

# Franchising the Past: Transmedia Historiography, Cultural Memory Management, and the Fanboy Historian

## ABSTRACT

This article discusses the phenomena of “transmedia historiography” and the “fanboy historian” to investigate the role of nonfiction practices in contemporary media franchising through a case study of *Star Wars* (George Lucas et al., 1977–). I argue that since 1977, Lucasfilm gradually developed a transmedia historiography to construct, disseminate, and manage a coherent cultural history of the franchise. Fans play a crucial role in this process. Lucasfilm incorporates the historical productivity of some fans to foster a cultural memory of the franchise and also invests much effort in writing the history of *Star Wars* to counter independently produced, fan-made histories that challenge the company’s historical narrative. As such, transmedia historiography and the fanboy historian reinforce Lucasfilm’s preferred versions of the past and guarantee future relevance and consumption of franchise products.

In 2017, Lucasfilm celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the release of George Lucas’s *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* (1977). The franchise’s official website, *StarWars.com*, played a central role in the company’s festivities, featuring a special section on the production history and cultural impact of the first *Star Wars* trilogy (1977–1983). This included blog articles, interviews with cast and crew, galleries with film stills and behind-the-scenes photog-

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raphy, movie clips, documentaries, sound effects, various poster designs, information on the merchandise, footage from the original cast at *Star Wars* Celebration Orlando, and fan memories and tributes.<sup>1</sup> While the franchise itself is four decades old, the push to commemorate it dates back nearly as far. Since as early as 1978, the company has marked anniversaries with paratextual material such as “making-of” documentaries, print publications, and museum exhibitions.<sup>2</sup> Taken together, these *Star Wars* histories suggest that Lucasfilm has invested as much attention to expanding the franchise’s reach and audience through the production of nonfiction media as it has to expanding the fictional *Star Wars* universe itself.

The wide range of *Star Wars* histories produced within the last four decades is anything but repetitive in terms of format and content. Instead of appropriating the same content across different media, each example provides a new perspective on, and experience of, how the franchise came into being. Each *Star Wars* history is produced by different personnel, employs different historical and archival documents, and incorporates the perspectives of a variety of above-the-line and below-the-line talent as well as fans. Lucasfilm’s production of nonfiction media mirrors the strategies of transmedia storytelling in the realm of fiction.<sup>3</sup> Because each entry expands *Star Wars* history by providing new and additional knowledge, the nonfiction practices outlined above can be thought of as a “transmedia historiography.” As a subset of transmedia storytelling, transmedia historiography describes the making of a storyworld’s production and cultural history across multiple platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to the audience’s understanding of the franchise’s past.

Crucially, fans are active participants in transmedia historiography. Carlos Scolari, Paolo Bertetti, and Matthew Freeman describe four degrees of fan involvement in fiction production within and beyond industry structures, all of which also apply to fans’ performance in transmedia historiography.<sup>4</sup>

1. Consumers of a single media product: for example, readers of the detailed book series by former Lucasfilm historian J. W. Rinzler on the making of the first and second trilogy.<sup>5</sup>

1 “Star Wars at 40,” StarWars.com, accessed August 20, 2018, <https://www.starwars.com/star-wars-40th>.

2 Lucasfilm celebrated the twelve-month theatrical run of *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope* with a poster showing Kenner toy company action figures around a birthday cake. See “Star Wars at 40: 40 Years of Star Wars Anniversary Posters,” StarWars.com, May 24, 2017, <https://www.starwars.com/news/40-years-of-star-wars-anniversary-posters>. Stephen J. Sansweet’s *Star Wars: From Concept to Screen to Collectible* was published by Chronicle Books in 1992, the fifteenth anniversary of the franchise. The special edition of the first trilogy was released in 1997, and *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth* (1997–2003) opened at the Smithsonian Institution in the same year. The documentary *Star Wars: The Legacy Revealed* (Kevin Burns, 2007) and J. W. Rinzler’s book *The Making of Star Wars: The Definitive Story behind the Original Film* (New York: Del Rey, 2007) celebrated the thirtieth anniversary.

3 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

4 Carlos A. Scolari, Paolo Bertetti, and Matthew Freeman, *Transmedia Archaeology: Storytelling in the Borderlines of Science Fiction, Comics and Pulp Magazines* (New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2014), 2–3.

5 Rinzler, *Definitive Story*; J. W. Rinzler, *The Making of Star Wars: The Empire Strikes*

2. Consumers of different media products: for example, fans who read books on *Star Wars* history as much as they watch television specials, read blogs, visit museum exhibitions, and visit social media sites.
3. Fans who share content and actively participate in conversations about their object of fandom: for example, those who post already existing but newly assembled information.
4. Fan prosumers who not only share and (re)contextualize existing information but also produce new knowledge: for example, those who venture into archives and libraries, interview witnesses, assemble and analyze tangible and intangible collections, and then distribute their work mainly through independent outlets.<sup>6</sup>

An invitation to actively contribute to this transmedia historiography, however, is only extended to select fans, whereas others are excluded from collaborative nonfiction authorship. In the past, Lucasfilm supported fan historians by advertising their works to a wider audience on StarWars.com, inviting them as speakers to their official conventions, or hiring them as authors for their official websites and publications.<sup>7</sup> In some cases, Lucasfilm also hired fans to write about the franchise's history. For instance, Stephen J. Sansweet, the most prominent Lucasfilm-employed fan historian, published *Star Wars: From Concept to Screen to Collectible* (1992) in collaboration with Lucasfilm and later managed fan relations for the company.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the bios on StarWars.com of paid contributors highlight their longtime fandom for the franchise.<sup>9</sup> Transmedia historiography, therefore, carries the potential for a select group of fans to actively contribute to the making of *Star Wars*.<sup>10</sup>

Conversely, fan-made histories that challenge Lucasfilm's accounts of the past often do not receive the same support and are not promoted by the company. Steve Binder's *The Star Wars Holiday Special* (CBS, 1978) illustrates this point. Lucasfilm stopped distributing the artistically and critically unsuccessful Christmas variety show to minimize the collective memory of it, but fans actively counteracted the effort by sharing bootleg copies. Official *Star Wars* histories mention the show at best in passing and generally dismiss it as a creative

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*Back* (New York: Del Rey, 2010); and J. W. Rinzler, *The Making of Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* (New York: Del Rey, 2013).

- 6 For a more detailed overview, see Philipp Dominik Keidl, "Between Textuality and Materiality: Fandom and the Mediation of Action Figures," *Film Criticism* 42, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.3998/fc.13761232.0042.207>.
- 7 "Community," StarWars.com, accessed August 20, 2018, <https://www.starwars.com/community>, the section included links to various fan-run projects, such as podcasts and websites. At the time of writing, however, the Community section of the website only linked eight organizations. Among them was Stephen J. Sansweet's Rancho Obi-Wan, a museum dedicated to *Star Wars* merchandise and collectibles.
- 8 Stephen J. Sansweet, *Star Wars: From Concept to Screen to Collectible* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992).
- 9 "Fans + Community: Featured Blog Contributors," StarWars.Com, accessed December 20, 2017, <https://www.starwars.com/news/category/fans-and-community>.
- 10 At the time of writing, StarWars.com has removed its section with recommendations of fan projects. In the past, online projects were listed and self-published books were not, leaving the attention on Lucasfilm-sponsored and sanctioned publications. Publicizing self-published fan books is therefore mainly left to fan blogs and podcasts as well as to conventions where authors can present their research.

misstep.<sup>11</sup> Fans have primarily taken on the task to preserve and document the history of the television special. The website *StarWarsHolidaySpecial.com*, for example, features content summaries, character descriptions, information on the cast and crew, publicity texts, production notes, script excerpts, stills, merchandise information, media files, the latest news, and links to other fan projects.<sup>12</sup> Lucasfilm's unequal responses to fans' historical projects show how transmedia historiography must be understood as cultural memory management. The goal of this historical gatekeeping is to disseminate the company's version of the past among fan communities while muting some of the historical perspectives that emerge within them.

