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## THE FUNCTIONALITY OF REBOOTS

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THE FUNCTIONALITY OF REBOOTS: *STAR TREK* AND *STAR WARS*

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
English Composition

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by  
Dustin Lance Shepherd  
September 2017

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Approved by:

Renée Pigeon, Committee Chair

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to better understand how film reboots empower fans by offering unique insight as critiques of the original texts and by displacing hierarchies amongst audience, critic, and author. My hypothesis is that reboots, as an act of adaptation, allow audience members of the original franchise to become authors, in this case screenwriters. By extension these screenwriters become critics by highlighting, expanding, or even disregarding themes found in the original film series. This complicates the reboot beyond a simple capitalistic venture to make money and invites us to consider the way they position and displace interactants to better foster critical engagement with works of art, specifically films.

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## DEDICATION

To Grandma, for saying that I really cared about movies. You were right.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## A FRAMEWORK FOR REBOOTS

### Introduction

Reboots are a common occurrence within the film industry. Within the last 10 years nearly every imaginable film franchise/cult classic has been rebooted, possibly with the intent of building new audiences for older intellectual properties. Another, more cynical, rationale for the reboot comes from the fact that studios and production companies expect to make profit with less risk than producing something that is “new” or “original.” However, there is a lot more to reboots than the safety of a guaranteed profit. Reboots do certainly perform this function, but more interpretive value and analytic meaning can be found in these films, as suggested by their overwhelming popularity and financial success. The reboot is a great medium because of its potential to foster critical awareness in a mass audience. This happens primarily because reboots disrupt traditional roles of the author, audience, and critic. Ultimately the reboot pushes all these roles into a form of criticism, and therefore better facilitates critical engagement with film texts, instead of mere critiques of whether or not the film was good or bad. Using concepts from Adaptation Studies, Genre Studies, and concepts of cultural capital and canonical formation, I will attempt to explore how reboots inherently facilitate critical consciousness in mass audiences, rather than critical consciousness needing to be painstakingly dug out of a text.

## What is Adaptation?

Reboots constitute a form of adaptation. To better understand the functionality of reboots, it is important to first understand theoretical conceptions of adaptations. What constitutes adaptation, however, is not without contention among scholars. It is difficult to define, yet it is also paradoxically seemingly simple to define. In her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon looks extensively at what constitutes adaptation, why works are adapted, and most importantly how she believes these works should be approached by critics and scholars. She argues that adaptations are recontextualizing stories and providing new insight into those stories. As a result, Hutcheon does not count sequels, or prequels as adaptations, observing, “There is a fundamental difference between never wanting a story to end—the major reason behind sequels and prequels, according to Marjorie Garber (2003: 73-74)—and wanting to retell the same story over and over in different ways” (Hutcheon 9). While I agree that “never wanting a story to end” is a primary feature of sequels and prequels, I also believe that these films are adaptations in their own right (Hutcheon 9). According to Hutcheon’s conception, an adaptation stems more from an adaptation of a narrative, and sequels and prequels would not fit this conception because they are extending a story instead of adapting it. Adaptations have more to do with “repetition” of an informing text “as much as the change” made to that text (Hutcheon 9). However, there is a problem with Hutcheon’s conception of

adaptation, as it limits the types of texts that can be looked at within this framework.

Julie Sanders, however, sees different forms of work as adaptations, which would include sequels and prequels, among a slew of other terms (3). I am more inclined to agree with Sanders, if anything because narrowing the focus of what counts as an adaptation actually detracts from the label “adaptation.” Sanders uses an evolution metaphor to better explain how we can conceive adaptations. Adapting a text actually keeps the original text alive:

Stories do get retold in different ways in new material and cultural environments; like genes, they adapt to those new environments *by virtue of* mutation—in their ‘offspring’ or their adaptations. And the fittest do more than survive; they flourish (emphasis in original 32).

If adaptations are meant to allow a text, or bodies of texts, to remain relevant, then it would only make sense that their forms expand, evolve, and mutate as well. I think the second edition of Hutcheon’s book sees this and gives an alternative form of adaptation. She noticed that with certain adaptations it was “less the story itself than the story world, or what [Hutcheon] called the ‘heterocosm’ (literally, an other cosmos), that was being adapted” (Hutcheon xxiv). This conception of a heterocosm opens up a plethora of works that can be analyzed through Adaptation Studies. Specifically, film reboots should be looked at through an adaptation lens. Whatever you wish to label a particular work (e.g adaptation, sequel, prequel, reboot, reimagining etc.), these types of works

should fall under theorizations/conceptions of adaptation. They share the same features and characteristics of adaptation as theorized by both Hutcheon and Sanders.

What might simplify matters is understanding our need to label and categorize. Hutcheon writes that some of the confusion in writing about adaptations is the term itself as it is used “because we use the same word for the process and the product. As a product, an adaptation can be given a formal definition, but as a process—of creation and of reception—other aspects have to be considered” (15-16). This might be why there are so many terms that ultimately amount to adaptation. Confusion might be cleared up if we conceive of adaptation as the process, whether it be of a narrative or heterocosm, and the slew of other terms as the product and function. This repositioning of terms allows audiences to know what they are to expect from a particular type of work.

### Reboots as Adaptations

Before looking at the motivations, results/reasoning, and functions of reboots, it might be important to further establish what a reboot is and how Adaptation Studies can benefit the analysis of film reboots. Firstly, it is important to define reboots as they pertain to film franchises. The term “reboot” has been used pretty flippantly, almost as an umbrella term to indicate any popular film being remade. But there are some common features that can actually be teased

out. I believe that reboots have a very specific goal that separates them from more traditional ideas/forms of adaptations.

Reboots seem to occur with franchises that have multiple installments already, and may have been forgotten by the general public. The reboot is then an attempt to reignite the general public's interest in those franchises. Hopefully, what the reboot will do is garner enough attention, interest, and profitability to justify the production of many sequels. This would allow film studios to produce films that are almost guaranteed to make money. So ultimately, reboots are new iterations of an old film franchise, made for the purpose of profit and the potential of many, many sequels indefinitely.

Now it is my belief that this purpose of indefinitely extending a franchise's lifespan separates reboots from adaptations, although the economic aspect of reboots actually helps reinforce the notion of reboots being adaptations as well. More important than the economic allure of reboots are the features that reboots have in common with adaptations. One of these features, and arguably one of the most important for Hutcheon, is that "adaptations have an overt and defining relationship to prior texts" and that "adaptations usually openly announce this relationship" (21). With reboots this can come in the form of the title, actors returning to famous roles, or even a repetition of the plot. The title informs the audience on what to expect, but it also informs the author's choices in adapting that particular heterocosm. For instance, in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, we expect protagonist Max Rockatansky's actions to serve his own interests and for him to

only reluctantly help those he encounters because that has been how the character is portrayed throughout all of the *Mad Max* films. Returning actors, whether or not in their original roles, also announce the relationship to a previous text or texts. It brings memories of the first film franchise, which in a way sets up what the audience is to expect from that character, given what the heterocosm has already established for that character. B.D Wong returning as Dr. Henry Wu in *Jurassic World* reminds the audience of the ambition and willingness to pervert nature in the original *Jurassic Park*. Or even Judi Dench being cast as M in two different *James Bond* franchises.

Casting an actor in a new role in a new franchise also reminds audiences of the original franchise. Heather Urbanski, in *The Science Fiction Reboot: Canon, Innovation and Fandom in Refashioned Franchises*, points this out with the casting of Richard Hatch in the original *Battlestar Galactica* series as Captain Apollo, one of the series's heroes, and his recasting as Tom Zarek, "a political activist/terrorist," in the reboot series (121). This recasting is meant to create associations with the original series, but it is also meant to illustrate how vastly different this new incarnation of *Battlestar Galactica* is from the original series. It acknowledges the prior franchise while simultaneously illustrating a great departure from the informing franchise. But it can also further expand that character. For example, Paul Reubens portrayed the Penguin's father in *Batman Returns* and played a different version of the Penguin's father on the television series *Gotham* (*Batman Returns*; "Mad Grey Dawn"). Both versions are

connected through the actor, and by looking at them in conjunction, audiences can see a deeper characterization or interpretation of the character as a whole.

Likewise, recasting a character might signify new directions for the character; at the very least, it signifies a different interpretation of the character from the new actor because the new actor will inherently have new interpretations and characterizations of the character. They will not try to impersonate or repeat the performances of the previous actor. The characterization of Dumbledore changes between the second and third *Harry Potter* movies because of the death of actor Richard Harris. Michael Gambon states that he went in and did his “own thing” with the role, and even added an Irish accent to the character (“Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban DVD,” 25 minutes). Even visually we can see the change in characterization. From the third movie forward, Dumbledore wears his beard in a sort of ponytail fashion. Subtle nuances like these announce a change in character. Recycling a plot can also announce a relationship with a previous text or texts. All of these represent what Hutcheon claims to be important to adaptations: “Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication” (9). All of these functions further the interpretations that are available to these characters and narratives.

While all of these factors contribute to the ways in which reboots can, and should, be viewed as adaptation and approached through theories of Adaptation Studies, the most important aspect of adaptations pertaining to reboots is the adaptation of the franchise's heterocosm. Unlike adapting a single narrative,

adapting a heterocosm/narrative world comes with far more restrictions, which makes relaunching a film franchise much more difficult. This more than likely comes from the fact that adapters are not only presenting their own conceptions of the heterocosm, but they are also trying to create/expand the heterocosms in ways that are economically viable so studios will continue to produce these films. They are also trying to expand the heterocosm in ways that fans will appreciate and accept. It is a process that amounts to a lot more than just “taking possession of another’s story, and filtering it, in a sense, through one’s own sensibility, interests, and talents” (Hutcheon 18).

#### Why Reboot a Film Franchise?

There are several reasons to reboot film franchises. As briefly mentioned earlier, some of these motivations are economic in nature. However, this is only a small/initial reason for rebooting film franchises. Peter Gutiérrez offers several other reasons for why reboots are made beyond these economics reasons/incentives, but they do seem to stem from these economic reasons. Some appear to be cynical while others appear to be more idealistic:

- “Update content or context to reflect more contemporary history,”
- “Remain more faithful to the source material,”
- “Leverage a solid premise/story from a film that is (comparatively) little-known by today’s audiences,”
- “Exploit enhanced ability to convey spectacle,”



- “Expand narrative scope and/or revise for greater adherence to genre conventions,”
- “Target a wider audience via a new setting or demographic representation,”
- “Satisfy talent drawn nostalgically to ‘classic’ work from youth,”
- “Service a massive fan base without extending the existing story continuity of franchise” (Gutiérrez 47).

