). Campbell was pleased to be associated with the pop-cult-phenom: "'Here the man understands the metaphor... What I saw were things that had been in my books but rendered in terms of the modern problem... (Lucas) opened a vista and knew how to follow it and it was totally fresh'" (qtd. in Hearn 87).

According to Campbell, the "mythologization of the environment and the world" is the artist's *raison d'être* (Campbell and Moyers 107), but Lucas was busily mythologizing his myth; a late convert retrofitting his films with lofty aspirations and historical prestige. The sprawling Skywalker Ranch was still under construction as his other major property – the *Star Wars* trilogy – was being renovated. Barthes argued that "(myth) is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it *is a second-order semiological system*" (137, emphasis in original). In claiming the mantle of "modern-day mythology," *Star Wars* stretched that chain into a third-order, manufacturing a myth about a "myth" based on myth.[67]

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[67] Shone contends that "the mythical archetype into which *Star Wars* most forcefully plugged was the one about driving really, really fast with a bunch of new friends" (47).

If *Star-Wars-as-Monomyth* is the system's macro-myth, a series of micro-myths have sprung from the nodes, and the *Star Wars* mythopoeia includes a multiplicity of addenda and obfuscations. Lucas claimed that Darth Vader had always been Luke's father: "'I wanted the father to be Darth Vader, but I also wanted a father figure. So I created Ben as the other half'" (qtd. in Bouzereau 34). However, Bouzereau later notes that "the notion of Vader being Luke's father first appeared in the second draft" of *Empire* (217).[68] In a 1977 interview, teasing the idea of prequels, Lucas reveals Vader's backstory: "'It's about Ben and Luke's father and Vader when they are young Jedi knights. But Vader kills Luke's father, then Ben and Vader have a confrontation'" (qtd. in Scanlon 12).

Lucas has frequently claimed that he always envisioned *Star Wars* as a series of nine or six films. Faced with a bloated early draft, "Lucas divided the story into three parts, put two parts in a drawer, and distilled the remaining one into a story that would resemble the finished film" (Jenkins 58). In 1980, Lucas told Vallely that "'(t)here are six hours worth of events before *Star Wars*" (Kline 96). Baxter, however, reports that "(i)nitially, Lucas didn't visualize *Star Wars* as an epic, or imagine it going beyond one film" (159). Kurtz backs up the claim: "it was kind of a red herring in a way, because there was no immediate thought to make any other films right away" (Plume "Interview"; Baxter 166). When *Star Wars* was first released, "it's opening title crawl did not begin with *Episode IV: A New Hope*" (Kenny xxiv). Only when re-released in 1978 did Lucas add *"Part IV: A New Hope*" (Baxter 242).

Lucas grew increasingly cognizant of his corporate image, and made attempts to adjust the optics. Though Dykstra's bohemia had been disbanded, Lucas promoted his adolescent corporate entities as suffused with an "enthusiastic and wild spirit," adding that "(i)n the unlikely event that they might be 'tamed into corporate soldiers, the creative army would quickly lose its creative spark'" (qtd. in Silvio and Vinci 160).

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[68] In the earlier version, Kenobi brings Luke's father as backup in a confrontation (Bouzereau 182).

Far from the disease, ILM was a laid-back "antidote to the formalization or corporatization of film production"; a safe haven for hippies rebelling against "authority figures and traditional work rules" (Silvio and Vinci 160). A miniature pyrotechnics expert in charge of repeatedly blowing up the Death Star testified that once the bacchanalia was dissolved:

> it was 'you have to do one thing and one thing only. You cannot interfere with everyone else' ...it became conservative, less creative. ... It was a little bit colder. You're walking through the halls and they're crystal-clear and clean and sterile. It didn't have that flying-by-the-seat-of-your-pants kind of thing. (Viskocil, qtd. in Shone 84)

A more pernicious mini-myth, one that took time to calcify, was the suggestion by Pollock – a reiteration of the auteur ideal – that after years of absorptive television watching, the "attractive graphics" and "simple message(s)" had percolated and then leapt, "seemingly fully formed, out of (Lucas') imagination" (18). The gradual drift with *Star Wars,* it seems, is always towards "mono"-ization. Lucas as auteur, *Star Wars* as "fully-formed," the film as contemporary mono-myth. That Lucas' filmic texts are so often framed as a monolithic undertaking stands in stark contradistinction to their original form: collage. That *Star Wars* represented an unprecedented exercise in pan-cultural/-historical bricolage was first noted – alongside the Campbellian inflections – by Gordon:

> *Star Wars* is a modern fairy tale, a pastiche which reworks a multitude of old stories, and  yet creates a compete and self-sufficient world of its own...deliberately old-fashioned plot... fashioned out of bits and pieces of twentieth-century American popular mythology – old movies, science fiction, television, and comic books. (Gordon 314, 315)

"Pastiche" became the clarion call. Lucas had "raided the junkyards of our popular culture" and "rigged a working myth" out of "an amalgam of pieces of mass culture" (Gordon 315). *Star Wars* contained

"images, ideas, and motifs borrowed from many different people" (Sammons 366) and "the spare parts of other movies" (Shone 54) resulting in a "skillful combination of the satisfying righteousness of classic theism with the pulse-quickening thrills of an action hero film" (Smith 200). Lucas ransacked his memory for what it contains about comics, pulp fiction, SF, 20th-century history" (Sammons 366), and manipulated "the styles and artifacts of the cultural past" (Kline 51), transforming "a hodgepodge of inherited mythologies and legends into an immutable touchstone of twentieth-century pop-cultural consciousness" (Kenny 148). In short, *Star Wars* was "a masterpiece of synthesis" (Gordon 315).

> What finally emerged through the many drafts of the script has obviously been influencedby science fiction and action adventure I've read and seen. And I've seen a lot of it. I'm trying to make a classic sort of genre picture...in which all the influences are working together. (qtd. in Gordon 316)

Lucas himself tends to sift through the cultural silt he so assiduously synthesized: his Wookies were like "Indians...more like noble savages" (Gordon 318); there was Edgar Rice Burroughs' *John Carter of Mars* series, from whence came "banthas," elephantine "beasts of burden" (Pollock 315); Boba Fett was Sergio Leone's The Man With No Name (Lucas, *Empire* commentary, 1981); Lucas asked graphic artist Ralph McQuarrie to give his renderings of C-3PO "some of the elegance of his predecessor in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*" (Jenkins 60). There were political and historical inflections of Napoleon, Rome, World War II, and Richard Nixon stitched into the tapestry; a multi-million dollar gestalt "'with *The Magnificent Seven* thrown in'" (Lucas, qtd. in Baxter 73). All in the service of a children's story in the Classical Greek mode: "you go back to the *Odyssey* or the stories that are told for the kid in all of us. I can see the little kids sitting there and just being enthralled with Ulysses" (Scanlon 5). When it came time to score the film, Lucas compiled a temp track that included "*Ben-Hur* and Holtz's *The Planets*." He told composer John Williams that he wanted the music "like the classic Max Steiner scores for films like *Charge of the Light Brigade*"

(Pollock 179, 181); "something like Liszt or Dvorak" (Jenkins 141).

*Star Wars* stemmed, furthermore, from the drive to create a sequel to *THX* (Scanlon 9). Lucas had material he was keen to recycle: he shot and discarded a scene where the lead character lands in "a garbage compactor and is menaced by a rat-like creature" (Baxter 101). Lucas was also inspired by NASA: "'I like the space program, and I'm very keen on having people accept the space program. We've grown up in what is the flowering, and maybe the apex, of the space program'" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 118). Aesthetically, he was intrigued by "'how dirty the Apollo missions had been when they returned from space'" (qtd. in Jenkins 61).

One cornerstone, as already intimated, was generic: the western. Lucas saw westerns as "the last of our myths" (Wetmore, Jr. 87). This essential genre had been unceremoniously discarded post-Vietnam, robbing the next generation of a central pillar of the American identity (Rose, *Lucas*). "'I came to realize that since the demise of the western, there hasn't been much in the mythological fantasy genre available to the film audience'" (Lucas, qtd. in Hellmann 209). The western rubric presents a rich, textured, and poignant semiological field. The frontier wilderness is a "real place to (Americans), with a real history"; a site all the more appealing in the disorienting wake of Vietnam. "(H)eroism, love, and success are made to look accessible only through the setting aside of all social, historical, and even natural realities" (Wright 121). In an "alienated and rather desperate" time, the "idea of individual accomplishment amidst neutral institutions no longer seemed quite so appropriate" (Wright 122), hence the antiquated myth was abandoned.

> But while the films of paranoia...may have reflected the felt experience of the times, they offered little
> if any possibility of direction, hope, and social identity. They catered to the sensation of oppression
> and powerlessness rather than asserting confidence and purpose in the face of it, as the western
> always had. (Wright 123)[69]

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[69] "Films of paranoia" comports with Browne's "incoherent" film text framework.

In a morally ambiguous age, the western is an oasis: explicit black/white good/evil binaries, and ethically (if not legally) clear-cut "ancient (codes) of honor" that enable an audience to "work through their own...feelings about violence and its necessity in the service of various causes" (Lyden, *Religion* 142). The western is also, naturally, nostalgic, "hankering for the past is one of its central themes...the western frequently was set at the origins of social institutions and principles – the law, justice, religion, and the community. Its stories usually focused on the conflicts over what these institutions should be and what values they should embody" (Browne 289).

As mass ritual, the western represents a return to a liminal "beginning." In this generic paradigm, nostalgia functions as reflection on "how it all started" coincident to meditation on "how it might be renewed" (Browne 289). "The enormously rich...legacy of the past," writes Wood, "can teach us so many different ways, not merely of *thinking*, but of *feeling*. It can reveal attitudes, complexities, emotions that today have been rendered either inconvenient or irrelevant" (Wood xxiv, emphasis in original).

The tweezing out of every inspirational shard became a sport of sorts. That Lucas had mined eclectic veins in mixing his "space opera" alloy became abundantly clear as journalists, scholars, enthusiasts and fans itemized the influences: there was epic poetry (the *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*,[70] *Beowulf, The Divine Comedy, Orlando Furioso, Gerusalemme Leberata, The Faerie Queene, Paradise Lost, Suhrab and Rustam*, *Gilgamesh,* the *Iliad* (Sammons 356, 366; Winkler 280)), theatre (the *Orestia*, *Hamlet*), the Arthurian cycle and medieval culture (Winkler 278; Sammons 363; Galipeau 29, 30),[71] novels (Frank Herbert's *Dune*, Edgar Rice Burroughs' *John Carter of Mars* series, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, E.E. "Doc" Smith's *Lensman* saga (Kapell and Lawrence 23; Baxter 193; Winkler 273; Pollock 142)), comic strips (assorted Marvel series,

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[70] "Just as Aeneas carried his father out of the fallen Troy, so Luke manages to get his father's body out of the crumbling Death Star. And in saving himself, Luke serves his country (the Rebel Alliance) and the "gods" (the Force)" (Sammons 364).
[71] "(T)he Jedi knight combines two archetypal figures: the knight and the priest...both 'active fighting figure' and 'caretaker of the soul'" (Galipeau 29-30).

*Terry and the Pirates* (Gordon 319)), television (*Forbidden Planet* (Gordon 317)), and films (*Metropolis* (1926), *Triumph of the Will* (1935), *Captain Blood* (1935), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), *The Sea Hawk* (1940), *Shane* (1953), *Seven Samurai* (1954), *The Hidden Fortress* (1958)[72], *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), *Yojimbo* (1961), and *The Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964) (Baxter 142, 146, 147, 193, 200; Winkler 273; Gordon 317)).[73] Darth Vader's cape and "sarcastic courtesy" came from Ming the Merciless (*Flash Gordon*); Luke's discovery of his murdered aunt and uncle was pilfered from Ford's *The Searchers* (Gordon 317, 318); the phrase "Galactic Empire" was poached from Asimov's *Foundation Trilogy* (McDowell 5); *Dante's Inferno* inspired the Mos Eisley Cantina sequence (Jenkins 127); Lucas' penchant for "multiple climaxes" was reminiscent of D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (Kenny xviii); Vader's helmet was "nearly identical to *kabuto* bowl-like samurai helmets," and the Stormtrooper outfits were "modeled after samurai armor" (Kenny 87); the Jedi fought in "Japanese kendo" style, "an ancient style of swordplay dating from as early as 400 C.E." (Kenny 92). No one denied, Lucas included, that Luke was "effectively his alter ego, a conduit for all the heroic dreams he had experienced during his solitary Modesto childhood. 'You can't write a main character and not have him be a part of you and not be able to identify with him'" (Jenkins 53).

The Force, too, is best understood as a mosaic: "Lucas's distillation of religious thought and feeling throughout human history" (Decker and Eberl 145).[74] As with the films themselves, the Force was made manifest through manifold influences and inspirations, and elicits a profusion of interpretations. Scholars and authors of various stripes have identified religious antecedents, parallels, and analogues in Buddhism ("Buddhism teaches the interconnectedness of the entire world and embraces the Doctrine of the Middle

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[72] "Lucas is borrowing from Kurosawa borrowing from Shakespeare" (Kenny xxvi).

[73] Also worthy of mention is stop-motion animation wunderkind Ray Harryhausen, whose work inspired not only Lucas, but the generation of special effects experts and aficionados that Lucas assembled to create the effects for *Star Wars*. Their innovations would form the bedrock of Industrial Light and Magic (Baxter 200).

[74] Lucas "actually likes the fact that a number of religions can find their own ideas reflected in the *Star Wars* films; they fill in the answer to the question with the content of their own faith" (Lyden 4). "When the film came out," said Lucas, "almost every single religion took *Star Wars* and used it as an example of their religion; they were able to relate it to stories in the Bible, in the Koran and in the Torah" (Lucas and Moyers 51).

Way, which eschews extreme solutions to the quest for enlightenment and urges moderation in all things"; the

*ch'i* is described as an "inner spiritual force" (Moyers and Lucas 50; Kapell and Lawrence 81-84)), Taoism

("(t)he theology and cosmology of *Star Wars* constructs an ultimate reality much closer to Taoism than any

Western religious philosophy" (Wetmore Jr. 83; Kapell and Lawrence 76-77)),[75] and Christianity ("Christian

concepts of redemption clearly take center stage") (Kapell and Lawrence 75, 85; Wetmore Jr. 88; Lawler 150;

Lyden 6). Furthermore, the Force features elements of "Hinduism, Jainism, (and) Islam" (Kapell and

Lawrence 77). Winkler compares the Jedi sect to Grecian Stoics, and identifies "logos" and "breath" as

obvious Force corollaries (17, 20, 23).[76] Jewett "analyzes *Star Wars* in terms of Pauline theology" (Wetmore

Jr. 81); Lyden argues that Lucas "used a variety of religious sources to construct the world of *Star Wars,*

including biblical apocalyptic," as well as the philosophies of John Hicks ("there is a Reality which

transcends all the religions and which each is trying to describe as best it can") and Paul Tillich (the Force

echoes his "method of correlation, which claimed that culture can ask the questions of existence but only

revelation can answer them") (1-6). Lawler considers the Force coterminous to Hegel's "Calvary of Absolute

Spirit" (Decker and Eberl 145).[77] There are disputes over which faith, and to what extent, the Force owes the

preponderance of its underpinnings, as well as efforts to reconcile disparate strands into a harmonious whole.

Bowen and Wagner, for example, see Anakin Skywalker as "Jesus in a Taoist world" (Kapell and Lawrence

75). Academics have argued that the Force comports with features of psychoanalysis (there is much ado

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[75] "(T)he Jedi are (reminiscent of) Shaolin monks, who train in kung fu and a variety of weapons in addition to their religious training. They also take vows of obedience and vows of celibacy...dedicating themselves not only to spiritual mastery, but mastery of combat as well" (Wetmore, Jr. 86).

[76] "(Breath) pervades all objects in the cosmos. This 'breath,' composed of the elements air and fire, is the sustaining cause of all bodies, and it controls the growth and development of all living bodies. It holds the cosmos together as the passive principle of all matter" (Winkler 23).

[77] "All life goes through transformations in which what at first appears to be evil turns out to be good, while the good must be crucified... This transformation of light into dark and dark into light is the pathway of Spirit – Hegel's philosophically probing conception of what George Lucas calls 'the Force'" (Decker and Eberl 145).

about the "castration" implied by the frequent lightsaber limb-severing (Silvio and Vinci 148)).[78] The Force, moreover, has antecedents in mythological archetypes: "a basic theme of all mythology – that there is an invisible plane supporting the visible one. ... This speaks for certain powers in the psyche that are common to all mankind" (Campbell and Moyers 90, 273). Campbell inferred that the Force is "'what best fosters the flowering of our humanity in this contemporary life,' and as such it is not a 'first cause' or a 'higher cause,' but 'a more inward cause... You've got to find the Force inside you'" (qtd. in Lyden 3).

In tempering raw materials, Lucas once again folded in television and film. Kasdan notes that "'(a)ll through Kurosawa's movies you have the idea that it's one thing to be physically adept and something else to be spiritually adept'" (qtd. in Bouzereau 180). The term "Jedi" was "suggested by 'Jidai Geki,' the term for period TV samurai stories" (Baxter 158),[79] and the term "the force" itself "came out of Carlos Castaneda's *Tales of Power* (1974) ("a 'life force' that unites and binds all things") (Wetmore Jr. 82; Scanlon 20). Furthermore, there is a "force" in Jutra's *21-87*, the NFB film that Lucas loved: "Many people feel that in the contemplation of nature and in communication with other living things, they become aware of some kind of force...behind this apparent mask which we see in front of us, and they call it God" (qtd. in Silberman 6).[80] (Some of *Star Wars'* influences are opaque and subtly grafted, while others are clearly cut from whole cloth.)

The Force is, therefore, *Star Wars'* feature amalgamation, clipped and culled from the catalogue of (post-)modern *mentalité*. That the Force is, in a sense, the overlap in a Venn diagram of multiple doctrines can be viewed as a testament to the polysemic nature of religion. "Each civilization has its own religious picture of the ultimate nature of reality," writes Lalwer, "the divine, the God, the Absolute Spirit." (Kapell

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[78] "I would (suggest) that (the Force) is a symbol for the whole of psychic energy, for what Jung called the collective unconscious, an aspect of psychic reality that all peoples share and from which religious experience, myth, symbol, and art emerge. The Force...expresses symbolically this layer of the human psyche in a feeling, imaginative way, offering a sense of the "other world" referred to in so many of our cosmologies and religions" (Galipeau 29).

[79] "Yoda" is the Sanskrit word for "warrior" (Decker and Eberl 17).

[80] "Lucas confirms that his use of the term...was 'an echo of that phrase in *21-87*. ...Similar phrases have been used extensively by many different people for the last 12,000 years to describe the "life force"'" (Silberman 6).

and Lawrence 147). Furthermore, what religion can rightly claim to have emerged "fully formed"? "No religion appears in the world without a heritage of religious influences, and no religion remains alive unless it deals with the continuing encounters it has with other religions." Lyden continues: "all religions have been formed by the processes of syncretism, borrowing and stealing from various other philosophies and religions to create a new system" (Lyden, *Religion* 135, 224). Myths, according to Campbell, first emerge in a "bounded field... Then they come into collision and relationship, and they amalgamate, and you get a more complex mythology" (27-8). Culture *itself* is cumulative, "it builds like a barrier reef. Nothing from the past ever disappears completely; new stories often depend on our knowledge of old ones. Moreover, the pull of the past is powerful. Representations from the present often appear credible in proportion to their resemblance to those from the past" (Browne 214). An artist may be variously conscious of the forces that have "shaped their creative impulses" (Winkler 10), but those forces are indisputably in play nonetheless. It is the very kaleidoscopic quality of *Star Wars* that guarantees its "epic *manqué"* (Sammons 366). "Myth" may be the skeleton, and genre the muscle, but sources are the sinew – binding one to the other; endowing the animal with agility, grace, and thrust. As it was with the "medium," it is the "matrix" – the dynamic interplay between intersecting, interpenetrating cultural/political/historical valences – that is the "message." Luke, whom we barely know, finds his aunt and uncle killed, and "our experience of Ford's films, and others that use the convention, allows us to read the scene...in more depth than the scene itself would permit" (Kline 84). "The multiple cross-references, the archetypal characters and situations, give it both reinforcement and deep resonance for an audience which may not consciously recognize the sources, but will still respond emotionally to the conventions" (Gordon 319-20). Art isn't born in a vacuum, nor does it emerge wholly conceived from the mind of its creator. "(M)yth is speech *stolen and restored.* Only speech which is restored is no longer quite that which was stolen" (Barthes 150, emphasis in original).

With the Vietnam hangover staved off by *Star Wars*, it was time once more for America to seize the

day, and who better to champion the re-mythologized age than a vestigial "western" agent? "The release of

*Star Wars*...marked the cultural beginning of the Reagan era. I don't know if Jimmy Carter ever even saw the

movie... But one look at it ought to have been enough to tell him he was a goner" (Kenny 160).[81] If Carter

had thrown the country a rope – "(hoping) to induce Americans to come to terms with an age of diminished

swagger and reduced gratification" – then they had tossed back a noose. One could read the lines snaking

around city blocks as script; a "figurative declaration" that Americans "had had it up to here with second

thoughts. ...we didn't want realism; we wanted certitudes, and triumphalism" (Kenny 160, 161). The "mental,

emotional, personal, and social disaffection" (Self 6) that had darkened the preceding decades was receding,

and by the end of the 70s, the air was charged with renewed optimism, "an overall feeling of change for the

better," with Reagan as avatar (Silvio and Vinci 55). Under the stewardship of a twinkling, avuncular ex-

actor, American audiences would reaffirm filmmaking that "(diminished, defused, and rendered) safe all the

major radical movements that gained so much impetus, became so threatening, in the 70s" (Wood 146),

"*Star Wars* has often been discussed as a harbinger of the renewed American conservatism of the

Reagan presidency" (Lev 31), a correlation that Reagan and his administration would brazenly seize upon.

The sobriquet for Reagan's intercontinental ballistic defense shield was the "Star Wars Defense Initiative"

(McDowell 19). Reagan would subsequently purge "all the shades of gray out of the Cold War by calling the

Soviet Union an 'evil empire,'" an obvious homage to the series. "(T)hat nobody dismissed such talk as fit

for a comic book may be the ultimate example of the movie's seepage from pure fantasy into people's real-

world attitudes" (Kenny 161). It was an age of infantilization. With Lucas and Reagan as their loving

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[81] "Melding tomorrow with a yesterday that never was, Lucas's invitation to the audience to return to the comforting simplicities of an earlier era of entertainment was as ideologically loaded as Reagan's summons to hark back to an earlier state of historical ignorance-is-bliss, because you can't uncritically revive the pulp narratives of another age without also replicating their values" (Kenny 166).

patriarchs, Americans were encouraged to regress and embrace "a moral superiority that more than made up for being uninformed" (Kenny 166). The cinemas were soon flush with "children's films conceived and marketed largely for adults – films that (constructed) the adult spectator as a child, or, more precisely, as a childish adult, an adult who would like to be a child" (Wood 145). The industry progressed from the incoherent/paranoiac film text to coherent/credulous to reuse/recycle/repeat: sequels and franchise entries began to dominate marquees. Lucas had concluded his trilogy in 1985, but had further *Indiana Jones* entries the works;[82] there were umpteen sequels to *Jaws*. Furthermore, the adrenaline junkie demographic that Lucas and Spielberg had cultivated was soon offered a powerful new stimulant: take a hit of *Top Gun*.