Taking *Star Wars* as a case study, this article uses the phenomenon of transmedia historiography to investigate the production and role of nonfiction texts in contemporary media franchising. Unlike Matthew Freeman's examination of transmedia historiography as the resources and tools used to create shared cultural memories, which he explicitly locates outside the entertainment industries, this article analyzes the narrativization of histories within the "transmedia logics" of a large-scale media franchise.<sup>13</sup> It uses the concept to examine how a large media corporation uses nonfiction productions to construct, disseminate, and manage the history of their intellectual property. If each of the nonfiction productions on its own functions primarily "to hype, promote, introduce, and discuss" the fictional *Star Wars* texts, they "function [collectively] as ongoing sites of narrative expansion" of the production and cultural history within a transmedia historiography.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the notion of transmedia historiography approaches nonfiction productions as cultural artifacts that exist beyond the relationship to a fictional narrative. Jonathan Gray's influential discussion of paratexts frames them primarily in relation to a "parent text," focusing on the question of whether, what, and how they are contributing something "meaningful to the . . . narrative, storyworld, characters or style."<sup>15</sup> Transmedia historiography, in turn, operates independently from the fiction universe. Here, nonfiction is less concerned with contributing new meaning to a fictional story than with guiding engagement with the franchise's history. The orchestrated *franchising of the past* establishes a cultural memory, enabling Lucasfilm to maintain authority over *Star Wars* as a cultural object as a whole by producing histories about the franchise. Even though Lucasfilm cannot fully control *what* is written about *Star Wars*, it can influence *how* its history is written by choosing

11 Stephen J. Sansweet and Peter Vilmur, *The Star Wars Vault: Thirty Years of Treasures from the Lucasfilm Archives* (New York: Harper Entertainment, 2007), 50.

12 "Celebrating 40 Years of *The Star Wars Holiday Special*," *The Star Wars Holiday Special* (blog), accessed November 20, 2018, <https://www.starwarsholidaysspecial.com>.

13 Matthew Freeman, "Transmedia Historiography as Educational Practice: Narrativising Colombian Cultural Memory," *International Journal of Creative Media Research* 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.33008/IJCMR.2019.04>. For more on transmedia logics, see Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia Logics and Locations," in *The Rise of Transmedia: Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Benjamin W. L. Derhy Kurtz and Mélanie Bourdaa (New York: Routledge, 2017), 220–240.

14 Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 293.

15 Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 210.

authors and selectively licensing and granting access to its own archival collections and copyrighted materials. Consequently, whereas transmedia historiography in educational contexts encourages the integration of divergent views of the past, audience participation and the multi-perspectival nature of history-making are less welcome in franchising contexts.<sup>16</sup>

This article has two aims. First, it emphasizes the role of nonfiction products in contemporary franchising and transmedia practices, which have so far been underrepresented in scholarship on large-budget entertainment properties. Second, it underlines the importance of nonfiction practices in fan communities by showing how Lucasfilm produces histories on its intellectual property in collaboration with those fan communities—and in countermeasure to fans’ history-making activities. Building on Freeman’s argument that character-building, worldbuilding, and authorship form the basis of fiction transmedia storytelling, I first develop the theoretical foundation of transmedia historiography within franchise contexts.<sup>17</sup> This first section chronicles how *Star Wars*, analogously to its fiction storyworld, developed into a transmedia historiography by adapting the narrative template of the hero’s journey for its nonfiction texts. The second section draws on Aleida Assmann’s notion of *canon* and *archive* and analyzes how transmedia history is a tool to establish textual continuity and hierarchies between different *Star Wars* texts and authors.<sup>18</sup> Transmedia history develops a cultural memory of the franchise that focuses on theatrical releases and sidelines extra-cinematic products to manage the expectations and disappointments of different *Star Wars* fan generations. The final section mobilizes Suzanne Scott’s concepts of the “fanboy auteur” and “everyfan” to explore the role of Sansweet as a “fanboy historian.”<sup>19</sup> Used to transmit Lucasfilm’s version of the *Star Wars* textual and cultural canon to the fan community, the fanboy historian additionally represents a model fan. Together, the three sections analyze the dilemma inherent in nonfiction franchising: while transmedia history generates fan interest in history, fans’ own historical productions may highlight aspects of *Star Wars* history that Lucasfilm seeks to actively forget, thereby requiring further interventions by the company.

16 Freeman defines *transmedia historiography* as “the coordinated use of digital platforms and non-digital materials—integrated dialogically in ways that encourage audience appropriation—to transform how people make sense of a historical moment, encouraging more active ways of learning about the complex, multi-perspectival components that make up a given history, such as its politics, cultures, memories, and so on.” Freeman, “Transmedia Historiography,” para. 5.

17 Matthew Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling: Early Twentieth-Century Transmedia Story Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 22–36.

18 Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 97–108.

19 Suzanne Scott, “Who’s Steering the Mothership? The Role of the Fanboy Auteur in Transmedia Storytelling,” in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, ed. Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson (New York: Routledge, 2013), 43–52; and Suzanne Scott, “Modeling the Marvel Everyfan: Agent Coulson and/as Transmedia Fan Culture,” *Palabra Clave* 20, no. 4 (2017): 1042–1072, <https://doi.org/10.5294/pacla.2017.20.4.8>.

## FROM TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING TO TRANSMEDIA HISTORIOGRAPHY

The development of *Star Wars* from a single film into a concerted transmedia storytelling project occurred in four phases.<sup>20</sup> The first phase encompasses the production of the first film trilogy (1977–1983), supported by “tie-in comics, film novelizations and franchise novels, television films and animated cartoons, a radio adaptation, and [the development of] video game platforms.”<sup>21</sup> Phase two describes the period between the first and second trilogies, spanning from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s. Although no new motion pictures were produced during this time, the *Star Wars* storyworld further developed across non-filmic media into what is now known as the Expanded Universe. George Lucas’s *Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace* (1999) marks the beginning of the third phase, which intensified transmedia worldbuilding across media and established profitable new business relations, such as with LEGO.<sup>22</sup> Phase four began with Disney’s acquisition of Lucasfilm in 2012. By rebranding the Expanded Universe as *Star Wars Legends*, Disney set the course for rebooting the franchise with a new film trilogy set after *Star Wars: Episode VI—Return of the Jedi* (Richard Marquand, 1983), two anthology films, new comic book series, and several forthcoming series and films for their streaming service Disney+, as well as a new trilogy not centered on the Skywalker saga. Disney’s production and branding strategies over the last decade demonstrate their intention to creatively connect all new *Star Wars* releases across different media, thereby correcting previous inconsistencies in Lucasfilm’s licensing and storytelling.<sup>23</sup>

The periodization, however, reflects a typical privileging of fiction over nonfiction that sidelines museum exhibitions, making-ofs, behind-the-scenes reports, print media, and blogs that chronicle the franchise’s production and reception history. Research on *Star Wars* paratexts have primarily focused on Kenner action figures, highlighting how Lucasfilm’s lucrative licensing strategies has revolutionized Hollywood’s production practices in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>24</sup> In comparison, the circulation of behind-the-scenes features, making-ofs, and other paraproduction materials have been a common industry practice before *Star Wars* and therefore received considerably less attention by media scholars.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the lack of transmedia scholarship on the role of nonfiction in media franchises such as *Star Wars* can be attributed to the tendency in transmedia scholarship to differentiate transmedia from

20 Sean Guynes and Dan Hassler-Forest, “Introduction: ‘What Is This Strange World We’ve Come To?’,” in *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling*, ed. Sean Guynes and Dan Hassler-Forest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 12–13.

21 Guynes and Hassler-Forest, 12.

22 Guynes and Hassler-Forest, 13.

23 For an overview of *Star Wars* under Disney, see William Proctor and Richard McCulloch, eds., *Disney’s Star Wars: Forces of Production, Promotion, and Reception* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2019).

24 Henry Jenkins and Dan Hassler-Forest, “‘I Have a Bad Feeling about This’: A Conversation about *Star Wars* and the History of Transmedia,” in Guynes and Hassler-Forest, *Star Wars*, 17.

25 Bob Rehak, *More Than Meets the Eye: Special Effects and the Fantastic Transmedia Franchise* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 10.

adaptation and cross-media storytelling. Definitions stressing that transmedia involves “the telling of *new* events from the *same* storyworld” would make it easy to dismiss Lucasfilm’s (hi)storytelling as cross-media or adaptation at first sight, as *Star Wars* histories follow the same narrative arc describing the life and career of George Lucas and often feature the same historical documents, such as Ralph McQuarrie’s concept art.<sup>26</sup>

Still, what makes these historical works a form of transmedia and not cross-media is the way they expand historical knowledge through different readings of the franchise’s past. In Carol Titelman’s *The Art of Star Wars* (1979), McQuarrie’s work is used to outline the process from Lucas’s first idea through the first draft of the script to the final film.<sup>27</sup> Robert Guenette’s documentary *The Making of Star Wars* (ABC, 1977) uses the concept art to demonstrate how Lucas and his creative team realized his ideas, creating a before-and-after moment for the viewer. Museum exhibitions such as *Star Wars Identities: The Exhibition* (2012–2021) invite visitors to view the drawings from an anthropological perspective and, more specifically, to understand how cultural, biological, and geographical environments impact an individual’s personality.<sup>28</sup> Rick Hull’s documentary *Star Wars Tech* (History Channel, 2007), which investigates how technologies featured in the films might be realized, transforms the concept art into blueprints for actual vehicles, tools, and weapons. Action figures and high-end collectible figurines based on early concept art allow haptic comparison and speculation on how *Star Wars* could have looked or might look in the real world. Furthermore, the figures, which, just like the early concept art, differ considerably from the final look of the film, establish connections to a comic book series based on Lucas’s first draft of the script.<sup>29</sup> As such, each of the aforementioned media texts provides a new perspective on, and experience of, the history of the franchise.