Most of these reasons might only be possible because of economic incentives. “Exploit enhanced ability to convey spectacle,” “Target a wider audience” or “Service a massive fan base” and “Satisfy talent drawn nostalgically to ‘classic’ work from youth” all have economic underpinnings (Gutiérrez 47). All of these reasons might explain some of the choices made within the reboot/remake, but all of these allowances come from the ability of the film to make money. Even allowing talent to reboot/remake a film that affected them in their youth can be seen as an economic incentive.

By satisfying talent, the studio ensures that the talent will continue to work with the studio, and that talent might be a big box office draw. That is not to say that I am trying to fully dismiss the validity of these reasons/motives because they are monetary in nature, but looking at money and profit as the cause of reboots might actually be beneficial in understanding the prevalence for reboots. Gutiérrez illustrates that over half of the top grossing films in Australia in 2010 were remakes, reboots, or sequels (Gutiérrez 48). Ultimately, I think that the

economic rationales for reboots can help to better facilitate a critical engagement with the text precisely because the reboot must also be analyzed with other textual conversations outside of the source text, and these economic motivations are an example of such a conversation. These films are made with these other conversations taking place around it, which helps to offer a critical lens for analysis. Julie Sanders puts this best when she suggests that “it serves us better to think in terms of complex processes of filtration, and in terms of intertextual webs of signifying fields, rather than simplistic one-way lines of influence from source to adaptation” (24). In other words, to better understand adaptations, and therefore reboots, we must be able to look beyond the relationship between the source text and the adaptation, and we must begin to look at the intertextual relationship between these texts and other texts/conversations that may have an influence on the adaptation.

In order to better understand other motives/rationales and how these evolve over time, we should turn our attention to Genre Studies, and begin to conceptualize reboots as a genre in their own right. Genre Studies can provide a great lens in seeing reboots as better offering a particular type of critical engagement.

### Reboots and Genre

Looking at reboots as a genre facilitates critical consciousness, primarily through a redistribution, or reassignment, of traditional roles in the production and reception of a body of work. Genre studies can be very beneficial in

understanding how reboots help give different roles in the reception and creation of art—critic, audience, and author (or in this case the auteur)—a critical edge. This notion of reboots enhancing critical engagement with a text will be explored further in this thesis. However, the beginnings of a more critical engagement with a body of texts stems from the exigence of reboots as a genre and the evolving rhetorical situation that allows reboots to persist. It must be noted that this conception of genre is not entirely concerned with typified forms and structures, but is instead more concerned with the rhetorical situation that spawn genres. Form and structures do play a role in the understanding of genre, but more important is the rhetorical situation(s) that give rise to these typified forms. Reboots do not necessarily have a typified structure, but they do have typified expectations within those forms—alluding, building, and adapting a previously-established heterocosm being the most prominent. Carolyn R. Miller defines exigence as “a form of social knowledge—a mutual understanding of objects, events, interests, and purposes that not only links them but also makes them what they are: an objectified social need” (157). Miller further claims that “Exigence must be seen neither as a cause of rhetorical action nor as intention, but as social motive” (158). Exigence should not be thought of as what is done, or what the intent of that action is, but instead, it should be thought of as the social motives behind those actions and intentions.

If exigence helps to create the genre and is based on “social motive” over intent, then it is necessary to discover what the possible social motives for

reboots are. This becomes tricky because it is difficult to distinguish between “rhetorical action,” “intention,” and “social motive” (Miller 158). I think that the three converge together and are difficult to separate, but, based on definitions from Miller, it would appear that the exigence of a genre extends beyond the rhetorical actions and intentions of a singular source or author. It is a collective social motive that helps to define and determine the use of genre.

Reading other motives of reboots does not remove economic imperatives. It is not easy to separate reboots from the intentions of the studios that fund and produce these films. The majority of major studio films, especially big budgeted reboots, are meant to make money. That is their overall purpose. Despite what others, including myself, might read into the function of reboots, the amount of money that a film makes determines its future. Box office receipts greatly determine whether or not the adaptation or reboot of the heterocosm continues. However, a move must be made beyond focusing on the capitalistic desire of studios to make money. Chelsey Crawford, in her article “Familiar Otherness: On the Contemporary Cross-Cultural Remake,” writes that “any claim that Hollywood is not a commercial enterprise would yield limited results” (113). It would be impossible and possibly shortsighted to dismiss the economic incentive for reboots. It is inescapable, but it is possible to focus on other aspects. Kathleen Loock, in her analysis of the cycle of reboots from franchises from the 1980s, claims that “The idea behind remaking is that these properties retain their commercial and cultural value over time and can be easily revived to be sold to

both the original generation of viewers and a new one” (291). Even when a motive is to retain a work’s “cultural value” that, at least in my reading of Loock, is only accomplished through selling it to audiences.

Even though the desire to sell products and merchandise are inherent motivators of reboots, they do serve a larger purpose beyond this capitalistic desire to make money. If we look at reboots, and by extension adaptations, as genres, we can see more purpose and meaning than selling a product, and we can see more than just a medium for the role of critic to simply assert their authority over authors and audiences. Amy Devitt promotes several important theories in regard to genre and the study of genre. She extends Miller’s claims of rhetorical genre and claims that genre is a rhetorical action and should not be studied by typified forms and structures, but through rhetorical analysis. As mentioned earlier, genres are responses to a recurring rhetorical situation, in which that particular genre is best suited to fit that rhetorical need. Devitt claims that “Genres develop, then, because they respond appropriately to situations that writers encounter repeatedly” (576). Reboots, and therefore the screenwriters and production crews attached to them, are responding to a reoccurring situation, namely increased profits for the studio. Kathleen Loock claims that “During the recent financial crisis and global recession...remaking has become a very attractive business plan for Hollywood” (280). Loock further claims that “From the film industry’s point of view, remaking is a profitable business because it minimizes costs and risks by repeating existing stories and by putting presold

products back on the release schedule” (280). As we can see from Loock, the social motivation for the reboot is to get audiences back in the theaters, while reducing the chances of producing a flop.

However, as context changes, so too does the recurring rhetorical situation that spawns the reboot. As Devitt writes “Genre not only responds to but also constructs recurring situation” (577). So, this would assume that if the current recurring situation has been addressed (i.e. getting audiences to go to the movies) then it would be safe to assume that the recurring situations would also evolve over time. It could be that the recurring situation is to further increase profits. This is an entirely plausible claim, but beyond capitalism and profits, there is another, more critical recurring situation involved with the substantial number of reboots that have been made and are slated to be made in the future. The key here can be seen in Kathleen Loock’s reasoning for film remakes of beloved franchises of the past. She claims that the motive is to “retain their commercial and *cultural value* over time” (emphasis added 291). What rebooting a film franchise does is to reestablish its cultural value by reintroducing it into the public’s consciousness. Thus, I think that the recurring rhetorical situation then changes based on this reintroduction. Fans and audiences have the ability, through what they choose to see and spend their money on, to stop reboots and rebooted franchises from moving forward. What audiences choose to see can also cause studios to create more films within a particular franchise. Therefore, the recurring situation changes to appease audiences. While the original

reasoning for reboots is to make profit for a studio, eventually in order for that to continue, the studios must start to take into account the audience's desires and wants. In order to make a profit with these reboots, the studio must be able to help to reaffirm "their commercial and cultural value over time" (Loock 291). Therefore, the economic motives need to work in conjunction with the rhetorical motives of the audience and authors of reboots. Audiences feel personally attached to these pop culture franchises, so much so that Loock mentions that "there is a general apprehension among audiences that cinematic remaking will destroy these personal ties to the past" (279). When we look at the cultural phenomena that *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* have become, the personal connection to franchises becomes obvious. Fans of both series have tied entire identities and lifestyles to the franchises.

With this attachment of identity, there comes a sense of ownership. Because these franchises have helped to define the identities of different individuals, there is a natural apprehension and trepidation when someone else attempts to add or change the original, and therefore the meaning within the original. There would almost appear to be a nervousness about how the new iteration of the franchise will change the meaning to be found in the original. These works are meant to enhance the original franchise. Genre studies provides yet another way of looking at this. Ralph Cohen provides a great history of genre, and maintains that we must look at genres in their historical context. He also provides an especially interesting explication of Frederick Jameson's ideas

regarding genre. Jameson believes that genre represents “a social contract between a writer and a particular public ‘whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact’” (qtd in Cohen 208). If audiences have entire identities tied to particular franchises, and their role within genres are to decide the use of an artifact, it would make sense that there would be trepidation if someone were to go back and change that cultural artifact by giving it new usage. It potentially takes away the role of the public in the social contract. However, this may not be the case; because the writers of reboots were/are part of the public of the original social contract, they are extending the “proper use of a particular artifact” (Jameson qtd. in Cohen 208). Within this framework, I do not believe that the original film franchise is being stripped of its proper use, but instead I think that the act of rebooting a film franchise actually renegotiates the parties involved in the social contract. In a way, as will be explored later in this thesis, the reboot illustrates the public creating a social contract with another public by rebooting a film franchise.

Another contention comes from the cultural capital that these franchises represent. Fans not only feel a sense of ownership of the text, but they also feel a sense of worth, knowing all the intricacies that come along with a franchise’s canon. This leads to a contention between fans and producers due to this attachment to the original franchise. I believe that this can be both detrimental and beneficial to the reboot and the functionality of reboots. It is detrimental because it leads to the apprehension in engaging with a reboot with anything



beyond fidelity criticism, the idea that “the source text is granted an axiomatic primacy and authority, and the rhetoric of comparison [is] that of faithfulness and equivalence” (Hutcheon 16). Fans may not look beyond the ways that a reboot changes the meaning of the original, which might not align with the ways in which the fan has molded him/herself after the text. But, if we move beyond this fidelity approach to a text, the reboot, whether faithful to the original franchise or not, serves as a conduit to better interact with the franchise, old and new.

To better understand the ways in which reboots can foster critical interaction with a text, we will need to turn our attention to canonical formation and the ways in which reboots facilitate better interaction and inclusion into the production of the canon and, ultimately, of cultural capital.

### Canons and Cultural Capital

With the exigence and recurring rhetorical situation continually changing, the motivations for reboots then must be evolving as well. Once a rebooted franchise accomplishes the goal of making money, then what becomes the recurring rhetorical situation? The exigence of a genre is always changing. I have looked at economics and profitability as a primary factor in why reboots exist, but I think that the situation also changes. As Devitt claims “Genre not only responds to but also constructs recurring situations” (577). If we think of reboots as a genre, then after economic goals are reached, the reasons to create reboots evolve and new reasons for reboots begin to emerge: contributing, creating, and interacting with a canon, and the creation and contribution to cultural capital.

