

## 10. How Star Wars Became Museological

Transmedia Storytelling in the Exhibition Space

*Beatriz Bartolomé Herrera and Philipp Dominik Keidl*

Star Wars's production and reception histories—not to mention the millennia-long history of the storyworld itself—have been documented across books, television specials, DVD extras, interviews, articles, wikis, and fan-run websites. Another important site to encounter the franchise's history is the museum. In fact, with the sale of Lucasfilm to Disney in 2012, George Lucas has turned his attention from filmmaking and producing to the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, which is set to open in Los Angeles and will house his collection of paintings, illustrations, comics, props, films, and digital art.<sup>1</sup>

This museum project is not the first time that Lucas has appeared in the role of art collector, philanthropist, and museologist. Since the early 1990s, Lucasfilm has licensed and co-curated several themed exhibitions for museums, science centers, and other exposition venues, offering visitors detailed insights into the production process through the display of various objects from Lucas's cinematic oeuvre. Star Wars-themed exhibitions have been the most popular of Lucasfilm's exhibitions by far, bringing large numbers of visitors into many different institutions. For instance, throughout its fifteen-month run from October 1997 to January 1999, *The Magic of Myth* drew more than 900,000 visitors to the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum (NASM), becoming one of the most popular shows in the institution's history.<sup>2</sup> However, despite the franchise's growing museum presence, the study of exhibitions has only played a minor role in Star Wars scholarship. The few studies addressing exhibitions mostly discuss the complex and mixed perceptions of the franchise's cultural status and

1 After the unsuccessful plans to build the museum in San Francisco and Chicago, Lucas announced in January 2017 that the project would be realized in Exposition Park in Los Angeles. At the time of writing, the museum has no official opening date.

2 Kevin M. Williams, "Exploring the Myth that Is 'Star Wars,'" *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 14, 2000. *Star Wars the Magic of Myth* Press Clippings Chicago, Accession 07-135, Box 10, The Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C.

its use as an educational tool within art, science, natural history, film, and technology museums.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, we redirect the debates of cultural and educational value to a discussion of exhibitions' role in Star Wars's transmedia economy. We argue that Star Wars-themed exhibitions function as a space for managing and refocusing transmedia expansion and narrative coherence. In structure, form, and content, museum exhibitions are complex transmedial sites engaged with current understandings of and practices pertaining to stories and creativity. In particular, we are interested in how these exhibitions manage Star Wars's constantly expanding storyworld and mediate debates about canonicity, authorial hierarchies, and collaborative creation. For some scholars, transmedia storytelling opens up increased possibilities for "participatory authorship" and "collaborative spectatorship"; for others, however, it represents an industrial strategy where participation means the "continuous consumption of texts that narratively and financially supplement a franchise."<sup>4</sup>

Transmedia storytelling problematizes notions of authorship by simultaneously encouraging collaborative productions and reaffirming creative authority. Indeed, the latter assures "audiences that someone is overseeing the transmedia text's expansion and creating meaningful connections between texts."<sup>5</sup> Our chapter shows how Star Wars-themed exhibitions contribute to the processes of author and content management on three levels. First, they position Lucas as the ultimate world architect and creative authority, thereby sidelining other authors' contributions. Second, in the translation of the films to the museum, the curator emerges as another mediating authorial figure, even if Lucasfilm strictly oversees their curatorial agency. Third, they encourage narrative speculation and expansion through interactive activities, but also frequently limit and regulate visitors' creative contributions through copyright and reaffirmations of the canonical boundaries set by Lucasfilm. A study of these three authorial figures provides insight into how exhibitions configure Star Wars's collective memories in the museum

3 See Matt Hills, "Star Wars in Fandom, Film Theory, and the Museum: The Cultural Status of the Cult Blockbuster," in *Movie Blockbusters*, ed. Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2003), 178-189; Ian Peters, "Hello Shoppers?: Themed Spaces, Immersive Popular Culture Exhibition, and Museum Pedagogy" (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2015).

4 Suzanne Scott, "Who's Steering the Mothership? The Role of the Fanboy Auteur in Transmedia Storytelling," in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, ed. Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson (New York: Routledge, 2013), 43.

5 Scott, "Role of the Fanboy Auteur," 43.

space, where institutional priorities, visitors' creative contributions, and industrial management intersect and sometimes collide.

