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Hervé Mayer

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***Disney's Star Wars: Forces of Production, Promotion, and Reception.* William Proctor and Richard McCulloch (eds.). Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019, ISBN 978-1-60938-643-6, 396 p.**

Hervé Mayer, Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3

This edited collection on Disney's *Star Wars* is a much-needed assessment of the impact of Disney's Lucasfilm purchase on production, promotion and reception of the *Star Wars* franchise across media. The collection brings together contributors from the film industry and academics specializing in media and visual studies as well as communication and fan studies. The twenty-one chapters are organized in two parts: production and promotion, and reception and participation. The book proposes a well-researched overview of the impact of the buyout in various areas and is noteworthy for its contributions in corporate production studies and fan studies..

In their introduction, Proctor and McCulloch discuss the purchase of Lucasfilm in 2012 in light of George Lucas's prior relationship to Disney and contradictory declarations about a sequel trilogy, arguing that Disney's main strategy was "not to rebrand *Star Wars* by constructing a binary between Lucasfilm and Disney but, rather, by unifying them in order to instill trust and belief" (11). The editors then announce the aim of the collection, which is to distinguish "key shifts that have occurred at the level of industry, narrative, and reception" since the Disney acquisition and "examine the ways in which ownership, conglomeration, and branding operate within the postmillennial mediascape" (12).

The first part of the volume, "Production and Promotion," opens with three chapters focusing on brand synergy. Matthew Freeman's chapter on "Rebuilding Transmedia *Star Wars*" analyzes the ways in which Disney shifted the status and content of the *Star Wars* Expanded Universe to create a discourse of legitimacy and canon. Disney rebranded the Expanded Universe *Star Wars Legends* and presented its texts as alternatives, using imagination as a specific world-building approach connecting Disney's *Star Wars* productions to Lucasfilm's. Similarly, Matt Hills' chapter on "Transmedia Spectacle and Transownership Storytelling as Seen on TV" examines the position of televisual productions within the *Star Wars* universe, pre- and post-acquisition. It compares the *Holiday Special* (1978) to *Rebels* (2014-2018) and shows that the latter used aesthetics and narrative as another bridge between past and present owners. The brand synergy is further exemplified in Lincoln Geraghty's "Rebuilding the Force, Brick by Brick" stressing the role of LEGO and LEGO-book publisher Dorling Kindersley in the process. Dan Hassler-Forest work on "Fan Labor and Brand Management" discusses how the promotion of *The Force Awakens* relied on a form of immaterial fan labor and collaborative, yet asymmetric, brand management. The film's promotion rested on nostalgia for the original trilogy, but also incorporated fan participation: "fan culture's transformative creative work is itself transformed into something that can be used to rebrand not only the *Star Wars* franchise but also the conglomerate of which it is a part" (80). In "Rebellions Are Built on Realism," Joshua Wucher argues that the use of special effects in the film *Rogue One* is heir to the Lucasfilm tradition. Both *Rogue One* and promotional paratexts reprised the original trilogy's analog and digital special effects traditions in ways that ensured fidelity. Colin B. Harvey's "Binding the Galaxy Together" stresses further the link with tradition and investigates the role of memory in the construction of the *Star Wars* franchise's transmedia network. He compares memory practices pre- and post-acquisition in relation to the increasingly connective digital practices of fans' engagement with the franchise.

The first part closes with three chapters that study the effects of Disney's purchase at the narrative and aesthetic level across different media. Ross Garner's "The Mandalorian Variation" focuses more specifically on the limiting impact of Disney's acquisition on the franchise's gender identity and dynamics, and more particularly on the construction of the lead action female character in the TV series *Star Wars Rebels*. Douglas Brown analyses the impact of the acquisition on *Star Wars* videogames in "To *Disney Infinity* and Beyond." Comparing classic *Star Wars* games with three post-acquisition releases, Brown finds that pre-acquisition games were bolder in experimenting articulations to the franchise. Finally, Rebecca Williams's "From *Star Tours* to *Galaxy's Edge*" examines the ways in which the history of Lucasfilm and Disney intertwined before the Disney buyout through the *Star Tours* immersive rides featured in Disney's theme parks since the mid-1980s. She argues the rides completed the transmedia world of *Star Wars* by extending

fan experiences “from the textual into the bodily and the spatial” (136), making them more immersive and personal.

Part II of the collection on “Reception and Participation” starts with two chapters addressing the critical responses to Disney productions and the role played by nostalgia in both promotion and reception. Jonathan Gray’s chapter responds to the critical appraisal of *The Force Awakens* as an unimaginative remake of *A New Hope*. The author addresses the question of franchises’ relationship to originality, nostalgia, and repetition, arguing that *The Force Awakens*’s mode of relation to *A New Hope* is one of reflexivity. Another way of redefining nostalgia was to appeal to fans disappointed by the Disney acquisition through subcultural branding as argued by Emma Pett in “Real Life is Rubbish”, her examination of the promotion and reception of Secret Cinema’s 2015 immersive production of *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980).