Given the narrative framing and medium specificity, transmedia historiography follows transmedia storytelling in the sense that “each medium does what it does best” in terms of introducing, expanding, and exploring a narrative.<sup>30</sup> Whereas McQuarrie’s concept art appears across media, other forms of evidence do not and are bound to the potentials and limitations of their respective medium. Books like J. W. Rinzler’s *The Making of Star Wars* (2007) offer the chance to reprint original manuscripts, production notes, transcribed interviews, concept art, photography of sets and post-production environments, among other artifacts. In contrast, documentaries such as Kevin Burns’s *Empire of Dreams: The Story of the Star Wars Trilogy* (A&E, 2004) provide audiovisual evidence such as audition reels or footage from location shoots as well as clips from the final films. Museums enable a close encounter

26 Elizabeth Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media and Daily Life* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 27.

27 Carol Titelman, ed., *The Art of Star Wars* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1979).

28 Beatriz Bartolomé Herrera and Philipp Dominik Keidl, “How Star Wars Became Museological: Transmedia Storytelling in the Exhibition Space,” in Guynes and Hassler-Forest, *Star Wars*, 155–168.

29 J. W. Rinzler’s *The Star Wars: Based on the Original Rough Draft Screenplay by George Lucas* is an eight-part comic book launched in 2013 by Dark Horse Comics.

30 Henry Jenkins, “Transmedia Storytelling,” *MIT Technology Review*, January 15, 2003, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2003/01/15/234540/transmedia-storytelling>.

with the original objects and their materiality as well as with the proportions of props, set designs, and vehicles. Finally, biographical information in works like Rinzler's book can narrate events from Lucas's and others' personal lives. Each medium introduces new materials and includes new perspectives from actors, producers, costume designers, conceptual artists, special effects artists, and model makers, as well as fans, scholars, and contemporary witnesses. If transmedia storytelling tells different stories, or at least different parts of a larger story, transmedia historiography tells different parts of a larger *Star Wars* history.

In line with Hayden White's idea that history is primarily a literary artifact, Lucasfilm approaches its history as a story with a beginning, middle, and end.<sup>31</sup> As is the case with the film trilogies, the work of mythologist Joseph Campbell inspires the franchise's transmedia historiography. The hero's journey functions as a template for the narrativization of *Star Wars* histories, albeit with George Lucas rather than Luke at the center. Lucas's journey takes us from provincial California to Hollywood, where he defies skeptical studio bosses and fellow filmmakers to produce one of the biggest pop cultural phenomena ever, ultimately making him one of Hollywood's most powerful players. For instance, Rinzler's detailed *Star Wars* history promises insights into the "budget battles that nearly scuttled the entire project," "the director's early casting saga," or "the who's who of young film rebels who pitched in to help."<sup>32</sup> Together with the variations of personal perspectives and media-specific evidence, this narrative template enables Lucasfilm to establish a "system of producing narrative variation on sameness."<sup>33</sup> Although transmedia storytelling depends on cohesion and consequently requires narratives that feel as if they fit with one another and belong to the same storyworld, each new story explores different events and introduces new characters to offer variation between texts without losing sight of what audiences already know.<sup>34</sup> Based on this balance between variation and sameness, Freeman identifies character-building, worldbuilding, and authorship as three main transmedia characteristics that can also be applied to transmedia historiography.<sup>35</sup>

In Lucasfilm's nonfiction hero's journey, Lucas functions as a "transmedia character" whose "adventures are told across different media, each one giving more details on the life of that character."<sup>36</sup> Lucas's biography determines the construction of a coherent master narrative for the history of the franchise, emphasizing certain aspects of his personality to make him an appealing character. His life and work are framed as the American dream of the underdog who worked his way to the top, following his inspirations as a filmmaker, his struggles as a writer, his friendships with some of New Hollywood's most talented filmmakers, and the construction of

31 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).

32 See the product description for *The Making of Star Wars* (enhanced edition), Amazon.com, accessed August 20, 2018, <https://www.amazon.ca/dp/B00DQQSD2W>.

33 Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*, 39.

34 Freeman, 39.

35 Freeman, 10.

36 Paolo Bertetti, "Toward a Typology of Transmedia Characters," *International Journal of Communication* 8 (2014): 2344.



the production facility Skywalker Ranch. Each history further develops his back story, appearances, psychology, and relationships with other creative agents by focusing on specialized topics such as costume design or special effects or by retelling his interaction with cinematographers and directors. He remains a constant presence even when the focus is on other members of the crew, whose memories and contributions to *Star Wars* are introduced with phrases like “George wanted,” “George asked,” or “in George’s vision.”<sup>37</sup> Consequently, Lucas is more than the creative face of *Star Wars*: he represents “a good character [who] can sustain multiple narratives and thus leads to a successful [history of a] movie franchise” by connecting different creative agents and production sites.<sup>38</sup>

Notably Lucas becomes a form of a nonfiction “legacy character” in the eight-part making-of series *Disney Gallery: The Mandalorian* (Disney+, 2020).<sup>39</sup> Although the series centers on the first live-action *Star Wars* television show, *The Mandalorian* (Disney+, 2019–), the show’s cast and crew regularly praise Lucas for his visionary filmmaking and the foundation he built for their own work for the franchise. Moreover, Lucas is also constantly present in behind-the-scenes footage of the first two trilogies that is incorporated into the episodes. Reinforcing his status as the sole creative architect of the franchise, the series nevertheless marks the beginning of a post-Lucas history by recasting him in the role of the mentor whose creative mind is always present but who has been succeeded by a new generation.

In terms of worldbuilding, the central location of Lucas’s journey is Hollywood, although it should be understood less as a concrete geographic site than as “a name that stands in for and connotes a range of other experiences and symbols, many of which are subjective and ever changing.”<sup>40</sup> Hollywood stands for an outdated, uninspired, and cautious studio system whose executives and personnel fail to recognize Lucas’s groundbreaking visions, which he would later realize in his own production sites, Parkway House in San Francisco and Skywalker Ranch in Northern California. Skywalker Ranch in particular features prominently in pictures, descriptions, and anecdotes or as an actual site for interviews. It is the main set for the narrative of Old Hollywood and New San Francisco, or old and new technology, Southern versus Northern California, establishing sharp contrasts between the assembly-line production of the studio system and a new workflow that allows lunchtime tennis breaks.<sup>41</sup> Restricted access further mystifies the ranch, with publicity images depicting it more as a private space than a busy production hub. If transmedia storytelling is “the art of world building,” then *Star Wars* histories build an idealized version of Lucasfilm’s production sites as a liberal and creative counterpoint to the business-oriented and outdated world of Hollywood.<sup>42</sup>

37 Bartolomé Herrera and Keidl, “How Star Wars Became Museological,” 161.

38 Jenkins, “Transmedia Storytelling.”

39 See Dan Golding, *Star Wars after Lucas: A Critical Guide to the Future of the Galaxy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 74–77.

40 Alison Trope, *Stardust Monuments: The Saving and Selling of Hollywood* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2011), 2.

41 Rinzler, *Empire Strikes Back*.

42 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 114.

The flow of copyrighted materials lies with Lucasfilm. The Lucasfilm Archives, which holds unique objects rarely found in other institutions, regulates access to *Star Wars* history and feeds licensors with materials. Control over who can see what from their archive gives the company another advantage over fan, professional, and academic historians. For instance, authors of books endorsed by the company can choose “almost any photos, stills, etc. from the *Star Wars* corpus to illustrate their chapters.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, the Lucasfilm Archives functions as a key institutional “transmedia location” that combines franchising logics with the cultural and industrial contexts of historiographical practices and nonfiction production.<sup>44</sup> Lucasfilm therefore takes on “the author function” in terms of classifying their histories and differentiating texts.<sup>45</sup> Of course, it is possible to write *Star Wars* history without an official license or authorization by Lucasfilm, as history per se does not fall under copyright laws. Nevertheless, the company has considerable advantages on the nonfiction market, as it does have control over copyrighted materials and can restrict access and use of such materials in popular nonfiction media. In other words, Lucasfilm might not be able to influence what is said about *Star Wars*, but it can limit the commercial appeal of unlicensed productions by refusing image rights. Besides, Lucasfilm owns the most valuable and rare documents—materials that contribute to high sales numbers for its own, in-house historical projects. While some Lucasfilm-employed historians, such as Rinzler and Sansweet, have become recognizable names for those interested in *Star Wars* historiography, the Lucasfilm trademark remains the indicator of an authorized history for general consumers.