> There was also a new dread, a penumbra adumbrating morning's rosy glow:
>
> The fear of nuclear war – at least, of indescribable suffering, at most, of the end of the world, with the end of civilization somewhere between – is certainly one of the main sources of our desire to be constructed as children, to be reassured, to evade responsibility and thought. The characteristic and widespread sense of helplessness – that it's all out of our hands, beyond all hope of effective intervention, perhaps already predetermined – for which there is unfortunately a certain degree of rational justification. (Wood 149)

In 1987, Lucas announced that there would be no new *Star Wars* movies for the foreseeable future. "'I'll do more eventually; I just don't know when. ...my heart is in other areas now. I can make more *Star Wars* and make zillions of dollars, but I don't need to do that, and I really don't have the interest right now'" (qtd. in Kline 154). Lucas was stupendously, staggeringly rich. "His personal fortune," estimated at over $2 billion, "was bigger than that of most corporations – and, indeed, some countries" (Baxter 385). Upon the release of *Empire*, Lucas "was chairman and sole shareholder in Lucasfilm Ltd. – a corporation of 200 employees with

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[82] Shone sees *Raiders* as "Reaganomics incarnate: a lean, athletic entertainment that opened the new decade with a resounding crack of the whip" (108).

a net income of $1.5 million a week" (Jenkins 228). Shone compares *Star Wars* lucre to water from a flailing

hose: "if you were standing nearby, you got wet" (65). Spielberg put it most succinctly: "George has a bank

called *Star Wars*" (Jenkins 233).

When Lucas and Fox had been negotiating their *Star Wars* agreement, Lucas had traded "cash for

control" (Jenkins 73). In lieu of the higher fee – a raise regarded as his due after *Graffiti*'s success – Lucas

retained merchandise and sequel rights, then considered worthless, sought ownership of novel and soundtrack

rights, and final cut of the film (Pollock 137).[83] Lucas asserted that his sole motivation was quality control:

"'I took over control of the merchandising not because I thought it was going to make me rich, but because I

wanted to control it. I wanted to make a stand for social, safety, and quality reasons. I didn't want someone

using the name *Star Wars* on a piece of junk'" (qtd. in Pollock 193). If a given product didn't meet Lucas'

standards, "it was turned down" (Pollock 195).

Whatever the impetus, the numbers were nuts. *Star Wars* was the "biggest merchandising boom a

Hollywood film had ever spawned," and Lucas was, as with special effects, perceived as the savvy, prescient

pioneer (Jenkins 170, 172). As *Star Wars* swag became its own "micro-economy" (Shone 66), Hollywood

took note of the new and sizable profit margins.[84] The *LA Times* quoted Lucas confirming that "'(i)n a way

this film was designed around toys. I actually make toys. If I make money it will be from the toys'" (Baxter

174).[85] "'All of this was part of the film, the intention of launching toys in supermarkets, creating books and

stuff'" (qtd. in Kline 59). After all, Lucas loved to "'create games and things, so that was part of the movie,

to be able to generate toys and things." (qtd. in Scanlon 19). Make no mistake: merchandise came second to

moviemaking. "'My only interest was to make sure I got those three movies made. ...that whole idea that all

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[83] The studio granted him sixty percent of merchandise, and ownership over the sequels. By 1979, he owned the merchandising 100% (Baxter 178).

[84] Thus "(a)dding an incentive," Biskind surmises, "to replace complex characters with simple figures that could be turned into toys" (341).

[85] "'I might be a toymaker if I weren't a film-maker'" (Lucas, qtd. in Baxter 21).

this was product-driven is nonsense'" (Lucas, qtd. in Shone 66).

Demand for swag became a "frenzy" (Baxter 249). Kenner sold "$1 billion worth of toys" – 250 million figurines worth – "every year for the next seven years." When *Jedi* was released, the *Star Wars* section of the Kenner catalogue ballooned to forty pages, and there were five *Jedi* books on the *New York Times'* bestseller list (Jenkins 174, 250; Baxter 251). There were comics from Marvel, "R2-D2 mugs and wind-up C-3PO toys, model rocket ships and Jedi Knight lightsabers," products dreamt-up long before *Star Wars* arrived in theatres (Jenkins 77, 76). In 1983 alone, Lucas pulled in $1.5 billion in retail sales, and between 1977 and 1997, Lucas sold more than "$4 billion in merchandise" (Kline 138, 218). There was a lull in the 90s, but after Lucas announced his intention to produce three prequels, sales surged to *Jedi*-era levels: *Star Wars* became, once again, "the holy grail of licensing" (Kline 191).[86] Lucas claimed that without the steady stream of lucre from his toys, staff would have been destitute, R&D at ILM stagnated, and *Jedi*'s effects sub-par. "'People tend to look at merchandising as an evil thing. But ultimately, a lot of fun things come out of it, and...it pays for the overhead of the company and everybody's salary'" (qtd. in Jenkins 251).

From his guerrilla filmmaking days with Coppola, Lucas had nurtured the notion of having the resources to "gather his friends and re-create the USC experience" (Biskind 92). This was meant to have been American Zoetrope, but the first incarnation had been stillborn. Now, with the proceeds from *Star Wars*, Lucas could assemble the guild anew. "'I just wanted to take the fun and camaraderie we had and move it to a slightly larger environment that is also comfortable, relaxing, and warm'" (Lucas, qtd. in Pollock 233). Lucas envisioned a "self-contained community, a new version of the nineteenth-century company town"; something "small, intimate, and noncommercial" (Pollock 233, 259). "'I'm trying to develop a place that is designed to stimulate activity, especially among writers'" (Lucas, qtd. in Hearn 124); an incubatory "creative

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[86] Milius recalls Lucas saying to him "'"I'm going to make five times as much money as (Coppola) on these science fiction toys. And I won't have to make *The Godfather*"'" (qtd. in Biskind 320-1).

atmosphere" as alternative to Hollywood's "cold and impersonal" environment (Pollock 232).

In 1983, at the age of thirty-nine, Lucas was an institution unto himself (Kline 135); the reluctant steward of a "cluster of media companies...for whom the *Star Wars* films are calling cards of technical excellence, showcases for the high fidelity aptitude of their equipment" (Silvio and Vinci 164). Lucas was not only the foreman, he was also the sole shareholder (Baxter 7). After *Star Wars*, said Lucas,

> the main reason that I stepped down from directing and became...the overall executive producer, was that I also at the same time had to build up the companies and get a financial paradigm working that would allow me to not have to go back to the studios anymore. That I could be free of...begging for money. So I've never had to go back to the studio, I've been able to make the films exactly the way I want. (Suskind, "Unscripted")

Lucas won his "financial and logistical" freedom through a steady stream of revenue secured through cunning and foresight (perks that the studios would never give away again). "(P)ropelled by his diverse conglomerate of privately owned subsidiaries," Lucas sustained an ironic pedigree: independent filmmaker and "maverick" (Kline v). Such security was to prove a double-edged sword, however, for with much corporate power comes much corporate responsibility. Lucas asserted, on the one hand, that his company was "'designed to service me while I'm alive and to give me the things that I want to do'" (qtd. in Pollock 275), and yet, "'the more wealthy you get and the more powerful you get, the more restrictions you have – and the *less* you can actually do'" (qtd. in Kline 125, emphasis in original). Listless is the head that wears the crown: "'Let's face it...(it's) is a boring job. ... It's not dramatic, it's boring" (Lucas, qtd. in Pollock 231).

In the mid-90s, Lucas' companies were cumulatively worth approximately $5 billion (Jenkins 262), and the Lucasfilm corporate cosmos was nursery to an ever-growing array of nebula. Subdivisions included: LucasArts, LucasArts Attractions, LucasArts Licensing, Learning Systems, Luminaire, Skywalker Sound,

and the THX Group (Kline 158). The division that claimed profit pole position was Lucasfilm Commercial

Productions, which made special effects for upwards of forty commercials *per annum* (Baxter 362).[87]

During production on *Empire*, Kurtz wrung his hands over the "mushrooming Lucasfilm machine"

(Jenkins 221). Jenkins reports that the company dilated from the office of a "small, happy family" into

precisely what Lucas had decried: a studio. "'It became so big and corporate, like...Universal Studios'"

(Alsup, qtd. in Jenkins 222-3). As Lucas' empire fanned its tentacles throughout the industry, the squeeze

irrevocably molded the infrastructure. ILM and Skywalker Sound garnered reputations as "technological

torch bearers" (Jenkins 261), factories for the tools – "computer graphics, computer-assisted editing, digital

sound – that will revolutionize the way movies are put together" (Kline 135-6).

"Every artist is faced with the problem of technology," Lucas told Charlie Rose, "because art is

technology" (Rose, *Lucas*). Technology, precisely, employed in the service of storytelling. "We have faster

film, we have faster lenses, we have high-speed cameras, we have slow motion... widescreen, colour,

sound...all these things were the artist saying 'I want *that* power that I don't have; I need more storytelling

power.'" Lucas required a "'broader palette,'" because his imagination went "'way beyond what people are

doing right now'" (Lucas, qtd. in Rose, *Lucas*). Desperate to escape the constraints of the past, he had paved

the road to the future.

Lucas was credited with singlehandedly reviving "the dying art of special effects" through the

"marriage of computer and camera" – i.e., Dykstraflex motion control. "(Priding) itself on the meticulousness

of its effects an the lapidary perfection of their application," ILM was soon widely recognized as the "world's

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[87] The 80s was an era of corporate consolidation, and one wonders if the success of Lucas' multi-tiered conglomerate inspired other powerful media companies to pursue diversification, acquiring and warehousing smaller companies as sub-divisions under multinational umbrellas. Biskind notes that other studios "began to resemble other large corporations. They became bloated bureaucracies, with a proliferation of so-called creative executives" (402).

premier special-effects house," and Lucasfilm's crown jewel (Baxter 366, 298).[88] Director John Lasseter,

who worked for Lucas' CGI animation subdivision, Pixar, credits Lucas with

> basically (creating) his own division to come up with digital sound editing, digital film editing, digital
>
> optical printing, digital compositing, then computer animation. At the time, crazy nutty ideas. Now,
>
> tell me a movie that doesn't use an Avid or a Lightworks. Every bit of sound editing is now digital.
>
> (qtd. in Shone 137)

Lucas spearheaded the development of EditDroid, later sold to Avid, which became "the core of the

technology used to edit most major studio releases and nearly all prime-time TV programs today" (Silberman

7).[89] THX Certification – a set of sonic standards proposed and promoted by Lucas – led to both "massive...

upgrades" at the multiplex, as well as "surround sound systems at home" (Silberman 7). The holy grail,

however, was CGI.

In 1991, Vincenzi reported that "(t)he most complicated, time-consuming, and vanguard ILM

effects...involve the computer-graphics division, which evolved from Pixar" (Kline 161). In 1983, having

spent $8 million on development, and with graphics engineers busily churning out "calculated synthetic

images," Lucas saw the faint glow of the CGI era on the horizon. In the cinema of the future, computers

would do "the drudge work," supply "exotic locales and devices," duplicate "strange creatures," "leaving the

filmmaker to think about how the movie fits together." Films would be shot and distributed "on high-

resolution video systems, with a picture quality superior to that of film." As an added bonus, the technology

would mark down the sticker price (Kline 163-164). "'Everything George has done has been to reduce the

distance between what's in his skull and the pixels on the screen. He's really a painter" (Rubin, qtd. in

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[88] In 1984, ILM became a company for hire, in the process amassing "(eleven) Academy Award nominations, nine Oscars, and four Technical Achievement Awards" (Kline 158).

[89] Rubin compares pre-Avid editing to the byzantine warehouse, brimful with crates, at the conclusion of *Raiders*: "'you had 300,000 feet of film and sound rolls that had to be code-numbered and matched by hand. ... It was like the Library of Congress with no librarian'" (qtd. in Silberman 7).

Silberman 7).[90] Lucas had thrown the bulk of his creative and corporate weight behind "extending a director's editorial control over not just a film's pacing and choice of shots, but every element inside the frame as well" (Silberman 6).

As Lucasfilm expanded, some of the staff found it increasingly stifling, "a sterile, spooky place where everyone went around in jeans and sneakers and said 'neat' a lot, just like their employer." Scott Ross, former General Manager of ILM called it "'an incredibly cloistered environment, like entering a nunnery'" (137). Furthermore, says Ross, the edict from above was ""No one can make movies within my organization except me." We were losing the likes of Joe Johnston and David Fincher... Lucas sold off Pixar, along with John Lasseter, to Steve Jobs... Lucasfilm was hemorrhaging talent at an alarming rate'" (qtd. in Shone 137). What staff should have kept in mind was the Lucas mantra that this was all, ultimately, in the end, totally completely utterly to do with telling better stories: "'computers or no computers, movies will always be about storytelling'" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 175).

> Entertainment is good ideas, not technology... Good stories are still the heart of it all. The truth is I'm not all that enamored with new technology; I just acknowledge its existence. All that special effects can do is allow the writer or creator to let his imagination go wild and deal with themes that weren't possible before. (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 169)

Some couldn't help but notice, however, that while the Ranch housed a glut of tech-driven enterprises, it did not attract many writers. Filmmakers came not to write screenplays, but to attend to various postproduction duties (Kline 197). Others still drew the same conclusion as the vanished Marcia: the Ranch had become Lucas' personal Xanadu (Pollock 259). Lucas was crossing a thorny threshold: from corporate overlord to

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[90] "The filmmaker," Prince writes, "approaches the painter's ability to control the fine details of color, shading, contrast, filtration, and other attributes of the image – *within images that can otherwise appear naturalistic*" (28, emphasis in original). Kurtz paraphrases Jean Renoir: "'for an artist, the most important thing is to know when you're done, and leave it. ...you put too much extra paint on and you've ruined the painting'" (Plume, "Interview").

quasi-deity.[91] Baxter describes Lucasfilm as a cloistered "cult of personality," with deferential disciples honouring their liege with a "mystical significance."[92] Lucas is the reclusive guru making the rare, hallowed appearance, his pronouncements carrying "messianic" gravitas (Baxter 139, 11). Pollock sensed "an imperceptible wave" undulating through the office when Lucas swept through, his "small entourage amorphously (accumulating) around him, as if he were too special to be related to on a normal level" (237). "George" was no longer a name you spoke, but rather invoked (Baxter 307).[93]

This phalanx of corporate hoplites allowed Lucas to conquer the known cinematic world, but with all the means of production at his fingertips, what Lucasfilm wasn't making much of was movies. Lucas "immured himself in (his) remote retreat" and "saw almost nobody" (Baxter 386). In 1987, an article in the *New York Times* referred to him as "almost a total recluse" (Biskind 427),[94] and if he appeared in public at all, he said little (Jenkins 259). The few films bearing the Lucasfilm seal that did dribble out of the pipeline were critically derided box office anathema: *Tucker: The Man and His Dream*, *Howard the Duck*, *Willow*, *Radioland Murders,* and the failed television franchise *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles.* Only *Temple of Doom* managed to shake some rust off the turnstiles (Jenkins 259-260). With each failure, Lucas grew "increasingly bitter," coming to regard his career as a "failure" (Biskind 424).[95]

Lucas had subsumed his artistic aspirations to secure corporate domination, but latent desires started to surface. In 1983, Pollock reported that Lucas planned to direct "only if he can control the situation" (274).

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[91] Sid Ganis, Vice President of Marketing for Lucasfilm in the 80s, remembers seeing a secretary meeting Lucas for the first time "'look at him as though he was a deity'" (qtd. in Baxter 139).

[92] "On the ranch, Lucas settled down to a life of privacy and reflection that a Russian aristocrat of the early nineteenth century might have enjoyed. Thirty-five permanent staff catered to his needs, and kept the ranch ticking over" (Baxter 353).

[93] "As human beings develop greater technological powers over nature," Lawler comments: "together with mighty systems of economic, social, and political power in which a small number of people have immense control over the lives of the majority, *the divine is conceived of in the image of the rulers* – a power radically separate from ruling over the world" (Kapell and Lawrence 148, emphasis in original).

[94] Kaplan claims that Lucas kept track of the number of references to his reclusiveness were made in the *Times* (1).

[95] Milius turns the screws: "'George built Lucasland up there, his own private little duchy – which was producing what? A bunch of pap'" (qtd. in Biskind 424).

In a 1987 interview, Lucas said, "'(u)ltimately, I'm a director…that's really where my heart is.'" In 1991: "'My first love is editing... It's what I came out of, and it's still what I enjoy most,'" adding "'I will get back to directing. ... Lately...I've been getting the itch to play" (qtd. in Kline xi, 166, 169). Lucas thought of the *Star Wars* films as "bankable investments." Eerily echoing the cinematic avatar of the Reagan 80s, Gordon Gecko, Lucas affirmed that his films were properties belonging to him and him alone: "'They're not sacred... They're ultimately tools'" (qtd. in Baxter 10). *Star Wars* was simply "a means to an end" (Pollock 273).

Throughout the decade, Lucas had kept a firm grip on the levers of the *Star Wars* myth-making machine as missionaries throughout the "content-creating galaxy" spread the gospel through the "Bible,"

> a burgeoning canonical document (currently 170 pages long) that is maintained by "continuity editors"... It is a chronology of all the events that have ever occurred in the *Star Wars* universe, in all the films, books, CD-ROMs, Nintendo games, comic books, and role-playing guides, and each medium is seamlessly coordinated with the others. (Kline 200)

Any and all amendments to that chronology, that galaxy, no matter how minor a blip on the timeline, or remote a corner, "are always approved by Lucas himself. The continuity editors send him checklists of potential events, and Lucas checks yes or no" (Kline 200-1).

"(A)t the bottom of the abyss," says Campbell, "comes the voice of salvation" (Campbell and Moyers 46). Though Lucasfilm's movies were flops, the CGI (and CGI-related) effects were not. *Star Trek 2: the Wrath of Khan* (1982) featured "one of the earliest entirely computer generated sequences in a feature film," and Disney's CGI "extravaganza" *Tron* contained "sixteen minutes of completely computer-generated imagery" (Abbott 92). Eager to stay apace, Lucas' *Willow* (directed by *Graffiti* alumnus Ron Howard) became a testing-ground for "morphing," which facilitated fluid transitions between forms (be they practical or CGI) – e.g., a duck becomes a troll becomes a person, all within a single shot (Hearn 157, 170; Abbott 93).

*Young Indiana Jones* incorporated "digitally (augmented) and (enhanced) live-action images" with "resounding success" (Hearn 179). With only a handful of actors, computers could create expansive crowd scenes and "backgrounds that weren't really there" (Kline 173). Not only were the effects of better quality, but of increased quantity, and increased quantity equalled cheap. "'Within the next couple of years, we'll be able to take what was a $30,000 shot and do it on the big screen in full resolution for $6,000 or $7,000'" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 173). "'(B)y the first year (of *Young Indiana*),'" recounts producer Rick McCallum, "'we were achieving about a hundred digital effects shots in each episode'" (qtd. in Hearn 179).

*Radioland Murders* (1994) further demonstrated the capability of CGI effects to digitally engorge the frame by adding extras and set elements to shots during post-production. "'(N)ow that we are in that (digital) environment, there's almost no limits to what we're able to do'" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 178, 182). *Radioland Murders*, thus, exists as a footnote to game-changing technology – the "extensive use of high-tech matte techniques that allowed separately filmed actors to appear in the same scene" (Baxter 382) – with those actors, the characters they portrayed, and the content of those scenes all but forgotten. If brows had truly furrowed over whether or not films were being reduced to testing-grounds for effects, they could now collectively de-crinkle: Yes, they were. In 1997, Lucas gushed over his cinematic concoctions as "dynamic creations, forever showcasing the latest technological breakthroughs in sound and image" (Kline 224).[96]

Lucas grew increasingly exultant: "'It makes the medium much more malleable; you can make a lot more changes. You can cut and paste and move things around, and think in a more fluid style – and I love that'" (Baxter 386). Breakthrough followed breakthrough: the "water tentacle" ILM created for James Cameron's *The Abyss* was the first independent, free-floating CGI entity that "seemed seamlessly to exist

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[96] "Fears that CGI would not be able to counterfeit reality were decisively dispelled. Literally nothing seemed beyond the latest generation of computers. This knowledge, and the experience gained, was almost more profitable than (*Young Indiana*) itself" (Baxter 380).

within the 'real' (represented) world";[97] the T-1000 in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* was a further leap in morphing (Kline xviii; Abbott 92). A new set of goalposts appeared: a free-standing, independently-operating anthropomorphic CGI entity indistinguishable from the "real" environment into which it was transplanted, capable of convincingly "interacting" with its corporeal counterparts, and able to elicit emotions from the audience with the aplomb of any flesh-and-blood actor. In a neologism: a "synthespian" (Baxter 387). Despite some dissension in the ranks – could actors, sets, and environments be supplanted by software? – Lucas was resolute: "'it will be possible to create the likeness of a human being...and the result will evoke an emotional response'" (qtd. in Baxter 351).

At the turn of the 90s, "*Star Wars* was as dead as film franchises get" (Shone 278). The brand rallied, however, with the release of Timothy Zahn's *Heir to the Empire* – the first of three novels set in a post-*Jedi* galaxy. The book catapulted to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list and stayed there for twenty nine weeks (Jenkins 263). Lucas was once again taken aback: a *book* had given a defibrillating shock to *Star Wars'* stalled heartbeat, and the franchise was re-vivified. In 1995, Lucasfilm released a VHS box set of *Star Wars* remastered in THX sound and sold an astonishing twenty-two million copies in six months (Baxter 390; Jenkins 266). The "sleepy *Star Wars* merchandising market" was further reenergized when toy rights were scooped up by Galoob after Hasbro let their license lapse. Within two years, Lucasfilm saw revenues of $360 million rolling into their coffers from *Star Wars*-related products alone (Jenkins 264).

It was *Jurassic Park,* however, that "'changed everything'" (Lucas, qtd. in Hearn 174). Lucas remained adamant that his storytelling agility was critically hamstrung by arcane technology, and, as such, no further chapters in the *Star Wars* saga were possible. That the Original Trilogy had been subservient to the technology of the day had been a "'frustrating, imagination-inhibiting experience'" (Lucas, qtd. in Hearn

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[97] "'It took ILM...six months of intensive work and constant checking with the director on the form and realism required...before it's magnificent pod became a convincing animated object'" (Baker, qtd. in Abbott 92).

182); a narrow aperture offering a paltry, pinprick view of the universe Lucas envisioned. "It's very controlled where we go, it's very limited in what we see, and decisions were made in the storytelling to say 'Well, I'll only go here and I'll only see this – it would be great to do all this other stuff, but I can't do that'" (Lucas, *Star Wars* commentary, 1977). If it had always been Lucas' intent to continue the *Star Wars* saga, however, it was "ILM's achievements with *Jurassic Park*...that... finally convinced him" (Jenkins 262). Early CGI renderings exceeded all expectations, and the moment of truth arrived when the upper echelons assembled for an effects test screening. As a pod of long-extinct lizards ambled realistically*, convincingly* across the screen, Lucas began to cry. "'It was like one of those moments in history, like the invention of the light bulb or the first telephone call. A major gap had been crossed, and things were never going to be the same. You just cannot see them as anything but real. It's just impossible'" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 176). The long-simmering filmic uprising was finally at hand: "'Digital technology is the same revolution as adding sound to pictures and the same revolution as adding color to pictures... Nothing more, nothing less'" (Lucas, qtd. in Kline 224; Shone 213). "Maybe twenty years from now, fifty years from now, they will look clumsy. But I'm not sure even that will happen. I think we may have reached a level here where we have actually artificially created reality, which of course is what the movies have been trying to do all along" (Lucas, qtd. in Hearn 174). As the lights rose, model and puppet maker Phil Tippett turned to Spielberg and said: "'I think I'm extinct'" (qtd. in Shone 218).[98]

Fire in hand, Prometheus could now descend. Not only was Lucas able to tell "more interesting" stories, but he could do so without breaking the bank (Jenkins 262). "'I didn't take seriously the idea of doing prequels to *Star Wars* until I had the digital technology with which to do it,'" said Lucas. "'I wanted to walk

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[98] Tippett was right. The model-makers on *Star Wars* had been so successful "that they unleashed a desire for better and better special effects in movies, which ended up putting a number of the people in the model shop out of work. 'Either you learn the computer or you might as well work as a carpenter.' ... Today," writes Seabrook, "the model shop survives as a somewhat vestigial operation, producing prototypes of the creatures and machines that will then be rendered in computer graphics for the movie screen" (Kline 212).

around in a world I'd created, and mine its full potential'" (qtd. in Hearn 182). At long last, free of the fetters

of material reality, Lucas could deliver any and every particular of his immense imagination, pure, limpid,

and undiluted, down to the last pristine, pixellated detail. Lucas announced that he had started work on a new

set of *Star Wars* adventures "concentrating on the period that preceded the *Star Wars* trilogy" (Jenkins 262).