A canon represents accepted bodies of texts supporting a particular group's ideology and constructs of knowledge. "Canon" has been used to mean a set of high works that have social merit and worth, or official works within an ideology; in terms of film franchises from my own observations and experiences, it has been used synonymously with continuity, especially with such practices as retroactive continuity changes ("retconning") which influence and change an official canon. Additionally, fan communities use this canonical knowledge to demonstrate their ability to make/exhibit meaning from particular works. As John Guillory notes in *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, a canon functions as a system of exclusion and indoctrination. Access to a canon becomes contentious because it grants the "*means of cultural production*" (emphasis in original Guillory 18). Therefore, a canon creates cultural capital. A canon, in a pop culture sense, usually boils down to what is claimed as official.

Guillory discusses several important ideas regarding access to a canon, and subsequently, cultural capital. It must be noted that Guillory is writing about the literary canon and how it pertains to the university, but his ideas can be easily extended to pop culture definitions of canon. Guillory, writing during the 1990s' canonical revision movement/debates, writes that the debate over canonical revision is misguided. To Guillory, canonical revision should not be as concerned as it is with producing an all inclusive representation of the types of students being introduced to the literary canon because a canon's ultimate purpose is one of control and indoctrination. Instead, he maintains that the real issue with

canonical revision should be more focused on the creation and access to the canon and the access to create the canon and cultural capital. Guillory further claims that canons have much to do with certain practices, such as the teaching of literacy, which he defines as

not simply...the capacity to read but...the *systematic regulation of reading and writing*, a complex social phenomenon corresponding to the following set of questions: Who reads? What do they read? How do they read? In what social and institutional circumstances? Who writes? In what social and institutional contexts? For whom? (18).

He additionally claims that “An institutional ‘fact’ such as literacy has everything to do with the relation of ‘exclusion’ to social identity; but exclusion should be defined not as exclusion from representation but from access to the *means of cultural production*” (emphasis in original 18).

If we are to accept Guillory's premise that the implementation of a canon is to indoctrinate and enforce a set of social values, then “The selection of texts is the selection of values” and “Canonical texts are the repositories of cultural values” (23; 22). If we accept these ideas, then what does this look like for pop culture canons? I argue that this takes the form of ownership. Fans of the franchise and authors (i.e screenwriters, creators, intellectual property owners) begin to struggle over the ownership of these bodies of text. This does not necessarily mean ownership in a legal sense, but more along the lines of ownership as a means of producing and constructing knowledge based on a

body of texts. Reboots represent a direct challenge to creators/authors/screenwriters/studios as the sole producers of knowledge based on a canon.

Before the reboot and the age of the internet, official works within a franchise's canon and continuity were determined by an elite group that had the privilege of deciding the direction a franchise takes. Writers created these worlds and audiences and critics received them. Perhaps that is an oversimplification. Fans have always attempted to interact with the franchises that they hold dear; however, fans have not fully had the ability to dictate the direction the franchise would take. Fans/audiences are simply given texts, and they can make meaning with what they are given by the producers of those texts. The reboot directly contradicts this notion. The opposition to audiences being mere recipients becomes apparent when we look at not solely the reboot, but contexts surrounding the rebooted film franchise. I think the reboot reflects more pronouncedly Hutcheon's claim that "readers are no longer considered passive recipients of textual meaning, but active contributors to the aesthetic process, working with the text to decode signs and then to create meaning" (134). The audience plays an even bigger role in the construction of the reboot. The audience does not just actively "decode signs" and then "create meaning" (Hutcheon 134). As will be explored in Chapters 2 and 3, the audience actually plays an active role in constructing the reboot, and this construction is not solely based on the text itself. Audiences are able to play a pivotal role in the direction a

heterocosm takes. Reboots have the ability to disrupt common ideas of audiences only receiving a text, pushing all of these roles toward a more critical position.

Authors more readily become critics of 'original works' through what they choose to acknowledge/reference in their reboot of a film. Criticism changes because of an inherent intertextual and announced relationship between multiple films. Audiences become more critical of a particular work for much the same reason. Audience members have the opportunity to become authors (e.g. screenwriters), no longer simply receiving texts, but becoming contributors to a canon and the heterocosm of a franchise. What is most telling is that a rebooted franchise is not the sole idea of a solitary genius author. Whereas George Lucas and Gene Roddenberry can be considered the ultimate authorities of their respective franchises (*Star Wars* and *Star Trek*), this no longer becomes the case for rebooted films. Each film in the rebooted franchise is written by different people and directed by different fans. Though not in a legal sense, the franchise is no longer owned by a lone individual, it is owned by the fanbase and audience. This illustrates how the reboot allows for definitions of ownership to be challenged. The changing/blurring/complicating of these seemingly standard roles regarding a particular work or text, allows not only for a better tool for critical engagement and articulation of that engagement, but it also creates a tool to contribute to a canon and therefore cultural capital.

The canons of these franchises are very important to the communities that make meaning from them. The ability to actually contribute and not just receive, or navigate a film for meaning from what is being distributed is equally important. A more detailed look at these roles should illustrate how they become more complicated/less rigidly defined because of the reboot as an adaptation and genre. These redefined roles can be seen as an attempt to claim the ability to produce cultural capital as well as challenge the institutional function of a canon by interacting with it and changing the dynamic relationship between the producers of a canon and the receivers of a canon.

### Author

There are numerous ways in which a reboot changes the standard role of the author, and differs in some respects from simply looking at the author's role in creating an adaptation. In order to understand how this is done, it is important to look at Auteur Theory, as many of those behind pop culture film franchises might be considered auteurs in their own right. Richard Koszarski's "Auteurism Revisited" points out that Auteur Theory stemmed from the fact that "many of those seeking to view cinema as an art saw film criticism as necessarily artist-centred, and identified the director as the necessary artist" (355). So, instead of analyzing the film on its own, the director was put at the forefront for the work of art, despite the fact that films are made by many individuals, not by the director alone. The director became representative of the entire film. While at one time Auteur Theory was a prominent critical lens in Film Studies, Koszarski maintains

that “The whole notion of authorship became highly suspect, and any reference to specific directors might easily be dismissed as ‘great man theory’” (356). Kosarzski argues that academia attempted to move beyond the notion of the auteur in film through various critical lenses, but “none of these critical approaches had any degree of success outside of academia” (356). While academia may have attempted to move beyond focusing on the auteur, the general public still uses this notion when engaging with films. The idea of the auteur was, or is, inescapable. Koszarski concludes that author-based theories “must play a significant, perhaps central, role in understanding those achievements which make cinema so attractive a subject of inquiry in the first place” (356). However, this is not the case. The reboot actually pushes against the idea of the auteur as ultimate artist and author, and places more emphasis on the heterocosm and the product.

Firstly, the author is no longer creating an individual work; the author is creating only a section of a much larger work. Adaptations are generally isolated, individual works. With reboots, what is being adapted is not an isolated work, it is part of a hopefully ongoing franchise. The reboot is not meant to be the end of the adaptation. The adaptation is meant to be continuous. Because the franchise is meant to continue beyond one film and every installment in the new franchise has the potential to be handled by a different creative team, the role of an individual author as a creative genius is greatly diminished. This forces us to look beyond the role of the author as the authority of a text.

Instead of seeing the author as a solitary genius, the focus changes toward the rebooted film as a critique of the preceding franchise. However, in order to better analyze the reboot in this way,

We are entering the tricky domain of authorial 'intention', a world which in some respects Barthes's notion of the reader as an active creator of meanings sought to eschew, and yet it seems inescapable in any genuine study of the motives involved in adaptational art (Sanders 81).

This will require an effort on the part of anyone interacting with a rebooted film franchise, but I think this can be overcome by thinking of the author as a critic and the reboot as a work of criticism toward another text/film. The rebooted film franchise is already part of a conversation of meaning-making because of the original franchise. Reboots offer criticisms through the new franchise.

Additionally, these texts are not entirely self-contained as they reference conversations outside of the film that have been created by fans. In this way, the author works with the audience to create new contributions to a franchise's canon and the cultural capital found therein.

### Audience

In a reciprocal process, the audience is equally responsible in the creation of new texts, primarily because the authors of most reboots, especially the more successful ones, were in fact audience members before they were authors of the text. Examples of this include J.J. Abrams with his work on *Star Wars*, and Justin Lin and the writers of *Star Trek Beyond*. Fans and audiences make meaning



from the original films in the franchise, and incorporate that meaning into the new film franchises. Examples of this feature will be further explored later. One way they do this is with fan theories, found on a multitude of online forums and discussion boards, surrounding gaps in the narrative of the film. Authors work with these theories and can either reaffirm the ideas of the fans or challenge their interpretations. While this appears to put much of the authority back into the role of author, because an author can completely dismiss an entire community's interpretation of a film, I do not think that it necessarily performs this function. The rejection, or affirmation, of an interpretation really opens up the dialogue between author and audience further. When discussing the mechanical reproduction of art, Walter Benjamin predicted that "the distinction between author and public is about to lose its basic character. The difference becomes merely functional; it may vary from case to case. At any moment the reader is ready to turn into a writer" (232). I think that this is entirely true with the reboot. The author/s of the new franchise was a reader turned into a writer. The two work in conjunction with one another to create new texts.

The audience is given much more authority in the production of the new franchise. This will be more illustratively explored in the following chapters. The creator of the franchise had the authority of the direction of that franchise, which influenced the meaning that could be made from the text since it originated from a singular source. However, for a rebooted franchise to proceed and develop into a full-fledged franchise of its own, the audience must accept it as such and give

the new author/s permission, in a way, to continue. This becomes most apparent in box office returns. If a movie performs poorly at the box office, a studio may not want to produce any more films because it might not be as financially viable as initially thought. Because the reboot allows for many more contributors to bodies of texts, there must be acceptance from numerous parties in order for the body of texts to continue to grow. The audience almost has more authority than they did before when it comes to interactions with a reboot. They can actually help decide the direction in which a film continues through what they choose to invest their time and money in.

### Critic

All of these new facets contribute to a more critical engagement with texts. This most obviously comes from the fact that instead of having to judge a particular film in isolation, the reboot, and adaptations more generally, puts two different films next to each other and forces a comparison of the two. Linda Hutcheon argues that a drawback to studying adaptation is its ability to deteriorate into fidelity criticism, that is, how faithful it is to its source material. This drawback to adaptations is reduced when it comes to reboots because it is not necessarily a narrative that is being adapted, but the heterocosm that the franchise has created. Therefore, critics must be more astute in their reading of the reboot because fidelity to a narrative source might not play that important of a role in the reboot.

This is only a brief consideration of the multiplicity of approaches to analyzing reboots. Hopefully, what this has accomplished is a framework to look at how rebooted franchises have allowed for these approaches and can help articulate ways in which authors, audiences, and critics are able to contribute to a franchise's canon, which allows for many more individuals to become capable of contributing, interacting, and producing cultural capital rather than remaining recipients. I will use these ideas to illustrate the ways in which the rebooted franchises of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* fit into my conceptions of reboots.