### A Brief History of Star Wars-Themed Exhibitions

Star Wars-themed exhibitions played a crucial part in the Star Wars renaissance of the 1990s, marking the end of the so-called Dark Ages, a term often used to describe the period between 1985 and 1991. Following the release of *Return of the Jedi*, no major related productions were planned or realized.<sup>6</sup> The first Star Wars exhibitions accompanied content released concurrently as part of what is known today as the EU. Beginning with Timothy Zahn's successful set of novels, the Thrawn trilogy (1991-1993), a number of notable items were released, thus demonstrating the franchise's continuing creative and economic potential. These included Micro Machines, Topps trading cards, several video games, a new line of comics now licensed to Dark Horse Comics, a number of re-launched Kenner toys, and the introduction of the fan magazine *Star Wars Insider*.<sup>7</sup> Both *The George Lucas Exhibition* in Tokyo in 1993 and *The Magic of Myth* in 1997 were launched in this period of revitalized interest. As with the EU productions, the exhibitions are more than simply ancillary products in a well-oiled marketing machine. They are important sites for understanding the tensions that arise in the process of world-building, brand-building, and world-selling that began after the first trilogy's cinematic run.<sup>8</sup>

Star Wars exhibitions displayed the film's production materials, props, costumes, and narrative tropes in order to position the franchise as a cross-generational cultural symbol. After years of accumulating dust in the Lucasfilm warehouses, production materials were unboxed, restored, and made visible for *The George Lucas Exhibition*. Organized by Hata International in collaboration with Lucasfilm, the show celebrated the director's imagination and creativity by presenting his complete oeuvre up to that date. At the same time, the Smithsonian had begun planning its own exhibition project, and requested the same objects for a Star Wars exhibition at the NASM. *The Magic of Myth*, which presented the Star Wars films' production history

6 William Proctor and Matthew Freeman, "The First Step into a *Smaller World*: The Transmedia Economy of Star Wars," in *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds: A Subcreation Studies Anthology*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2017), 223.

7 Freeman and Proctor, "Transmedia Economy of Star Wars," 225.

8 Freeman and Proctor, "Transmedia Economy of Star Wars," 226.

through an exploration of classical mythologies and heroic narratives, was displayed in various US and Australian venues from 1997 until January 2003. Since then, Star Wars-themed exhibitions have become a constant presence on the international museum circuit, approaching more or less the same selection of objects through the curatorial lenses of art, science, and popular culture. *The Art of Star Wars* (Barbican Centre, 2000); *Star Wars: Art of the Starfighter* (Smithsonian Institution, 2001); *Where Science Meets the Imagination* (Boston Science Museum, 2006); *Star Wars: The Exhibition* (Cité des Sciences, Paris, 2006); *Star Wars: Identities* (Montreal Science Centre, 2012); *Rebel, Jedi, Princess, Queen: Star Wars and the Power of Costume* (The Museum of Pop Culture, Seattle 2015); *An Art Odyssey* (Le Café Pixel, France, 2015); and *Visions* (The Mori Arts Center, Tokyo, 2015) are among the best-known examples of the franchise's extended museological life.<sup>9</sup>

Star Wars exhibitions have been profitable for museums, even though their production and rental is expensive. For example, renting the Smithsonian's third Star Wars traveling exhibition *Rebel, Jedi, Princess, Queen: Star Wars and the Power of Costume* for a period of 22 weeks cost \$US 400,000. However, this was still a profitable investment given the large crowds and media attention these shows attract. In March 2014—two weeks before its final run at the Tech Museum of Innovation (San José, California) and 20 venues and nine years into the exhibition's tour—3,000,000 people had visited *Where Science Meets the Imagination*. Moreover, an evaluation conducted for the Boston Museum of Science (MOS), which originally produced *Where Science Meets the Imagination*, indicated that interest in Star Wars exhibitions also impacted general admissions, and encouraged ticket sales to infrequent visitors at a higher rate than other exhibitions in the museum.<sup>10</sup>

As the evaluation explains,

over 75.0% of respondents reported coming to the site that day specifically to see the Star Wars exhibition, [...] about 50.0% of the audiences

9 The exhibitions listed here have circulated widely across several museums, most of them situated in North America, Europe, and Australia. Many exhibitions, in fact, continue to do so (*Identities* and *The Power of Costume*). In this chapter, we list the museums where exhibitions initially opened, omitting—for reasons of space—all the other sites where they have also been presented.