Fans were stupefied, the earth shook, Atlas collapsed to one knee. "'It took a long time for me to adjust to

*Star Wars,*'" Lucas confided. "'I finally did, and I'm going back to it. *Star Wars* is my destiny'" (qtd. in

Biskind 424).


The Prequel Trilogy (1996 -2005)

  With the surprise success of the THX box set, Fox proposed to Lucas that the *Star Wars* trilogy be

rereleased in theatres to commemorate its twentieth anniversary (Jenkins 266). The ensuing effort was

heralded as a landmark in film text conservation; the primary stated purpose was "maintenance and

preservation" (Brooker 63). Producer Rick McCallum asserted that

> (t)here's only one reason why we did this, and that reason is archival. ...two years ago it would have
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> been impossible for this film to ever be released in the theatres again. It was gone, finished. Had this
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> work not been done, in two or three years the picture would have completely disintegrated. (qtd. in
>
> Bouzereau 113)

The project would serve a further dual purpose for Lucas. With CGI he could finally refurbish his insufficient

25% of a movie, and test the imbrication of CGI elements and his dusty, shopworn "used universe" – a "dry

run" for the ensuing prequels (Jenkins 267).[99] Lucas had always agonized over how *Star Wars* had fallen far

short of his intentions. The film should have been "much more out there in terms of creatures and aliens,

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[99] "'Probably more than half the reason for doing (the *Special Edition*) in the first place...was to have a trial run for what's coming up'" (Knoll, qtd. in Baxter 392).

(and) environments." Though *Star Wars* seemed "'very big,'" he said, "'it was an illusion, it's technically very small'" (qtd. in Shone 49). These shortcomings were thorns in Lucas' side from the moment *Star Wars* was released. In 1977 he told Scanlon: "'there is nothing that I would like more than go back and redo all the special effects, have a little more time'" (qtd. in 13).

> So when I got the opportunity later on to actually fix that 25% and make the film be the way I wanted it to be and…I could be happy when I watched it instead of depressed – gee I wish I could have...I wish I'd had the time...I wish I had the money, I wish they hadn't taken it away from me... – I fixed it. The changes aren't very much, but it made a huge difference to me. (Rose, *Lucas*)

A dry run would be especially advantageous for Lucas, who had not only long been away from the director's chair, but had little idea how CGI technology actually worked. "His company...had developed it, and his technicians had used it at the behest of other filmmakers, but he himself did not have a drop of CGI in his creative bloodstream" (Shone 280). The *Special Edition* was the perfect opportunity for Lucas to familiarize himself with the tools and utilities of the new medium. "We called it an experiment in learning new technology" (Lucas, qtd. in Hearn 183). The impact of CGI on Lucas' system, writes Shone, was "rapacious and all consuming" (280), and ILM would, in the final tally, redo five hundred effects shots throughout the Original Trilogy, "inserting wholly new scenes, new characters, (and) changing the motivations of existing ones." A quick polish had spiraled into revisionism (Shone 279).

"'Does an artist have the right to revisit his work?'" asks McCallum. "'George didn't change anything that he didn't want or didn't originally conceive'" (qtd. in Bouzereau 113). What had Lucas originally conceived, and been forced to elide, that had so vexed him over the decades? Certain changes were merely touch-ups to details that had "irritated" him – "nitpicking minutiae" such as painting out matte lines and the smudge under Luke's landspeeder. Lucas then resurrected scenes that had been left on the cutting room floor:

a confrontation between Solo and Jabba that Lucas had shot with a burly actor in Jabba's role, intending to replace the performer with an effect that was never completed (Jenkins 266-267). In *Jedi*, Jabba's palace was always meant to feature "'a big musical number... Now...we're able to turn this scene into the real musical number that it was supposed to be in the first place'" (Lucas, qtd. in Bouzereau 243). Through ILM, Lucas grafted three-to-five minutes of CGI footage onto each film in the trilogy. In *Jedi*'s denouement, a CGI-rendered shot of Coruscant – a "city planet" visited frequently in the prequels – provided "the first glimpse of the future of *Star Wars*. 'The end of *Jedi* doesn't really belong to the middle trilogy any more... What you're seeing is the first shot of the new trilogy'" (Lucas, qtd. in Jenkins 267).[100]

A "minor" alteration to the cantina sequence would elicit the greatest degree of frustration from fans, and raise larger questions about artistic revisionism. The bounty hunter Greedo has cornered Han at a table in the cantina. In the shooting script, Han surreptitiously unholsters his blaster, and *"(s)uddenly, the slimy alien disappears in a blinding flash of light. Han pulls his smoking gun from beneath the table as the other patrons look on in bemused amazement"* (Bouzereau 49). Ergo: Han shoots first. For the *Special Edition*, however, a laser blast is loosed from Greedo's gun a hair's breadth before Han's shot. Han has now killed Greedo *in self defense.* The amendment is strange for several reasons: logistically (a professional mercenary misses his target from two feet away?), aesthetically (the blast itself (before further tweaks were made in the 2004 DVD release) looked "off" – the trajectory skewed to an awkward angle, clearly mismatched with how Greedo is holding his blaster), and, moreover, entailed a "major (shift) in characterization" (Brooker 76). Han Solo – the shrewd, canny, swashbuckling rogue undergoes a conscientious shift from callous individualist to comrade – was re-construed in the space of a single two-second shot, and with the addition of a single effect.

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[100] When Ben Burtt first heard of Lucas' intent to tinker with the trilogy, he "'had reservations'" (qtd. in Jenkins 267). Kurtz finds the scene between Solo and the digital Jabba "totally unnecessary"; "we put all that information in that scene into the Greedo scene in the cantina" (Philippe 2010).

Lucas had rocked the foundations of the filmic hierarchy. "(T)he Solo/Greedo face off," write Lyons and Morris, "requires a rethinking of what has traditionally been the preeminence once assigned to principle photography over post-production processes typically aimed at fine-tuning" (Kline 200). In assigning heretofore unknown (under-contemplated?) prominence to post-production, Lucas was placing a thumb on the creative scales, affecting a whole series of interrelations – actor/text, actor/actor, actor/director, director/ text, editor and all of the preceding, etc. As performances grew increasingly permutable after the fact, the actors in particular are "(alienated)...from the filmmaking process," and their performance dislocated from "context and continuity...with gestures and expressions having no immediate relevance" (Kline 201). In decoupling diegetic components (actors, scenes, the cumulative meaning(s) of interactions as situated within the broader narrative) from the context/conditions in which they were generated, Lucas modified the nature of – and the audiences ability to make meaning from – a central character, and destabilized (if "only" on a minor scale) the integrity of the film.[101]

This was a momentous foray into "edit-suite" directing – which we shall turn to shortly – and the debate over the author's "right" to retroactively modify the text provokes a dilemma: what (/when) is "authentic" art? Furthermore, in an inherently collaborative craft, when and by whom is the story being told? In a sense, Lucas had reduced his films to templates; palimpsests on which to independently inscribe "the signs of digital technology," thus "problematizing notions of authenticity and permanence" (Silvio and Vinci 162, 163, 190). "Despite their intended goal of smoothing the joins and making the six films more visually continuous and compatible, some of the new sequences disrupt the text's received interpretations" (Silvio and Vinci 163). How does *post hoc* intercession, in turn, "affect the the interaction between the viewing subject

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[101] Kurtz was livid: "I think...it ruins the scene, basically. ... There was no reason that it couldn't have been shot that way" (Plume, "Interview"). In the documentary *The People Vs. George Lucas*, a devoted fan expresses similar outrage: "When you go into the heart of a character and you do something which changes that character's dynamic, that's not nitpicking, that's destroying story. That's betrayal" (Philippe 2010). As much elation as had met the announcement of the prequels, the Greedo/Solo controversy was an early indication that fan fealty has limits.

and the cinematic object" (Silvio and Vinci 195)? To the reader of the text – the audience that has previously (repeatedly) consumed the text – the text acquires "permanence" and is invested with an "aura of sacredness." By manipulating the text subsequent to its (recursive) reception, Lucas dissolves that permanence, rendering the text and its received interpretations "fluid and unfixed" (Silvio and Vinci 163); as such, divested of sacredness. Concurrently, Lucas argues that he is "returning" the work to its pre-conceived state, recapturing the intended "authentic... rendering" (Kline 195); thus the "authentic" text is inverted; re-contextualized as the *inauthentic* version. Consequently, the "original" (retroactively inauthentic) version is expunged: the original *Star Wars* "no longer exists" (Lucas, qtd. in Silvio and Vinci 163).[102]

Of course, it *does* exist; both literally (in unadulterated versions released on VHS, LaserDisc, and DVD, as well as digitized copies accessible on-line) and figuratively – in memory, within our communal cultural *mentalité*. Far from obviating the "original," the *Special Edition* "put the old text in dialogue with the new" (Silvio and Vinci 163). The audience is challenged to reconcile incongruous components, and concurrently invited to compare and contrast their "memory" of the text with its present iteration. When the current version chafes with the "original," it incites an *anti-nostalgic* reaction by indicating that what the consumer "remembers" is "wrong," thus subverting one of the very strengths that made the "original" so compelling. Instead of "papering over its defects," CGI elicits a juxtapositional field that foregrounds the respective trilogies' aesthetic and technological incongruities (and ironically underscores an inverse invocation of the technological ambivalence prevalent in the "original") (Silvio and Vinci 165).

The material realities of rust, grease, and grime, correlates to a textual reality that, in turn, connects to authority. ...digitization allows Lucas to recapture his original auratic intention, it nonetheless

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[102] There is an implicit irony here not lost on some scholars, namely that Lucas himself spearheaded a campaign to prevent Ted Turner from colorizing black and white films. "In 1988, George Lucas testified before Congress against the colorization of Black and White films" and argued, in what can only be described as one of history's most public acts of cognitive dissonance, that "(o)ur cultural history must not be allowed to be rewritten" (Philippe 2010).

undercuts the very heart of that aura and moves the viewer from a world of textual reality achieved

through constancy, to one of simulatory reality marked by difference. (196)

The issue seems, once again, to be one of seams. One is never not aware, in watching the *Special Edition,*

that these are new edifices shoehorned into a preexisting topography; there are too many obvious

inconsistencies in architecture. Digitized elements present a *sheen* that cannot organically enmesh with the

sandblasted, scabrous texture of the "original" film. That "awareness" – that a "digitizing apparatus" has

been (/is) at work within the space – "creates a distance between the screen and the spectator" (Kline 197).

Not "bad" so much as distracting, but distractions that nonetheless interrupt reception. The text is bifurcated

into layers, one modern, one antiquated; a stratification of compositional elements that implies a hierarchy of

CGI (new, good) and practical (arcane, inadequate). There is no longer an "authentic" film text, only the

permutation one prefers. "This is only about an artist going back to do a film and make it in the way in which

he originally envisioned it" McCallum would later reiterate (Philippe 2010), yet fans were not placated. The

chorus of disdain continued to swell as alterations accrued through subsequent DVD and Blu-Ray re-releases.

Revisionism further problematizes the text by dislodging it from the time/place context in which it

was created and shifting it into an alien "contemporary" sphere. "Film is a product of its time and

conditions," said a characteristically candid Kurtz. "All of the conditions that we had in 1977 – constraints of

money, constraints of time...created that original film" (qtd. in Philippe 2010). "A movie is what it is because

that's what happened at the time...there is a whole emotional vortex around how a movie is made, and it

captures a certain flavor of the moment" (Plume, "Interview"). John Knoll, one of ILM's cadre of effects

wizards, concurs: "'I kind of felt like those are a classic product of their time, and all the things that are kind

of dated about them, well, that's because of when they were made, and the conditions they were made

under. ... They have a stylization that comes from the period they were made'" (qtd. in Shone 279-80).

One integral change that had occurred between the completion of the Original Trilogy and the *Special Edition* was that Lucas had become a father. "'I had a family, and that changed things,'" Lucas told Seabrook in 1997 (qtd. in Kline 200). "'For the first time...I've been able to see a child's reaction to what I'm doing'" (qtd. in Kenny xxiv).[103] Could Lucas' role as *paterfamilias* have had any bearing on Han shooting in self defense? "Now as a parent, or...as an older filmmaker he's looking at it and saying 'Wow, that's really brutal'" (Philippe 2010).

If diehards dissented over "the loss of the first series' casual 'starvation' quality," they were soon "drowned out in a wave of approval." The *Special Edition* screened to pan-demographic, multi-generational audiences; adults who had never seen the films theatrically, alongside their children, who were not yet born when the trilogy originally premiered (Baxter 394). The *Special Edition* of *Star Wars* earned over $100 million within the month, en route to a $138 million run, "(putting) it among the half-dozen most successful films of the year" (Jenkins 268, 269). In a market saturated with sugar, *Star Wars* seemed to remind audiences of their first surge. "'It's like sex and love,'" Lucas pontificated. "'An adrenaline movie is more like having sex. But if people are interested in and fond of your movie twenty years later, it was either the best sex they ever had, or it's a romantic love, which means there is more to it than just the adrenaline rush'" (qtd. in Jenkins 270). As a further coup, the cumulative box office haul vaulted *Star Wars* to all-time box-office champion, it became "the first movie in history to break $400 million in domestic grosses" (Kline xix). The astonishing success of the *Special Edition* reaffirmed the supremacy of nostalgia – of nostalgia *for* nostalgia – a nostalgic hall of mirrors reflecting "an ever-receding vision of a mythic past" (Kline 193).[104]

In 1998, "energized" by the success of the *Special Edition* and the "relative ease with which (digital

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[103] In 1983, after Lucas (and Marcia) had adopted their first child, Pollock mused on whether or not parenthood would bring a "maturity to (Lucas') films that he hasn't had, and that may not be good for them commercially" (241).

[104] Former Fox executive Sandy Lieberson tables a cynical appraisal of the re-release, stating that "it has nothing to do with creativity, it has to do with marketing and business and sales of home videos and...re-licensing on television and all the rest of it" (Philippe 2010).

technology would allow him) to direct" (Baxter 390), Lucas set to work on the new trilogy in earnest. In 1981, Lucas had forewarned that "the look of the films will be different" (qtd. in Kline 106), and described the back-story as less action-adventure-oriented and more "Machiavellian" (Kline 218). "'Maybe we'll make it have some humor, but right now it's much more humorless than *Star Wars*. ...it's all plotting – more of a mystery" (qtd. in Kline 107). Now in his mid-fifties – "an older, wiser, and more resourceful writer" – Lucas "returned to writing with an enthusiasm that caught him off guard" (Jenkins 271). He reassembled his cherished accoutrements – the pencils, the lined paper – and resurrected his eight-hour writing regimen (now 9:30-6:60) in a "small writing den" tucked away in a remote corner of the Ranch (271). The moment the muse struck, Lucas could spirit his scribblings to a retinue of artists who "immediately set to work on ideas," generating character and location concept art, effects renderings, and storyboards. Haunted by the Original Trilogy's shortcomings, Lucas let his imagination run wild (Hearn 182). "The one advantage I have is to sort of be able to follow my own muse, even if it seems contrary to what might be best for selling the movie. I've become more interested in the story than anything else" (Lucas, *Jedi* commentary, 1985).

Scripting proceeded slowly while Lucas – who referred to this new trilogy as "a history, a back story, a personal dossier on all these characters" (and, puzzlingly, as "a resumé") (Hearn 182) – ruminated on lofty sources of inspiration (*Othello* (Jenkins 272)) alongside not-so-lofty ones (Buster Keaton) (Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999). There is no metric sufficient to evaluate the invective inspired by cinema history's first "synthespian" – one Jar Jar Binks. Suffice it to say that Binks was conceived as Keaton-esque comic relief. Lucas amused himself concocting various hijinks for his "bumbler,"

> (c)oming up with little humorous pieces for Jar Jar to exploit the fact that he's a bumbler, but at the
> same time make his bumbling be the thing that helps turn the tide of the battle for the Gungans even

though they don't win the battle. Anakin and Jar Jar are both playing the same note in this which is

they're kind of bumbling their way through (Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999).

Nor was Lucas above a self-reflexive homage to Lucas, saying of a setting in *Clones*, "I had to do a scene

somewhere...to have (Obi-Wan) get this information from this character who had been all around the galaxy.

So I wanted to do a little homage to (*Graffiti*), and have it be in a diner" (Lucas, *Clones* commentary, 2003).

The prequels, furthermore, would be pointedly political. Politics were, of course, always intrinsic to

*Star Wars*, "it's just that most people never noticed it until (*Sith*) was put into the puzzle. Sometimes the

politics are kind of confused and muddled in terms of the way people see (politics in the films), which is the

way most people see politics" (Lucas, *Sith* commentary, 2005). "Ultimately, what I looked forward to the

most in going back," Lucas claimed, "was the fact that I can deal with how the Empire was created, how a

society goes from a democratic society to a dictatorship" (Lucas, *Clones* commentary, 2005).[105]

Lucas was nothing if not introspective (and self-contradictory) in detailing his approach to the craft:

he was "not a big linear storyteller" ("I like simultaneity and jumping back and forth") (Lucas, *Jedi*

commentary 1985); was a "'visual filmmaker'" ("'I do films that are kinetic, and I tend to focus on character

as it is created through editing and light, not stories'" (qtd. in Kline 202)); and wrote "'as an editor'" ("'I

understand how scenes go together and how much of the story I need to tell because I've spent so much time

fixing and rewriting in the editing room'") (qtd. in Kline 166). Nor is he adverse to recycling attenuated or

elided elements from prior efforts. Pollock writes that "Lucas has trouble discarding an amusing idea" (177),

and Jenkins goes further: "Lucas never discarded anything. He merely accepted that some of his ideas might

not be achievable – yet" (56). "'Usually, if I like something and I have to drop it, I put it on the shelves and

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[105] "As if determined to show that the *Star Wars* back-story really makes sense," Baxter comments, "Lucas labored to dignify first-draft ideas by cementing them into a rickety quasi-historical framework" (400).

very often end up using it somewhere else later on'" (Lucas, qtd. in Bouzereau 249).[106]

Before launching into the screenplay proper, Lucas revisited "a bundle of carefully stored notes" from twenty years earlier, including the *Journal of the Whills* (Hearn 182). "The inspiration for *Episode I*," Hearn writes, "emerged from the back story for *The Star Wars* that Lucas had completed in the summer of 1973" (190). The Prequel Trilogy is thick with detritus: characters, plot points, and aesthetic attire jettisoned from early drafts of *Star Wars*: Mace Windu, solar fins, "insectlike" creatures, air whales, Obi Wan imprisoned via "(l)arge gold bracelets with small antennas are attached to his wrists and ankles...spread-eagle and slowly rotating," characters trapped in gas chambers, protestations of love refuted on the basis of political obligations; "semistoic" aliens ("tall, thin, white, maybe similar to the aliens in (*Close Encounters*)"), "a planet that was a city with endless built-up areas" (i.e., Coruscant), a lightsaber battle over a "bubbling pool of lava" with characters jumping "from rock to rock," and "the Chrome Barons," an early model for the Trade Federation (Bouzereau 7, 89, 214, 31, 68, 140, 196, 297, 306; Hearn 200, 193; Baxter 400). The new bio-materialist mooring – "midi-chlorians" – had also been prefigured in a discussion between Lucas and Brackett over "Force Levels" during *Empire* story conferences: "maybe Ben was a six, Vader was a four, and Luke is now at level two" (Bouzereau 214).

One of Lucas' newfound (and oft-indulged) powers was to make logistical and narrative inconveniences disappear, and he dismissed interpellation with a cavalier wave of the wand. "Lucas would always respond to any querulous staff...with lofty invocations of the grand design of the saga... you don't understand, but it's part of the stylistic patterning, the musical riff, I've got going in my head" (Shone 282). Plume told Kurtz that a colleague inside Lucasfilm had relayed that Lucas' "catch phrase" during production

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[106] "The thing about writing is that ideas aren't precious; you have to get over the thought that everything you think up is brilliant. When you think of something, you have to be willing to throw it away. More important than to think up an idea in the first place is to be able to reject it if it doesn't work, if it doesn't fit. You have to be very hard on yourself when you write a script and only use things that are symmetrical to the centre of your story. You should never use an idea just because it's a cute idea" (Lucas, qtd. in Bouzereau 249-50).

on the prequels was "'It's good enough,' and they say he uses it all the time now" (4). The commentary tracks

for the prequels are rife with supporting evidence. Animation Director Rob Coleman worried that a Tatooine

junk-dealer called "Watto" defied the laws of physics. "We were worried that the audience wouldn't believe

he could actually fly. ... George said: 'Well, think of him...he's got some helium in his belly... He's from a

different galaxy, don't worry about it'" (qtd. in Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999).[107] The Swedish actor

Pernilla August, who played "Shmi," Anakin Skywalker's mother: "I said, 'What about my accent? What

should I do about it?' He said, 'Don't worry about it. She's coming from a Swedish galaxy'" (qtd. in Hearn

195). "I never figured out how Yoda's supposed to be moving this chair," Knoll recalls during a scene in *Sith*.

"We talked about it a bit at the time, George decided 'Well, he's using the Force'" (qtd. in Lucas, *Sith*

commentary, 2005). At the conclusion of *Sith*, Lucas notes that

> obviously there's a little bit of a stretch with the Death Star being started in this one, and then twenty
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> years later gets finished, but, y'know, they had supply problems, and union disputes, and a few design
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> problems they had to work out, so it took longer than you would think, even for the Emperor. (qtd. in
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> Lucas, *Sith* commentary, 2005)

At issue, perhaps, was the lack of vantage by which anyone but Lucas could perceive the panorama. This was

a pantheon with only one pedestal. "We never get a script," admits Producer McCallum, "or we never get a

fully complete script. I think I got one that was more of an outline script two days before we started

shooting." Nor was Lucas an especial advocate of collaborative clarity: "The really interesting way that

George works is is he doesn't sit down with you and become specific. He says 'I see this,' which is just the

starting point" (McCallum, qtd. in Lucas, *Sith* commentary, 2005). Furthermore, if Lucas was prone to

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[107] "'Such extreme success can be dangerous,'" Huyck cautioned in 1983. "'When you're that successful and you've been proven right too many times, you don't give people an opportunity to argue with you, because they can't argue with success" (Pollock 3-4). In the commentary for *Clones,* Coleman notes that *"*Watto's wings were too small to make him fly and it still worked." Knoll replies, "It's *Star Wars*." Coleman: "*Star Wars* physics, remember?" (qtd. in Lucas, *Clones* commentary, 2002).

narrative shortcuts, it may be because he saw the route and destination as preordained. Lucas is what I will refer to as a "diegetic determinist," he was less writing a story, and more ticking off a laundry list of narrative beats prescribed by the previous trilogy. Diegetic determinism crept into the process as early as *Empire*: "The film itself takes its own life, and it kind of demands that you do it in a particular way" (Lucas, *Empire* commentary, 1983). In 1981, Lucas told O'Quinn: "'I'm stuck with the way it was originally planned, and I can't suddenly go off on some tangent'" (qtd. in Kline 106). *Jedi* would prove even more recalcitrant:

> the story is pretty much dictated by everything that's gone before it...there's a lot of exposition, a lot of things that need to be tied up, confronted, and resolved. Which sends the film in a particular direction that is more about explaining things than it is about drama. But there are times when the material sort of dictates what you have to do in order to make the film work. (Lucas, *Jedi* commentary, 1985)

In conceiving of his prequels, Lucas was similarly subservient to the story: "The plot was written thirty years ago and there's a certain story that has to transpire. When I set a character up I can't just use a character 'cause I want to use a character" (Lucas, *Clones* commentary, 2003).