## CHAPTER TWO

### STAR TREK AND THE AUTEUR

#### To Boldly Go...

The previous chapter was more focused on the common threads and functions of film reboots. This chapter will focus more specifically on a few of these features as they relate to a specific rebooted franchise: *Star Trek*. By doing this, more nuanced conceptions of reboots can be teased out. This analysis will illustrate how reboots represent a change in cultural production and authorship/ownership.

*Star Trek* has been part of American culture since the original television series premiered in the 1960s. It has permeated pop culture for decades and has appeared in many different media. The franchise has had six live action television series, thirteen films, one animated series, novels, comics and other media tie-ins. Because of the plethora of material found within this narrative world, this franchise is ripe for analysis. This body of texts can help to illustrate issues of a canon, its ownership, and how reboots challenge our perceptions of the author/auteur, critic, and audience.

In 2009, Paramount Studios released a reboot of the *Star Trek* franchise. The film follows young versions of the original series' characters during their formative years as they join the crew of the USS Enterprise. This qualifies the film as a reboot as it is a reset, of sorts, of the *Star Trek* universe. It allows for a

fresh start within the heterocosm with reinterpretations of its canon and the inclusion of new stories and plots, while still utilizing classic and beloved characters. It is a way for fans to take control of the canon of *Star Trek* and begin to interpret and make meaning in their own ways. The film accomplishes this by using time travel to bring the narrative back to the younger versions of these characters. What ensues is a battle between a Romulan, an alien race similar to Vulcans that has been in perpetual conflict with the Federation, from the future with a vendetta against a future/alternate timeline version of Spock.

If reboots are conceived as a way to create and gain access to the “*means of cultural production*,” then rebooting the *Star Trek* franchise is an excellent way to make this happen (emphasis in original Guillory 18). As mentioned in the first chapter, what the reboot facilitates is a way to turn audiences into creators of culture and a canon instead of being mere recipients. The reboot allows audiences to make meaning and illustrate those meanings within the heterocosm through how they choose to adapt certain elements therein.

In order to understand exactly how the reboot of *Star Trek* facilitates alternate conceptions of ownership and the creation of cultural capital, it is important to look at the history of ownership of *Star Trek*. I do not mean this in terms of the legal, intellectual property ownership of the narrative world, but the perceived ownership of the heterocosm, and how the narrative world is interacted with, due to these perceptions.

Gene Roddenberry (1921-1991) created *Star Trek*. He has been lauded as the creative visionary behind *Star Trek*, and according to Leora Hadas, in her analysis of the promotional material for the 2009 reboot, Roddenberry had always been the driving force of the heterocosm. Hadas argues that “Roddenberry’s name has been particularly inseparable from the franchise...and all subsequent *Star Trek* series and films were created either with his involvement or by people who have known him and professed commitment to his authorship” (49). Hadas further illustrates this by pointing out that the showrunner of the television series *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Rick Berman, was focused on “his devotion to carrying on ‘Gene’s vision’ and denying the existence of any personal vision of his own that might interfere” (52). Furthermore, Hadas points out that the screenwriters of the 2009 reboot meant to keep the narrative in line with Roddenberry’s vision, but adherence to that vision was almost non-existent in the promotional materials regarding J.J. Abrams’ involvement with the film. Hadas states that “Gene Roddenberry’s name is conspicuous in its relative *absence* from the production discourse surrounding the new film” (emphasis in original 54). Hadas maintains that the film represents passing the franchise from one auteur to another, and Roddenberry’s absence from promotional material is evidence of this occurrence. However, there may be an alternative interpretation.

I do not think that the promotional materials surrounding the 2009 *Star Trek* reboot fully represents a new auteur taking the helm of the *Star Trek* heterocosm. In fact, it might be better interpreted as an attempt at de-centering

the author/auteur in a systematic way. The 2009 reboot is branded as J.J. Abrams's film without necessarily elaborating on what that means and, as Hadas notes,

The thematic features usually associated with Abrams's body of work—a high-concept premise, a convoluted plot with many twists and surprise reveals, and secrecy and misdirection surrounding the project—were at no point used as selling points for Abrams's *Star Trek* film, not by Abrams himself, not by others in the crew, and not in Paramount's official materials. What Abrams was expected to bring to the film is not a question of content. Instead, Paramount promoted him as bringing in an attitude, a visual and cinematographic *style* (emphasis in original 56).

By vaguely encoding Abrams as the creative force behind this new incarnation of *Star Trek*, the franchise/heterocosm is being placed into the hands of the audience, and taken away from the invocation of Roddenberry as a solitary visionary, or Roddenberry-esque as being the criteria for what can be labeled *Star Trek*. Roddenberry did not write or create everything in the *Star Trek* universe, but he is still the creator. His approval was needed for contributions to the *Star Trek* heterocosm. The reboot franchise, however, represents a handing off of *Star Trek* to the audience, both old and new, precisely because it decentralizes Roddenberry from the focus of what constitutes *Star Trek*. When Abrams is invoked, it is not to address Abrams as auteur and creative genius of *Star Trek*. It is instead an attempt to remove Roddenberry from primary focus.

*Star Trek* has always been propelled by the fans. While this is a statement that can be made about any franchise, there is a distinction with *Star Trek*. Elizabeth Thomas, in “Live Long and Prosper: How Fans Made *Star Trek* a Cultural Phenomenon,” further elaborates on exactly how fans were able to keep *Star Trek* from being lost to obscurity after its first cancelation. According to Thomas, NBC cancelled the original television series after two seasons, but “intense pressure by fans convinced NBC executives to grant a one-year reprieve” (11). The fans literally resurrected the show from death. Unfortunately, this did not improve viewership, and the show was cancelled again (Thomas 11). This did not stop fans from pursuing more *Star Trek*. The series’s “loyal fans lobbied incessantly for repeats of the original 79 episodes. The magic number to make an ‘off-network’ series marketable to mainstream television channels always had been (and still is) 100 episodes—a milestone *Star Trek* never hit” (11). Fans finally got their wish for repeats of the series when NBC began to air *Star Trek* in syndication. From there fans began publishing *Star Trek* novels and organizing *Star Trek* conventions (Thomas 12-13). At one of the first conventions, Gene Roddenberry was almost denied entry because security did not recognize him, to which Roddenberry responded, “Young man, I AM *Star Trek*” (emphasis in original Thomas 14). Even though it was the fans that had kept *Star Trek* alive and helped build it into the cultural staple it is today, Roddenberry still saw this as a monument to himself.



In order to take power away from the fans, at that very convention, Roddenberry asserted his ability to control the heterocosm. At the convention, a fan asked what the 'T' stood for in James T. Kirk. Roddenberry answered that it stood for "Tiberius" (Thomas 14). It is my belief that this illustrates the control that Roddenberry had over the heterocosm he had created. It could be argued that the fans look to Roddenberry, as auteur, for meaning within the heterocosm. It is the fans and audiences that give the auteur his power. However, this can be interpreted in another way, namely that Roddenberry controls this universe. He is asserting his authorial authority, by pointing out and divulging information that even the most diehard Trekkie does not have access to. Roddenberry creates the information, while audiences and fans are meant to receive it. Fans were able to speculate what the 'T' stood for because "Until that moment, even William Shatner did not know this was his character's middle name" (Thomas 14). By establishing the middle name of Captain James T. Kirk as "Tiberius," Roddenberry asserts control over the narrative world.

The 2009 reboot of *Star Trek* is a way for the new franchise to do away with this authority of the auteur. By restricting the importance of Roddenberry, and not emphasizing Abrams's creative role, the franchise is in effect being taken out of the hands of a creative genius and being put into the hands of a collective force. In my conception of the reboot, this is a major accomplishment. Firstly, it gives the heterocosm a communal and creative drive. Reboots begin to feel more collaboratively created. Without this communal feeling, the text is being merely

received from a controlling auteur. It is a step closer toward Julie Sanders's call for "a paramount shift away from the idea of authorial originality towards a more collaborative and societal understanding of the production of art and the production of meaning" (149). It leads further toward a rejection of the auteur. This actually changes the role of the audience toward the creation/reception of art, specifically film franchises. Hutcheon elaborates on this when she states that in terms of adaptations "readers are no longer considered passive recipients of textual meaning but active contributors to the aesthetic process, working with the text to decode signs and then to create meaning" (134). The reboot puts this facet of audience at the forefront. The fans can continue to contribute in ways that they already have, but without the added task of having to adhere to an authorial vision. Fans get to contribute in many ways beyond creating products within the heterocosm. The reboot does not allow for mass audiences to openly contribute to scripts and produce films in that capacity, and the scripts for reboots are not crowdsourced; however, the reboot does allow fans to contribute to the body of knowledge that constructs *Star Trek*. They are not told what *Star Trek* represents and what it means. They actively contribute to the meaning of the heterocosm, if not the actual production.

In another way, fans get to further decide what is *Star Trek*. As mentioned earlier, Roddenberry was the driving force behind *Star Trek* and its heterocosm. This new franchise is trying to decentralize the importance of Roddenberry, and this allows fans to be able to decide what is accurately representative of *Star*

*Trek*. This primarily occurs through issues of fidelity to the original franchise. Hutcheon writes, “we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (8). It is this repetition that allows for the fans to decide what is appropriate to the heterocosm, or whether or not it is appropriate for *Star Trek*. Fans and critics are given the opportunity to decipher the new narrative in an attempt to understand how it relates to their perceptions of *Star Trek*. The variation aspect of Hutcheon’s conception allows fans to create meaning of the heterocosm based on what is being added to the narrative world. Issues of fidelity can be of use in analyzing how fans/audiences are at the forefront of creating meaning within the heterocosm. Hutcheon maintains that criticism must move beyond issues of fidelity, that is how faithful the film is to an informing text, but fidelity is important to the reboot, especially as a way to initiate audiences into the world of criticism. I believe that reboots help to move the audience’s criticism beyond issues of fidelity. I think fidelity is a natural critique to jump to for fans of the original franchise who are not well versed in the field of Adaptation Studies. But because reboots do not have to adapt a singular text or narrative, I believe that the reboot pushes toward a more comparative criticism. Hutcheon writes that

If we know that prior text, we always feel its presence shadowing the one we are experiencing directly. When we call a work an adaptation, we openly announce its overt relationship to another work or works. It is what Gérard

Genette would call a text to the 'second degree' (1982: 5), created and then received in relation to a prior text. This is why adaptation studies are so often comparative studies (6).

This comparative aspect is important. Comparison is integral to the reboot, but because it does not focus on narrative adaptation, it shifts importance away from fidelity criticism. This opens up doors for audiences to develop a better critical consciousness toward the heterocosms they value. The comparison allows for audience members to articulate the successes and failures of any given reboot, and it fosters an ability to further articulate the interpretive meaning that can be found within any given heterocosm. Fidelity criticism lacks the means to fully engage with a reboot. Comparative criticism, on the other hand, provides both a language and a frame to fully explore the interpretative meaning of narrative worlds.