10 Carey E. Tisdal, *Summative Evaluation of Star Wars: Where Science Meets Imagination Museum of Science* (Boston: Tisdal Consulting), 2007, 34. *Exhibitfiles*, accessed February 27, 2017, [http://www.exhibitfiles.org/dfilez/ReviewFinding/247/original/Star\\_\\_Wars\\_\\_Summative\\_\\_EvaluationReport\\_\\_Final.pdf](http://www.exhibitfiles.org/dfilez/ReviewFinding/247/original/Star__Wars__Summative__EvaluationReport__Final.pdf).

across sites were infrequent visitors [and] the exhibition was successful in attracting some atypical science center and science museum visitors than it would first appear by looking at the numbers alone.<sup>11</sup>

The 2013-2014 annual report of the Canada Science and Technology Corporation also highlights that *Where Science Meets the Imagination* was far from a one-hit wonder. Its report on *Identities* listed attendance numbers of 130,000 over a five-month period at the Canada Aviation and Space Museum and “significant media coverage, with more than 80 unpaid mentions.”<sup>12</sup> The report also highlights the positive outcomes of the museum’s cross-promotional strategy, which offered visitors a 50% discount on admission to the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum and the Canada Science and Technology Museum, leading to “a spike in attendance across the board.”<sup>13</sup> The exhibition’s marketability is also evident in the production of specific merchandise sold on site, at the gift shop, and online. In addition to catalogues, this includes postcards, stationery, clothes, posters, and mugs with *Identities* logos and imagery.

## Museums, Canon-Making, and Authorship

Museums and transmedia storytelling both mobilize ideas around individual creativity and authorship. Exhibitions about cinema and its production histories, in particular, frequently emphasize individual creators and canonical films.<sup>14</sup> They display discourses of authorship, offering material evidence of a director’s filmic style and personal obsessions. For example, exhibitions featuring the names of Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick, Tim Burton, and, of course, George Lucas, have translated the work of (white, male) film directors into the exhibition format.<sup>15</sup> In doing

11 Tisdal, *Summative Evaluation of Star Wars*, 34.

12 Canada Science and Technology Corporation. 3 *Fascinating Museums: Canada Science and Technology Corporation Annual Report 2013-2014*, accessed February 27, 2017, <http://technoscience.ca/doc/content/cstmc/AnnualReport2013-2014.pdf>, 18.

13 Canada Science and Technology Corporation, *Annual Report*, 18.

14 For a detailed history of cinema-themed exhibitions see Alison Trope, “Le Cinéma pour le Cinéma: Making a Museum of the Moving Image,” *The Moving Image* 1, no.1 (2002): 29-67; and Alison Trope, *Stardust Monuments: The Selling and Saving of Hollywood* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2012), 11-88.

15 Examples include *Hitchcock and Art: Fatal Coincidences* (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2001); *Stanley Kubrick: The Exhibition* (Deutsches Filmmuseum and Deutsches Architekturmuseum 2004); and *Tim Burton* (Museum of Modern Art, 2010).

so, these exhibitions not only perpetuate contested ideas about individual creativity, but also make use of the author as a promotional discourse, just as the most commercially driven media-industrial economies commonly do.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, their use of recognizable names serves as a branding tool throughout synergistic and cross-promotional efforts, providing immediate recognition and encouraging consumption.<sup>17</sup>

In transmedia economies, authors add textual coherence to largely dispersed narratives like Star Wars. Henry Jenkins writes that “the most successful transmedia franchises have emerged when a single creator or creative unit maintains control.”<sup>18</sup> For Jenkins, Star Wars is an example of transmedia storytelling that succeeds because Lucasfilm manages to maintain textual coherence while offering something new with each media expansion. Fans who want to get the whole picture are propelled to “hunt” and “gather” bits and pieces across various Star Wars productions.<sup>19</sup> The task, then, is to determine what constitutes the whole. This, however, has become a terrain of dispute between Star Wars fans, Lucasfilm, and now Disney, due to the growing amount of canonical, quasi-canonical, or apocryphal materials constituting the galaxy. These conflicts over authenticity, labeled by some fans as the “canon wars,”<sup>20</sup> have divided fans between those who recognize Lucas’s authority above all and those who deem the narratives developed in the Star Wars EU and through fans’ creative contributions as equally valid.<sup>21</sup> These controversies are silenced within the context of the exhibition space, which grants Lucas exclusive creative authority.

Exhibition labels, catalogues, audio commentaries, and promotional discourses consistently reference Lucas as the creative force behind Star Wars. Lucas’s life experiences, artistic tastes, and personal commentary are brought into the exhibitions as a framing device to understand creative and narrative outcomes. The emphasis on Lucas was initially established in 1993’s *The George Lucas Exhibition*, which celebrated him as a storyteller and filmmaker with the skills to craft and realize his artistic and narrative vision

16 For a detailed discussion on the commercial auteur see Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam* (London: Routledge, 1991).