Considering Lucasfilm’s approach to telling the *Star Wars* history, we can periodize the *Star Wars* transmedia historiography project through the four abovementioned phases. Phase one encompasses the production of histories dedicated to the making of the first film trilogy. Between 1977 and 1983, the early histories established the narrative of the hero’s journey for nonfiction *Star Wars* media. Phase two, from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, includes histories and reports on the first three films, which aimed to revitalize interest in the franchise and market the new *Star Wars* products to old and new fan bases. Most notably, Lucasfilm began collaborating on museum exhibitions and, to manage fan relations, hired Sansweet, who published several *Star Wars* histories in this role. The third phase, which starts alongside the release of *The Phantom Menace*, is defined by the release of high-end products. This includes *The Making of* . . . series by Rinzler as well as a further commodification of holdings from their archives, such as Hasbro’s translation of McQuarrie’s concept art into action figures. Finally, the fourth and current period begins with Disney’s acquisition of Lucasfilm in 2012. Disney’s reboot of the franchise continues with communicating and commodifying the history of *Star Wars*. Besides already established nonfiction outlets for *Star Wars*

43 Connie Santisteban, associate editor for general interest books at Wiley, cited in Noam Cohen, “Studying How ‘Star Wars’ Mined History,” *New York Times*, July 3, 2011, <https://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/07/03/studying-how-star-wars-mined-history/>.

44 Jenkins, “Transmedia Logics and Locations,” 220–240.

45 Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*, 32–39.

history, Disney+ takes on a central role in the company's transmedia historiography. The streaming platform features previously released making-of documentaries as well as original productions such as *Under the Helmet: The Legacy of Boba Fett* (Bradford Burah and Brian Kwan, 2021). The series *Disney Gallery: The Mandalorian* indicates Disney's interest in developing new formats around the history of the franchise.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, Lucas's foundation of the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art is another defining project for this phase. Set to open in Los Angeles in 2023, the museum will house Lucas's collection of paintings, illustrations, comics, props, films, and digital art and will give *Star Wars* history a permanent home in one of the most expensive museum projects in recent history.

As this periodization indicates, transmedia storytelling and transmedia historiography are deeply intertwined. The next section outlines the histories Lucasfilm produced that guided the textual relationships and interpretations of the growing *Star Wars* storyworld. George Lucas might be considered a founding figure of contemporary transmedia storytelling practices, but the development of *Star Wars* from a blockbuster film to a transmedia franchise has been anything but smooth.<sup>47</sup> Although Lucas's foresight and investment in licensing agreements carried *Star Wars* from the screen into every fiber of American popular culture, his early licensed products rarely challenged the self-contained narrative of the first trilogy. Toys, radio adaptations, board games, and novelizations offered fans an alternative entry point into the space saga without ever considerably altering Lucas's vision. Only in the early 1990s, when works by tie-in authors as well as fans challenged the films' centrality by introducing new or highly personal interpretations and continuations of the Skywalker saga did this start to change.<sup>48</sup> It was at this point that Lucasfilm began using *Star Wars*' past to (re)establish the films at the center of the franchise through the active construction of a cultural memory.

## TRANSMEDIA HISTORIOGRAPHY AND CULTURAL MEMORY MANAGEMENT

Memory is central for understanding the production and reception of transmedia. Producers and consumers need to establish a "transmedia memory" between different media and their content, as Colin B. Harvey explains. For the media industries, memory is central for the formulation of legal arrangements and copyrights to protect licensors from the misappropriation of their intellectual property and provides licensees with the framework to produce media recognizable and attractive to old and new consumers alike.<sup>49</sup> For consumers, memory is a crucial part of their immersion in and understand-

46 Disney+ offers a similar format on the *Frozen* franchise (*Into the Unknown: Making Frozen 2*, 2020) as well as on the history of Disney films told through select props (*Prop Culture*, 2020).

47 Jenkins and Hassler-Forest, "I Have a Bad Feeling," 17.

48 For a discussion of this process, see Will Brooker, *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 164–171; and William Proctor and Matthew Freeman, "The First Step into a Smaller World: The Transmedia Economy of *Star Wars*," in *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds: A Subcreation Studies Anthology*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2016), 221–243.

49 Colin B. Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia: Narrative, Play and Memory across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.

ing of the different configurations of a character and a storyworld across films, video games, series, and novels. Without the recollection of previous texts, each entry would represent a new and standalone work that would fail to develop a cohesive transmedia project.<sup>50</sup> Yet aspects of a narrative may be “misremembered, forgotten, and even ‘non-remembered.’”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, transmedia describes a triangular system of producing and managing—or at times erasing—memories. This triangular system bears the tensions between producers and audiences, which often surface through arguments over authenticity and canonicity of a storyworld.<sup>52</sup> Frictions emerge between definitions of canon as “the media universe created by the makers of a text” or as “a set of texts chosen by critics or prominent fans as the best or most indicative of a cultural field.”<sup>53</sup> Such incompatibilities between personal and collective canonization result in “ongoing tensions between the relationship of subjective remembering and collective memory [and subjective opinions] on what constitutes the collective ‘reality’ of the storyworld.”<sup>54</sup>

In the case of the *Star Wars* franchise, such debates have materialized in what fans refer to as the “canon wars,” or complex and heated debates about which extra-cinematic story elements form the textual foundation of the franchise.<sup>55</sup> There are two basic camps: those who follow and those who challenge Lucasfilm’s canon, which marginalizes extra-cinematic story elements, guides audience consumption toward the films, and constructs the cultural memory of the franchise around them. By embedding *Star Wars* in a discourse of cinematic authorship, technological innovation, and industrial reinvention, Lucasfilm degrades “everything else *Star Wars*” as an indicator of the films’ influence without acknowledging their reciprocal contribution to the films’ success. And by privileging the films—or specific versions of the films—and presenting them as a common denominator, Lucasfilm implicitly hierarchizes fans’ experiences, memories, and self-understanding. The dismissal of non-canonical texts brings with it a danger of marginalizing fans who strongly identify with them. As such, canonization also impacts the *Star Wars* fan community on a social level, as canons promote a singular collective fan identity and cultural memory that may not reflect the diversity of memories and interpretations that appear in some fan-produced histories. Fan autobiographies that reflect on the authors’ struggles or end with their fandom, or preservation projects that restore the first trilogy as it was seen upon first release, suggest that fans actively dispute both decisions made in the past and Lucasfilm’s representation of this past.<sup>56</sup>

50 Harvey, 3.

51 Harvey, 200.

52 Harvey, 3.

53 Mark Duffett, *Understanding Fandom: An Introduction to the Study of Media Fan Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

54 Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 4.

55 For a detailed overview on the canon wars, see “The Star Wars Canon: Overview,” *Canon Wars* (blog), accessed March 8, 2017, <https://www.canonwars.com>.

56 See *Saving Star Wars* (blog), accessed May 11, 2020, <https://savestarwars.com>; and Gib van Ert, *A Long Time Ago: Growing Up with and Out of Star Wars* (Lexington, KY: Soi-disant press, 2012).