Simultaneously, comparative studies allow new audiences access to the heterocosm. Comparative studies allow new audiences to enter into conversations about the meaning of the *Star Trek* heterocosm with the audiences that have foreknowledge of that heterocosm. The two might not necessarily be discussing the comparison of one franchise to another, but would instead be discussing a comparison of experience and interpretation based on that experience. This can lead to new interpretations of the heterocosm from both perspectives. Fans, both old and new, get the opportunity to interpretively decide what is representative of *Star Trek*. The focus of conversation is on the product—

the new franchise coalescing with the old franchise in this case—than it is on the genius of a solitary individual.

As mentioned earlier, the 2009 *Star Trek* follows a young iteration of the crew of Starship Enterprise as they battle the time-displaced Romulan, Nero, as he attempts to destroy both Earth and the planet Vulcan. This time-traveling plot device serves a couple of functions, especially when it is looked at through the exigence and conceptions of cultural capital formulated in chapter one. If the exigence of reboots as a genre is to make money, and that goal is reached, the exigence then evolves to reaffirm the cultural value of that particular franchise. Devitt can shed light on this, especially when we conceptualize reboots as a genre, by explaining that “Genre not only responds to but also constructs recurring situation[s]” (577). The initial exigence is to make a profit on a tried and true franchise, but the reboot also constructs an exigence of reaffirming the cultural value and capital of the heterocosm. Thus, the time travel plot device allows for the fans of the heterocosm to keep the cultural capital from the original, while still being “involved in offering commentary on a source text” (Sanders 18). In essence, they can have their cake and eat it too because through the reboot they are able to critique and expand the heterocosm, without negating the importance of the source texts.

Time travel as a plot device, especially in this instance, is used in two ways. It illustrates that this is a new franchise. This is a new universe. Zachary Quinto's Spock even indirectly tells the audience as much:

Nero's very presence has altered the flow of history, beginning with the attack on the USS Kelvin, culminating in the events of today, thereby creating an entirely new chain of incidents that cannot be anticipated by either party...Whatever our lives might have been, if the time continuum was disrupted our destinies have changed (*Star Trek* 70 minutes).

This speech announces to the audience that we will be seeing a new version of Spock in this version of *Star Trek*. However, the new text is still affirming the cultural value of the original text by alluding to, and reinterpreting previous events.

This announces new interpretations of the original text, but the 2009 *Star Trek* is also able to show the importance and reverence for the original franchise through the time travel plot. It does not negate anything that has already occurred. There is another instance of the film showing reverence to the original heterocosm: the casting of Leonard Nimoy as Spock, dubbed Spock Prime in the closing credits (120 minutes). Hadas even claims that by casting Nimoy, "Nimoy was thus in a perfect position to *authorize Star Trek* without appearing to *author* it; he was certainly a far better candidate for that than his conspicuously absent colleague William Shatner" (emphasis in original 62-63). The new franchise is removing the author/auteur step by step. This focus on Nimoy as the voice of *Star Trek* decentralizes the authorship of Roddenberry even further. While it still puts considerable focus on a lone individual, that focus becomes more and more centered on the character of Spock, which helps increase the focus on the

heterocosm, as opposed to the auteur. In essence, by casting Nimoy in a returning role, the new franchise is validating the cultural capital of the preceding franchise, while simultaneously taking it into new directions. The new franchise is attempting to illustrate its relevance to the original franchise, while not completely negating the existence of the original. It pays respect to the value of the original while simultaneously attempting to create something new.

This does lead to other problems because, as Sanders puts it, “adaptations and appropriations prove complicit in activating and reactivating the canonical status of certain texts and writers” (22). While the dangers of “activating and reactivating the canonical status of certain texts and writers” might appear to be a detriment to the reboot, I do not think that this is the case, especially with *Star Trek* (Sanders 22). Leonard Nimoy reprising his role illustrates a passing of the torch to a new iteration of the crew of the Starship Enterprise. His involvement establishes that everything is going to be okay. There is nothing to fear in this new *Star Trek* universe. If anything, it represents an activation of the canonical and cultural importance of a character and the heterocosm, and undermines the status of the auteur as creator.

### Everyone’s a Critic

If, as Hadas suggests, the 2009 *Star Trek* is removing the authorship of Gene Roddenberry and replacing it with J.J. Abrams without bringing up the specifics of what makes it Abrams’s film, then what is the point of invoking Abrams at all? Hadas suggests that Abrams, and to a lesser extent Roddenberry,

are actually representative of what Foucault dubbed the “author function”:

“Foucault identifies authorship as a discursive function, one in which the author’s name—rather than signifying a flesh-and-blood individual—serves as a means of classification and capitalist value assignment” (Hadas 51-52). This is meant to invoke all the things audiences might associate with Abrams. The function here is to remove the driving influence of *Star Trek*, that being Roddenberry. Abrams, however, is not a new auteur. The third installment of the rebooted franchise is not helmed by Abrams, but director Justin Lin. The franchise is slowly deemphasizing the auteur and thus changing the focus toward the text. The franchise is finally catching up to the way that it has been perceived for decades.

If the author is not meant to be in control of the heterocosm, what is the role of the author? It is difficult to point out the intentions of the author, and dangerous to assume what the intentions of the author are. Again, Julie Sanders points out that doing so enters

the tricky domain of authorial ‘intention’...yet it seems inescapable in any genuine study of the motives involved in adaptational art (81).

This is entirely true. Adaptation Studies does seem to rely on the intentions of the author. However, that is only if we conceive of the author as author. In reality, we must reconceptualize this notion of authorship. The role of the author shifts from that of creator to that of critic. Since “adaptation is frequently involved in offering commentary on a source text,” then it would seem to move the author from a position of authorial authority to a position of critic (Sanders 18). This is not an



unfathomable leap, especially since in the act of adaptation and appropriation, authors/auteurs are, in essence, interpreting and critiquing the informing text(s). This leads to a more critical engagement from all parties that experience the reboot.

We can see the author as critic throughout the newly rebooted *Star Trek* franchise. The author, as critic, can be seen through the franchise's use of palimpsests, and how these moments are used as conduits to explore and recontextualize themes. Although Hutcheon claims that "Palimpsests make for permanent change" (29), I do not believe this to be the case. A palimpsest announces a relationship to the informing text, but I am not entirely sure that it permanently changes it. If anything, it illustrates a multiplicity of interpretations and possible themes to explore within that particular context.

In one of the films of the rebooted franchise, *Star Trek Beyond*, we can see how the palimpsest becomes a way to recontextualize and explore established themes within the heterocosm. In the film *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, Dr. Leonard "Bones" McCoy and Captain Kirk celebrate Kirk's birthday. The two characters reflect on their lives and getting older, namely Kirk being forced to retire due to Starfleet Regulations. Sitting in Kirk's quarters surrounded by Kirk's antique collection, Bones tells Kirk to take his command back before "you become a part of this collection. Before you really do grow old" (*Star Trek II* 11 minutes). These are ruminations about growing old from two characters having difficulty accepting they are past their prime.

However, *Star Trek Beyond* recontextualizes Kirk's birthday. It is still about getting older. But it is from the perspective of a young man who has been perpetually surrounded by death. Bones mentions that "I know you don't like celebrating it on the day because your pa bit the dust" (*Star Trek Beyond* 6 minutes). Kirk then begins lamenting that he is "one year older...A year older than [his father] ever got to be" (*Star Trek Beyond* 7 minutes). In this instance, we can see that Kirk's birthday becomes an event to explore conceptions of death and aging, as it is informed by the scene from *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. However, the writers of *Star Trek Beyond* have extended this theme to include perceptions beyond that of two middle-aged men. These are younger men contemplating these thoughts, which in turn allows for new contexts and thematic explorations. Kirk's birthday becomes a conduit to explore conceptions of not only death and aging, but identity. Bones mentions that because Kirk "joined to see if you could live up to him, you spent all this time trying to be George Kirk; now you're wondering what it means to be Jim" (*Star Trek Beyond* 7 minutes). We can see this questioning of identity and purpose through both iterations of Kirk's birthday. In *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, Kirk is wondering what to do during this transition in his life because all he has ever known is being a Starship Captain. *Star Trek Beyond's* Kirk is wondering what the meaning of his own life is because he has modeled so much of it on living up to his father's memory and accomplishments. These adapted moments do not mark a permanent change, as Hutcheon suggests. Instead, they offer a conduit to

explore these themes given new contexts. In this case the screenwriters are adding commentary to the notions of identity brought up in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. Reflections on personal identity are not just for older individuals contemplating changing external circumstances, but they can affect any age and can be related to internal changes. This scene may have entirely different circumstances than the informing film, but because it is similar and explores similar themes of identity, it takes the author out of the role of creator of meaning and instead pushes them into the role of critic.

We can further see the author being restructured into a critic through other palimpsests. The rebooted *Star Trek* franchise has an abundance of scenes that are directly inspired from scenes in the previous franchise. However, most of the scenes are inverted. One prominent example of this comes from *Star Trek Into Darkness*. *Star Trek Into Darkness* draws heavily from *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, primarily through the use of Khan Noonien Singh as the primary antagonist. In *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, Khan successfully damages the Enterprise's warp drive, leaving the crew unable to escape his final attack. The radiation within the damaged warp core is at a level too dangerous for anyone to survive. Spock eventually takes matters into his own hands. He subsequently goes in and saves the crew by sacrificing his life to bring the warp core back online. Spock and Kirk have an emotional exchange:

Spock: "The needs of the many outweigh"

Kirk: "The needs of the few,"

Spock: "Or the one" (*Star Trek II* 98 minutes).

*Star Trek Into Darkness* has an informed scene in which similar events occur, but it is Kirk who sacrifices his life, and it is Spock who arrives to watch Kirk die. The two go back and forth claiming that they had only done what the other would have done (*Star Trek Into Darkness* 109 minutes). Ultimately, the crew is able to save Kirk because of Khan's genetically enhanced blood, but the fact remains that this scene provides commentary on the informing text. It is illustrating the impact that both of these characters have had on each other, so much so that they have influenced each other's decisions in life threatening situations. I also believe it is a way to speed up the process of developing Spock and Kirk's friendship. Their bond is something that originally took three seasons and two movies to develop into this heart wrenching scene. For the rebooted franchise, the writers are able to build this relationship much faster due to their knowledge of the heterocosm.