Lucas has a tendency, throughout the commentary tracks, to expound upon plot points with all the passion of plumber laying pipe (in contradistinction to the enthusiasm with which he parses and elaborates upon technical minutiae). "One of the difficulties of writing a script with lots and lots of characters," Lucas says during *Menace*, "is you have to be able to rationalize why everybody is along." Furthermore,

> (w)hen you have a situation like this where there isn't any mandate that they stay together, that they're there for transitory reasons that are constantly having to be renewed as the plot progresses, it becomes much more difficult to be able to get all the characters in on the act and take them along on whatever journey you're going on. (Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999)

*Clones* relieved Lucas of trudging through the expository murk of "how the senate works, the politics of the Trade Federation," but not of exegetic obligations entirely: "It's one of those scenes you don't like to write but ultimately you have to. It's the scene that kind of explains what's going on and who's gonna go where. It's kind of a logistics scene"; "(m)ostly this scene is, again, one of those functional scenes where we have to split the parties up, everybody has their little assignment and we have to know where everybody's going"; "(t)his scene, this little eating scene, is designed to, again, just casually get them back into a situation where we can set up the next scene in the fireplace"; "it's a very long scene, and it needs to play out in a very methodical way... By getting it in a new environment I think it adds enough interest to make you focus on the dialogue...without getting bored" (Lucas, *Clones* commentary, 2002). The dutiful fulfillment of narrative responsibilities would pay off, however, as political skulduggery deftly converged in a startling climax:

> The political intrigue that's going on through all the movies, or at least the first three, is fairly opaque in the first two, and it has to do with commercial interests, and corporate reality, and the machinations of the senate. ... The political machinations are meant to be kind of political, which is...you don't quite understand what's going on, or what the issues are. (Lucas, *Sith* commentary, 2005).[108]

Deterministic prohibitions did not preclude tampering with one of the saga's core constitutive elements – the Force. Lucas, who had grown up "under the influence of both the Protestant-ethic values of his father" (Hellmann 209),[109] reiterated to Moyers in 1999 that though he believes categorically that "there is a God," he doesn't see *Star Wars* as "profoundly religious" (Lucas and Moyers 50). That the Force had resonated with authors and audiences, however, was clear beyond any doubt. Hellmann notes that "writers in religious publications were among the most receptive to the latter two films of the (Original Trilogy), perceiving that spiritual allegory could probe contemporary concerns deep below specific political positions

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[108] Well, at least *Sith* has "more sword fighting in it than all the other movies put together" (Lucas, *Sith* commentary, 2005).
[109] Lucas would later define his religion as "Buddhist Methodist" (Kurtz, qtd. in Baxter 165).

or even ideologies" (211). Galipeau's book was inspired by a weekend camp retreat for the youth of a large

church; he chose *Star Wars* as source material in an effort to "offer something that would capture their

attention and help them explore the deeper spiritual values necessary for an authentic life" (2). Furthermore,

the Force had grown so sacrosanct in some quarters that a campaign was mounted in Australia to install

"Jediism" as a real religion by writing "Jedi Knight" under "religious affiliation" on the census (Wetmore, Jr.

78).[110] While census subterfuge may appeal to the zealous and frivolous alike, the leader of an American-

based Jedi organization offers a more sanguine appraisal, offering that *Star Wars* "is simply a vehicle to

bring...Eastern beliefs to Western people" (Wetmore, Jr. 87).

Lucas now claims that he had always intended to "explain" the Force, but ran out of time: "Why some

people are more susceptible to the Force that others, which is an issue that's in the first film, but you never

know why some people have the Force...is stronger with some people and not strong with other people. What

is the device that causes that to happen?" (Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999). The statement is suspect.

There are sequences throughout the Original Trilogy that address the Force at length, and there is ample

opportunity for elaboration. Nor is the assertion supported by the archives. Bouzereau writes that in *Empire*

story conferences between Lucas and Brackett, the Force was defined as a "force field, an energy" generated

by the "act of living": "That energy surrounds us; when we die, that energy joins with all the other energy. ...

We are part of the Force because we generate the power that makes the Force live. When we die, we become

part of that Force, so we never really die; we continue as part of the Force" (181). To Kershner, a Zen

Buddhist, the Force represents "the combined vibrations of all living things" (Bouzereau 269).

There are respects in which "orthodox" Force traits are consonant between trilogies: the Force must

be taught/learned, requires training (begun in early childhood), and there are masters and apprentices (in

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[110] That a yield of 10,000 signatures would enable disciples to establish a church of "Jediism" turned out to be an urban legend that residents of more than one country fell prey to, including Canadians. (I speak from experience.)

Prequel Trilogy nomenclature, apprentices are "padawans"); the Force is related to senses and feelings – one can identify "disturbances" (though the scale of "disturbances" vary wildly, from the annihilation of an entire planet and its inhabitants (*Star Wars*) to the presence of a Sith Lord (*Menace*)); Jedi's employ the "mind trick" to influence the weak-willed; the Force can be used to manipulate physical objects (this is done far more frequently and fluidly in the Prequel Trilogy, presumably owing to CGI); and the Force, throughout the series, is invoked as a platitude: may it be "with you" (Lucas 1977, 1999, 2002, 2005; Kershner 1980; Marquand 1983). Yoda offers concomitant cautions against the Dark Side, warning Luke to "beware...anger, fear, aggression...the Dark Side are they. Once you start down the dark path, forever will it dominate your destiny" (Kershner 1980). In *Menace*, Yoda instructs Anakin, here a young boy, that "Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering" (Lucas 1999).[111] In both trilogies the Force is portrayed as affording some degree of prescience. In *Empire*, Yoda tells Luke: "Through the Force, things you will see... The future, the past, old friends long gone" (Kershner 1980). In *Jedi*, the Emperor often claims to have "foreseen" impending events (Marquand 1981).

Of the disparities, some are slight or (seemingly) superficial. In the opening moments of *Menace,* Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson) tells his *padawan,* Obi-Wan (Ewen McGregor), to "be mindful of the *living* Force" (Lucas 1999, emphasis mine). The word "living" is an innocuous but puzzling prefix (no such reference is made the Original Trilogy). In terms of "foresight," in the Original Trilogy the connotation often carries overtones of classical Greek tragedy: the Emperor prophesies the future in terms of fate and destiny, recalling the pitiable oracular predestination of Oedipus Rex. In *Menace,* prescience is framed as autonomic aptitude. According to Qui-Gon, "(Anakin) can see things before they happen, that's why he appears to have

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[111] This phrasing is reminiscent of Buddhism's "Four Noble Truths": 1) all is suffering; 2) suffering is aroused by desire; 3) if one can eliminate desire, they can eliminate suffering; 4) the noble eight-fold path can eliminate desire. Yoda's assertion that "luminous beings are we, not this crude matter" (while pinching the flesh of Luke's arm) carries inflections of the Buddhist precept that "life is an illusory projection of our own minds" (Cho 163).

such quick reflexes" (Lucas 1999). *Menace* demonstrates Anakin's "unusually strong" acumen in a crazed

chariot-style "pod race," and his victory over a slate of alien competitors is presented as proof of his incipient

powers (in an expository passage, we have been told that no humans have ever won this race) (Lucas

1999).[112] Furthermore, Anakin is revealed to have been born of immaculate conception. Curious, Qui-Gon

administers a blood test (telling Anakin that he's "checking (his) blood for infections" (Lucas 1999)), and the

results confirm his suspicions: Anakin's cells "have the highest concentration of midi-chlorians" ever

observed in a life form.[113] "It is possible he was conceived by the midi-chlorians" Qui-Gon later tells the Jedi

Council, concluding that Anakin is the "chosen one" prophesied to "bring balance to the Force" (Lucas

1999).[114] The Force is hereby granted agency: it was through the Force's "will" that Anakin was

consummated (Silvio and Vinci 20).[115] The Force, as instantiated in the Prequel Trilogy, has not only an

"awareness," but also determinism: a professed "preference about how things go in the universe" (Decker

and Eberl 133). Wait, you may be wondering, what *are* "midi-chlorians"?

Qui-Gon:     Midi-chlorians are a microscopic life form that resides within all living cells.

Anakin:       They live inside me?

Qui-Gon:     Inside your cells, yes. And we are symbiont with them.

Anakin:       Symbiont?

Qui-Gon:     Life forms living together for mutual advantage.[116] Without the midi-chlorians, life

could not exist and we would have no knowledge of the Force. They continually speak

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[112] One is left to wonder if Han Solo might not be equally endowed, having successfully navigated an asteroid field against seemingly insurmountable odds (Kershner 1980).

[113] "In the original script...didn't [sic] have this scene...The plot device in this is that he has to get the blood sample to figure out the midi-chlorian count" (Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999).

[114] How or why the Force is out of whack, or what "bringing balance" would entail or result in, is never addressed.

[115] "In this trilogy, the Force has a plan, and...there is little room for individual agency" (Silvio and Vinci 20).

[116] In "Of Myth and Men," Lucas tells Moyers that "(o)ne of the main themes in *The Phantom Menace* is of organisms having to realize they must live for their mutual advantage" (50).

to us, telling us the will of the Force. When you learn to quiet your mind, you'll hear

them speaking to you. (Lucas 1999)

Lucas notes that the theme of "symbiotic relationships," or "people helping people," runs through the entirety of *Menace*: "there may be a completely different race of life form that lives inside your body, completely independent of you, but has some influence over you" (Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999). The Force is, in a sense, the spiritual equivalent of the digestive tract.

"Midi-chlorians" represent a stunning departure, "perhaps the most obvious and striking way in which the (Prequel Trilogy) subverts the thematic concerns of the (Original Trilogy)" (Silvio and Vinci 19). In *Star Wars*, the Force is "an energy field created by all living things" (Lucas 1977), and in *Empire,* Yoda counsels Luke that "(l)ife creates it, makes it grow" (Kershner 1981). The Force of the Original Trilogy is "an unconscious energy that is not only connected to all individuals, but created by them" (Silvio and Vinci 21, 22); a mystical power "in which he (Luke) believes but which he cannot empirically verify" (Decker and Eberl 205). Luke has, in fact, "little to go on other than his belief that there is a Force" (Lyden 5). *Menace,* however, furnishes irrefutable evidence. Once "intuitive and empowering" (Silvio and Vinci 20) and "un-authoritative" (Wetmore, Jr. 20), the Force is now "defined through a series of rules and is completely institutionalized." In lieu of an innate or immediate connection, this Force requires an independent biological mediator "thus degrading the importance of individual agency" (Silvio and Vinci 20). To cut to the quick, what rankles is the *specificity*; the materiality of quantifiable, "testable" blood-borne microorganisms. Lucas has transposed the "mystical and ephemeral" into the "observable and quantifiable" (Kapell and Lawrence 160), a domain antithetical to the Force as originally presented. The Prequel Trilogy refashions myth into bio-materialism: the figurative is made literal, the subjective objective, the irrational rational, the sublime

normative, and the theological ideological. Faith has ceded to science.[117]

How are "thematic differences between the *Star Wars* trilogies...explained through a fundamental difference between the cultures that engendered (them)" (Silvio and Vinci 29)? The Prequel Trilogy arrived during the ascendance of genetic science: cloning, GMO foods, and the mapping of the genome;[118] the Clinton presidency was prematurely paralyzed when he tumbled off of DNA's twisted ladder. "All visions of the future are shaped by the time in which they are created," writes Esmile. "(*Menace*) reflects the way that recent advances in molecular genetics are popularly represented in the late 1990s" (Esmile, "'Gene' for Jedi?").[119] The premise that Force powers "are somehow inherited through the cells of the body is a very different proposition" than the Force as originally conceived (Esmile, "'Gene' for Jedi?").

At the peak of the paranoia, curiosity, and utopian possibilities provoked by the "gene revolution," genetics was exalted as an elixir for every inherited wound. The media gushed over genes for luck, religiosity, and laziness; genes would cure men of promiscuity, and could confirm preconceptions about female nurturing instincts. Furthermore, while "theories about the biological basis of intelligence, homosexuality, alcoholism, and criminality are not new" – nor are concerns surrounding the appropriation of such theories "to explain 'trouble at the bottom (and) virtue at the top'" – they were "given renewed legitimacy" through the genome revolution.  By involving a "gene" for Jediism, Lucas raises the spectre of "science"-based qualifications for social stratification in which "eligibility for the club is a matter of superior

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[117] Kurtz was caustic: "The biggest thing that bothers me about *(Menace)* as far as I'm concerned is the destruction of the spiritual center of the Force, turning it into DNA and blood" (Gore, "Original"). Even Lucas has occasionally criticized excessive exposition: "I can't stand it when you sit around and try to explain how a teleporter works or why. It's just not what the movie needs to be about" (Lucas, *New Hope* commentary, 1977).

[118] Though it may be a tenuous comparison, the AIDS epidemic gained prominence in the interstice between trilogies. Recall that in obfuscating the true intent behind the blood test, Qui-Gon tells Anakin that he is checking his blood for "infections" (Lucas 1999).

[119] Traditionally, science fiction cast a jaundiced eye on the advent and utility of technology in society; a wary, skeptical analysis that falls flush with the ambivalent attitude permeating *Star Wars*. Science fiction pictures of the 30s and 40s were dominated by an "antiscience bias," wherein "scientists and engineers (were) depicted as servants of corporate, political, or military institutions, committed to executing the at best misguided, and frequently insidious, agendas of those institutions." Furthermore, the genre was "overwhelmingly dystopian, projecting the consequences of science and technology as politically or environmentally disastrous, or as inevitably co-opted by antidemocratic vested interests" (Goldman 275, 276-277).

bloodlines" (Kenny 162), and the "elite justifies and maintains its position over less powerful sections of society" (Esmile, "'Gene' for Jedi?").[120] Lucas has recast the Jedi as evolutionary superiors set astride the apex of the genetic pyramid. "Midi-chlorians" confirm that the Force is "all in the genes," and, as a result a "whole host of personality and behavioral factors are predetermined...those with the 'right' genes will do well in life, and those with the 'wrong' genes will not" (Esmile, "'Gene' for Jedi?").[121]

This is not to imply that Lucas intentionally champions the "virtues" of social stratification, but simply to expose the more egregious and sinister interpretations suggested by a "midi-chlorian" framework. Therein lies the crux: what meaning are we meat to make? What does the Gospel preach? Is *Menace* a testament to the God of Science ascendent? As organized religion recedes, one is left on a jagged shore where "(r)eason and science become the new gods. The new believer finds himself worshipping the Divine Order, the Power of the Mind, the Inevitability of Historical Change" (Baxter 43). In the wake of the "revolution in empirical science...the more spiritual view of the natural world as an expression of God had been transformed into a countable, analyzable, and thereby controllable nature that would yield all its secrets to human inquiry

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[120] For a different interpretation of the selfsame dilemma – namely how a "midi-chlorian"-based Force evokes hegemonic structures rooted in quantifiable evidence – see "Eugenics, Racism, and the Jedi Gene Pool" by Kapell in *Finding the Force of the Star Wars Franchise.*

[121] Kapell argues that the Force of the Original Trilogy is depicted as hereditary, and the "powers to dominate as oppressors or liberators are rooted in their own elite biology"; an unwelcome return to the "dawn of biological understandings of inheritance and the earliest crude attempts to sort out the relations of social dominance and submission." That the Force is "strong" in Vader and his offspring is a form of "biological determinism" that suggests that "it will be the strong lineage of the Skywalker family that ultimately saves the day and provides the heroes of the rebellion." The "re-importation of aristocratic and biological justifications of individual worth," therefore, thematically undermines the message of "rebellion against tyranny" – the likely inheritors of the success of that rebellion are the coronated figureheads/rulers of the subsequent tyranny (Kapell and Lawrence 159-170). The point is well taken, but the transgression could, in another light, be seen as a storytelling strength. The point is less that Luke has inherited the Force from Vader than the startling twist that *the villain is his father!* Arguably, the implied thematic arc is that any "good" person harbors the capacity for evil. "Luke confronts the possibility of evil in himself," writes Lyden, "in that even his Jedi father turned to the Dark Side. Luke's dream-vision in the cave on Dagobah, in which he kills Vader only to find he wears Luke's own face, reinforces this idea that the only evil one needs to fear is the hatred and anger that lurks within oneself" (*Religion* 221). Furthermore, Kapell's analysis ignores the dark/light (pacifist/aggressor) binary. That Luke may have "at his disposal the ability to use the Force at lethal levels to the Emperor," is beside the point, for to assume the role of aggressor is to succumb to the "dark" path. It is this very lethality that must be overcome and subsumed in order for a Jedi to stay true to the Light, and this is more relevant to appropriate experience and training – choice, free will, agency – than heredity. "The Dark forcemasters tend to speak of 'destiny' in a way that suggests free will is non-existent; but the good side always allows participants to choose their own destinies, granting that free choice can and does contribute to the direction of events" (Lyden 7). Put in narrative terms, had Luke availed himself of his inherited powers, and acquiesced to the Emperor's entreaty to strike him down, would he have achieved victory?

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and human labor" (Browne 283). Ultimately, argues Mackay, every facet of our lives is at risk of being

overwhelmed by the dogma of "rational strategizing and technocratic governing."[122] The Prequel Trilogy, he

concludes, is "a myth created from contemporary culture's dependency on scientific rhetoric and capitalism"

(Silvio and Vinci 30). Doty argues that science is itself a form of modern myth "through which we

understand the world. We believe we have left myth behind, and so entertain the 'myth of mythlessness'"

(qtd. in Lyden, *Religion* 74). Galipeau agrees that traditional forms of religion have, to some extent,

> been replaced in our age by "myths" of science and technology, which have led us to overemphasize
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> linear thinking, technological achievement, and material gain. The result is an enormous
>
> psychological imbalance that has become unsatisfying to those in tune with the deeper yearnings of
>
> the soul. (Galipeau 59)

There are religious ramifications to the "rational" repackaging of the Force as well. If the Force

reflects the core tenets of various religious systems, that is because those systems, in turn, are concerned with

the essence of the Force: questions that defy empirical answers. Consider that "(a)ll Taoists strive to become

one with the Tao. This cannot be achieved by trying to understand the Tao intellectually; the adept becomes

one with the Tao by realizing within himself its unity, simplicity, and emptiness" (Wetmore Jr. 83-84). In

Hegel's Consummate Religion of Christianity, Jesus "teaches a people plunged in the darkness of a world

ruled by pitiless physical force that God is not a menacing power ruling over us, but the deepest inner reality

of each person" (Decker and Eberl 149). Hegel argued that religion is distinct "from science and philosophy

in being a matter of feeling...rather than of rationality and conceptual thought (Kapell and Lawrence 147).

Even Joseph Campbell "believed that skeptical scientific approaches had completed the wreckage of vital

mythology in their attacks on the reality of spirit" (Kapell and Lawrence 24). Didn't Obi Wan caution in *Star*

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[122] It is worth noting that, at the end of *Clones,* the Jedi are saved – in a *deux ex machina* event – by an army of genetically identical, lab-produced clones. "In the end," writes Case, "the Jedi are only saved from annihilation by biotechnology" (102).

*Wars* that "your eyes can deceive you. Don't trust them" (Lucas 1977)?

Theoretically, Kurtz would have been hard pressed to allow the inclusion of this transmuted Force, but Kurtz, of course, was long since vanquished. The Prequel Trilogy was midwifed by producer Rick McCallum, whom Lucas met while working on *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles*, where McCallum "had shown himself adept at handling both Lucas's demanding nature and the complex technology that went with it" (Jenkins 274). As steward of the Prequel Trilogy, McCallum made it clear that Lucasfilm was a one man band sourcing session musicians only: "'We're only interested in people who can park their egos long enough to work for a single individual dream'" (qtd. in Baxter 395). A "good producer," as McCallum understands the position, "'(enables) a director to achieve everything that he can within the confines of the schedule, money, and all the other compromises that you have to make'" (qtd. in Hearn 201).

That a producer should shield a director "from having to deal with the studio and any outside influences" is a different proposition than acquiescence to every directorial whim. In Kurtz's opinion, a producer should be a bulwark against a director's excesses, a buttress for their insecurities, both "mirror" and "sounding board"; a field hand assisting in the threshing to separate the wheat from the chaff. "'(The) producer's job has primarily turned to deal making,'" Kurtz opines. Producers are now indistinct from studio executives who may or may not have any comprehension of, or investment in, the artistic elements of the project. Without that necessary interface, that filter, the director has no quality control, no safety valve; "there's no one to say 'Wait a minute, that's terrible, don't do that!'" There are, to borrow Kurtz's apothegm, "no 'no-men'" (Plume, "Interview").

Though I do not presume to intuit motive or intent behind the following quotes, culled from the commentary tracks of *Menace, Clones,* and *Sith* (a charitable appraisal would infer that McCallum possess an especially ebullient attitude), I would propose that Kurtz and McCallum exhibit divergent conceptions of

producerial duties.

- I'll never forget, George came up with the idea of Liam grabbing on to Jar Jar's tongue, and the minute that happened it just lightened the whole day. (*Menace*)

- This is one of those scenes where you're working with George and you just don't know where he comes up with this stuff. Y'know, I mean I take the same road to work that he does and I just don't see any of this stuff. ... Our job is to enable him to be able to achieve whatever it is he comes up with. And this sequence is a classic example of George coming up with stuff that just would not stop. It's sheer, relentless, thirty minutes of absolute mayhem and you just don't know where he gets this stuff. (*Clones*)

- This is classic George. (*Clones*)

- This whole sequence is just fantastic. (*Sith*)

- I think he (Grievous) turned out to be a fantastic character. (*Sith*)

- Look at this, this...what an entrance. Just a...fantastic shot. (*Sith*)

- It's such a creepy little scene...just so bold and so audacious to put it in this kind of setting. (*Sith*)

- I loved it. It's just such a great moment (*Sith*)

- I really love this scene, though. Just, y'know, no dialogue; again: perfect, classic George. What can you do, how can you relay something just visually without using dialogue. Very simple moment, but very powerful. (*Sith*)

- The last hour, I just think, is almost perfect (*Sith*)

- Magnificent painting. (*Sith*)

- (T)hey went places that I just never imagined that we'd ever get to. (*Sith*)

- This is really the beginning of the most perfect ending to me. I don't think there's a single beat that goes wrong from this moment on in the movie. (*Sith*)

- Y'know it's interesting, I take the same road home every night that George does, and I

- come to work on the same road, but my God, he sees things that I can't...even imagine. (*Sith*)[123]

- This funeral scene came out beautifully. (*Sith*)

- We're so lucky, 'cause we get to work for a writer-director who has a very clear idea of the essence of what he wants, and then to be able to share in this kind of experience of watching him evolve, each day, with each shot, is just...remarkable, I don't know if it can ever be really done again in film history. (*Sith*)

Muren, one of the few stalwarts who worked with Lucas from the Original Trilogy onwards, observed that production on the new trilogy "'was a lot different...it wasn't much like working on *Star Wars*. ... What was interesting was the enthusiasm of all the other ILM-ers who had grown up watching *Star Wars* and who were now working on (*Menace*)'" (qtd. in Hearn 204). With McCallum as their ringmaster, Lucasfilm – as with Dykstra – had become a homing beacon for a generation of technological talent who flocked to the new *Star Wars* circus. No model makers and stop motion magicians need apply, however, only CGI rendering artists and computer animation experts. If there was an *esprit de corps,* it was personified by the obsequious McCallum. Lucas, "(f)lanked by his trusted inner group" (Baxter 12), had at his beck and call a stable of *technobrats*[124] predisposed to venerate their leader – and his concepts – unconditionally. These were "the children of *Star Wars*" (Shone 282), a generation of practiced genuflectors reared to worship.

What, pray-tell, was the intended target of the coordinated firepower unleashed from this cluster of top-of-the-line computers "whose amassed power was a little less than that used by NASA but more than that used by the Pentagon" (Shone 281)? Celluloid.

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[123] Note: this quote is not a duplicate, but McCallum using the "same road to work" analogy a second time in a separate commentary.

[124] "(E)ffects designers throughout the history of cinema have walked a fine line between technician and artist, magician and inventor, (and) the increasing use of computer technology for special effects has made them seem more like modern scientists" (Abbott 90).