The next two chapters explore gendered politics in Disney *Star Wars*. Paul Booth’s “Disney’s Princess Leia” focuses on controversy regarding the character and Disney’s handling of the conversation. One way to avoid criticisms of gender normativity was to shift toy manufacturer for the Princess toys from Mattel to Hasbro—a company mostly making toys for boys. Another was to promote Leia to the role of general in *The Force Awakens*. But Disney also emphasized the more princess-like attributes of Princess Leia in the Disney-Marvel’s five-issue comics *Princess Leia* (2015) which bridged the gap in the character arc from princess to general—when the original trilogy had constructed a figure of female empowerment by denying those characteristics. Lorna Jowett pursues the exploration of Disney *Star Wars* gendered politics through the analysis of merchandising strategies for *The Force Awakens* in “Rey, Mary Sue, and Phasma Too.” The film’s merchandising was met with negative responses from female fans as product lines initially obliterated completely the character of Rey. These responses fueled the discussion on gender politics and inclusivity in popular culture.

The chapters by Jones and Kent discuss the creative appropriation of content by fans. Bethan Jones’s “Jafar Wars” examines the role played by fan productions in framing and anticipating the narrative surrounding Disney’s acquisition of the *Star Wars* franchise. Jones analyses fan fiction, art, and videos that mix Disney and *Star Wars* texts and fan responses to these paratexts to show how they can play a role in fan reception of the original texts. In “Fans Negotiating Disney’s (De)Stabilized *Star Wars* Canon,” Michelle Kent discusses how fans negotiated Disney’s rebranding of the Expanded Universe and announcements of narrative departures in the up-coming trilogy. Analyzing responses from the two largest international *Star Wars* costuming fan clubs, Kent shows that Disney’s changes impacted real-world fan practice. Many fans use *Star Wars* as a cultural object to enrich their lives through acts of civic engagement (such as supporting children’s charities), and the decanonization of the Expanded Universe means disrupting such uses, thus making fandom less meaningful.

Fan reactions and their incorporation by the studio are further analyzed in the next four chapters. William Proctor’s “Fear of a #BlackStormtrooper” argues that the fan controversy surrounding the appearance of John Boyega as a Stormtrooper in the original teaser for *The Force Awakens* was less about race than it was about canonical authenticity. Proctor shows that the meanings of the controversy were partly shaped by media responses to it and advocates a more complex reading of online fan activity than the stereotyped binary between reactionary and progressive fans. Tom Phillips analyzes fans’ reaction videos to trailers for *The Force Awakens* and compares them to actors Daisy Ridley and John Boyega’s reaction videos. He then argues that the film’s promotion used fannish discourses as an act of reassurance for audiences and a perpetuation of the film’s culture of anticipation. Bridget Kies discusses the economy of knowledge surrounding film releases and how fans actively manage and engineer their expectations and access to information prior to release in “Spoiler Culture, Marathon Screenings, and Affective Responses to *The Force Awakens*.” Using her own fan experience, Kies argues that such fan activities as accessing or avoiding spoilers and behind-the-scene information, practicing screening marathons, and sharing energy through group events meaningfully shape the screening experience, while such experience retains its inherent power to surprise and affect fans in unexpected ways. Taking the opposite perspective, Lucy Bennett discusses her own experience as a non-*Star Wars* viewer to explore the processes and meanings that can occur when one remains unexposed to a cultural text. Being a non-viewer means being confronted with the cultural shame of not being familiar with a canonical work. It also means having mediated knowledge of, and expectations regarding, the unseen text charged through popular culture. Eventual viewing comes to confirm or contradict expectations in complex ways, leading to an experience the author terms “out-of-sync canonical viewing” (278).

The closing chapters in part II adopt a broader look on the franchise from the perspectives of narrative development and reception. Mark J. P. Wolf's "Beyond Vader: The Franchise Reawakens" examines the four post-Lucas *Star Wars* feature films – from *The Force Awakens* to *Solo* – from a world-building perspective as the franchise under Disney moves beyond the central character in the first six episodes, Darth Vader. Wolf discusses the production choices regarding the new trilogy's direction and the ensuing mixed contribution of *The Force Awakens* to the *Star Wars* storyworld. Finally, William Proctor's "A New Hate? The War for Disney's *Star Wars*" addresses the online debate among fans and critics about franchise fatigue and toxic fandom in the wake of the releases of *The Last Jedi* and *Solo*, and how the franchise has lately been ensnared in the new culture wars. Proctor argues that the media's preeminent focus on the most virulent elements of *Star Wars* fandom constructed a biased narrative that dramatized toxic narratives at the expense of a fan majority.

The first edited collection focusing on Disney's purchase of Lucasfilm, *Disney's Star Wars* is a rich, incisive, and valuable contribution to the study of transmedia franchises. The variety of perspectives, approaches, and methodologies featured in the collection illustrates the multilayered consequences of the purchase. One may regret the timing of the publication, with contributions that focus primarily on events prior to and surrounding the release of *The Force Awakens* (2015), but this leaves room for future publications that can offer an overarching perspective on the transmedia developments surrounding the Disney *Star Wars* trilogy.

Mots clés

Disney, *Star Wars*, Lucasfilm, transmédiatité, transmédia, production, promotion, réception, économie du cinéma, études de fans

Keywords

Disney, *Star Wars*, Lucasfilm, transmedia, production, promotion, reception studies, fan studies, branding, merchandising, franchising, media franchise

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