The film does not openly announce that this is an informed scene, other than a brief mention from the characters that they only did what the other would have done (*Star Trek Into Darkness* 109 minutes). There is no open acknowledgement that this scene is inverted from its informing source. It is hinted at that the scene is flipped, but that is only something that could be guessed at by new audiences. This scene actually helps to illustrate what Hutcheon refers to as "the knowing audience." Hutcheon writes that "If we know the work(s) in question, we become a knowing audience" (121). Because the screenwriters are

members of the knowing audience, they are able to draw in other knowing audience members into this accelerated friendship between Spock and Kirk. Leonard Nimoy as Spock Prime can be a further example of the knowing audience, but he serves as a bridge to the unknowing audience. He is the knowing audience telling the unknowing audience what information is needed for the story to continue. When Spock Prime meets the young Kirk in the 2009 *Star Trek*, he tells Kirk that “I have been and always shall be your friend” (*Star Trek* 75 minutes). This allows the knowing audience to decide what is important to the new heterocosm, while helping to engage the unknowing audience. It also allows for the relationship between the two characters to develop at a quicker pace, which might help to create new commentary on the Spock/Kirk dynamic.

The rebooted *Star Trek* franchise furthers these ideas with the way it incorporates palimpsests and allusions to the original franchise within the new franchise. Firstly, it serves as a form of cultural capital. Audiences get a feeling of knowing if they can figure out what is being alluded to. Knowledge of the heterocosm and its canon serves as a source of cultural capital for the informed audience member. For instance, in the previously mentioned version of Kirk’s death, knowing audience members are able to see what is being alluded to, which in turn serves as a short hand to validate their knowledge of the heterocosm. It has the ability to illustrate the knowledge of the author of the reboot as well, and in a way, build a sense of trust between the author and audience. At the very least it allows for a conversation to develop between the

original franchise and the new iteration of the franchise's audience. It can bring two different audiences into conversation with one another. New interpretations can constantly be found, particularly because there are two different viewers being brought into a dialogue. The way that this new franchise incorporates aspects of the previous franchise allows for more room for invention, while the alternate timeline allows the screenwriters of this new franchise to further decentralize Roddenberry as auteur and refocus on the heterocosm as being most important.

An excellent example of this comes in the form of the Kobayashi Maru. In the *Star Trek* universe, the Kobayashi Maru is an unbeatable test that is meant to gauge a Starfleet Officer's reactions under pressure, specifically unbeatable scenarios. The first mention of the test is in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. In this film Saavik, a Vulcan cadet, is tested and fails. She eventually asks Kirk how he passed the test, as he is the only person in Starfleet history that has passed the unbeatable scenario. It is revealed later that he cheated. Kirk points out that he "got a commendation for original thinking" (*Star Trek II* 77 minutes).

This is not at all what happens in the 2009 *Star Trek*. We get to actually see Kirk cheat during the Kobayashi Maru test. It is in fact during his third attempt at taking the test that he reprograms it, so he can pass. He then gets put on academic suspension and must face a disciplinary hearing for his actions. Heather Urbanski points out that this is a feature of rebooted franchises, adding that "even the most complex, longest texts can't answer all questions" (112).

Urbanski claims that “the change in the *Trek* multiverse that surrounds the Kobayashi Maru test can be seen as a gap, but not for fans familiar with its original appearance in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*” (112). Urbanski sees the appearance of the Kobayashi Maru as a gap in the narrative that can only be filled by knowledge from the informing film. While this may be true, I believe there to be a larger utility of the test’s appearance in the rebooted film. Actually getting to see Kirk cheat helps to establish his ultimate character. Kirk has always been a suave, cool headed captain, who does not buckle under pressure. As an audience, we can forgive him his faults because he gets results. However, if we look at the author as critic, we can actually see this as a criticism of Kirk’s incessant need to succeed. Kirk’s story to Saavik in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, can now be reinterpreted to illustrate his desire to be perceived as incomparably strategic and unique.

It is my belief that this is an attempt to get two audiences to talk with one another, while simultaneously establishing Kirk’s character. The reboot allows both types of audiences, the knowing and the unknowing, to come together into a more inclusive dialogue, without downplaying the knowledge that either audience brings to the conversation. The reboot allows everyone to have access to this cultural capital. Everyone can be an expert in a particular iteration of a heterocosm, and therefore can help to create new meaning of the heterocosm as a whole.

## CHAPTER THREE

### STAR WARS, CULTURAL CAPITAL, AND OWNERSHIP

#### A Long Time Ago in a Galaxy Far, Far Away

In 1977, George Lucas changed the face of pop culture by releasing *Star Wars*. The film took the world by storm. *Star Wars* has since become a cultural phenomenon; fans have always clamored for more *Star Wars*, something that George Lucas was more than willing to provide. Looking at the ways in which George Lucas, and Lucasfilm, rigorously controlled *Star Wars* during his time at the helm of the franchise and then at the new directions the franchise is headed since his departure can help facilitate our understanding of cultural capital, notions of canon, and ownership. While many may not consider the new *Star Wars* trilogy a reboot per se, I do believe that it shares many of the qualities I have outlined for reboots, and that the new sequel trilogy actually helps to illustrate the functionality of the reboot I have been forwarding in this thesis. But to better understand how the new *Star Wars* films are representative of the functionality of reboots, it is imperative that we first consider the previous incarnation, and ways in which it was controlled and distributed.

#### The Creator and His Audience

Lucas and his audience have almost always had a contentious relationship. It was even the subject of a 2010 documentary titled *The People Vs. George Lucas*. Lucas has always attempted to rigidly control his franchise and



intellectual property. *Star Wars* fans have struggled to claim ownership of the franchise for decades. Jason Scott's "*Star Wars* as a Character-Oriented Franchise" helps to expand on this by going over the history between Lucas and Lucasfilm's desire to control what gets the *Star Wars* stamp and fans' desires and attempts to interact within the heterocosm. According to Scott, "Moving beyond managing and policing the brand of *Star Wars*, Lucasfilm have furthermore developed close supervision of the authorized stories featuring the *Star Wars* universe and characters, to ensure continuity, and consistency with what is termed the '*Star Wars* canon'" (13). This is what so much of the contention between Lucas and his fans comes down to: the canon. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, "canon" is quite difficult to define because of its plethora of uses, but the way Lucas and Lucasfilm have dictated control over their heterocosm reinforces the idea that the word "canon" has the connotation of "official."

It is this ability of Lucas to be able to decide what is official that gives him power over his fans. He was the sole person able to dictate what was canonical, and therefore he was able to decide what interpretative meaning was available within the heterocosm. However, his control did not stop fans from trying to interact, and in essence, claim ownership of the heterocosm. Marc Joly-Corcoran and Sarah Ludlow, in "Fans, Fics & Films... 'Thank the Maker(s)!'", further elaborate on Lucasfilm's strict control of their texts and the ways fans have attempted to claim ownership of these texts. Fans have been attempting to

interact with *Star Wars* since the original trilogy came out by publishing fan magazines and their own stories and continuations of the saga, so much so, that in 1981 Lucasfilm “requested that any stories, if they were to be created and distributed by fans, were to adhere to Lucasfilm standards” (30). Lucasfilm tried to ensure that anything fans created was in line with the auteur’s vision. The Lucasfilm standards gave a limited access to the narrative world of *Star Wars* because Lucas could not stop the fans from creating works, but he could do his best to make sure that they were within his interpretation of the narrative world he had created. As I have argued creating fan works can be seen as an attempt to claim ownership of the heterocosm, and as an attempt to decentralize the intents of the auteur. Joly-Corcoran and Ludlow elaborate on this by writing that “Crafting a new set of stories, or developing films based on the source text, become ways of creating and controlling a canon without having to follow the plot lines set by the original creator” (31). This illustrates the desire to interact with the canon from the audience, but it also illustrates the desire for control from the auteur. However, by creating a set of standards, Lucasfilm is demeaning, while seemingly encouraging, the interactions from fans. The Lucasfilm standards allow for only a small, limited interaction with the heterocosm that must ultimately be reined in.

Fans interacting with the heterocosm in any meaningful way is what gives the text the value that it has. It is this desire to interact with the canon that gives the text its cultural capital, but because Lucas was the creator and authority of

the *Star Wars* canon, and he was able to enforce a set of standards in order to restrict what fans could produce, he became the arbiter of cultural capital. Thus, he had the ability to impose his own beliefs of what was valuable within his own heterocosm. By trying to control what is officially *Star Wars*, George Lucas and Lucasfilm are illustrating John Guillory's claim that a canon has much to do with exclusion, primarily the exclusion to "the *means of cultural production*" (emphasis in original Guillory 18). Lucasfilm is excluding certain interactions and values of the narrative world. This, of course, devalues any sort of interpretation that fans may have of the *Star Wars* heterocosm.

Beyond trying to voice their own interpretations of the *Star Wars* heterocosm, fans must also come to terms with the idea that *Star Wars* is a product meant to be bought and sold. According to Scott "The fans' distinctive interests, values and ways of reading *Star Wars* negotiate the commodity elements of the franchise to stress their discerning taste and critical awareness, which is in contrast to Lucasfilm's dissemination of authorized information, often promoting consumption" (15). Lucas wants the fans to consume, and he is the provider of media for consumption, be that of texts, films, merchandise, and the like. This can be seen throughout the variety of merchandise that is labeled *Star Wars*, but a major example stems from Lucas's remastering and rereleasing of the original franchise. George Lucas is notorious for updating and changing his films, even though he testified in Congress against the colorization of classic black and white films (*The People vs. George Lucas*, 35 minutes). Something

that appears throughout *The People vs. George Lucas* is the idea that by creating all the toys and merchandise associated with *Star Wars*, Lucas was providing a sandbox for fans to play in. When Lucas released the remastered special editions of *Star Wars* in 1997, it was an attempt to take back his franchise. In the film, Steven S. Vrooman claims that with this release “George Lucas took away your sandbox. He took away your coloring book, and said, ‘No, no, no, it belongs to me again’” (20-21 minutes). He further claims that this move is a fan move, changing the product as a way to claim ownership, and that George Lucas is George Lucas’s biggest fan (22 minutes). This illustrates the desire of the creator to control his/her heterocosm. Because of the Lucasfilm standards in regard to fan productions, the sandbox is not necessarily taken away, but you can only play in it on the terms of the creator, in this case Lucas.

One prominent example that still earns the spite of fans to this day is the controversial change of having the bounty hunter Greedo fire first in a standoff between Harrison Ford’s Han Solo in the Mos Eisley cantina. In the original film, Han shoots Greedo before he has the chance to kill Han. However, in the remastered rereleases of the films, Greedo shoots first and misses from across a table. Lou Anders, in *The People vs. George Lucas*, claims that being upset about Han shooting second is “not geeky nitpick. When you go into the heart of a character, and you do something that changes that character’s dynamic, that’s not nitpicking. That’s destroying story. That’s betrayal” (25 minutes). This sense of betrayal makes sense because fans have built an entire set of knowledge

based upon these films, and George Lucas can just go back and change their entire interpretation of the heterocosm. Greedo shooting first completely changes the dynamic of the character arc that Han Solo goes through within the original *Star Wars* trilogy.