Film, as Lucas saw it, was "no longer a necessary condition for cinema" (Prince 30). "'Celluloid is a 19th-century idea,'" he said in 1990. "'We're moving into the 21st century" (qtd. in Kline 164). Film's long-flickering flame was about to be snuffed out. As he had asserted a decade earlier, *Menace* would be "almost entirely computer-generated" (Baxter 351). "'If people like film, fine, let them shoot on film. For us, film is not as practical, because every single shot we do has a digital effect in it'" (McCallum, qtd. in Hearn 224). Digital was not only cheaper, but facilitated the smooth, seamless assimilation of CGI spectacle; and spectacle, in the final tally, was the *raison d'être* of the *Star Wars* saga. "'There was a cinematic innovation in the first *Star Wars* film that made people say, 'Gee, I've never seen that before...' I have the opportunity to do that again with the prequels'" (Lucas, qtd. in Hearn 185). While Lucas' fealty to the CGI godhead would never waver – would be vindicated by every high-def entity and effect (Baxter 102) – a cogent computer-generated reality has profound ontological implications for how the cinematic space is perceived, experienced, and interpreted. How is this "digital turn," Prince asks, "reconfiguring the meaning and experience of cinema, altering its nature, at a deeper structural level" (25)? What does CGI portend for the future of filmic meaning-making.[125]

Special effects have been a lynchpin of science fiction filmmaking since George Méliès employed "papier-mâché and stop-motion tricks" to fabricate fantastical, otherworldly imagery (Prince 26).[126] The frontier days of *Tron* and *The Last Starfighter* marked the embarkation of a twenty-five year pilgrimage "of experimentation and development" to reach the CGI promised land: verisimilitude and malleability fulfilling

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[125] It is worth noting that CGI effects are not simply a cost-cutting measure, or finer embroidery with conspicuous stitch-work, but an attempt to alleviate the painstaking, labour-intensive process entailed by irrefutably arduous "practical" techniques. Kurtz is an ally, here detailing the once onerous task of developing effects: "the shift of the film elements, due to temperature or processing chemicals is the worst, and it always has been that way. You have to be *really* meticulous...and even then you might have to do it over five, six times to do it right. All of that's a thing of the past now...since you're doing it on computers, digital – not only can you see it instantly, you don't have any of those photographic process problems (Plume, "Interview", emphasis in original). In a separate interview, Kurtz champions the evolution of Lucas' prefigurative animatics: "Now you could do that kind of shot in a day or two. No matter how many elements you had and you could see it on the screen, you could see how they fit, what everything was and it would all be perfectly good in terms of color...it's an entirely different world" (Gore, "Original").

[126] As a genre, science fiction "is ideally suited to display technological advances and developments through its futuristic narratives" (Abbott 89).

the filmic convergence of "'realization' and 'representation'" (Abbott 91). In *Clones*, the second prequel

entry, "the only residual live-action elements are the actors" (Prince 24) – a new pinnacle. Contemporary

special effects had become ever more "dazzling, more extravagant, more luxuriously unnecessary" (Wood,

qtd. in Abbott 89). Lucas collapses practical and CGI effects work: "fake is fake."

> I'm still amused by people that somehow think that when you use...digital technology in movies it's
>
> suddenly...it's fake. But when you look at a scene in here, like Jabba's palace, now there's some
>
> digital characters in here, but they're no more or less fake than all the other characters that are in here.
>
> Is a digital character more fake than a big fat rubber character? I mean, there's nothing real here at all.
>
> (Lucas, *Jedi* commentary, 1985).[127]

"(R)ealism in the cinema," writes Abbott, "is a complex concept" (91). Wood sees advantages afforded by

these technological accomplishments: "better sound, stronger definition, new potentials to add to the possible

range of expression." The danger, however, is that less discriminating artists attempt to "create...a kind of

magical unreality that seeks to impose itself as a new and better 'realism'" (Wood xxx).

Abbott argues that digitization perplexes "indexicality," extrinsic signifiers of tangible objects/entities

traced or inscribed by their spacial presence: a fingerprint left on a glass, the way light or shadow bends

around an object, etcetera. The "infinite malleability" of CGI, writes Abbot, has "has extended our

understanding of the 'indexicality' of the image...by challenging and reshaping our conception of the body

and its boundaries" (90). The exposure of photosensitive paper to rays of light locks down the object image at

a particular moment – "they record the object's present but they also inscribe that moment of time,

henceforth suspended." Digital filmmaking, strictly speaking, requires no "pro-filmic referent" and,

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[127] Baxter relays an intriguing anecdote in *Mythmaker*. During pre-production on *Star Wars*, Lucas perused real military weapons to be repurposed into laser pistols. He wanted real weapons, he said, because he wanted his blasters to have the "right weight"; the weapons in *Star Wars*, in other words, should evince the same physical presence in the framescape as their real-world counterparts. They were, therefore, built out of (/onto) those selfsame counterparts (Baxter 195). Coleman asserts that this "gravity" must now be duplicated by software: "(w)ith computer graphics you want to make sure that it has all the weight and believability of a real object moving through a three-dimensional space" (qtd. in Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999).

therefore, may be opposed to indexicality in generating a "sign that bears no physical relationship to the 'thing' it represents" (Abbott 98).[128] "(D)igital information and images can (and often do) have indexical origins," writes Rosen, "the digital often appropriates or conveys indexical images, and it is common for the digital image to retain compositional forms associated with indexicality" elicited, for example, by scanning an indexical image into a computer (qtd. in Abbott 98). The assimilation and digitization of the "indexical referent," however, does not correlate to the photosensitive "preservation" of the object, but its "crystallization and liquefaction" (Romney, qtd. in Abbot 98). The digitized object image may evoke or mimic indexical referents (in an effort to elevate or (re-)affirm its "realness"), but these objects are nonetheless "released from their suspension in time" (Abbott 99) and remain "infinitely manipulatable" (Rosen, qtd. in Abbott 98). This "severance of a causal link between photographic object and referent" precipitates what Willemen calls "the waning of the indexical" (qtd. in Silvio and Vinci 166).[129]

Coleman, Animation Director for the Prequel Trilogy, makes frequent ovations to his animators' acumen in adorning/undergirding their CGI constructs with digitized indexical referents (and "secondary movements," an indexical referent for flesh and musculature). "What makes that look work," Coleman asserts regarding a backwards alien glance, is

> the follow-through of the skin underneath his chin...and the way his trunk moves. That you have a
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> feeling of that head snapping around, but there's a follow-through of what we call in animation a
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> secondary movement. As animators that doesn't naturally happen inside the computer, though, so you

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[128] Much CGI work, including free-standing, fully digitized characters, is built onto/out of the use of "live referents." Binks, for example, was "performed" by an actor on set, in a rubber outfit up to his neck, and an elevated eye-line. A notable example is the CGI Gollum from Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, which was performed "live" by Andy Serkis in a suit outfitted with referential nodes which allowed animators to match the digital character to Serkis' physical performance.

[129] "(I)t comes down to whether you look to the computer for your reality or whether you look out there in the world. ... Look at the way the light bounces off the top of this tower, and how these shadows actually deepen here, when you'd expect them to get lighter – you would never think to do that on a computer" (Huston, qtd. in Kline 213).

have to be thinking about that when you make that character move. (qtd. in Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999).

On the commentary track for *Sith*, Coleman discusses the leaps made in "skin shaders" between the first and third of the prequels: "This shot here of Yoda, these close-ups...really are amazing. We would never have been able to do this on (*Clones*), but with...the new paint that was created for Yoda we can now achieve these super-extreme close-ups." Later Coleman adds, also in respect to the fully-CGI-generated Yoda, that the "glow on the far ear really adds a realism to the skin" (qtd. in Lucas, *Sith* commentary, 2005).[130]

Lucas exults in obviating "real" objects and characters from the framescape and the digitization of the space itself: "One of the more fun things about this pod race is that nothing's real...this is literally our little cast of characters in the little pod here, but the rest is just empty desert"; "the only person in this whole scene really is Qui Gon, and everything else is basically manufactured. So it's basically just Liam walking around with a blue screen" (Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999). For the creative cognoscenti, this "not-realness" never impinges on audience reception of the world *as* real; the topography of character/creature/effect is *that* coherent, believable, and seamlessly enmeshed. "You just don't get this strong sense that you're in an animated film," Lucas extolls, "you're in a real place." Muren concurs: "about five minutes into it you totally buy the effects…and you're looking just totally at the story" (Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999).[131]

Lest we forget, the digital realm – this boundless, lustrous visual palette brimful with baubles – is entirely in service to the story. CGI is the panacea – lower costs, grander scale, indistinguishable-from-real robots and creatures – wherein we experience "much more sweeping stories... That's where the real thrill of it

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[130] "We wanted (digital Yoda) to look just like the puppet, but upgraded to the time...the time we live in now" (Coleman, qtd. in *Clones* commentary, 2002).

[131] Having listened through all six commentaries, I can report that rarely does any participant discuss the story or characters or what they found particularly compelling or exciting about either. Lucas provides occasional synopses of the action and dialogue occurring on screen, but little analysis. The other contributors, by and large, were employed in technical capacities, except for the funny and acerbic Carrie Fisher, who barely speaks. The impression on the listener is that the story was epiphenomenal to the effects work. Furthermore, the phrasing "*looking* just totally at the story" is an intriguing slip, indicative of the extent to which the creative team contemplated every diegetic component – even the narrative – through a visual/aesthetic lens.

all comes" (Lucas, qtd. in Jenkins 274). Lucas' "enthusiasm for the story" was immeasurably buoyed by

shedding the ballast of "antiquated machinery": "Suddenly all the constraints are lifted. It's like you've been

ploughing fields in hundred-degree sun, with a seventy-pound backpack and lead balls chained to your

ankles, and someone comes along and puts you in an air-conditioned tractor'" (Lucas, qtd. in Jenkins 273).

Since the original *Star Wars* had exhausted every exotic locale on earth, there was no choice other than to

digitally go where no cinéaste had gone before. "The one thing that digital effects have allowed us to do is to

create these alternate realities in a believable fashion and tell more fantastic stories than we were able to do

before. Which is great for the people who are trying to put these things into a cinematic medium" (Lucas,

*Star Wars* commentary, 1977).

Which was the cart and which the horse? Was technology spearheading story, or story technology

(Abbott 89)? Moreover, did it matter? For Lucas, story and effect were interlaced into a single nerve center,

indiscriminately sparking one another's synapses. Everything within the filmscape was now malleable, and

technicians could thus "immediately interpret what George wanted to see" (Burtt, qtd. in Hearn 206). These

"greatly enhanced artistic powers" (Prince 27) generated an holistic "performance" "as good as your

imagination is. You can make the things look much much more interesting...much more elaborate and much

more fun to watch" (Muren, *Jedi* commentary, 1985). Thanks to digital technology, Lucas could realize any

and every "fantastical (thing)" proscribed in the pre-CGI dark ages (Bouzereau 164).[132] "'In (CGI), there

really aren't physical limitations. There are only believability issues'" (Morris qtd. in Kline 215).

Lucas is correct, in a sense, that "fake is fake," but do viewers engage with and make meaning from

tangible objects with indexical, tangible, and kinesthetic qualities – built with foam, rubber, plastic, mesh,

and wire – no differently from CGI-generated bodies? Prince argues that "the viewer who encounters special

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[132] That Lucas frames potentialities in terms of scope – the epiphanic realization of boundless, sweeping, epic *grandeur* – is no surprise, argues Shone. "There is one obvious reason for this genuflection before scale, of course: computers, which just happen to be good at all the things – vast, endless, repetitive shapes and forms – with which Lucas used to tag the evil empire" (286).

effects, with their fantastic, digitalized creatures, is led to frame the image, to contextualize it cognitively, in different terms than images that appear more naturalistic" (26, 28). Furthermore, the material qualities of film stock differentiate the resulting visual field from its digital counterpart. Film contains "bits of silver halide suspended in (its) emulsion," which effects the "special luminosity and vividness" apparent as it unspools. The grain changes from frame to frame, "making each frame a unique visual experience even if its content... is static" (Prince 31). Prince posits that though film lacks the extreme "clarity" of digital, it looks "more alive." Without that grain, the digital image, by contrast, "looks unnaturally clean and shiny," and presents a flat image; "an unchanging cleanliness from frame to frame that registers perceptually" (31). The end result is what Shone describes as "the pitiless perfection of CGI" (312).[133]

CGI has not only obliterated every boundary of what can "exist" in the framescape, but consequently reconfigures the filmmaking process itself, "producing tremendous changes that are affecting the role and function of such traditional domains as cinematography" (Prince 26).

> (T)he computer generated images must look "real" – i.e., must reproduce the necessary proportions and textures of the original object – but they must also look as if they were filmed with a "real" camera, therefore maintaining certain photographic properties such as motion blurring, depth of focus, and the grain of the film stock. (Abbott 91)

Digital recording tends to skew to "deep" and "extremely sharp" focus, as opposed to gradients of "shallow focus" present in film (Prince 30), whereby celluloid replicates "'the viewer's ontological experience of a rich, multi-plane visual world'" (Bazin, qtd. in Prince 31). Because digital cannot process "motion blur" (but will instead "strobe in a distracting manner") digital necessitates a revised cinematographic methodology that changes how and where the camera is placed and maneuvered, whilst restricting the use of pan and dolly

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[133] Some filmmakers have found that CGI presents its own set of seams. The digital image is so crisp that the "fakeness" of sets and make-up – otherwise obscured by the motion blur and lush multi-layering of film – is exposed (Prince 31).

shots (Prince 32). (This may account for the shot/reverse-shot style that dominates the prequels.) CGI

sequences, notes Abbott, typically exhibit "a mode of spectatorial address" featuring "tableau-style framing,

longer takes, and strategic intercutting between shots" (93). Furthermore, shooting stage (or "on set")

cinematography is being winnowed as an increased number "of the components of cinematography" are

shifted into post-production, and "altered or even created once principal filming is finished" (Prince 29).

Magid defines "edit-suite filmmaking" as "a phase of post-production that not only situates shots in

sequence but also edits spaces, characters, and objects within individual shots." Actors can be split out of

various takes of a single scene and spliced into "new plates to achieve the optimum performance from each

character; adding lip movement to accommodate new dialogue; removing lip movement to edit dialogue; and

adding characters to scenes in which they weren't originally scripted to appear" (Silvio and Vinci 167).

Subsequent to the disastrous *Star Wars* production process, Lucas had faith that his film would be "salvaged"

through editing, and was vindicated in that faith (Pollock 174). "George came out of a documentary film

background,'" Kurtz elucidates. "His style was to shoot a lot of footage and sit in the editing room and put it

all together...very much a loner and very shy" (Plume, "Interview"). Former ILM employee Scott Ross also

describes Lucas as "'incredibly shy. He's not a very people person.'" Ross contends that Lucas founded Pixar

– at the time intended as Lucasfilm's in-house CGI animation subsidiary – so that he could "'make movies

with a limited amount of people – literally put himself in a dark room, and direct and edit the whole thing by

himself'" (qtd. in Shone 85). With *Menace*, Lucas commanded the power and resources to make his dark

room a reality; to become, in effect, a full-fledged edit-suite filmmaker. "As the (*Menace*) set closed down

each evening, that day's footage was beamed back to ILM to be processed overnight," whereafter Lucas

"could monitor and assemble downloaded material with ease" (Jenkins 284). "Some scenes of straight

dialogue," Shone reports, "ended up using up to six layers of computer-composited imagery" (281). Lucas

"(continues) to direct his actors long after they've gone home...he tweaks line readings and interchanges facial expressions from scene to scene or slows the synch in a performance in order to slip a cut around an eyeblink." Thus, "directing" is downgraded to a process of collecting and collocating the live action elements necessary for compositing, with digital technology allowing for a "remarkable layer of creativity" when reworking footage *post hoc* (Prince 25, 30, 29). Editing has always been an eminently interpretive craft on par with directing and cinematography, but today "one can...rewrite, restage, and reshoot – essentially think the film anew – while editing" (Gruens, qtd. in Silvio and Vinci 198).

North argues that this "modular" directorial style "inflects the film with a troubling hint of tyrannically fastidious ownership" (Silvio and Vinci 167, 168). Regardless of whether or not filmic elements were intended to exist in the "the same diegetic space," they are effortlessly fused to "enforce the illusion" that they occupy the selfsame space and operate in tandem. The framescape is "comprised of discrete components" which initially existed independently of their "final output" (Silvio and Vinci 168, 167). This "transition of performative control – from an actor's holistic performance to an editor's constitution of disparate parts...(collapses) all productive processes into one (Silvio and Vinci 198).

> George liked to repurpose things, shoot elements and then decide he wanted to make it a wide shot, blow this up and change this and put that character there: "What if I take this guy from this shot and put him in the back of this scene?" There's a lot of torture of elements that goes on. You go, "You know, this is just not the right way to do this shot. All right, but this is the way George wants to do it, so I'll go and figure out how to not make it look bad. (Knoll, qtd. in Shone 282)

"In a sense," Shone contends, "(Lucas) hadn't returned to moviemaking at all, but waited until moviemaking had come to him in a form more conducive to his shy, synthesizing talents" (282). "Ideally, George would like to come up with an idea for a film, have somebody go out and shoot it, and then get all the footage in a

room so he could finish the movie all by himself, without anyone else imposing their ideas on him" (Kurtz, qtd. in Pollock 217).

Burtt confirms that it became "common practice" to manufacture/modify even "intimate scenes" by searching "thoroughly through all the performances and concentrating on each actor in their own right and not be as concerned with the ensemble within the shot" (qtd. in Lucas, *Clones* commentary, 2002). This process of pan-performative pastiche echoes a suspicion harboured by Mark Hamill during the *Star Wars* shoot, namely "'that if there were a way to make movies without actors, George would do it'" (qtd. in Pollock 163). While actors themselves are not obsolete as of yet, performers are "increasingly called upon to interact with FX technology" (Abbott 104). McCallum recalls that the first week *Menace* started shooting, "it was very tough for the actors...to understand where they were and what they were supposed to be doing" (qtd. in Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999). Liam Neeson professed bafflement "at having to act against 'invisible entities.'" Samuel L. Jackson (Mace Windu) called the situation "'pretty bizarre" (Jenkins 283). Ewen McGregor admitted that the prequels were "very, very difficult to make. It's a completely technical exercise to be completely surrounded by blue and to play to a character that's not there. ... You do your reactions and you just hope that the computer-generating guy matches his actions to what you're doing. It's a weird process" (qtd. in Hearn 226).[134]

Co-presence in film acting is difficult to qualify, but North postulates that building scenes "from disparate spatio-temporal units" must detract "from a sense of liveness" (Silvio and Vinci 168). Acting is, after all, an "act" – a "live" event that, however carefully choreographed, must at some point "transpire" while being captured by the camera. "It is this erasure of idiosyncrasy and spontaneity from human performance," writes North, "which makes the body another prop, one more media element to be integrated

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[134] McCallum admits that he "had to have a lot of discussions about the face replacement" – i.e., the digital transposition of the face of an older, physically fragile feature performer onto the body of a younger, more physically agile double – in compositing one of the several-hundred lightsaber duels (qtd. in Lucas, *Sith* commentary, 2005).

with all the other equally pliable components of the filmic space" (Silvio and Vinci 168). Furthermore, acting often entails "inter-action"; not just idiosyncrasy and spontaneity *from* human performance, but *between* performers. Inter-action, furthermore necessitates inter-*reaction*. These (esoteric) essences of the "act" cannot be actualized via computer software, only, as with indexicality, emulated via programming.

Physical interaction between "live" actors and CGI characters was one key to engineering the successful miscegenation of real/digital objects. According to Coleman, having a live actor touch or hold a digital character "helps the illusion" (qtd. in Lucas, *Sith* commentary, 2005).

> I'm especially happy with how we're able to get some physical interaction... It's those kinds of moments that I'm always looking for, I really want the characters touching each other ... I'm always thinking that helps you believe that they're both in the same space, that they exist in that world. (qtd. in Lucas, *Clones* commentary, 2002)

Evincing a sense of "shared space" – a convincing imbrication of flesh and pixel co-habiting "spatio-temporal" vectors – was a recurring concern of Coleman's, especially when entities interacted. The animators layered in indexical elements to further smooth the joins: "you can see the tight interaction between the animation and the compositing where you can see that there's shadows being cast on the computer generated droids as they run through the live action. It really makes it feel like they're in the same space together" (qtd. in Lucas, *Menace* commentary, 1999). As his team turned to *Sith*, Coleman aspired to further refine the material actuality of his flourishing cast of animated characters and ever-sprawling environs, so he had his team step away from their computers and *perform*.

> I wanted them to feel what it was like to do the actions, to walk like Yoda, or move like Grievous, or act out the lines and look at their faces so that we could really judge the level of acting and the kinds of movements we were really trying to achieve in the animation. And for me that was one of the

successes of this film, was that we were able to put a little bit of our own spirit, and a little bit of our

own humanity into our digital characters. (qtd. in Lucas, *Sith* commentary, 2005)

Imbuing what is essentially software – or *code* – with "spirit" and "humanity" is a curious notion. CGI is,

after all "animated partly by procedural programs" designed to "approximate and simulate the responses of

objects to the spaces into which it is inserted" (Silvio and Vinci 157). A certain degree of "representational

graft" is delegated to "pre-packaged software," inscribing images with "an aesthetic inflected by particular

properties borne out of digitalization." All movements stem from the same core codes, and thus exhibit an

inherent sameness. Human input (e.g., "spirit") is imported, but must then be reconciled within "the nexus of

new computer processes" (Silvio and Vinci 157, 161).[135]

The paradox of CGI, and the primary obstacle to an observer's ability to syncretize the visual field, is

that while the digital performer must "blend within the live-action footage" – "regular pro-filmic elements

such as sets and human actors" – it should simultaneously "stand out within the fictional world of the

narrative" (Abbott 93). The character is concurrently a "spectacular attraction" designed to "protrude from

the diegetic space...(and) viewed as a distinct object of technological wonder" (Silvio and Vinci 170). Your

mission, should you choose to accept it, is to be both conspicuous and inconspicuous; to entreat *and* deny.

According to Brooker, this newfound aesthetic prowess has prompted a self-conscious awareness of

"the wonders of this new technology" (93). The special effect has always drawn attention to itself – hence the

modifier "special" – and effects-laden films often "provide a narrative space within which to gaze in awe at

the magic of the effect" (Abbott 93). As the largesse of CGI objects expanded concomitant to their saturation

within the frame, the narrative space required to accommodate them grew ever-more explicit. In *Jurassic*

*Park*, Abbott notes how the desired audience response – "the wonder of the moment" – is prefaced by the

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[135] This proved too strange for Neeson. Feeling his own "irrelevance" (Baxter 402), Neeson announced his retirement. "'We are basically puppets... I don't think I can live with the inauthenticity of movies anymore'" (qtd. in Shone 281).

reaction of a character. The paleontologist in *Jurassic*, shot from a very high angle, *sinks to his knees in amazement*, followed by the "revelation" of the stupendous "photo-realistic" CGI dinosaur. That wonder, writes Abbot, "is not simply the narrative revelation of living dinosaurs but the amazing special effects that have produced a realistic, three-dimensional, computer-generated image of a dinosaur smoothly integrated into the live-action shot of the actors"; effect and narrative merged "into one spectacular gestalt" (94).

This is the fundamental distinction between CGI and practical effects: on the level at which CGI effects must be articulated within the text – that the text functions as a  showcase – the effect is figuratively (and often literally) foregrounded. This incessant foregrounding, this perpetual calling attention to itself, overdetermines the effect and forces it to *distract.* When an audience is drawn into a film, "we 'forget' its unreality, but as soon as our attention is diverted we recall it's illusionary nature. We are never really fooled, *but we do not constantly reflect on the fact of its unreality*" (Lyden, *Religion* 52, emphasis mine). Practical effects, partially due to of the agony of seams, necessitate obfuscation; their wires and matte lines and puppeteers must be hidden and circumvented. CGI entities, to the contrary, require no masking, and – neither precluded nor prohibited by material "limitations" – are thrust into the spotlight. Commenting on the digital details stitched into the *Special Edition,* Kurtz stipulates that "'all of those digitally-enhanced shots of robots floating around and creatures walking through the frame...call attention to themselves'" (Plume, "Interview"). Of a scene wherein Lucas has set stormtroopers astride computer-generated "dewbacks," Kurtz contrasts the giant lizards' ceaseless CGI snorting and shuffling to the wrangling of a "live" animal, such as a horse, in a similar shot. The horse you would want to stand still, "but those (dewbacks) moving actually distract from the principal purpose of the scene" (Plume, "Interview"). This overdetermination demands attention in a way that practical techniques do not, inviting the viewer to cast a critical eye on the results. The "forceful iteration" of digital and live elements, North observes, "showcases the craft involved in making

them appear to be spatially co-dependent, and the spectator is challenged to perceive the point at which the simulation meets the solid." This scrutiny elicits a "microspectacle," by which "the CGI object incites close inspection of its surface detail, texture, shading, and motion, the very elements which enforce the acceptance of real and virtual figures as occupying the same diegetic space" (Silvio and Vinci 170).