Assmann's definitions of *canon* and *archive* capture not only the processes of achieving textual continuity and a coherent "transmedia memory" but also how they impact social relationships between media industries and fans. She proposes that cultural memory emerges between forgetting and remembering, both of which have passive and active aspects. Active forgetting refers to intentional negation, destruction, and censorship of materials, whereas passive forgetting refers to unintentionally neglected, disregarded, and forgotten aspects of the past. In turn, passive remembering suggests the accumulation of relics of the past without further interpretation, whereas active memory is mediated and interpreted with a message for posterity. Passively stored memories that preserve "the past as the past"—literally and metaphorically—therefore represent the *archive*, whereas actively circulated memory preserves the past as present with a clear message for posterity as the *canon*. Cultural memory, Assmann elaborates, emerges out of the dynamics between these two separate poles.<sup>57</sup>

The transmedia logics of Lucasfilm illustrate the spirit of the *archive* and the *canon*. The Lucasfilm Archives collects and preserves everything related to the production and cultural history of *Star Wars*, but not all objects and nonfiction media in the collection are treated canonically. The history of the films and their makers are given an auratic and existential importance, but the invitation to dig deeper and discover new aspects of the films' production and cultural impact is not extended in a similar manner to information on non-cinematic texts, which are stored and potentially available in the Lucasfilm Archives but are not actively interpreted with the same attention. This hierarchy also materializes in the organization of and becomes spatialized in the programming at *Star Wars* conventions, where exhibitors and panels dedicated to theatrical releases receive the largest stages and best time slots, respectively.<sup>58</sup>

The canonical treatment of the theatrical releases and the neglect and exclusion of the rest of the franchise gradually intensified throughout the four phases of transmedia historiography development. Non-theatrical *Star Wars* productions such as *The Star Wars Holiday Special*, John Korty's *Caravan of Courage: An Ewok Adventure* (ABC, 1984), Ken Wheat and Jim Wheat's *Ewoks: The Battle for Endor* (ABC, 1985), and the animated series *Ewoks* (ABC, 1985–1986) and *Star Wars: Droids: The Adventures of R2-D2 and C-3PO* (ABC, 1985–1986) all presented original *Star Wars* stories but were rarely mentioned in Lucasfilm-produced histories in the 1970s and 1980s. However, back then, with the success of the films and the recognition of Lucas as the sole authority over the storyworld, there was less need to develop specific strategies to actively forget certain aspects of *Star Wars* history.<sup>59</sup> Although each of the above mentioned productions had the potential to refocus audiences' reception of the theatrical films, Lucas's rough-and-ready rule that "movies are gospel, and everything else is gossip" was very much the attitude Lucas-

57 Assmann, "Canon and Archive," 101.

58 Matt Hills, "From Transmedia Storytelling to Transmedia Experience: *Star Wars* Celebration as a Crossover/Hierarchical Space," in Guynes and Hassler-Forest, *Star Wars*, 213–224.

59 Proctor and Freeman, "First Step," 232.

film adopted in relationship to extra-cinematic texts at this time. Lucasfilm's deliberate textual and cultural canonization began only later on in the second phase and was further streamlined in the third and fourth phases, when the growing number of *Star Wars* texts and fan discussions complicated notions of canon and continuity.

Five developments made the gospel-gossip analogy an insufficient organizational model for the increasingly expanding *Star Wars* storyline history. First, the emergence of the Expanded Universe told new *Star Wars* stories in every medium but film, "expand[ing] the [story]world in profound ways by installing new data to the story-program and collaboratively building a substantial narrative history [that] grafted new narrative tissue onto the bones of the franchise."<sup>60</sup> Suddenly and unexpectedly, Lucas was no longer the only authorial figure spearheading the development of *Star Wars* and its canon.<sup>61</sup> Second, Lucasfilm experienced a fan backlash to the special edition of the films that was released to commemorate *Star Wars*' twentieth anniversary. Advertised as a way of restoring damaged film prints and improving some of the special effects, changes to the films' content angered many fans who felt that seemingly small adjustments had a considerable impact on the story.<sup>62</sup> Third, Lucas's declaration that the special edition would replace the original three films as canon, and restricting the circulation of the original films, disturbed many fans. No longer able to see the films that catalyzed their fandom, they challenged Lucas by starting their own projects to restore the films into "despecialized" versions.<sup>63</sup> Fourth, *The Phantom Menace* starkly divided fan communities. Whereas a new generation of fans reacted more positively, older fans considered the new film to be poorly written, childish, commercial, and inauthentic in its use of computer-generated imagery. Some fans began to describe Lucas as a destructive rather than creative force for *Star Wars*.<sup>64</sup> Fifth, merchandise became increasingly visible within and beyond fan communities. With the flood of new merchandise, fans feared that *Star Wars* was turning from a film series that sold toys to a series of films primarily made to advertise ancillary products.<sup>65</sup> It was at this time that Lucasfilm increased the production of nonfiction texts and media as a tool to canonize and archive texts and memories of the *Star Wars* franchise.

In 1994, Lucasfilm released its first official statement on the relationship between the feature films and the Expanded Universe in *Star Wars Insider*, its official fan magazine. The term *Expanded Universe* itself already implies "a certain degree of separation from the 'official' or 'canonical' films."<sup>66</sup> The statement further manifested this hierarchy by placing the films at the top of

60 Proctor and Freeman, 227.

61 Brooker, *Using the Force*, 101–114.

62 Brooker, 69–77.

63 For example, see Harmy, post to "Harmy's STAR WARS Despecialized Edition HD - V2.7 - MKV (Released)," *Original Trilogy* (Forum), April 5, 2011, <https://originaltrilogy.com/topic/Harmys-STAR-WARS-Despecialized-Edition-HD-V2-7-MKV-Released/id/12713>. Also see the blog *Saving Star Wars*, updated September 29, 2011, <http://fd.noneinc.com/savestartarscom/savestartars.info/>.

64 Brooker, *Using the Force*, 69–77.

65 van Ert, *Long Time Ago*, 129–130.

66 Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*, 35.

the *Star Wars* canon: “‘Gospel,’ or canon as we refer to it, includes the screenplays, the films, the radio dramas and the novelizations. These works spin out of Lucas’s original stories; the rest are written by other writers.”<sup>67</sup> Tie-ins such as a *Star Wars* encyclopedia functioned as a platform to further implement this tactic. Its aim, among other things, was to canonize the special edition and decanonize the original films, placing “authorized adaptations of the films” as “a close second” and degrading the rest into the “category of quasi-canon.”<sup>68</sup>

Such clear-cut structured and (at first glance) simple categories, however, are complicated by Lucas’s occasional borrowing from the Expanded Universe, indicating that the books “also fed back into the ur-text of the feature film series.”<sup>69</sup> Because of the fluidity, Lucasfilm developed a new canon structure in 2000, following a more cohesive documentation of all storyworld information provided in various media in a central database called the Holocron.<sup>70</sup> The purpose of the Holocron—with its more than 30,000 entries that are not available to the public and rarely presented to fans—was to handle internal breaches by establishing a hierarchy of five levels of Lucasfilm-produced fiction that did not include any fan works. At the top of the hierarchy was the George Lucas or G-Canon (the most recent versions of films Episodes I–VI, the scripts, movie novelizations, radio plays, and Lucas’s statements) and on the bottom the Non- or N-Canon (“What if?” stories, such as the *Star Wars Infinities* graphic novel series as well as tie-ins such as the *Star Wars* LEGO films and video games).<sup>71</sup>

By building the canon around the director, Lucasfilm follows a general tendency in transmedia storytelling to simultaneously deemphasize and confirm the importance of a singular author figure. “Transmedia stories disintegrate the author figure, as artists in different media collaborate to create the transmedia text,” Scott explains, “but, in order to assure audiences that someone is overseeing the transmedial expansion and creating meaningful connections between texts, the author must ultimately be restored and their significance reformed.”<sup>72</sup> However, Lucasfilm’s attempt to smooth out the inconsistencies between the films and their media extensions through this complex and layered canonization has not been unanimously accepted by fans, as the ongoing canon wars and fan-run projects documenting and commenting on such debates demonstrate.<sup>73</sup> Lucasfilm-authorized *Star Wars* histories need to be understood as a measure to stabilize these textual hierarchies by *canonizing* the production histories of the films and predominantly *archiving* the past of the Expanded Universe and other non-cinematic texts.

67 Curtis Saxton, “Continuity, Canon and Apocrypha,” *Star Wars Technical Commentaries*, *TheForce.Net* (blog), updated January 16, 1999, <http://www.theforce.net/swtc/continuity.html>.

68 Stephen J. Sansweet, *Star Wars Encyclopedia* (New York: Del Rey Books, 1998), xi.

69 Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 145.

70 Shortly after Disney’s acquisition of Lucasfilm, Kathleen Kennedy started the Lucasfilm Story Group to manage the canon and adjust it to Disney’s plans for the franchise. “The Legendary Star Wars Expanded Universe Turns a New Page,” *StarWars.com*, April 25, 2014, <https://www.starwars.com/news/the-legendary-star-wars-expanded-universe-turns-a-new-page>.