Han Solo begins the movie as a smuggler who does not care about anything but himself. He grows as a character and begins to see his role in the larger galactic struggle and eventually becomes the hero we know by the end of *Return of the Jedi*. By making Han's killing of Greedo reactionary, Lucas is trying to make audiences reconceptualize the character. Han Solo was not meant to be a murderous smuggler; he was meant to always be seen as a hero. Howard Tayler points out that "it's a small change, but it's a change that is informing the whole character" (*The People vs. George Lucas*, 26 minutes). The audience is being told that their characterization and interpretation of Han Solo has been wrong from the time the original movie was released to the time of the rerelease. Lucas seemed to be unhappy with fan interpretation of the Han Solo character, so he changed the text to reflect his preferred interpretation. According to an article by James Hibberd, "Lucas says Han shooting first in the Mos Eisley cantina—which is what happened in the original edit of 1977's debut *Star Wars* film—ran against the character's principles." In essence the fans are wrong, and their interpretation does not matter. Lucas will do whatever it takes for audiences to see the characters and world as he envisions it.

However, with the release of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, the first *Star Wars* film to have no direct influence from George Lucas, the interpretation of Han Solo is back into the hands of the audience, along with the rest of the heterocosm; the fans are able to reaffirm what they see as cultural capital from the *Star Wars* universe. *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* follows a young woman named Rey, who teams up with Finn—a runaway Storm Trooper—as they attempt to help return a droid to the Resistance in order to find Luke Skywalker. Along the way she meets Han Solo who attempts to help her in her mission. This film has so many allusions to the original trilogy that it is clearly made by fans, for fans. There is even a documentary on the Blu-ray that chronicles how everyone involved in this film was a huge fan of the original trilogy.

Turning back to Ralph Cohen's explication of Jameson's use of genre can be of help to explain why it is important that intellectual property ownership be diffused and incorporate more fan input into the heterocosm, as opposed to being under the complete control of an auteur. If, as Jameson claims, the genre is "a social contract between a writer and a particular public 'whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact,'" then paying attention to fan's desires and making them almost equal with the producers of the new film is a way to reinforce this contract (qtd in Cohen 208). With the example of the changing of who shot first—Han or Greedo—George Lucas was in fact betraying that social contract of genre. Under Jameson's premise, the public is meant to decide "the proper use of a particular cultural artifact," but this recharacterizing of

Han Solo takes away the role of the public (qtd. in Cohen 208). They are no longer able to play a role in the social contract. Allowing for intellectual property ownership to be dispersed amongst an audience actually helps to maintain this social contract. The parties involved in the contract become shifted from that of a writer to the public, to one form of the public to another aspect of that same public. It can help to make sure that the public gets to decide what “the proper use of a particular cultural artifact” is (qtd. in Cohen 208). That is not to say that the creators of the heterocosm are not important, but it is important to note that audiences have an equal role in the creation of cultural artifacts. When this contract is violated, it would make sense that fans would want to take control of it and do their best to reestablish the artifact’s proper use. If we think of the reboot as a genre, then Jameson’s social contract theory of genre becomes more important. This helps to explain why there is a diffusion of intellectual property and why the auteur becomes less important. Because most pop culture franchise heterocosms keep expanding, the auteur will almost certainly betray that public. Because the reboot is made by fans, the risk of breaking the social contract is less likely.

We can see through Han Solo’s role in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, that the screenwriters and fans of the franchise are rejecting Lucas’s insistence that Han Solo be interpreted as solely a hero, and fans get their preferred Han Solo back. When the audience first meets Han Solo in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, he has abandoned his hero role and has returned to his role as the

smuggler that fans of the original series loved. This illustrates a new facet to Sanders's assertion that adaptation is "involved in offering commentary on a source text" (Sanders, 18). In this case, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* is not entirely critiquing the original heterocosm, but is instead critiquing the revisions from the auteur. This can be explained because popular franchise heterocosms are not only informed by the film-text, but also the paratextual conversations surrounding the text. Han Solo's characterization within *Star Wars The Force Awakens* is a critique of the auteur's interpretation of him.

This reclaiming of Han Solo illustrates Julie Sanders's point that "adaptations and appropriations prove complicit in activating and reactivating the canonical status of certain texts and writers, even when the more politicized appropriation may be seeking to challenge that very status" (21). By having the character of Han Solo revert back to being a scoundrel, J.J. Abrams and his team are in effect "reactivating the canonical status" of the original trilogy, while simultaneously trying to subvert the reconceptualization of the character by Lucas (Sanders 21). Han Solo is a horrible person in this film. He double crosses everyone, is an illegal smuggler, has abandoned Leia Organa and their son because their son has turned to the Dark Side of the Force, and yet, the audience still roots for him, and he does ultimately die a hero. The film is able to navigate all of the perceptions and interpretations that the audience may have of the character. In the film when our two new protagonists meet Solo, they argue about what his role is.



Rey: You're Han Solo.

Finn: Han Solo? The Rebellion General?

Rey: No, the smuggler.

Finn: Wasn't he a war hero? (*Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, 42 minutes)

This exchange can help to illustrate a couple of facets of reboots. Firstly, the characters are illustrating, through their exchange of who Han Solo is, that there is a multiplicity of interpretations of the character, and all of them add up to who the character is. Additionally, this action might serve to “reinforce that canon by ensuring a continued interest in the original or source text, albeit in revised circumstances of understanding” (Sanders, 98). Finn’s questions about Han Solo’s roles might spark this “continued interest in the original” because audiences may come to see the original differently after experiencing this debate in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (Sanders, 98). Through Lucas’s rereleases, audiences are meant to interpret Han Solo in one way, but this reclaiming of Solo makes us see him in the audience’s preferred interpretation, while simultaneously reinforcing the canonical status of the original films. This back and forth between Rey and Finn actually reaffirms the original film before the recuts. If we look closely at the dialogue between these two characters, we can see that Finn asks questions about the roles Han Solo has assumed. Rey, on the other hand, does not ask questions. She speaks in declarative statements. She knows who Han Solo is, and that is the version that George Lucas tried to take away from fans.

This preferred characterization can be seen several times throughout *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. Firstly, Han Solo has returned to being a smuggler. He joins the narrative of the film by stealing back his ship from Rey and Finn, who in turn had stolen it from someone else. He is also smuggling illegal goods again, this time in the form of alien creatures called Rathtars (*Star Wars: The Force Awakens* 42 minutes). He also has a standoff with two gangs that he has stolen money from (*Star Wars: The Force Awakens* 44 minutes). His actions, from the moment we see the character again are all reminiscent of the way the character was introduced in the first released *Star Wars* film. He is brash and he acts as the ultimate authority.

Additionally, we can see that Han Solo sees himself as a smuggler above all else. When he is finally reunited with Leia, after an unspecified amount of time, the two discuss how they reacted to their son, Kylo Ren falling to the Dark Side of the Force. Solo claims that “[he] went back to the only thing [he] was ever any good at” (*Star Wars: The Force Awakens* 84 minutes). He went back to being a scoundrel and a smuggler, with the implication being that this is his true characterization. He went back to ripping people off. I believe that this could be interpreted as that dangerous man that fans of the original, unaltered, first film preferred.

This return to Han Solo’s original character illustrates the ways in which he can be interpreted and the preferred interpretation of the character. I think that the new protagonists of the film are also used in this instance to represent the

audience. For those audience members who may be new to the heterocosm, or who may have only grown up with Lucas's rereleased special editions of the original franchise, Rey and Finn represent those members. Rey represents the knowing audience, and Finn represents the unknowing audience. The scene almost gives a sense that Han Solo and the *Star Wars* heterocosm were lost, and they are being rediscovered by this new generation of heroes, similar to how Luke discovers the force in *Star Wars: Episode IV-A New Hope*. The film is acknowledging all these possibilities of who the character can be, and throughout the course of the film, Han Solo does assume all of these roles. What is most interesting in this analysis is that it is bound to change because of the upcoming young Han Solo movie.

#### Order of Experience

We can also see an attempt from Lucas to control his heterocosm through the prequel trilogy he released in the 1990s and early 2000s, *Star Wars: Episodes I-III*. Given the concepts of cultural capital and adaptation, there are several ways we can interpret these films. One important way is to look at the control of cultural capital that is being exhibited within the episode titles of the prequel trilogy. By ascribing that the prequel trilogy is *I-III* and the original trilogy is *IV-VI*, George Lucas is telling fans how to read and experience his heterocosm. The saga becomes less about the journey of Luke Skywalker, and the focus of the heterocosm changes to Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader, as he is the primary protagonist of the prequels and an important character within the

original trilogy. The heterocosm is meant to be experienced in the order that the creator has told us. However, this has not stopped fans from trying to gain a semblance of authority and control over the heterocosm.

When Heather Urbanski focuses on the ways in which fans interact with a canon and can create new thematic meaning from these texts, she is not writing about the ways in which fans attempt to own knowledge and a canon through the act of creating. Instead, she writes about the use of the reboot as a way in which a canon and its franchise stays alive and creates new meaning through the established mythologies of a science fiction franchise. Although it is not explicit, Urbanski's work does seem to suggest that there is a way for fans to own canons and franchises, but it is in a more intangible way than the fandom produced through *Star Wars*, namely the ways in which fans experience these franchises. She believes that the viewing order of reboots and the informing texts is a way in which to create new meaning from rebooted films. This is a way in which fans can claim ownership of these texts. The order in which the canon is experienced contributes to interpretation and thus creates new meanings. Urbanski claims that an "unavoidable element to consider in this analysis of medium is the proliferation of options for viewing these narratives. We no longer must watch films only in the theater, or television shows according to the broadcast networks' schedules" (53). The thematic knowledge gained from these texts is continually in flux because there does not have to be a set order of experience of the texts. Authors may have a preferred order—George Lucas's episode order for

instance—but this does not guarantee this is the order in which the text will be experienced. Using *Star Wars*, among other texts, Urbanski illustrates how the order of experience can change thematic interpretation, and thus the knowledge gained from the canon.