17 Leora Hadas, “A New Vision: J.J. Abrams, *Star Trek*, and Promotional Authorship,” *Cinema Journal* 56, no. 2 (2017): 46-66.

18 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 106.

19 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 21.

20 For a detailed overview on the canon wars, see “The Star Wars Canon: Overview,” *Canon Wars*, accessed March 8, 2017, [www.canonwars.com](http://www.canonwars.com).

21 Freeman and Proctor, “Transmedia Economy of Star Wars,” 228.

across several films. The promotional materials and exhibition catalogue that were circulated beyond the gallery produced an image of authorship tied to the idea of a unique creative mind. The catalogue cover and poster even depicted Lucas in the center with his arms crossed, surrounded by Star Wars props and models, thereby explicitly signaling his mastery over the storyworld.

Despite expanding the focus from the director's persona to broader themes, subsequent exhibitions have continued to position Lucas as the visionary architect behind the franchise. *The Magic of Myth's* audio tour provided commentaries through two main narrative strategies. First, Lucas's personal anecdotes detailed the writing process and discussed everyday life experiences, such as how his dog made its way into the film by inspiring the character of Chewbacca.<sup>22</sup> Second, the production crew recounted the creative labor involved in bringing to life Lucas's visions, such as the complex sound effects of the films. More explicitly, museum labels in *The Power of Costume* reaffirmed Lucas as the main source of knowledge: quotes made reference to what "George wanted," what he "told" his creative team, what "was a priority for Lucas," what was done "at Lucas' request," and how the team helped to "realize his vision." Even though the exhibition labels mentioned members of the creative teams and other directors involved in the production of the films, the labels firstly emphasized Lucas's individual vision as the ultimate Star Wars authority.

Official endorsements by Lucas, such as the ones presented in the exhibitions, have become a point of reference for many fans who treasure the narrative coherence of a clearly delimited world. Lucasfilm's textual authority, however, has resulted in a hierarchical system "with multiple levels of authenticity," with the films occupying a position of privilege.<sup>23</sup> Novels, comics, video games, and television series have been set apart as ambiguous products partly dismissed by Lucas as second-tier sub-worlds, in spite of the fact that they are also embraced by Lucasfilm Licensing and fans. For their part, the exhibitions have become places to encounter, remember, and celebrate the films, but they also replicate industrial mandates that obliterate sections of the Star Wars world, particularly those that have been created by other authors through licensing or fan engagement. In doing so, exhibitions construct and disseminate a selective memory of the

22 Antenna Audio Production, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth* Audio Tour Script, 1999, Accession 07-135, Box 12, National Air and Space Museum, Exhibits Design Division, Exhibit Records, 1991-1999, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C.

23 Freeman and Proctor, "Transmedia Economy of Star Wars," 222.



franchise that does not reflect transmedia storytelling's complex narrative organization.

## Transmedia Memory and Curatorial Agency

Building on Maurice Halbwachs's research on the interrelationship between individual and communal memories, collective memory studies have examined how the ways in which we encounter and share the past in our everyday lives shape perceptions and beliefs.<sup>24</sup> As "memory institutions," museums function as "social entities that select, document, contextualize, preserve, index, and thus canonize elements of humanity's culture, historical narratives, individual, and collective memories."<sup>25</sup> When exhibitions display Star Wars, they clearly function as "memory institutions," by selecting, classifying, and rewriting what we know about the franchise's content and production history. Such systematic processes, where some objects and narratives are included while others are excluded, become particularly relevant when we think of the central role of memory in recalling transmedia narratives across multiple media.

Colin Harvey explains that memory is a defining factor of transmedia storytelling, since "characters, plots, settings, mythologies and themes necessarily have to be remembered from transmedial element to element in order for the various elements to be considered as part of the same storyworld."<sup>26</sup> In writing about encounters with Darth Vader across the films, video games, and novels, he describes how each medium not only requires adaptation to its specific configurations, but also "to engage with the work transmedially by recalling the character of Darth Vader from his other appearances in the broader storyworld."<sup>27</sup> Harvey then introduces the concept of transmedia memory to examine the various material and narrative incarnations of a storyworld across media, assessing the impact of copyright laws, licensing agreements, and other legal restrictions on the making and reception of transmedia narratives. Given museums' roles as "memory institutions," transmedia memory is therefore key to examining how Star Wars exhibitions produce, commodify, and circulate a distinct

24 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

25 Guy Pessach, "[Networked] Memory Institutions: Social Remembering, Privatization and Its Discontents," *Cardozo Arts and Entertainment Law Journal* 26 (2008): 73.