Case in point: cloth. Coleman perpetually fixates on the quality and believability of computer-generated clothing. Such are the sartorial concerns of contemporary digital storytelling:

- The real clothing is flowing back and forth, and so does Jar Jar's. It needs to move and be real, otherwise the audience is pulled out of the moment and doesn't believe that this digital character is really living and breathing in this scene. (*Clones*)

- One of the things I'm really happy about…is where we've been able to go with the digital cloth. ... To me it adds so much to the movement, to the realism of these characters and helps blend them...for the audience to believe in them. ... When you add in the secondary motion, the overlapping action of the cloth, to me it just breathes all that extra life into the character. (*Sith*)[136]

- (I)t's the ultimate challenge because we have real actors wearing clothes next to digital characters wearing simulated clothes. We had a brilliant team of cloth sim people on episode three. (*Sith*)

- You'll see a rolling tumble here that I'm really happy with, because of what the clothes look like...shots like this with the cloth, where he just looks absolutely real to me, and it adds so much to Yoda and his performance to have that realistic-looking cloth on. (*Sith*)

The true milestone, of course, was not digital cloth, but the character inside the clothes. In 1997, Seabrook reported that ILM was in a heated race against its competitors to create "the first 'synthespian': a (CGI) human actor in a live-action movie" (Kline 214). The synthespian became both "aspirational object"

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[136] While shooting *Empire*, Kershner wanted Yoda's clothes to look "'homemade, but none of the fabrics we selected looked right. Finally we found this raw silk from India, and it was just perfect. It hung nicely...'" (qtd. in Bouzereau 188).

and yardstick against which the progress of CGI was measured (Silvio and Vinci 157). With Jar Jar (and later, digital Yoda), ILM had crossed the rubicon, creating virtual actors "indistinguishable from their organic counterparts" (or so Lucasfilm would claim). Synthespians are not *sui generis*, however, but (generally) require human actors – and their attendant "performances," both physical and vocal – as referents for animators. The transitional form is a cyborg of sorts, an ungainly hybrid of fleshy spontaneity and encoding/inflection; "a mechanized performance attempting to mimic the properties of organic bodies" (Libreri qtd. in Silvio and Vinci 168-169). Impressive as a technological marvel, the entity still serves as "an exhibit first and a character second" (Silvio and Vinci 157).

"(I)t's hard to say that a rubber character has more integrity than a digital character," says Lucas. "What I try to do is make the characters...believable, so that they look realistic enough to where you have a suspension of disbelief and accept them as characters, not as tricks, which is what they all are" (Lucas, *Jedi* commentary, 1985). What is suspension of disbelief? Conscious denial? Self-subversion? There is a close corollary in Lyden's concept of "forgetting": though we "know" the textual representations to be "unreal," we "allow" that awareness to be suspended. I posit that this suspension is a form of sympathy: the audience is cognizant of the limitations imposed by the medium on the artist – that materiality inflicts "seams" – and, thus, that there is no "perfect" product, only degrees of competence. The filmmaker's responsibility is both to attempt to hide those seams, and distract from them (as distinct from the "distraction" provoked by the CGI character, which is both cause and effect) through story and character, knowing full well that total seamlessness is impossible. (Think of a magician using misdirection to pull off the trick.) The impossibility of the task elicits sympathy – we "know" Yoda is (merely) a puppet, but forgive "his" inadequacy provided character traits and narrative utilities are sufficiently diverting. The audience conspires with the filmmaker to transcend the prohibitions inherent to the praxis, thereby becoming the last link in the collaborative chain

facilitating the transubstantiation of a fabrication into "reality." In other words, it was the very impediments to his imagination Lucas found so vexing that allowed the audience to access, and participate in the creation of, the *Star Wars* world.[137]

North notes that the "obstacles which film poses for filmmakers are actually what create the dynamic interaction between its mechanical and its organic artistic elements" (Silvio and Vinci 168). Wood laments technology that proceeds "to the point where it can create the world, saving us the trouble of having to do it ourselves" (xxx). Spielberg and Zanuck (the producer of *Jaws*) mused over what their movie might have become had they utilized CGI: "'we probably wouldn't have made as good a picture. It would have been too perfect and we would have used (CGI) too much...we didn't have the tools (and) we had a better picture. We had to invent things to keep the shark alive'" (Zanuck qtd. in Shone 12). "'The trick is to know what you can leave to the audience's imagination,'" Lucas once said (qtd. in Pollock 209). Having hit a convoluted nadir with *Star Wars*, Lucas realized that "(t)he more detail I went into, the more it detracted from the concept I was trying to put forward" (Bouzereau 35).

If less is more, then more must also be less. CGI *Sturm and Drang* tends to leave audiences craving more/bigger/better *Sturm and Drang*. The torrent of "never-before-seen images" incites a self-perpetuating cycle; a feedback loop wherein one set of amazing images "creates the desire to see even more amazing images" (Kline 215). The "period of synergy" between futuristic images and the effects technology that brings those images to life "is short-lived since the 'phantasmagorical projections of the future often only achieve the glamour and allure of the truly novel in that brief moment before the techniques used to bring them to the cinema have grown too familiar'" (Pierson, qtd. in Abbott 90). Subsequent to the thrill of that

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[137] "Ford's powers of sarcasm," writes Shone, "were always the grit in the oyster, and back in 1977 Lucas hadn't yet found a way to expurgate that grit – all the happy accidents that beset any film born of a collaborative process. *Star Wars* was, said Lucas, "only 50-60 percent" a realization of his vision for the film, which is why it is as good as it is: he had to fight for it, which is why there is fight in the picture" (285).

first dino in *Jurassic Park*, we emerge into a wilderness of (now-)insufficient amazement – the cutting-edge

now spent and impotent – forced to forage for newer, more thrilling thrills.[138]

"Today the 'real' is old-fashioned; only the computerized unreal is really 'real'" (Wood xxxii). In

time, however, the "computerized unreal" will come to seem less (or more) real, one in a line of progenitors

of the next innovation in spectacle (even 3D appears on the wane). The demise of celluloid – as with makers

of models before it – elicits nostalgia more than pathos. Prince's preference for the qualities unique to film is,

he admits, somewhat sentimental: "The soft, grainy, slightly hazy look of film will seem as strange to future

generations of viewers as the hot, sharp DV look seems to us now." Exalting film (and deploring digital) "is

mainly a nostalgic drive, an attempt to retain a part of the past in a present that is outdistancing it" (Prince

33). Bemoaning the latest in flashy effects technologies is, after all, a generational passing of the torch.

Winkler found the practical effects in *Jedi* obviously fake:

> With the help of his second-unit director and two first-rate stuntmen, Mann shows us a real race (in
>
> *Ben-Hur*). Lucas and his director, on the other hand, have to rely entirely on technical gadgetry and
>
> can only show us something that was put together in the lab or, rather, on the computer. We know it to
>
> be fake as we are watching it. (288)

Lucas had scaled the mountain and reached twin summits: in the real world, he was the unilateral

owner/overseer of a multimedia conglomerate; in his fake universe, he was God. In *People Versus*, Pollock

reflects on the subject of his monograph: "(Lucas is) beyond a certain level of criticism now. He's beyond the

idea of true collaboration" (qtd. in Philippe 2010). This was the liberation and ultimate control that Lucas had

fought and struggled for lo these many decades; moreover – *earned*. "The only reason it's fun is that I don't

have to answer to anybody. I don't have anybody telling me what to do... They don't have any input into it.

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[138] What can the shrewd filmmaker do but submit to the audience's insatiable craving for more stimulus? "George will always get us to add more characters, more creatures, more droids" (Coleman, qtd. in Lucas, *Menace* commentary 1999).

I'll do whatever I want" (Rose, *Lucas*). On Conan, Lucas regaled his gangly interlocutor with a wry smile

and *bon mot* (cum Bush reference): "I'm more than the decider, I'm the creator" (qtd. in Philippe 2010). The

self-anointed David to the studio Goliath now rivaled all largesse. Gone was his 70s consortium of idealists.

"'All the folks working on (*Menace*) had the confidence to give George what he wanted. George guides the

whole thing'" (Muren, qtd. in Hearn 230). Now the auteur would do right by the auteur.[139]

As the release date for the *never-before-in-the-history-of-cinema-has-any-movie-ever-been-*

*anticipated-at-this-fever-pitch* neared,[140] the expertly-oiled Lucasfilm merchandising machine cranked into

high gear. "(E)very fragment of (*Menace*) had a spin-off, and a corresponding price tag" (Baxter 401), and

"every merchandise manufacturer in the world was by now desperate to jump aboard the...gravy train"

(Jenkins 220). Multi-national food conglomerates sparred for tie-in rights, and when the dust settled, Tricon

Global (parent company of Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, and KFC) doled out $2 billion and change to plaster Darth

Maul and Jar Jar all over drink cups and frisbees. Once relegated to the dustbin, movie merchandising had,

thanks to *Star Wars*, grown into an elephantine (and indispensable) infrastructural adjunct. Merch was,

furthermore, now part of the story. *Menace* was "(overpopulated) with creatures so clearly designed with at

least half an eye on the merchandising shelves...(leaving) a nasty taste in the mouth" Biskind opined, quoting

Peter Rainer of the *LA Herald Examiner* that "'(t)his time the toys have taken over the store'" (251).

The *Star Wars* pulse quickened as Lucas sent a shot of pure mythology coursing through the

commodified capillaries of his franchise. Lucas and Moyers reunited for a *TIME* cover story in which Lucas

burnished his mythological *bona fides*. Lucas reiterated that, in the Original Trilogy, he had "consciously set

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[139] Howard Hawks put a positive spin on such subservience and compromise: "The studio system worked because we couldn't be excessive, we couldn't just do what we wanted to do." Spielberg puts it even more succinctly: "Power can go right to the head" (Biskind 378, 384).

[140] Capturing the magnitude of audience anticipation became a sort of contest: Ebert called it "the most eagerly-awaited new movie of the decade" (Philippe 2010), Biskind described it as "pathologically anticipated" (399); Kaplan weighed in with "the most anticipated entertainment event since they introduced lions to the Roman Colosseum" (1).

about to re-create myths and the classic mythological motifs," and "use those motifs to deal with issues that exist today." Clock-wipe to 1999, where Lucas was once again "telling an old myth in a new way. Each society takes that myth and retells it...which relates to the particular environment they live in. The motif is the same. It's just that it gets localized. As it turns out, I'm localizing it for the planet" (Lucas and Moyers 51).

The landscape that Lucas' resplendent butterfly – soon to burst from its meticulously tended cocoon – would flutter through, however, was much changed from that of its predecessors. The economy was now global, human culture had been subsumed to the "logic of capital" (the stock market, securities trading, 401k's), the studios had been bought and shuffled into the portfolios of multinational conglomerates,[141] and there was a "proliferation of increasingly complex technologies, particularly communications technologies" keeping the juice flowing throughout a sprawling, intricately interconnected grid (Silvio and Vinci 54). This was the "information age," the "post-industrial society" (Silvio and Vinci 55); the anti-establishmentarianism of the 70s had surrendered to the pro-establishmentarianism of the 90s. As luck would have it, Lucas had traded membership in the rebel alliance to run an empire.

The prominence of film-going had shifted within the marketplace as well.[142]  Movies were now one (albeit boisterous) voice in a polyphonic cacophony clamoring for attention amongst the din. "You're fighting a confluence of other media. Driving through not just the clutter of other movies, but the clutter of entertainment, concerts, music, cable, satellite" (Shone 262). *Star Wars* had stentorian lungs, however, and handily drowned out all speculators. *Star Wars* was pan-cultural mythology, and watching *Star Wars* – much

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[141] According to producer Peter Gruber, "blockbuster" films were no less monetized: "'the attitude changed in the eighties: they became targets of opportunity. People looked to these pictures as a means of moving the company's stock up, of generating this locomotive for all the other businesses that you wanted to drive with the movies, and to create people's careers in the company... You managed an asset'" (qtd. in Shone 182).

[142] When *Gone With the Wind* was released, Shone surmises "films accounted for (90%) of the leisure time activities. Movies are now probably (10%)" (262).

less attending a brand new *Star Wars* movie – was ritual.

"A ritual," writes Campbell, "is the enactment of a myth. By participating in a ritual, you are participating in a myth" (103). This particular myth was a media sensation, a title-prize contest with hype coterminous to its new punching weight. The original *Star Wars* had been a modestly budgeted surprise snuck into theatres under the radar, but *Menace* would be broadly and ceremoniously spliced into a global culture for which its progenitors were already part of the genetic makeup; "so embedded in our popular consciousness that we encounter (it) every day without even trying" (Brooker 2). The hype surrounding *Menace*, however, was not hype as it is commonly understood. Typically the combined effort to "(pump) up interest in a venture...with mass accessibility as the goal" (Kenny 68), *Star Wars* came complete with built-in interest: was already widely accessible, and the new chapter so highly anticipated no superlatives sufficed. Lucas, therefore, artificially limited supply (Kaplan 3), doling out judicious scraps and stirring the frenzy into near-chaos. Toys were proscribed (by Lucasfilm fiat) from release prior to May 3rd – "Menace Monday." A Fox publicist claimed: "We're almost trying to get people not to talk about it" (Shone 277). As if the public needed prompting, media and merchants colluded in the craze, playing off the mystery, feeding the beast (Kaplan, 1). "(T)he hype for (*Menace*) possessed its own peculiar inverse magnitude," writes Shone, "like that of a collapsing sun" (276). *Menace* was a black hole sucking everything, even light, inside.

On November 21st, 1998, Fox premiered a teaser trailer for *Menace* prior to *The Siege,* causing an 85% spike in business (Shone 276).[143] When Apple posted the trailer on-line, it was downloaded over ten million times (Kaplan 2; Shone 276). Vanity Fair plopped a few cast members onto the cover – fifth best-selling issue ever. Estimates ran that 2.2 million people planned to skip work on opening day – a $293 million dollar hit to American employers (Kaplan 2). Everyone, it seemed – "even the most cynical and

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[143] One especially effusive fan found the trailer akin to "a Beatles concert" (qtd. in Philippe 2010).

media-weary members of a generation conditioned by thirty-plus years of mass media hoo-ha to react with smart-ass dismissal to any sort of Giant Mainstream Media Event at all" (Kenny 174) – were swept into the prerelease excitement. "There was never anything more hyped up than (*Menace*)," noted one observer. "Even Jesus was less hyped" (qtd. in Philippe 2010). As the endless, snaking queues for the 70s sensation, replete with costumed patrons, had been a story in their own right, "lining up to see *Star Wars*" – and dressing up while doing so – became a performative component of the *Menace* ritual. "(N)ot only did (*Menace*) have queues, it had live webcam broadcasts of its queues: you could either line up to watch the film or you could watch the lines of those who lined up to watch it" (Shone 276).

The punishing terms Lucas imposed on theatre owners came with heavy penalties for transgression. If you ran a multiplex, *Menace* had to play in the biggest theatre(s) and remain there for two-to-three months. If the movie is run on multiple screens, it had to stay on multiple screens. Trailers could only play for eight minutes max, and no on-screen ads could be shown at all (Shone 276, Kaplan 2).[144]

By the standard of grosses alone, *Menace* was a monster hit. Audiences, however, were divided, and in the aftermath, polarized fans split into factions of "basher" and "gusher." A recurring refrain ran that everyone's expectations had simply been too high. "In the hundred-year history of cinema," after all, "no filmmaker has ever been burdened by the same weight of expectation" (Jenkins 290). This is a disappointment endemic to sequels; a symptom of Lucas' bread and butter: nostalgia. The audience craves sequels due to "a deep unconscious nostalgia for a past (textual) pleasure." The audience, moreover, knows that the sequel "cannot literally reconstitute its charismatic original," but are disappointed nonetheless. "Unconsciously they persist in demanding the impossible: that the sequel be different, but also exactly the

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[144] In a further example of artificially limiting supply, Lucas announced that *Menace* could only be shown in theatres "able to offer a fitting showcase for his film. 'I'm not interested in trying to break any records. I'm interested in quality presentations and a positive group experience for everyone who comes to see this film'" (qtd. in Jenkins 290). "(*Menace* opened) on only 3,800 screens – half the expected amount. ... 'So there were far less theatres, and you had to wait in line again, so you saw those lines outside and thought, "I gotta be a part of that"'" (Devlin, qtd. in Shone 276).

same. Their secret mad hope is to find in the sequel a paradoxical kind of doubling... They wish to read the "unforgettable" text once more, yet as if they had forgotten it." (Berliner 109). Though we crave (re)immersion in the cherished text, the conditions of that original experience – personal, social, cultural – have changed and cannot be reconstituted. Even if it were possible to recreate those conditions, "nothing can equal one's first experience of something great." Attempts to recapture the nostalgic experience – to (re-)experience the object of nostalgia *as* nostalgic object – are fundamentally futile, for "at the same time a sequel calls to mind the charismatic original, it also recalls its absence" (Berliner 109).

To compensate for the loss of the original experience, sequels "(tend) to supply excessive amounts of whatever audiences seemed to have liked about the first movie." There is an "escalation of violence and thrills" as the sequel competes "not only with other films in its genre but also with the original film it imitates" (Berliner 109). Sequels represent "'the triumph of surface over depth, (and) spectacle over meaning and history'" (McMurtry, qtd. in Berliner 110); a reductionist repackaging of the original as

> a lavish display of the mere surface of the prior work. Even plots and characters turn into spectacles...
> When C-3PO and R2-D2 make narratively gratuitous re-appearances (in *Menace*)... the prequels
> attempt not only to reinspire the audience's affection for the characters but to call up the *spectacle* of
> C-3PO and R2-D2 by superficially reiterating their connection to the prior films we loved. (Berliner
> 110, emphasis in original)

Hanson contends that the prequels are victims of spatio-temporal alterity, an allogenic tissue rejected by an incompatible cultural body.

> (T)here was no way that something as old-fashioned, as willingly, gleefully even,  nonironic as a new
> *Star Wars* movie would match the late-'90s atmosphere of hypercritical, media-savvy, self-aware

yadda yadda yadda; that there would be no place for Space Opera Nonsense in the embittered zeitgeist of the Jaded Age. (Kenny 186)

The meaning of a text neither fixed nor "exhausted by the intentions of its author." As the text drifts or is transplanted "from one cultural or historical context to another, new meanings may be culled from it which were perhaps never anticipated by its author or contemporary audience... The text itself is really no more than a series of 'cues'" (Eagleton, qtd. in Winkler 10). The recipient encounters and interprets elements "based on their own prefilmic assumptions" (Barker, qtd. in Lyden, *Religion* 138). Dramatic content "(acquires) significance beyond the individual character so that the person's journey becomes one that can be symbolic of our own transitions in life as audience members" (Lyden, *Religion* 81). A film "does not mean," says Wetmore, Jr., "but generates meaning by connecting the life experience of the viewer with composed visual images, aural experiences, intellectual content and narrative" (88).[145] This field of meaning is suffused with "contested themes, images, and other signifiers that cannot be neatly divided into text, subtext and context because neither producers nor consumers have the final word on their meaning" (Browne 281). Furthermore, because interpretation occurs "in the context of...actual viewing," a film can only be understood through "how the average viewer sees it, what she liked about it, where she saw it, why and with whom" (Lyden, *Religion* 47-8). In "circuit of culture" terminology: the context of reception.[146]

*Star Wars* is uniquely fertile soil due to three dynamics: first, the diegetic space (the "expanded universe") is relatively limitless; second, because that space is populated with characters who, at their most developed, are generic archetypes and, at their least, *tabula rasa*, inviting interpretation and inscription;[147]

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[145] "(I)t is the reader of myths himself who must reveal their essential function. How does he receive this particular myth *today*?" (Barthes 153, emphasis in original).

[146] For more, see Lynch, "Cultural Theory and Cultural Studies."

[147] "Some fictional characters...welcome addition, subtraction, clarification, filigree. ... Artists and writers go back and reanimate and enlarge these characters time and again because, through some magic confluence, they mean so much more than the typographical marks that signify them. This is a rare and magical thing, and...the *Star Wars* films...are...blessed with a surfeit of such characters" (Kenny 30).

third, the film has been so broadly consumed, within so many cultures, over so many years, that it represents the rarest textual breed: *Star Wars* forms the nexus of a pan-demographic/-generational/-cultural semiological network. Because the saga (and its supplementaries) has been continuously revisited/reinterpreted/recreated/renewed by fans and filmmakers over thirty-plus years, it exists in a dynamic interrelationship with the emergence, adoption, and assimilation of new media – creative, distributive, consumptive, interpretive – across these same decades. *Star Wars*, as cultural artifact, necessitates an additional clause under the "circuit of culture" rubric: the *context of appropriation*.[148]

As the *Special Edition* amply demonstrated, several generations of fans – adults and children who had seen the film in theatres, adults and children who had grown up with the films on VHS and DVD – had woven "webs of significance" using *Star Wars* as supporting strands. In *People Versus*, one fan asserts that "(t)here are these essential building blocks to who I am now that are *Star Wars*" (Philippe 2010). Director Kevin Smith describes his "childhood love affair" with *Star Wars* as "a prepubescent first marriage... *Star Wars* influenced – and sometimes *defined* – important epochs of my life" (Kenny 72, 73, emphasis in original). British performer Simon Pegg insists that "*Star Wars* was extremely important in my development as a child. It stimulated my imagination, increased my vocabulary, (and) informed my notion of morality" (Brooker 83). Brooker encountered aficionados whose enthusiasm not only influenced their "belief framework" and "personal ethics," but was channeled into education and career choices. *Star Wars* "inspired (fans) to become involved in technology or art, in psychology or the military"; another fan "attributes his interest in computers and technology to his first experience of *Star Wars*"; others were inspired to become sociology professors, police officers, computer network and systems analysts, video producers, entertainers, librarians, and industrial designers (Brooker 2, 12, 17, 18).

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[148] "(T)he fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be *appropriated*" (Barthes 143, emphasis in original).

"(O)utstandingly dedicated and skilled" adherents have congealed around the series (Brooker v).

Fastidious contingents of archivists and perfervid fans "police the texts, branding as abject those elements

which seem either incongruous or destructive of that immersion" (Silvio and Vinci 166).[149] Members

organize, stratify, and catalogue content, differentiating "'official' (i.e. canon) texts" from less credible

contributions such as "novels, computer games or comics" (Brooker 52). Even casual fandom grants access

to a "common vocabulary," a hierarchy of increasingly obscure intra-, inter-, and paratextual references.

"This is the lasting gift that *Star Wars*...offers its fans: a community, worldwide and possibly lifelong,

grounded in a common heritage and united by a fictional universe" (Brooker 62, 53, 237).[150] Fandom now

comprises "an experiential unit that is interconnected to an expansive multi-textual environment

(encompassing) magazines, books, collectibles, interactive media, online clubs, conferences, and role-playing

events" (Shefrin 273). In protean "universes" such as *Star Wars*, fans no longer "receive" media, they

appropriate it – even (perhaps especially) "corporate-generated imagery." Fans take this content and

> embellish or transform it with personal artistic expressions such as poetry, songs, paintings, scholarly
>
> essays, creative fiction, photographs, digital films, collages, or clothing...fans may also adopt
>
> attitudes, language, or behaviors that are an outgrowth of their "immersion in a special lexicon"…
>
> participatory fandom is marked by a sustained emotional and physical engagement with a particular
>
> narrative universe – an engagement that visualizes a non-commercial, shared ownership with the
>
> media company that holds the…legal property rights. (Shefrin 273)

This progression from consumptive to participative ecosystems was precipitated and propelled by various

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[149] "It is one of the ironies of Lucas's position that a filmmaker so averse to joining the dots of his plots should find himself beset by a sea of fans who have seen his films thirty-three times" (Shone 287).