Viewing order is extremely important in shedding light on metaphorical ownership of the films, particularly the *Star Wars* films because they are meant to be seen as one collected story. Urbanski looks at the differences between watching the films in chronological order (at the time of her publication, *Episodes I-VI*) compared to watching the films in order of release (*Episodes IV-VI* followed by *Episodes I-III*). One example she cites is Yoda telling Luke that there is another Skywalker. She explains that “Yoda’s declaration that ‘There is another’ in *Episode V* is an anticipation that is most recognizable in chronological order because we, as an audience, *know* that there is another Skywalker, something that the attentive fan, watching in release order, might only guess” (78). Ultimately, the rearranging of the film order changes the way in which information is revealed and therefore received. This changes our reception to the text and how we further experience the saga. If the text can be rearranged then there is no limit to the knowledge that can be gained from it. If we gain knowledge from the thematic elements of franchises, then creating new knowledge from reboots and rearranged viewing orders, or more accurately orders of narrative experience, do facilitate a sort of fan ownership that takes away emphasis from the author/auteur. The franchise is created by the auteur, but meaning is made

by the audience. Urbanski's example with Yoda explaining there is another Skywalker illustrates that while an auteur can claim ownership of what is released and what is constituted as canonical, it is not an easy task to claim ownership and regulate the meaning of the text. However, these are not the only two ways in which to experience the films.

Fans have created a different order in which to experience the Lucas-helmed films dubbed the Machete Order. The Machete Order consists of watching *Episodes IV* and *V*, then watching *Episodes II* and *III*, before finally concluding the saga with *Episode VI* and completely ignoring *Episode I*. This order disregards chronology and order of release, and instead, focuses on the interpretation that is available given the way the information unfolds within the films. Jason Inman, on an episode of the YouTube channel Screen Junkies, claims that by watching in the Machete Order, our interpretation of the text changes:

what happens is you put Luke and Anakin on equal footing into *Return of the Jedi*. It changes your perspective of Vader in *Return of the Jedi*, and it actually helps set up why he would turn to the good side. Whereas if you just watch the original trilogy, ...at the very end for Darth to kinda just suddenly turn, you're just like "wait a minute, he was just shooting the guy in [*Episode IV*] and what? Why?" ("Batman v. Superman Trailer," 31 minutes).

This Machete Order represents the ability for audiences to further decentralize the auteur's vision, in this case determining a different order of experience than

what the auteur decides. Urbanski writes that “in reboots, fandom and canon complicate this neat sense of authority because fans, armed with (in some cases) decades of canonical knowledge, often decide for themselves which sequence in a narrative they will follow” (71). Through the Machete Order, fans are able to construct their own narrative in a sense, and further decide how exposition within the narrative unfolds. In this way, the audience can evaluate their own interpretative viewing habits of *Star Wars* and experience the films in a way that is representative of their own desires and values. Jason Inman further elaborates on the interpretive value of the Machete Order by stating

It gives a layer of Anakin's hero's journey...and it makes that fight in *Return of the Jedi* more personal and more epic because it is about a father, and we get to see how far this father went to just throw his life away...against his son (“Batman v. Superman Trailer,” 35 minutes)

By removing a prescribed order from an auteur, audiences are able to construct the heterocosm in their own preferred interpretation. Kathleen Williams, in her analysis of fan-edited movie trailers, mentions that “Meaning is not fixed in a feature film; it is up for negotiation and manipulation by viewers through their memories and by creating their own objects” (263). The Machete Order is representative of such an object. The fans are negotiating the meaning of the heterocosm by deciding how best to experience its narrative. Additionally, this idea reinforces Steven S. Vrooman's claim that George Lucas reediting and rereleasing his films is a fan move and that Lucas is Lucas's biggest fan (*The*

*People vs. George Lucas*, 22 minutes). It decentralizes Lucas as auteur and puts him at the same level as the audience, albeit he is an audience member with a lot of power and money.

We can additionally see this decentralization of an auteurial prescription of viewing order through the episode numbers in the new sequel trilogy. While the traditional opening crawl of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* does contain an episode number, the official title, as listed on the blu-ray box is simply *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. The filmmakers are not emphasizing a particular way to read/experience the heterocosm. The episode number exists more to explain where the story fits into the overall narrative, but the order in which the films are experienced is not the focus. Looking back to Guillory's definition of literacy might help to explain what is going on here in regard to the episode numbers. Guillory claims that literacy

is not simply...the capacity to read but...the *systematic regulation of reading and writing*, a complex social phenomenon corresponding to the following set of questions: Who reads? What do they read? How do they read? In what social and institutional circumstances? Who writes? In what social and institutional contexts? For whom? (18).

The episode numbers are a way for Lucas to control the literacy of his audience. He decided what you read, and how you were meant to read it, and the Lucasfilm standards set up the social and institutional circumstance of reading and writing, and helped to narrow down who would be able to read and write. Now that the



heterocosm is no longer in the hands of George Lucas, the question of literacy takes on new meaning. The audience has turned into the author. The public has even fought Lucas on his strict control of their literacy through the Machete Order and through how the new films are marketed, with the emphasis being taken off of the prescribed episode number. Fans are taking agency of how they read and can actually rewrite the original heterocosm, especially with the Machete Order because it reorders the films and completely disregards one of them.

But, even though fans have a semblance of agency within the construction of the heterocosm now, there are still some apprehensions about the new directions the heterocosm is taking. There might not be a reason to fear George Lucas deciding the cultural capital of *Star Wars*, as it is now owned by Disney. However, there might be the fear that those working on the new films will disregard what fans have deemed as cultural capital, due to their own experiences with the *Star Wars* heterocosm. This might take the form of retconning, or changing characters, or even disregarding aspects of the heterocosm that fans have found highly valuable. There may be a fear of changes to the heterocosm, but I feel that this is lessened because there are multiple teams working on these new films. It almost appears as though the way these films will be made is to safeguard against a controlling auteur. There should no longer be a fear of an auteur detracting from the cultural value that fans have had. This heterocosm is not going to be put into the hands of a solitary auteur. Every film is going to be handled by a different creative team, all of whom

are fans of the heterocosm. J.J Abrams and his creative team helmed *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, while the next film, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, will be helmed by Rian Johnson, and the third film in the sequel trilogy will be helmed by Colin Trevorrow. Every installment will be handled by a new creative team, which illustrates a decentralization of auteurship. There is no worry of the creator going back and changing the narrative world, only expanding it.

We can see this in the ways that fan interaction finds itself reemerging within *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. When it was announced that the new sequel trilogy would not be adapting storylines from the Expanded Universe of novels and comic books, many fans were outraged that what they had seen as canonical and the continuation of the original trilogy were being dismissed. However, this may not actually be the case. As pointed out by screenwriter Max Landis, on an episode of the YouTube channel Screen Junkies, “they got rid of the Expanded Universe...that doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist...because Han and Leia’s son going to the Dark Side...there are elements of the Expanded Universe in this movie” (“Star Wars: The Force Awakens SPOILER Review!” 36 minutes). Another guest on the same episode, Ken Napzok, reiterates that there were definite elements from the Expanded Universe in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*: “They’re definitely nudging and making some nods to the old canon. The Sun Crusher type of thing was a little tie-in to this planet, the Starkiller Base” (“Star Wars: The Force Awakens SPOILER Review!” 38 minutes). I am inclined to agree with these two. The Expanded Star Wars Universe is not gone. It still

exists and it gives knowing audiences the opportunity to have certain plot elements affirmed for them in subsequent *Star Wars* films. If anything, it opens the doors for unknowing audiences to be exposed to the value of these texts, of which the knowing audience is already aware. I think this illustrates the ways in which reboots open up dialogues between different types of fans. It is representative of Sanders's claim that "The inherent intertextuality of literature encourages the ongoing, evolving production of meaning, and an ever-expanding network of textual meanings" (3). It allows for these ideas and plot elements to inspire new *Star Wars* films, whether they be a part of the saga, or part of the series of anthology films that are to be released in between releases of the saga (i.e the *Star Wars* anthology film *Rogue One*).

The heterocosm is being directed and controlled by fans, and it is being made for fans. The auteur/creator is no longer in control of the heterocosm. Because the roles are becoming blurred in the creation and reception of art, and the auteur is not influencing how the heterocosm is to be received, the entirety of the heterocosm is now open to more diverse analysis. There are no more rules. It further becomes a medium to explore ideas because the reboot detracts focus from the creation and ownership, and shifts focus toward the issues presented within the heterocosm. Truly with the reboot, everyone can feel that they own a piece of a particular narrative world.

## Conclusion

In this thesis, I hope I have demonstrated why film reboots are important artifacts that are ripe with potential for study. I hope that I have been able to demonstrate how rebooted film franchises are adaptations in their own right, and how the motives for rebooted film franchises are more than just economic in nature. In fact, the reasoning for a rebooted franchise is to reaffirm its cultural worth and value, and through rebooting a film franchise, the roles of author/auteur, critic, and audience become far more blurred. Using this framework allows an analysis of specific reboots and how these reboots decentralize the role of the auteur. This decentralization helps to put emphasis on the role the audience and fans have in the production and ownership of cultural capital.

Of course, this is not the be all end all for analysis of reboots. I fully expect reboots to continue to evolve as they become more and more successful and prevalent in popular culture. But beyond looking at the roles of the author, critic, and audience, and the ways that these different parties try to own the heterocosms of these intellectual properties, what else should be looked at? How can this possible framework be used to further analyze reboots? I think one important aspect of this thesis that is particularly important for further study and analysis is the dialogue created amongst the different parties involved. The reboot is expected to continue a franchise indefinitely, so there is considerable space for audiences, authors, and critics to talk with one another between films.

A film in a rebooted franchise allows for comparison and critical discussion. But it also provides a space for speculation. This space can provide great opportunity to further analyze the effects of rebooted franchises and how they give a sense of ownership. In this space for speculation (generally provided on comment sections and forums on the internet), fans can construct their own narratives and theories, which allow for a critical discussion of the heterocosm as fans can discuss the strengths and weaknesses of such constructions.

Additionally, I think that this framework can allow for further exploration of a seeming contradiction in our postmodern and capitalistic sensibilities. The reboot might be able to help us explore the ways in which postmodern theories and ideas conflict or find themselves represented in these capitalist ventures. I think the way we perceive ownership and the way it actually manifests itself can benefit from the framework I have attempted to provide here. It is my hope that this framework can provide a multiplicity of ways to analyze reboots, and to illustrate that it is worthy of study as a cultural phenomenon. This work can be greatly expanded as reboots continue to be made because this happens and heterocosms continue to expand, the reboot will begin to evolve into new forms. Ideally, as the form evolves, so too will the ideas found within this thesis. This thesis is a starting point for future conversations, be that of the relationship between an author/auteur and his audience, or ideas of cultural capital. Many of these ideas can even be applied to other film franchises that are not reboots, such as the relatively recent phenomena of shared cinematic universes.

Finally, I hope that this thesis has illustrated the importance, and even the treasure trove of analysis that can be found in reboots. It is my belief that by analyzing reboots and their heterocosms, a stronger critical analysis and consciousness can be fostered within a mass population. It is a high hope to be sure, but I think the only way that this can happen is through an engagement with mass culture. Reboots are tailor made for fostering critical engagement on a massive scale.

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