71 Proctor and Freeman, “First Step,” 232.

72 Scott, “Who’s Steering the Mothership?,” 41.

73 See “Star Wars Canon,” *Canon Wars*.

The introduction of the franchise into the museum exemplifies the making of *Star Wars*' cultural memory from the second phase onward. Since 1993, Lucasfilm has regularly (co)produced traveling exhibitions that feature original props, costumes, concept art, production notes, and behind-the-scenes photos and footage. Curated under specific themes such as mythology, arts, science, and psychology, these immersive exhibitions offer insights into *Star Wars* and were framed as forms of education and edutainment, firmly placing the franchise within the context of cultural heritage.<sup>74</sup> Through the collaboration with Lucasfilm and the curatorial staff of the Lucasfilm Archives, museum curators become mediating authorial figures. However, Lucasfilm has the "final say over the objects and narratives on display as much as the ways in which the museum [designs] interactions with the public."<sup>75</sup> As a result, Lucasfilm can use the museum to present their sanctioned version of the franchise's history and canon. On a rather consistent basis, all exhibitions presented Lucas as the main creative force behind the franchise. The *George Lucas Exhibition* (1993) established this emphasis on Lucas by celebrating him as a storyteller and filmmaker. Pointedly, the catalog cover and poster depicted Lucas with his arms crossed, surrounded by *Star Wars* props and models, thereby explicitly signaling his mastery over the franchise. Cast and crew are given a voice in these exhibitions but mainly to proclaim how they helped realize Lucas's vision.<sup>76</sup> Ultimately, *Star Wars* exhibitions also represent the diversification of target audiences. On the one hand, Lucasfilm continued to produce histories geared at existing fans, covering more production aspects of the franchise. On the other hand, producing exhibitions enabled Lucasfilm to reach a wider audience through the educational promises of museums and science centers.

Within these exhibitions, four tendencies define Lucasfilm's approach to Assmann's notion of *archive* and *canon*. First, exhibitions mention the Expanded Universe only in passing, without including any related objects or documents, and thus refuse to give it a place in the canon. Second, museum-based *Star Wars* histories actively forget the impact of non-cinematic texts on the films. In the exhibition *Identities*, for example, the first appearance of Boba Fett is credited to *Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back* (Irvin Kershner, 1980), even though the character first appeared in the short film *The Story of the Faithful Wookiee* (David Acomba, 1978) in *The Star Wars Holiday Special*. Third, as is the case with the narrative elements of the Expanded Universe, the material culture of *Star Wars* merchandise finds no place in these exhibitions, although a comparatively small corpus of Lucasfilm-sponsored literature exists on the topic written for the growing collecting community.

74 *Star Wars* (Barbican Centre, London, 2000); *Star Wars: Art of the Starfighter* (Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 2001); *Where Science Meets the Imagination* (Boston Science Museum, 2006); *Star Wars: The Exhibition* (Cit  des sciences et de l'industrie, Paris, 2006); *Star Wars Identities: The Exhibition* (Montreal Science Centre, 2012); *Rebel, Jedi, Princess, Queen: Star Wars and the Power of Costume* (Museum of Pop Culture, Seattle, 2015); *An Art Odyssey* (Le Caf  Pixel, Marseille, France, 2015); and *Visions* (Mori Arts Center, Tokyo, 2015) are among the best-known examples of the franchise's extended museological life.

75 Bartolom  Herrera and Keidl, "How Star Wars Became Museological," 164, 165.

76 Bartolom  Herrera and Keidl, 160–162.



Fourth, museum exhibitions neglect any form of negative reception and fan criticism, presenting the first six films as one large and continuous creative and critical success across different generations. *Star Wars* exhibitions oscillate between “transmedia memory” and “transmedia amnesia” by removing or ignoring non-canonical works and excluding critical fan reactions from official commemorations of the franchise.<sup>77</sup> What fans and visitors are encouraged to remember in these selective exhibitions is determined not only by Lucas’s vision of the canon but also by Lucasfilm’s determination to obscure any creative and financial failures.

Two of the tendencies established in collaboration with museums persist to the present day. On the one hand, the production history of *Star Wars* has been continuously connected to educational themes within and also outside the museum, diversifying the ranks of mediating authorial figures through engagement with scientists, public historians, scholars, and other experts. Some of the core themes of these exhibitions have been further developed by Lucasfilm for other media, turning museums into market-testing sites for future products. For example, the theme of the *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth* (1997–2003) exhibit is mirrored in Pamela Mason Wagner’s television special *The Mythology of Star Wars with George Lucas and Bill Moyers* (PBS, 1999) and the Lucasfilm-supported scholarly publication *Star Wars and History* (2012).<sup>78</sup> The exhibition *Star Wars: Where Science Meets Imagination* (2005) has been expanded by Lucasfilm into a book and a miniseries named *Science of Star Wars* (2005) and the web show *Science and Star Wars* (2017). On the other hand, the exhibitions’ neglect of the Expanded Universe continues in Disney’s strategic managing of the franchise, as evident with the official database on StarWars.com, which provides information on the *Star Wars* world and its characters. It lists in which films and series the characters or locations appear but does not provide any reference to the Expanded Universe. This absence represents Disney’s decision to reboot it as Legends as well as the company’s announcement that the new trilogy and anthology films, or any other future *Star Wars* project, will not be based on or consider the Expanded Universe.

Transmedia historiography should therefore be considered a form of cultural memory management. Canonization and archiving at the level of textuality and cultural memory seek to shape a particular (transmedia) memory of the franchise that does not conflict or challenge the canonical boundaries set by the company. Arguably, consumers of *Star Wars* histories who do not participate in fan-specific practices are more likely to remember this version of *Star Wars* as the authentic one anyway. Transmedia historiography contributes to consolidating a selective form of cultural memory that suits the franchise’s self-understanding. For fans, however, transmedia historiography imposes a form of “fanagement”: the attempt to manage fan readings, responses, and activities at an extratextual level, such as insights into the production history of a given text.<sup>79</sup> As will be outlined in the next section, one

77 Bartolomé Herrera and Keidl, 163.

78 Nancy R. Reagin and Janice Liedl, eds., *Star Wars and History* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2012).

79 Matt Hills, “*Torchwood*’s Trans-Transmedia: Media Tie-Ins and Brand ‘Fanagement,’” *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 9, no. 2 (2012): 410.

of Lucasfilm's strategies of fanagement has been the employment of fanboy historians, whose work supports the company's textual and cultural canonization from within fan communities.

### THE FANBOY HISTORIAN AND THE MODELING OF THE EVERYFAN

A trained journalist and former *Wall Street Journal* writer, Stephen J. Sansweet is the most famous *Star Wars* fan and historian, being for some of his peers "the closest thing there is to George Lucas."<sup>80</sup> Sansweet's transition as "fan turned producer, poacher turned gamekeeper" began with his seminal Lucasfilm-sponsored *Star Wars: From Concept to Screen to Collectible* in 1992, which chronicled the history of the first trilogy from Lucas's first ideas to the success of the toys.<sup>81</sup> In 1996, Lucasfilm hired Sansweet as director of specialty marketing, a title that was later changed to director of content management and head of fan relations. He left his position in 2011 but continues to work for Lucasfilm as a consultant. Sansweet has written seventeen books on *Star Wars* films and merchandise, helped develop the website StarWars.com, wrote articles and columns for *Star Wars Insider*, organized the convention *Star Wars Celebration*, and regularly appears as an expert in industry- and fan-produced media.<sup>82</sup> Considering his output and influence, Sansweet takes on the role of a historical author in the original dual sense: he authored *Star Wars* history, which promoted the company's conception of canonicity, but he also has the *authority* to uphold this version of the *Star Wars* canon among fans. As such, Sansweet takes on the role of a fanboy historian, whose main role is to negotiate the relationships between different texts and alternative readings through the generation of new knowledge about the franchise's past.

The idea of the fanboy historian draws from the notion of the "fanboy auteur," which fan scholars use to conceptualize fans' transition to professional producers—a role in which they negotiate and classify in their dual identity as fan and producer the relationship between producers and consumers and canon and non-canon, respectively.<sup>83</sup> However, Scott stresses that the inclusion of fanboy auteurs in industry networks discourages fan participation. The fanboy auteur's "liminal positioning (his ability to present himself simultaneously as one of 'us' and one of 'them,' consumer and producer) is framed as his greatest asset, suggesting that he is an ideal affirmative interpreter between text and audience," whose interpretations strengthen the industry rather than fan canons.<sup>84</sup> Considering the importance of nonfiction texts for the franchise, the notion of the fanboy auteur should be supplemented with an understanding of the fanboy historian, whose guidance extends to the writing of *Star Wars* history and the production and management of *Star Wars*' cultural memory.

80 Michael Joseph Gross, "The Force Is with the Fans (One Superfan, in Particular)," *New York Times*, May 15, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/15/movies/the-force-is-with-the-fans-one-superfan-in-particular.html>.