[150] One is often left to wonder if their ardor is misplaced, as Lucas often exhibits a disdainful or dismissive attitude toward his fans. Of the prequels, Lucas said: "I knew when I did (*Menace*) that I was doing exactly what the fans didn't want me to do...which was I was making it about a ten-year-old boy and not Darth Vader, and so I knew I would get killed for that, and I knew that the second one was a love story and I knew I was going to get killed for that" (Shone 288). Given the stated central theme of *Menace*, is of organisms living for their mutual advantage – "people helping people" – would Lucas extend his thesis to embrace the filmmaker and his audience?

emergent technological and interpretive factors, including the popularity of the Digital Video Disc and the bonus materials (generally) contained thereon. "*Star Wars,*" said Lucas, "was not meant...to be seen more than once in a movie theatre. ...But this was before there was such a thing as DVD" (Silvio and Vinci 190). The Original Trilogy "inaugurated a new way of looking at films – that is, repeatedly" (Kenny 66). Repeat viewings began in theatres, but migrated to, then promulgated within, the domestic scenario with the advent of video playback and recording devices – first Betamax, then VHS.

"(M)ass reproduction and home theatres have opened up access to cinema in unprecedented ways" (Silvio and Vinci 205). VHS – which usurped protectionist Sony's more expensive (though, my mother maintains, of superior quality) Beta – quickly joined pay-per-view and cable as lucrative "ancillary" revenue streams. By 1987, video sales and rentals amounted to "$7.5 billion, almost twice that generated by films in theatres" (Shone 181). As the scales of access and control – recording and re-watching material at leisure – tilted in the audience's favour, providers re-evaluated media content; *how* the audience used the technology transformed the nature of the content produced for use *with* that technology. Shone proposes a causal link between the "era of non-narrative music videos, and VCRs...surfing the action beats with fast forward" and "(a) cinema of moments, of images, of sensory stimuli divorced from story" (60). Browne notes that "(a)s revenues from tape rentals emerged as an increasingly important source of profits, producers attempted to tailor their films to that market as well." As films were watched less in urban cinemas, and more on home theatre systems, the onus shifted to currying favour with the most substantial cross-section of the video market: "young white suburban viewers" (229). How well would films hold up over repeated viewings? To what extent would Lucas' dreaded "seams" be laid bare? "(S)uspension of credibility bumps up against a repeatable viewing experience," write Lyons and Morris, "we may begin to notice chinks in the

filmic armor, the gaps and mistakes we were not meant to see" (205).[151]

DVD would both supplant VHS, and prove an even more "profoundly altering mode of circulation" (Silvio and Vinci 193). Not only was DVD "codex" to VHS's "scroll" – films are broken down into "chapters" accessed via menu screens (goodbye interminable fast-forward purgatory!) – but the increased storage capacity of the discs meant more content could be packaged with the film proper. A miniature archive,"bonus features" or "supplementary materials" can include: audio "commentary tracks" (wherein the director and/or other creative/technical personnel, or occasionally historians, discuss the film as it "unspools"), behind-the-scenes "making-of" documentaries and featurettes (variously informative, candid, vapid, and promotional), production stills, and trailers for other films (consonant in theme, content, or corporate heredity). These archival extra-diegetic materials transform the text and "refigure the nature of audience reception" as situated/"presented" within a pre-structured framework intended to inflect the interpretation and analysis of the core text (the film itself); thus "the film is...intensely mediated" and reoriented. (Silvio and Vinci 209, 208). The diegesis becomes a nucleus orbited by exegetic elements, the whole bound by an aspired-to harmony of forces exerting their respective push and pull. The core text is not intrinsically altered by bonus materials, but our extrinsic appraisal – "our *perception* of the originals" (Silvio and Vinci 208, emphasis mine) – is enhanced and/or altered. "DVD extras pivot on the relation between knowledge, critique, and access" (Silvio and Vinci 208), in the best cases constituting a pedagogical enterprise; a *de facto* course in (albeit specified) cinema scholarship. If the materials do not enlighten, they should at least entertain: "'the very devices of image making and effect generation are now a source of entertainment in their own right'" (Khalili, qtd. in Silvio and Vinci 209). DVDs "comprise a technological paratext which may be entirely unrelated to the film's narrative," but "'reinforce, enhance and expand upon

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[151] As an example, consider the emergence of "continuity error" websites.

the story" of the core text (Silvio and Vinci 158). The foregrounding and "activation of extratextual sources" through "supplementary narratives" – the personal/professional history of the director or star(s), "background" on how a certain scene was shot or effect accomplished (with emphasis on "authorial and technical achievement"); the promotional interests within which these materials are often housed – both "nuance and complicate" the narrative *of* the text, and the narrative *about* the text (Jenkins, qtd. in Schauer 193; Klinger 12, 13). The text is reified as an object produced by a particular group of artists and technicians, and resources and circumstances, earning it a "'deeper' place in the social sphere" (Klinger 12). A paltry narrative might be enriched and shaded with gradients of complexity with no predicate in the text itself (Schauer 193). Consequently, the film is no longer "a self-enclosed entity, but a source for and recipient of the activity of a constellation of other narratives" (Klinger 15).

The spectrum of spectatorial control and extra-diegetic materials facilitated by DVDs was entirely eclipsed by the arrival of the internet. The changes are so drastic, rapid, and all-encompassing that the internet represents a Xeno's paradox of analysis in which even "contemporary" theory and interpretation is always already half as far away. When surveying the habitat of the sociologically codified "internet generation," Henry Jenkins' term "cultural convergence" is useful.

> Sociologists are starting to refer to the "N Generation," the "Net Generation," or "Gen.Com," children who have come of age in relation to interactive technologies and digital media and who operate under the rather bold assumption that they can be active participants shaping, creating, critiquing and circulating popular culture. (Jenkins, *Poachers* 3).

Jenkins proposes "cultural convergence" as a theoretical framework encompassing the "new ways audiences are relating to media content, their increased skills at reading across different media and their desires for a more participatory and complex media culture" (*Poachers* 3). If the telegraph collapsed the spheres of time

and space, the internet has collapsed culture and corporatism. As access becomes ubiquitous and near-perpetual, torrents of "information (are) disseminated at a lightning pace," leading to a self-reflexive populace "far more savvy" (not, however, necessarily more well-informed) "than that of even fifteen years ago" (Kenny 65). What this means for *Star Wars* (among other "sacred" texts) is that audience engagement begins not with birth, but with conception. Appropriation occurs prior to the ritual of attending (much less viewing) the text, and precedes the dissemination of promotional narratives and marketing; it begins with every fluff of dander – rumor, speculation, innuendo – retrieved and potentially repurposed.

In the build-up to *Menace,* "(e)very rumor and counter-rumor found its way onto an Internet overloaded with sites and discussion groups devoted to" *Star Wars* (Jenkins 288), and the "monkish scholars" of TheForce.net[152] set to work analyzing even "the most arcane documents for possible rumors." When *Clones* was in production between 2000 and 2002, forensic-minded fans forged a crusade of sifting, tweezing, and stitching. They had "caught enough snippets to patch together virtually the entirety of *Episode II*, months before the film even received its official name" (Brooker 127, 128). Not only could one read "the entire plot to *Episode II* online," but there was an "illustrated version" aggregated from "snippets" and existing images. There was a frenzy of speculation over leaked storyboards (and retaliatory debate over their veracity) (Brooker 117, 122). Lucasfilm "license police" cracked down on "unofficial" sites that met their high priest's disapproval, and heretics were promptly excommunicated (Jenkins 288).

Our increasingly convergent culture was both a tightly-knit and sprawling matrix of intersecting, overlapping, interpenetrating "experiential units" and "raw" materials. Participants displayed little concern *vis-à-vis* "traditional conceptions of literary and intellectual property," so incompetent did the owners seem at patrolling the perimeter. Undaunted and unfettered, the internet generation set about "(raiding) mass culture,

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[152] Lucasfilm urges "the young fan...to make no distinction between episodes released twenty years apart (Jenkins 228), and contributors to "StarWarsKids.com are encouraged to see both trilogies as part of the same six-part story" (Brooker 227).

(claiming) its materials for their own use, and reworking them as the basis for their own cultural creations and social interactions," thereby repurposing "preexisting media content" into "new artwork" (Jenkins, *Poachers* 3).[153] In a sense, these new pirates were permutations of the old; co-opting, adapting, and diffusing preexisting "protocols"[154] for modern-day deployment. In practice, claims Jenkins, participatory culture is a preservation/transposition of "traditional practices of a folk culture...responding to mass culture" (*Poachers* 4). Contemporary practice requires probing the soft spots and fault lines of the corporate infrastructure in/ through which objects and artifacts of commodity culture are created and distributed, and exploiting weaknesses in order to appropriate useful components.

> Fans...(treat) film or television as if it offered them raw materials for telling their own stories and
> resources for forging their own communities. ...American folk culture of the twentieth century speaks
> to issues of leisure and consumption. Fan culture, thus, represents a participatory culture through
> which fans explore and question the ideologies of mass culture. (Jenkins, *Poachers* 4)

Lucas once said "'(j)ust give me the tools and I'll make the toys'" (qtd. in Kline xii). Through his massive merchandising machine, Lucas had – perhaps inadvertently, but absolutely profitably – supplied several generations of fans with the toys that became their tools, the action figures that "provided this generation with some of their earliest avatars."[155] The *Star Wars* trilogy became the epicenter of participatory culture "the moment...a kid playing with his action figure (got) to make up his own story" (Jenkins, qtd. in Philippe 2010). Ergo: we saw the films, we bought the toys, we played with the toys and watched the shows, we read the books and re-watched the movies (on cable, pay-per-view, VHS, LaserDisc, DVD, BluRay) over and over

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[153] "The symbolic field is based on the experiences of people in a particular community, at that particular time and place. Myths are so intimately bound to the culture, time, and place that unless the symbols, the metaphors, are kept alive by constant recreation through the arts, the life just slips away from them" (Campbell and Moyers 72).

[154] For more, see Gietleman, *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture.*

[155] "Fans have always been early adapters of new media technologies; their fascination with fictional universes often inspires new forms of cultural production" (Jenkins, *Convergence* 135).

again, thus replenishing and rejuvenating the franchise and symbolic field with the force of our individual

and communal imaginations. In *People Versus*, one fan insists (rightly, in my experience) that "(e)very one of

us who grew up with the original series has had that moment where you've sat at home in your bedroom...

and you've tried to levitate something with the power of your mind" (Philippe 2010). This process of

consumption, appropriation, and cross-pollination – of *play*[156] – is how *Star Wars* became "myth" in the

truest sense of the word – an ahistorical, mutli-authored "open access" text perpetually (re-)appropriated for

(re-)interpretation and transfiguration. *Star Wars* was the myth of a generation, "and now (fans) are

determined to remake it on their own terms" (Jenkins 135).

Not simply on their own terms, but in their preferred medium: film.[157] Here, again, by virtue of

his penchant for constructing technological toolkits *par excellence*, Lucas supplied aspiring cinéastes –

already inspired by his own rags-to-riches mythos – with cheaper, more powerful, and user-friendly

equipment such as digital cameras, linear editing suites, and off-the-shelf special effects software. The

circulation of "ancillary products" "placed resources into the hands of a generation of emerging filmmakers,"

encouraging them, from childhood, "to construct their own fantasies in the *Star Wars* universe" (Jenkins,

*Convergence* 135, 150); devices that transferred an unprecedented degree of power "back to the spectators."

Lucas, the original technobrat, equipped the "techno-literate" quarters of his audience with the resources with

which to outpace him (Silvio and Vinci 165). "(F)an films," says Brooker, "already have the potential to

match, if not better" their progenitors (194), and can "(duplicate) special effects that had cost a small fortune

to generate only a decade earlier." Furthermore, the "conditions that led to the marginalization of previous

amateur filmmaking efforts" – e.g., corporate control of production and distribution apparatuses – have been

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[156] "(T)he skills we acquire through play may have implications for how we learn, work, participate in the political process, and connect with other people around the world" (Jenkins, *Convergence* 23).

[157] "Lucas and (Spielberg) both made Super-8 fiction films as teenagers and saw this experience as a major influence on their subsequent work" (Jenkins, *Convergence* 148).

transformed through open access to an "exhibition outlet" allowing the free and instant passage of "amateur filmmaking from private into public space." *Star Wars* represents a repository of "countless images, icons, and artifacts that could be reproduced in a wide variety of forms" (Jenkins, *Convergence* 146, 147, 149). Just as Lucas procured his most scintillating moments from a constellation of textual sources, and set them into a "new" framework to forge into his magnum opus, the filmmaking generation he had inspired and equipped would now mine his universe to forge their works.

Many filmmakers find Lucas a generous custodian. Kevin Rubio, director of *T.R.O.O.P.S.*, maintains that: "George has been the one filmmaker that has encouraged everybody to play in his sandbox. He allowed people like myself to openly mock and create things" (qtd. in Philippe 2010).[158] The success of *T.R.O.O.P.S.* – Rubio first landed a gig writing *Star Wars* comics, and later for the CGI-animated television series *The Clone Wars* – inspired other amateur filmmakers to see their *Star Wars*-related projects "as calling cards and potential springboards" to Hollywood careers (Brooker 175).

There are countervailing pressures at play, however. According to Brooker, though "technical and creative invention is encouraged, there is clearly also a strong instinct...to stay within an established format... rather than...subvert, challenge, or suggest a radical direction away from the original" (181-2). North, however, asserts that other fan filmmakers intentionally "(exploit) the pliability of...digital technologies to postulate counter-narratives and oppositional stances to Lucas's canonicity" (Silvio and Vinci 165). Case in point: *The Phantom Edit.*

"High-quality moviemaking," Krause reminds us, "no longer takes a crew of hundreds. It takes one person. And this is how 'The Phantom Edit' was most likely created" (3). *Edit* is an non-affiliated cut of *Menace* completed by an anonymous fan who loathed the prequel, but "saw a lot of promise in the footage"

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[158] Brooker claims that the "implied policy" is that provided no profits are generated, Lucasfilm will not interfere with fan filmmaking (176). Jenkins contradicts the assertion, arguing that though Lucasfilm has promoted fan works, so too has it "limited what kinds of movies (fans) can make" (138).

(Krause 1). Fanned by the winds of disaffected fans everywhere, *Edit* caught fire on the internet, where it was downloaded and bittorrented *ad infinitum.* The scuttlebutt was that *Edit* was "much better than Lucas' original," and soon "bootleg tapes were being sold on the street and at comic book conventions" across America" (Krause 1).[159] Initially amiable, spokespeople from Lucasfilm pivoted to "intimidating": "'we had to be very clear that duplication and distribution of our materials is an infringement'" (qtd. in Krause 2). Lucas had long-touted the "new age of filmmaking" fomented by digital and CGI technologies (Krause 2), but now the weapons of the revolution were being turned against him. "Whereas digital technology equals 'boundless imagination' for Lucas, it equals 'cheap accessibility' for everyone else" (Krause 3).[160]

 *Edit* was not the first fissure in the dam, but the cracks were now so widespread, the integrity so compromised, that no number of thumbs could hold back the flood. The prevailing question had to be addressed: Just whose films *were* these, anyhow? Cyberspace had become a battlefield: the "site of a political struggle between utopian visions of participatory democracy and prevailing hierarchies of economic power" (Shefrin 263). The internet was confounding, occluding, upending, inverting, and exacerbating already ruptured relations between "producers of media and media consumers" (Jenkins, *Poachers* 4), squared off in a mighty *tête-à-tête* over who got access to what for how much. Centripetal corporate currents diverted into a centrifugal circulatory patterns. This was the end of the audience as "passive consumers for pre-produced materials," and the genesis of the (new) age of "cultural participation" (Jenkins, *Poachers* 4).

 It is precisely those fan communities, writes Shefrin, "that have experienced a lengthy shared legacy and sense of inheritance (who) will be the most inclined to desire roles in the co-production of artifacts that contribute to their narrative universe" (268). The swelling ranks of participatory fans "are exhibiting a sense

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[159] Those same conventions, we may recall, gained newfound prominence as sites for feature film promotions due to Kurtz's junket for *Star Wars*, and would continue to be instrumental in generating buzz for the series.

[160] The newly dubbed "Phantom Editor" was contrite, and released a statement reading: "'I sincerely apologize to George Lucas, Lucasfilm Ltd. and the loyal *Star Wars* fans around the world for my well-intentioned editing demonstration that escalated out of my control'" (qtd. in Krause 2).

of ownership that includes an investment in the creative development of these universes" (Shefrin 261).

Jenkins portends a "collision course between technologies that encourage collaboration and full participation in cultural production and economic and legal structures which are pushing to further privatize our culture" (Jenkins, *Poachers* 8). Unable to stay abreast of each new puncture in the porous boundaries between producer/audience and commodity/culture, media companies – duly baffled by this new breed of "consumer," and unsure what kind of relationship they want with them – "are giving out profoundly mixed signals" (Jenkins, *Convergence* 142). Lucasfilm is no exception, and was initially "one of the most aggressive corporate groups in trying to halt fan cultural production" (Brooker 176).[161] As "slash fiction" (inserting *Star Wars* characters into gay-themed, generally pornographic situations and stories) began to circulate on-line, Lucasfilm issued a firm warning through the director of *Star Wars* fan club: "'You don't own these characters and can't publish anything about them without our permission'" (Garrett qtd. in Brooker 165). In 1996, Lucasfilm would adopt a softer tone: "'Since the internet is growing so fast, we are in the process of developing guidelines for how we can enhance the ability of *Star Wars* fans to communicate with each other without infringing on...copyrights and trademarks'" (qtd. in Brooker 167).

LucasArts has continually re-conceived of and reframed fan relations "throughout the past several decades, trying to strike the right balance between encouraging the enthusiasm of their fans and protecting their investments in the series" (Jenkins, *Convergence* 21). Lucas, perhaps, sees an ever-finer line between celebration and appropriation (Jenkins, *Convergence* 154). One solution was to offer fans free space on Lucasfilm web sites, as well as access to "unique content" – such as sound cues and visual effects – on the condition that any creative product "(became) the studio's intellectual property" (Jenkins, *Convergence* 157). The diktat was unequivocal: "'you hereby grant to us the right to exercise all intellectual property rights, in

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[161] In Lucasfilm's defense, I wonder if this might be partly attributed to scale. That is, the size of the cultural phenomenon is proportional to the fan-generated content based thereon.

any media now known or not currently known, with respect to any content you place on your homestead-powered website'" (qtd. in Brooker 169). Anything created and posted on starwars.com belonged to Lucas. "Lucasfilm had cleverly shifted from repression to containment, drawing fan production into its own fence-ringed area where it could confiscate anything it didn't like – and potentially poach anything it did like"; a move at once "amazingly generous" (Brooker 169, 170) and, um, Machiavellian?

Throughout the on-line antagonism, subterfuge, and gerrymandering, it was increasingly clear that that fans felt an "intense possessiveness" over *Star Wars*, with some insisting that "*Star Wars* belongs to them because of their lifelong immersion in the saga" (Brooker xv). This was news to Lucasfilm, for which *Star Wars* was no "cult text or a folk myth but an ongoing business, a series of trademarks and properties that need to be protected" (Brooker xvi). Fans, feeling a powerful "emotional claim" on the central myth of their lives, were adamant: "we have developed a sense of ownership in protecting that spirit"; "I feel as if it almost "belongs" to people of my generation"; "(l)egally, it's theirs...but emotionally we feel we have a right to participate in the story" (Brooker 85, 88, 221, 170). Fans that disliked *Menace* were disappointed in "a very personal way," and argued, moreover, that Lucas had cracked certain cornerstones of the *Star Wars* mythology (Brooker 86, 88). The canonical text had been so thoroughly absorbed by the culture that it was being actively dissociated from its still-living author, whose authority was perceived as fallible (Klinger 8); a "general sense of distrust" emerged regarding Lucas' "ability to handle the mythos" (Brooker 90). In certain quarters, "Lucas" became a synonymous with proprietary, multimedia black boxes. The fans of the participatory age, however, rejected the notion of a "definitive version produced, authorized, and regulated by some media conglomerate" (Jenkins, *Poachers* 5). "Intellectual property," in the parlance of the times, had metamorphosed into "shareware," "(accruing) value as it moves across different contexts, gets retold in various ways, attracts multiple audiences, and opens itself up to a proliferation of alternative meanings"

(Shefrin 274). The once-rebellious Lucas had left his stifling desert home behind, charged off to confront the empire – and *won*. He built a fortress around his prize, and set about ruling the kingdom. It was the *fortress*, not the prize itself, that signaled to the new alliance that its liege lord was worthy of toppling, that his institution be besieged, that no such prize belongs to one alone. Joe Lyden (*Variety*) sounded the charge: "it's not just your dream, it's not just your fantasy, it's a universe that we all live in now" (qtd. in Philippe 2010).

"Consumption," Jenkins testifies, "has become a collective process. ... Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives." Perplexed by the "mixed signals about about how much and what kinds of participation they can enjoy," consumers nonetheless fight for the right "to participate more fully in their culture" (Jenkins, *Convergence* 4, 3, 19, 18). The story is old and oft-retold. The time and place in which it is shared will change. It will take on new shapes, textures, and meanings (both intended and interpreted). It sheds redundant skins and adopts new colours – the better to blend in with its surroundings. The story evolves, and sometimes a new species branches off while retaining a common ancestor. It is the act of telling and re-telling – the renewal of the story itself; the *ritual* – that transcends. This story, the story of American art at the turn of the twenty-first century, "might be told in terms of the public reemergence of grassroots creativity as everyday people take advantage of new technologies that enable them to archive, annotate, appropriate, and recirculate media content" (Jenkins, *Convergence* 140). We take the constituent elements of our world, regardless of their source, and use them to make and share our own myths. As it ever was.

Conclusion: A World After *Star Wars* (2005 -     )

There was consensus in some quarters that the prequels cast "an unalterable shadow" on the Original Trilogy, or exerted a "revisionist effect" (Silvio and Vinci 30, 31). It is not the purpose of the present paper to render subjective judgments on the relative quality of any given film in the series (though intimations may have seeped through regardless), only to affirm that the *Star Wars* saga cannot be viewed, interpreted, or analyzed as a singular text. Rather, these are two separate trilogies that share hereditary features (characters, locations, narrative threads), but irreconcilable narrative and aesthetic incongruities; two discrete species with a common ancestor. As I have demonstrated, the trilogies, though ostensibly the fruits of George Lucas' singularly fertile mind, are more the products of disparate creative cohorts and the distinct time/place contexts in which they were conceived and produced. The Original Trilogy, *Star Wars* in particular, represents an artful amalgamation of cultural and historical source material ranging from Greek mythology to 30s-era serialized action-adventure movies, and is rightly situated on the millennia-long continuum of mytho-narrative tradition. The Prequel Trilogy, while also a product of its time and place, is a compendium of recycled elements elided from its predecessors, and was a far less collaborative enterprise. The primary function of the Prequel Trilogy, as was Lucas' wont, was to showcase digital and CGI effects technologies.

Near the end of *Jedi*, Lucas admits that "usually what ties you up...is you end up with too many things to try to solve, and not enough time to do it in" (Lucas, *Jedi* commentary, 1985). He expresses a similar sentiment on the writing of *Sith*: "'(t)he issue is that I've painted myself into a corner... I have to get from there to here, and I have to connect these two things in a very precise way'" (qtd. in Hearn 240). The release of *Sith* in 2005 marked the end of journey begun over three decades prior. Lucas could be forgiven for breathing a long-overdue sigh of relief. The "all-consuming" *Star Wars* saga was finally complete, and he was now released from that obligation (Rose, *Lucas*). The final autopsy of the respective trilogies' success,

perhaps, might be writ by the winding-down of the very merchandise machine that had emancipated Lucas

from studio servitude all those many years before. "(T)he implosion of the merchandizing bubble told the

true story" (Kenny 192). "Hasbro saw its stock dip by (30%), while Tricon Global Restaurants saw only a

minimal sales boost, complaining 'our promotional tie-in with *Star Wars* was surprisingly ineffective.'"

Should we read into the deleterious outcomes reported by theatre chains, chafing at the bit to pull *Menace*

several weeks early, whose "twelve-week contracts...did nothing to reverse (their) slow slide into insolvency"

(Shone 289, 290)? Or perhaps Generation Net – each member the motherboard of their own self-soldered

multi-media network – was not so easily impressed as their 70s brethren. "I can't imagine an eight-year-old

of today being affected in anywhere near the same way by the *Star Wars* mythos as we all were back in

1977," Hanson opines, "because they've seen all this sort of stuff before" (Kenny 194). *Star Wars* now

carried the stale whiff of familiarity, a patina of too-high expectations tarnishing the sheen.

Lucas' technological legacy is not so hard to deduce. Our modern Prometheus brought us the fire of

Dolby Stereo and THX certified surround sound;[162] editing and effects techniques ("animatics" and

"morphing"); an "all-digital post-production system" (once EditDroid, now Avid); animation powerhouse

Pixar; and paved the way for sophisticated home theatre systems (Pollock 177; Silberman 7; Baxter 299, 367;

Kline 168; Kenny xxiv). Lucas devoted extraordinary resources to "changing for the better, the way we see

(and hear) movies" (Kenny xxiii).[163] Celluloid has been all but extirpated: "production and postproduction

have assimilated digital methods on almost all levels. Picture and sound editing and mixing...are

accomplished with nonlinear systems from which film has vanished" (Prince 26).

If one considers the contemporary cinema-scape dominated by big-budget, narratively dyslexic,

emotionally vapid, "effect-heavy, affect-light" vehicles replete with nugatory, unidimensional characters,

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[162] "*Star Wars* was the can opener that made people realize not only the effect of sound, but the effect that good sound had at the box office. Theatres that had never played stereo were forced to do it if they wanted *Star Wars*" (Murch, qtd. in Biskind 335).
[163] In the Dykstra days, every ILM innovation to roll off the line was greeted with the expression "(a)nother first" (Jenkins 131).

then laying the blame at Lucas' feet is *de rigeur* (Thompson, qtd. in Kipen 59). Lucas accepts responsibility

for more multiplexes and more screens on which to project more art-house and foreign films: "I did destroy

the Hollywood film industry, only I destroyed it by making films more intelligent, not by making films

infantile'" (qtd. in Baxter 245).[164] Lucas' erstwhile screenwriter-for-hire, Lawrence Kasdan, believes that

"'(a)ll other pictures reflect (*Star Wars'*) influence, some by ignoring it or rebelling against it'" (qtd. in Kline

210). Furthermore, Kasdan considers the current craze for frenzied pace and whipsaw editing a result of

Lucas' penchant for "intensified continuity" (Bordwell, qtd. in Schauer 194): "Every time a studio executive

tells a writer that his pacing and story needs an 'action beat' every ten minutes, the writer has George Lucas

to thank" (Kasdan, qtd. in Kline 210). Narrative structure as such no longer exists – "models, genres and plot

strategies" developed over 85 years of film history... 'are carelessly and indiscriminately assembled'"

(Gerhold, qtd. in Nagl and Clayton 272) – and "'all that matters is what's going to happen in the next ten

minutes to keep the audience interested. There's no faith in the audience. They can't have the story happen

fast enough'" (Kasdan, qtd. in Kline 210, 211).[165] "What *Star Wars*...did was provide a kind of template

for...the 'overdetermined' film. The movie wherein every emotional or visceral jolt is calculated like a point

on a graph" (Kenny xx). Kasdan contends that it isn't "George's fault, but he and (Spielberg) changed every

studio's idea of what a movie should do in terms of investment versus return... It ruined the modest

expectations of the movie business. Now every studio film is designed to be a blockbuster" (qtd. in Kline

217).[166] Preferably a blockbuster based on a comic book; the current bumper crop a testament to the triumph

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[164] Multiplexes, of course, would rather run ten of the same studio blockbuster than crowd their marquees with "avant-garde" films. "Ironically, of course, the multiplex behemoths produced by (Lucas) have helped boost the bottom-line mentality he so steadfastly scorns" (Kline xiv).

[165] "(F)ilms of this kind no longer convey any content – even an inchoate one – because content and narrative harbor risks, insofar as they stimulate thought...this heralds the death of narrative cinema...the new science-fiction film has the quality of a superdimensional advertising spot, in which only the packaging and not the content matters" (Gerhold, qtd. in Nagl and Clayton 272).

[166] "By the end of the seventies, Hollywood's total box office had nearly tripled, thanks in the main to just over twenty-two films, each earning in excess of $50 million" (Shone 99).

of "technical phantasmagoria" (Nagl and Clayton 272) capable of "(duplicating) onscreen what before could

be realized only by...artists on the page" (Prince 26).[167] "'What happened with *Star Wars* was like when

McDonald's got a foothold, the taste for good food just disappeared. Now we're in a period of devolution"

(Friedkin, qtd. in Biskind 344).[168]

Once considered a "sideline business," studios now set the foreign market front and center (Jenkins

185). Lucas, mythmaker for the planet, had foreseen the dissolution of cultural membranes as early as 1977,

telling Scanlon that *Star Wars* had been designed with the international market in mind (13). The growing

importance of the foreign market has placed "a new emphasis on films and genres that foreground

spectacular special effects and an aggressive style. Action films with archetypal characters and conventional

storylines tend to perform better abroad than films that require more culturally specific knowledge, tastes or

attitudes" (Schauer 195). "'You can preserve little bits of culture here and there,'" Lucas foreordained

decades ago, "'but the new culture will be global'" (qtd. in Kline 154).[169]

The multiplex proliferated, squeezing out the single-screen cinema. "(B)y 1998, the number of

screens in America had swollen...from slightly fewer than 28,000 to more than 37,000" (Shone 275). Most of

the theatres built between 1975 and 1990 were built in "shopping malls located in white suburban

neighborhoods" (Browne 228). The foreign market scrabbled to keep up: "an unprecedented multiplex-

building boom...is under way in China, the former Soviet Union, Australia, Malaysia, and Singapore, indeed,

everywhere except most of Africa, where it needs only time" (Kipen 62).

Apparently it was *Star Wars* that gave rise to the parlor game of box office statistics. "More than any

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[167] "I'm just disgusted by the American film industry. There are so few good films, and part of me thinks *Star Wars* is partly responsible for the direction the industry has gone in, and I feel badly about that" (Marcia, qtd. in Biskind 345).

[168] "Cinema's hundred years seem to have the shape of a life cycle: an inevitable birth, the steady accumulation of glories, and the onset, in the last decade, of ignominious, irreversible decline" (Sontag, qtd. in Shone 7).

[169] "(T)he commercial need to attract a heterogeneous audience impelled the development of stories and genres that established or extracted a common narrative vocabulary underlying the attitudes of otherwise disparate (and high context) groups" (Browne 280).

other film...*Star Wars*...transformed the release of a major movie into an exercise in statistics rather than salesmanship. ...now the number-crunchers controlled as much space as the critics" (Jenkins 251). In 1986, tracking movie grosses and speculative weekend tallies (now distributed daily, Friday through Sunday) became "one of America's favorite spectator sports" (Shone 211). Add to that grievances over the "mass opening," and the attendant pressure to secure more screens and a first place weekend finish (Shone 211). Furthermore, "it was a rare box-office chart that did not have at least one work of computer generated genius at its apex, most of which were produce by the wizardry of ILM" (Jenkins 265).

"*Star Wars* is one of those things that happen to you in life that you don't expect, but it ended up taking over my life, and I ended up spending the next thirty years making these films" (Lucas, *Jedi* commentary, 1985). The Lucas of 1980 sounded resigned to his fate: "'Maybe I was here to do *Star Wars* and that's it'" (qtd. in Kline 96).[170] The Lucas of 1987 affirmed that "'I make films about the things I feel deeply about. ... Making a movie comes from a lot of complicated reasons, a lot of emotional and personal reasons. I create out of a need that I have to fulfill in myself. I don't have much control over it. ... I make movies that I have to make'" (qtd. in Kline 152). In 1997, he would amend that statement with the following caveat: "'Of course your perspective changes when you get older and as you get battered by life'" (Kline 204), a jaded echo of Campbell's contention that "(o)ur life evokes our character. You find out more about yourself as you go on" (Campbell and Moyers 159).

Clearly, the thirtysomething firebrand who had scribbled out *The Journal of the Whills* was a different beast than the fiftyssometing titan of industry. All collaborators and contexts notwithstanding, who *was* the Lucas of the brave new cinematic world he was credited with, and criticized for, creating? Who was the Lucas spearheading the Prequel Trilogy? "The purpose of a myth...is to give people a structure for making

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[170] Lucas once stipulated that the overarching theme of *Star Wars* is "'the fact that you can't run away from your fate'" (qtd. in Pollock 140).

sense of the world, and it happens that Lucas's heroic myths are an almost irresistible way of making sense of *him*" (Kline 194).

"You are what you make," Murch muses, "and the films make you. You put so much of yourself into your films. There's no way around it. You can only make what you are" (274). Huyck observes of *Menace*:

George has an empire, and a lot of George's time is spent in meetings. So when you see (*Menace*), there's all these meetings. Y'know, they'll go to a new planet, and there'll be some sword fighting, but there'll also be a meeting. And then the next planet they go to, they're sitting in different chairs, but there's another meeting. And it's because meetings have become part of George's life, and they're important to him. (Bowser 2003)[171]

Many have noted that the "great irony" of Lucas' life is that as "the only New Hollywood director who succeeded in establishing his financial independence from Hollywood, the only one who is in the position to do whatever he wants," he became "imprisoned by the very Hollywood films...whose success gave him that independence in the first place" (Biskind 424). Seabrook states that "'(i)nstead of gaining his independence with the success of *Star Wars*, Lucas had lost it. ... This was the real lesson of *Star Wars*. In the end, the Empire wins.' Purchasing your freedom from the machine...means becoming another machine" (qtd. in Kenny xxvi).

The struggle between Frankenstein and his monster is one of science fiction's earliest and most iconographic tableaux, entering the tradition "as a powerful allegory of the activities of modern science and of man's relation to its technology." The tale treats in the creation "that takes on a terrible life of its own," and becomes "an independent external force which returns to haunt and persecute" – and potentially destroy – its creator. In manufacturing the daemon, the creator "effects an isolation... from which he is never able to

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[171] "'There is more of me in *Star Wars* than I care to admit'" (Lucas, qtd. in Jenkins 2).

return." *Frankenstein* "dramatizes the grim admixture of...messianic ambition with...failure of vision"; an "alienated man" set against "that which he alienates" (Rider 27, 29). At the end of *Sith*, Anakin's devastated corpus is encased in Vader's glistening beetle-black carapace. Vader breaks free and takes several halting steps – the Frankenstein allegory brought into stark relief.

The Original Trilogy struck a circumspect stance concerning technology. (As the survivor of a near-fatal car crash, Lucas might be forgiven his apprehension). In demonstrating the "triumph of good technology over evil (dehumanizing) machinery" (Gordon 325), *Star Wars* – as is the genre's bailiwick – "expresses our dystopian fears of what we may become if our destructive tendencies triumph, as well as our utopian hopes that we might overcome those destructive tendencies" (Lyden, *Religion* 204). Science fiction mirrored the public's "pronounced ambivalence, if not intense anxiety" toward technology – its social impact and potential (inevitable?) misuse (Goldman 276; Lyden, *Religion* 217). In the industrial age, technology was a gallows: "an instrument of social and economic oppression," and indicative of "a soul- and body-crushing work environment" (Goldman 285). Lucas simply "(rearranged) our old images to deal with our new anxieties about our machines" (Hellmann 208).

Not the anxieties alone, however. The "critique of...technology...unchecked by ethics and religion" is set transverse to a "celebration" – "via special effects and spaceship battles" – of potential benefits (Lyden, *Religion* 224). Both the aesthetic thrill of technologically-generated effects (i.e. "art is technology"), but also the presence of checked, controllable machines – the droids, the X-Wing fighters, the lightsaber – that serve at our behest and enable resistance and overthrow. "*Star Wars*...asks, 'Is the machine going to crush humanity or serve humanity?'" (Campbell and Moyers, 24).

This duality of the robot nature reflects the hope that our technology may be used for good along with our fear that it may be used for evil. These two sides in turn reflect our own nature and its twin sides;

which side will win in the end is up to us as we create our own future in addition to the machines that

will express the nature of this future (Lyden, *Religion* 206)

The answer – crush or serve? – depends on which machine you mean; the functional, day-to-day droids? The faceless, imperial bureaucracy (American military industrial complex? Hollywood studio system?). Genetic science? The technology that made Lucas rich and boxed him into corporate personhood. All or none of the above? Does *Star Wars* encourage embracing technology in service of "'sensations of power and exhilaration,'" only to "'(fall) back on heroic individual action and the metaphysical, non-rational Force to solve the problem of eroded values and depersonalized experiences which technology creates'" (Rubey, qtd. in Silvio and Vinci 159). Or is it a trick question? Regardless of which machine we choose, good or bad, our humanity depends on transcending it. "It's what Goethe said in Faust but which Lucas has dressed in modern idiom – the message that technology is not going to save us. Our computers, our tools, our machines are not enough. We have to rely on our intuition, our true being" (Cambell and Moyers xiii). The risk, of course, is that the technology we create – as Frankenstein discovered – is too unwieldy, too powerful, too all-consuming to be transcended. Vader is more than flesh and wire enmeshed, he is the individual subsumed by the system. "Vader...becomes a principal symbol of the evil of assimilation," writes Vinci, "a life that...relies on an external system for survival." Vader lacks both the autonomic and autonomy, and the absence of agency leads "to a perilous dependency that quickly becomes necessary for survival" (Silvio and Vinci 14). Vader, the "metallicized  man" is the semiological imprint of the "body's subjugation to dehumanized administration" (Rider 36).

"I purchased my freedom from the machine," said Lucas (Kenny xxiii). He hated the studios, then became "more powerful than any of them" (Kaplan 3). He proclaimed his anti-establishment credentials, but they only belied "his position as the ultimate symbol of that establishment" (Kline xiv). "(T)he Death Star is

most closely equivalent to (Lucas') production company and the technological finesse that went into the making of the films themselves" (Browne 286), and "the Empire could...serve as an allegory for almost any institutional force in Western culture...even a prophetic vision of the *Star Wars* film franchise empire itself" (Silvio and Vinci 14). The rebellion against that empire – pitting "life sciences against imperial hardware" – serves as a parable for the battle "for private, bodily freedom from the over-administered, bureaucratic world of management" (Rider 34).

Lucasfilm, Ltd. is a monolithic system, and "'the monolithic system is a machine system,'" cautions Campbell. "'(E)very machine works like every other machine that's come out of the same shop" (Campbell and Moyers 234). "(I)t is the failure of these Machineries to deliver on their empty promises, more so than said promises themselves, that our culture is really all about" (Kenny 192). In a letter pertaining to Coketown (*Hard Times*), Dickens wrote that we – the denizens of the machine age – "want '*something in motion*' for (our) entertainment" (Winkler 17, emphasis in original). The monolithic system will happily oblige.

Lucas had long prided himself on being in tune with the mass, but had the extremities of his success alienated him from the congregation? Friedkin observes that "'(w)hen someone achieves a degree of success you tend to alter your lifestyle in a way that is not conducive to staying in touch with the zeitgeist'" (Biskind 308). Wood believes that artists, "instead of living and working in isolation" should remain "part of a community, with common concerns and a shared creativity" (Wood xxxiv). "All the richest periods of artistic achievement," Wood continues,

> have been instances of communality: ...the constant interaction and exchange among artists, the sense of *belonging* to the culture, of being supported by it, of speaking to and for a wide audience that cuts across all divisions of class and gender. Compare the isolation of the modern artist, the emphasis on self-expression, "originality," novelty, the audience dwindled to a small elite. But art that is mere

"self-expression" tends to become increasingly impoverished and uninteresting. (Wood 309-10,

emphasis in original)[172]

Lucas, once ambivalent about "presiding over a commercial empire," now claims to "identify with his

arch-villain," Darth Vader (Silberman 3). "I'm not happy that corporations have taken over the film industry,

but now I find myself being the head of a corporation, so there's a certain irony there. I have become the very

thing that I was trying to avoid. That is Darth Vader – he becomes the very thing he was trying to protect

himself against" (qtd. in Silberman 3). What is Vader, when all the cards are down, if not the "consummate

militaristic technocrat" (Rider 34)? Vader's "corruption and switch to the Dark Side...(is) mapped onto his

literal dehumanization and cyborgic reconstruction." Having abdicated his "humanity to machinery," Vader

"bears the weight of posthuman themes and contexts" (Silvio and Vinci 161). During *Star Wars,* Lucas saw

himself as the son, Luke Skywalker. Post-prequels, Lucas identifies with the father, Anakin, redeemed by that

son. "The hero of yesterday becomes the tyrant of tomorrow, unless he crucifies *himself* today" (Campbell,

qtd. in McDowell 22, emphasis in original).

When Seabrook asked Lucas, in 1997, what *Star Wars* was ultimately about, "he said 'Redemption'"

(Kline 204). If Lucas is Vader, who will redeem him? Who is his "son"? The "son" is us, of course – the

children of *Star Wars.* Not that Lucas will be easily wrested out of his carapace, but then when was

redemption smooth sailing? Lucasfilm's protestations (and litigious chest-thumping) aside, Lucas no longer

"owns" *Star Wars*, "its characters and stories have escaped the original text and grown up with the fans"

(Brooker 77).[173] Brick by *pristine-and-mostly-real-looking-ILM-CGI-generated* brick, the "mythos" is being

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[172] Director John Ford, who inspired not only Lucas, but Lucas' inspiration – Akira Kurosawa – "grew up with the West...he was out there where there were cowboys and shootings in the streets... But there was still some rough-and-tumble craziness going on." This is Lucas explaining to Scanlon why the western was abandoned. "And the people now, the young directors like me, can't do it because there isn't anything like that anymore" (qtd. in Scanlon 5).
[173] In *People Versus,* one activist-minded fan thinks "an argument could be made that once a film is in the National Film Registry, it belongs to everyone, it belongs to all Americans because it's so important culturally to the United States" (Philippe 2010).

dismantled. First, "you find out that all the things you loved about the original films were other people's ideas, and were things that (Lucas) might have vetoed if he'd had the chance," then you reevaluate *Empire* "in particular as a collaborative effort whose merits may have been due more to director Irvin Kershner, producer Gary Kurtz, or the two scriptwriters, Leigh Brackett and Lawrence Kasdan" (Brooker 90), and already you're well down the road to recovery. The children of *Star Wars* have been appropriating their "space opera" for over three decades; high time that active fans were recognized not only as "important contributors to the formation of collective belief,"  but as creative participants (Shefrin 269). We are the "convergence culture" alliance, we co-opt, deconstruct, sample, repurpose, and reinvent "commercial texts, discourses, and images." The internet is our base of operations, our bullhorn to dispatch missives, to fire salvos at "producers and media companies," to lobby for alternate routes as we chart the course for "contemporary folk culture" – our emergent canon of modern-day mythologies (Jenkins 269).

Myth is – has always (already) been – communally owned. "All myth-having cultures' members are free to understand and experience their myths, even reinterpret them and rewrite them ... Never before has myth been the sole legal and intellectual property of one individual" (Wetmore, Jr. 101). Nor will it be again provided we fire a photon torpedo down that two-meter wide exhaust port (don't worry, I used to bullseye womp rats in my T-16 back home, they're not much bigger than two meters.) Tom Sherak, former head of Fox distribution told Lucas that *Star Wars* "'belongs to the culture...I kid George *Star Wars* is not his, he's just the caretaker. It belongs to everyone!'" (qtd. in Kline 228).

"(E)ach generation must create its own myths and its own heroes, or else regenerate those of the past" wrote Andrew Gordon in 1977, in reference to the "New Hollywood" brats (324). "Every generation," however, "has to die in order that the next generation can come" (Campbell and Moyers 131). Moreover, every generation must tear down the institutions (or empire) erected by their predecessors before they can

build those institutions anew (so that they may, in turn, be torn down by the next generation, and so on, *ad infinitum*). *The Lion King* (which is based on *Hamlet*, which is based on *The Orestia*, a 2500 year old Classical Greek tragic cycle by Aeschylus, and an inspiration for *Star Wars*) would call it the "circle of life"; death and regeneration. Myths are often labelled "ahistorical" – divorced from a specific chrono-spatio-temporal context – and yet they "encode meanings in forms that permit the present to be construed as the fulfillment of a past from which we would wish to have been descended" (Lyden, *Religion* 71). In other words, myth is a form of nostalgia. *Star Wars* is set in a far away galaxy in the distant past, but was "about" the very recent past – America weathering the whirlwind of Vietnam and Watergate and all the other tumult of that era. In emulating the action-adventure serials of the 30s and 40s, *Star Wars* was "about," those decades, about the values and attitudes reflected in the art objects – even the corny ones – produced therein. *Star Wars* is about faith, a mutual divination of the "ultimate mystery" by perceiving the splay of light cast by the the prism's fractal facets. *Star Wars* is about the Hero's Journey and every book about mythology Lucas ever read, and every movie and television show he ever saw. *Star Wars* is about none of these things, because when the lights dim and the shadows dance across the wall of the cave, it is about us – me and you – the lives we brought into the theatre, and our "prefilmic assumptions." *Star Wars* is about what we heard it was about, what we expect it to be, what we *want* it to be, what it is, and what our fellow audience-goers think. *Star Wars* is the myth of who we are, and who we wish we were; the "liminal space" in which ordinary social rules are suspended, and utopian ideals invoked. *Star Wars* is a ritual that "(connects) the world of 'reality' (how things are) with 'ideality' (how things ought to be)" (Lyden, *Religion* 101).

Myth is the proverbial torch passed up from the dark, arcane depths of the communal wellspring; the stories that speak to the shared anxieties, personal anguish, and philosophical paradoxes experienced and interpreted by our forebears; a probing of the "greater truths" undergirding the halting progression of the

species; a clarion call to "inspire the next generation to carry on the same values that the last generation had. What do we expect of you? What have we learned that you should...take with you?" (Rose, *Lucas*). Myth has no "author," only another bard, sweeping through town, leaving "the villagers with new tales to play with and expand to suit their own needs" (Durack, qtd. in Brooker 170); "a story that has always been and so cannot, properly speaking, ever be heard 'for the first time'" (Lyden, *Religion* 71). "The earliest form of entertainment was the storyteller who sat around the fire and told stories," Lucas told Charlie Rose while sitting around a table in a darkened studio (Rose, *Lucas*). *Star Wars* is ancient storytelling: "'There's no reason why the *Star Wars* story could not have been told as a Greek myth'" (Lucas, qtd. in Jenkins 257). The "space opera," in fact, says "a great deal about fundamental hopes and fears when confronted by the unknowns of distant frontiers, in a tradition stretching at least as far as *The Odyssey*" (Gordon 320). In *The Odyssey*, "Odysseus and Aeneas have been shipwrecked and *reveal who they are and why they merit aid* by telling their stories to their hosts" (Sammons 362, emphasis mine). Who are we? What happened to us? What measure of aid and succor do we seek? Why should anyone help us? How are we to be redeemed?

Lucas can keep the Prequel Trilogy, but the Original Trilogy is ours. By appropriating the text, we "kill" the author, but so it goes. As Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE) said: "Look back over the past, with its changing empires that rose and fell, and you can foresee the future too. Its pattern will be the same" (qtd. in Winkler 290). Don't worry about George, he's rich, *Star Wars* is done for him,[174] he'll be fine. Moreover, ever since he finished the first film, he's been jonesing to make "nonlinear, noncharacter...nonstory" "highly abstract, esoteric" "experimental films" about "philosophical issues" like "theology and slavery" "without plots and creating emotions without understanding what is going on in terms of purely visual and sound relationships" "that no one wants to see" (Silberman 2, 8; Farber 8; Pollock 273; Kline 60, 126, 131; Scanlon

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[174] "I've made what I consider the most conventional kind of movie I can possibly make" (Lucas, qtd. in Biskind 321).

19). Go forth and prosper, Mr. Lucas. Follow your bliss. As Joseph Campbell would have advised him, "(t)he ultimate aim of the quest must be neither release nor ecstasy for oneself, but the wisdom and the power to serve others" (Campbell and Moyers xiv).

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