81 Lincoln Geraghty, *Cult Collectors: Nostalgia, Fandom and Collecting Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 135.

82 "Board," Rancho Obi-Wan, accessed May 11, 2020, <https://ranchoobiwan.org/board/>.

83 Henry Jenkins, "The Guiding Spirit and the Powers That Be: A Response to Suzanne Scott," in Delwiche and Henderson, *Participatory Cultures Handbook*, 54.

84 Scott, "Who's Steering the Mothership?," 44.

Just as the notion of the fanboy auteur emphasizes the gender of the author and highlights the absence of fangirl auteurs in contemporary media industries, the concept of fanboy historian stresses the gendered gatekeeping of *Star Wars* history.<sup>85</sup> Several projects have argued that *Star Wars* fandom has always been a more diverse group than many male fans would like to acknowledge. For instance, Annalise Ophelian foregrounds the underrepresented history of female, nonbinary, and Black, Indigenous, and people of color *Star Wars* fans in her 2019 documentary series *Looking for Leia* (SYFY, 2019–2020), noting that men have not been more active but simply “the most visible or the loudest or the most prominent.”<sup>86</sup> Rebecca Harrison further argues that male fans achieved this disproportionate visibility because “*Star Wars*’ own official histor[ya] . . . erases and marginalizes women’s stories.”<sup>87</sup> Indeed, even though Lucasfilm has shown efforts to hire more women on its staff—Lucasfilm Archive’s curator Laela French has curated exhibitions, and Carol Titelman, Deborah Call, and Trisha Biggar, among others, have written *Star Wars* publications—they are acknowledged as professionals and experts within their respective fields rather than as fans. And while nine of the nineteen featured contributors listed on StarWars.com were female as of this writing, and their fan status highlighted in their bios, Lucasfilm has not elevated any of them to the same prominence as Sansweet. As such, transmedia historiography “reflect[s] and refract[s] franchises’ gendered valuation of their (imagined) audience” to be predominantly male by building the archetype of a fan around a masculine perspective of fandom.<sup>88</sup>

Sansweet’s highly publicized transition from fan to producer is one reason for his popularity. Lucasfilm has acknowledged how Sansweet’s fan identity works in their favor, explaining that “getting the message out to the influential fans who can then disseminate that information to the whole fan base is not as easy as you might think [and Sansweet] has relationships that can create a groundswell among our fans on a mass basis to go out and celebrate *Star Wars*.”<sup>89</sup> Biographical notes on Sansweet constantly place his fan identity and ownership of “the largest private collection of *Star Wars* memorabilia in the world” in the foreground, introducing him as someone who “has transformed his love for the *Star Wars* saga into a busy career.”<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, the introduction to *Star Wars: 1,000 Collectibles, Memorabilia and Stories from a Galaxy Far, Far Away* (2009) chronicles his development as a *Star Wars* fan and collector since his childhood to his first encounter with *A New Hope*

85 See Philipp Dominik Keidl, “Gatekeeping the Past: Fandom and the Gendered Cultural Memory of *Star Wars*,” in *Our Blessed Rebel Queen: Essays on Carrie Fisher and Princess Leia*, ed. Linda Mizejewski and Tanya D. Zuk (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2021), 52–82.

86 “Looking for Leia: I Didn’t Know That Other Women Did This,” WePresent, accessed September 13, 2020, <https://wepresent.wetransfer.com/story/looking-for-leia/>.

87 Rebecca Harrison, “I Know Because It’s Me,” *Contingent Magazine*, December 8, 2019, <https://contingentmagazine.org/2019/12/08/i-know-because-its-me/>.

88 Suzanne Scott, “#Wheresrey? Toys, Spoilers, and the Gender Politics of Franchise Paratexts,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34, no. 2 (2017): 139, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2017.1286023>.

89 Jim Ward cited in Gross, “Force.”

90 “About the Authors,” in Sansweet and Vilmur, *Star Wars Vault*, 128.

to his work for Lucasfilm and the opening of his museum Rancho Obi-Wan.<sup>91</sup> Hence, his histories are as much about the history of *Star Wars* films and merchandise as they are about his own experiences of fandom and fan practices.

This emphasis on Sansweet's fandom is in stark contrast to the publicity surrounding J. W. Rinzler, who was also one of Lucasfilm's most productive historians between 2001 and 2015. If we compare the publicity surrounding Rinzler's work to that of Sansweet, the importance of the latter's fan persona becomes clear. Rinzler's introduction to *The Making of Star Wars* is written without any reference to fannish feelings for the films, expressing only the historical curiosity of an eager researcher.<sup>92</sup> This is also reflected in the biographies written on him, which emphasize his professional status as a historian and scholar and do not refer to him as a fan. Instead, he is likened to the character of Indiana Jones, drawing parallels between Rinzler's interest in the past and that of one of Lucasfilm's other most popular characters.<sup>93</sup> Fans value Rinzler's work, but since he authored works for them and not as one of them, they see him as a scholar and in-house historian but do not identify with him.<sup>94</sup>

Based on these distinct positions, Sansweet and Rinzler take on two different roles in relation to the textual canon and cultural memory of the franchise. In similar fashion to the museums, Rinzler consistently focuses on the films and only refers to non-cinematic texts in order to highlight the impact of the films. Sansweet takes more freedom in pointing to otherwise sidelined aspects of *Star Wars* history that might be unfamiliar to regular audiences but well known among fans. His work acknowledges texts and objects of fan interest and contextualizes them within the history of the franchise, albeit without openly challenging or contradicting Lucasfilm's canon.<sup>95</sup> Sansweet also avoids criticism of special edition films and the prequel trilogy. In the case of the former, Sansweet has adopted Lucas's argument that films are never finished and that the special edition was merely Lucas's return to three films he was never able to complete due to financial and technological constraints.<sup>96</sup> In reference to the prequels, Sansweet argues that "nothing could have lived up to the combination of media hype, fevered speculation, and inflated expectations, as many reviewers themselves noted."<sup>97</sup> And instead of addressing older fans' negative reception of *The Phantom Menace*, Sansweet tends to emphasize the shared enthusiasm among *Star Wars* fans in the months and weeks before the three prequel films' releases.<sup>98</sup>

91 Stephen J. Sansweet, with Anne Neumann, *Star Wars: 1,000 Collectibles, Memorabilia and Stories from a Galaxy Far, Far Away* (New York: Abrams, 2009), 6–21.

92 Rinzler, *Definitive Story*.

93 Mike Ryan, "Lucasfilm's J. W. Rinzler Talks about *The Making of Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back*," *Vanity Fair*, October 11, 2010, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2010/10/jw-rinzler-talks-about-the-making-of-star-wars-the-empire-strikes-back>. Also see the publisher's summary for Rinzler, *Definitive Story*.

94 Rinzler's popularity manifests in the evil henchman "Rinzler" in *TRON: Legacy* (Joseph Kosinski, 2010) being named after him. See "J. W. Rinzler," *StarWars.com*, accessed December 6, 2020, <https://www.starwars.com/news/contributor/jrinzler>.

95 Sansweet cited in "The Star Wars Canon: Overview," *ST-v-SW.Net* (blog), accessed August 20, 2018, <http://www.st-v-sw.net/STSWCanon2A.html>.

96 Sansweet and Vilmur, *Star Wars Vault*, 96.

97 Sansweet and Vilmur, 102.

98 Sansweet and Vilmur, 102.

Sansweet's reputation is based on his vast knowledge of every aspect of *Star Wars*: if he appears to restrict his knowledge to select aspects of the franchise, he risks losing his fan capital, especially if he neglects texts such as *The Star Wars Holiday Special*, whose existence is well known among fans. He cannot, therefore, withhold narrative development from the Expanded Universe or deny the existence of unsuccessful moments in the franchise's past. In the end, however, it is a question of not only what Sansweet says but also how he says it. In *The Star Wars Vault* (2007), Sansweet's direct reference to the backlash against *The Phantom Menace* occurs in passing, in a comment about Jar Jar Binks, a character most "young kids love and many older core fans love to hate."<sup>99</sup> In regard to textual developments, the *Star Wars Encyclopedia* (2008) tries to acknowledge content from the Expanded Universe that was later replaced by new storylines in the films. For example, the different back stories of the character of Boba Fett are framed as rumors that circulated about the bounty hunter before his real back story was presented in *Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones* (George Lucas, 2002).<sup>100</sup> As such, Sansweet manages to walk a thin line between bowing to fan knowledge and protecting the canonical status of the films and between acknowledging fans' transmedia memory and triggering transmedia amnesia for the sake of textual continuity without explicitly excluding—but nevertheless hierarchizing—fans' textual preferences.

Similar strategies of framing can be found on the level of cultural memory and the active forgetting of creative and commercial failures. Sansweet's *The Star Wars Vault* acknowledges everything *Star Wars*, from the films and merchandise to tie-ins such as Robert Turk's 1986 ice show "The Ewoks and the Magic Sunberries." However, even if such productions are mentioned, their purpose is simply to illuminate the brilliance of Lucas and his films. *The Star Wars Holiday Special* is mentioned in a section on *Star Wars* on television, with references to the fact that the television special introduced Boba Fett. Moreover, Sansweet emphasizes that thanks to *The Star Wars Holiday Special*, McQuarrie produced concept design for the Wookiee Planet that would later be used in Lucas's *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith* (2005). Otherwise, the television special is openly labeled as "forgettable" or a "misstep—no, a stumble" and as nonrepresentative of the innovative storytelling of Lucas and the franchise.<sup>101</sup> Correspondingly, *The Star Wars Vault* addresses Lucasfilm's foray into animation with the series *Ewoks* and *Star Wars: Droids*, although with the purpose of pointing toward the Lucas-sanctioned animation projects being developed at the time.<sup>102</sup> *Star Wars*-themed rides or circus performances, figure skating shows, and stage productions are presented as national peculiarities, or as an indication of the extent of the film's global success. Mediocre television

99 Sansweet and Vilmur, 102.

100 Stephen J. Sansweet and Pablo Hidalgo, *Star Wars Encyclopedia: Vol. 1* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2008), 266.

101 Sansweet and Vilmur, *Star Wars Vault*, 50.

102 Dave Filoni directed the animated feature film *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, which was released in 2008. That same year Lucasfilm released the animated series *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* (Cartoon Network, 2008–2013; Netflix, 2014; Disney+, 2020).

films such as *Ewoks: Caravan of Courage* or *Ewoks: Battle for Endor*, however, are absent from *The Star Wars Vault*, which may be because they have not generated as many fan projects as *The Star Wars Holiday Special* and therefore require less historical framing and memory management.

Sansweet's centrality in writing *Star Wars* history functions as the ultimate force behind the recontextualizing of toys from mere commercial ancillary products into defining aspects of the *Star Wars* pop cultural phenomenon—although these works have been primarily addressed to fans interested in the toys in the first place. As is the case with the textual canon, Sansweet as a collector and fan has the freedom to address the craze around action figures and other tie-ins to an extent that is not evident in Rinzler's work or the museum exhibitions aimed at a larger audience. Sansweet's histories of toys have shaped a certain code of conduct for collectors of merchandise, negotiating between the consumption necessary to start, build, and exchange one's collection and the production of personal memories. In particular, Sansweet has advocated for the proper preservation of toys but has also reminded readers of his *Star Wars Insider* column that toys are meant to be played with.<sup>103</sup>

As a fanboy historian, Sansweet also functions as an archetypal Lucasfilm fan. He consumes everything *Star Wars* without questioning the company's textual and cultural canon. In transmedia historiography, Sansweet thereby resembles what Scott calls the "transmedia everyfan." Representing the media industry's desired modes of fan engagement, the everyfan "is modeled as an avid canonical consumer, collector and completist" so as to shape preferred fan consumption and behavior.<sup>104</sup> The concept of the everyfan in relation to *Star Wars* and Sansweet is a fitting model because he is a collector *and* completist—both in relation to the textual and the material aspects of the franchise—and "has a passion for everything *Star Wars*" without publicly questioning Lucasfilm's canonical hierarchy. In sum, Sansweet represents Lucasfilm's ideal consumer behavior in both metaphorical and practical terms. An article in the *New York Times* refers to how he built his collection without taking advantage of his position at Lucasfilm: he waits in line to buy toys like every other fan—a fact he likes to highlight in interviews.<sup>105</sup> Sansweet's image is that of a fan who had to take out several mortgages to finance and house his collection but also someone who built a reputable career out of his fandom and never lost control over his finances or private life. His fandom has led from a respectable career as a journalist to a position at Lucasfilm, after which he founded his own museum. Sansweet's work and fandom persona is personal and rich with anecdotes but never unrestrained or selfish. He therefore also models an idea of how fans should engage with one another as well as how they should represent their fandom in public.

Sansweet therefore contributes to Lucasfilm in significant ways. As a fanboy historian, he acts as a transmedia producer who writes and disseminates *Star Wars* history across media. He has become a central force behind the

103 Stephen J. Sansweet, "Scouting the Galaxy," *Star Wars Insider* 32 (1997): 82.

104 Scott, "Modeling," 1047.

105 Gross, "Force."

transmedia narrative, consciously guiding readers, visitors, and spectators from one entry to another and steadily expanding their knowledge about the franchise. And while Sansweet's opinions and fan identity should not be seen as cynically constructed or insincere, his example demonstrates how Lucasfilm appropriates fans' knowledge and labor to actively shape the cultural memory of *Star Wars*.

## CONCLUSION

Transmedia historiography and the fanboy historian are theoretical tools to investigate the complex historiographical debates and struggles between media industries and their fan communities. The two concepts enable the study of processes in which media industries create and commodify cultural memory, either in concert or in tension with fan responses. Transmedia historiography represents more than just another ancillary market exploited for the purpose of profit; it enables Lucasfilm to strategically produce and administer textual and cultural canonicity among different texts as well as to manage the cultural memory of the franchise. The fanboy historian is a crucial agent in this process due to his dual authority as an insider both to Lucasfilm and to the fan community. Additionally, the fanboy historian functions as a role model for an everyfan, who does not question Lucasfilm's decisions regarding the narrative developments of the franchise. Thus, the concepts of transmedia historiography and the fanboy historian can be used to investigate how nonfiction media navigates intertextual relationships as well as fans' relationships to the media industries and to one another. Transmedia historiography, however, emerges out of a dialectical opposition between fans and media industries: Lucasfilm's production of nonfiction texts encourages fans to engage with the past of *Star Wars*; some fans then produce their own *Star Wars* histories, which Lucasfilm in turn must manage through additional histories. The canon wars are the visible result of the dissonance that materializes out of this nonfiction production circle.

It remains to be further investigated how fan-made histories will impact Lucasfilm's approach to transmedia historiography. In terms of *The Star Wars Holiday Special*, Disney+ recently added *The Story of the Faithful Wookiee* to their "Star Wars Vintage" section, without further reference to its source text, and *Under the Helmet* features a segment with Lucas acknowledging the Christmas program, although he remembers it with critical distance by recalling how *they* made the television special. Furthermore, a 2018 article on StarWars.com celebrated the fortieth anniversary of Boba Fett's first appearance. The article focuses on Fett's "memorable" debut that laid "the foundations for one of the saga's most elusive and mysterious icons," thereby ultimately redirecting attention back to the films.<sup>106</sup> Still, these examples show an awareness that fans commemorate parts of the franchise that they deem valuable and that Lucasfilm is willing, at least to a certain degree, to follow such trends on

106 Lucas Seastorm, "Animator John Celestri's Road to *The Star Wars Holiday Special* and the first appearance of Boba Fett," StarWars.com, November 15, 2018, <https://www.starwars.com/news/the-star-wars-holiday-special-boba-fett>.

select platforms.<sup>107</sup> Whether or not this extends from websites and making-ofs mainly directed at fans to other platforms, such as the museum, remains to be seen.

*Star Wars* is far from the only franchise in which a struggle between industry and authors becomes evident. With the lengthening life spans of franchises across decades and (fan) generations, the past has become an increasingly important discursive field that defines textual relationships as much as the cultural memory of popular mass media franchises such as James Bond, Batman, Transformers, or Doctor Who. As long as memories are culturally constructed as the private property of the self, thereby freeing fans from the restrictions of intellectual property rights that would prevent them from sharing and even selling their memories, fandom will be as much about the interpretation of the past as it is about the interpretation of a storyworld. While fans might be restricted in sharing copyrighted *Star Wars* imagery, they are free to write their unofficial histories and also share their personal documentation of their fandom. It is within this realm of authorized and unauthorized nonfiction franchise media where the media industries and fans will continue to meet, negotiate, and argue who can say what, how, and where about the past.

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107 Similarly, the website features a couple of articles on the *Caravan of Courage* to celebrate its thirtieth anniversary, such as Mark Newbold, "Caravan of Courage: Celebrating 30 Years of an Ewok Adventure," StarWars.com, November 26, 2014, <https://www.starwars.com/news/caravan-of-courage-celebrating-30-years-of-an-ewok-adventure>.