26 Colin Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia: Narrative, Play and Memory Across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 38.

27 Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 3.



remembrance of the franchise that is tied to Lucasfilm's control over its contours.

Exhibitions contribute to building a cohesive and unified world, recreating a state of transmedia amnesia whereby non-canonical works, including those co-scripted by Lucas which rank low on canonical hierarchies, are removed from official commemorations of the franchise. A notable example is the complete absence from exhibition displays of the notorious *Holiday Special*, the 1978 television program that first introduced the character Boba Fett in an animated short. A number of fans, and especially Lucas, consider the program an "anomalous embarrassment,"<sup>28</sup> but the filmmaker's attempts to keep the 98-minute special out of circulation have been jeopardized by fans who have uploaded it to online video portals. In comparison with the internet, the exhibition space is, of course, easier to regulate; not only are the unwanted memories of Star Wars's past easier to conceal, but exhibitions also permit Lucasfilm to rewrite Star Wars's official history. This has been the case with the character of Boba Fett. Labels in *Identities* explained his origins by referring to his second appearance in *The Empire Strikes Back*, not his infamous debut in the *Holiday Special*. This intentional act of omission goes even further: its animated section was erased from the franchise's history in favor of *The Clone Wars*, which was the only animated production on display.

Rewritings of the Star Wars canon thus raise the question of how much Lucasfilm intervenes in the curatorial process of the exhibitions, regulating what to remember as well as the ways in which visitors are invited to engage with the displays. When we look at the makeup of curatorial teams—which, among museum curators and scientific experts, included in some instances in-house personnel—Lucasfilm's role becomes clearer. For example, Laela French, current Director of Archives at the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, co-curated the *Identities* and *The Power of Costume* exhibitions. While we know little about how curatorial responsibilities are distributed in these highly interdisciplinary teams, it would seem that collaboration and coproduction are important aspects of the process. However, archival research on the development of *The Magic of Myth* a few years earlier illuminates the process and provides a model to understand how Lucasfilm oversees curatorial teams' proposals through their licensing agreements.

Contracts signed between Lucasfilm and the Smithsonian demanded that displays should only be composed of "original creative elements [...]"

28 Will Brooker, *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 103.

which appear in and have been associated with the motion pictures.<sup>29</sup> The vagueness of the term “original creative elements” seems open to interpretation, but the exclusion of the EU and other non-canonized productions like the *Holiday Special* indicates a reading of “original” very much in line with Lucas’s delineation of canonical texts and his consistent privileging of the films. Lucasfilm’s right to “review and comment upon the overall ‘look’ of the exhibit” restrains curatorial independence even further.<sup>30</sup> What is more, other typical curatorial activities were also covered by the agreement, including public programs, audio tours, crowd control, exhibition promotion, book production, and the premiere event. The agreement granted Lucasfilm final say over the objects and narratives on display as much as the ways in which the museum designed interactions with the public.

As a result of these regulations, exhibitions contribute to the strengthening of a sanctioned but incomplete version of the Star Wars world, offering details about the galaxy and its inhabitants without ever contradicting canonical readings or including “secondary” texts. *The Magic of Myth*, *Where Science Meets the Imagination*, *Identities*, and *The Power of Costume* reinforce existing hierarchies that position Lucas as the only essential creative contributor. Despite these restrictive exhibition protocols, curatorial teams still open up new points of entry into Star Wars by offering scientific, technological, and anthropological understandings of the characters, geographies, and customs of the storyworld. In this way, exhibitions help build a rich and complex world where humans coexist with equally developed alien societies and technologies. *Identities*, in its exploration of subject formation around the character of Luke and Anakin, offered a tour of Star Wars’s different societies and species, including a description of different Force-sensitivities and a closer look at planets and species that could not be given as much detail in the films. While curatorial teams are indeed subjected to strict regulations that shape what and how we remember Star Wars, the exhibitions’ contributions go beyond the mere encyclopedic recounting and expansion of texts. Curatorial teams behind exhibition design bring about novel readings of Star Wars that, using Jenkins’s term, act as “cultural activators” propelling visitors and fans to decipher, speculate, and elaborate further.<sup>31</sup>

29 Licence Agreement, 1995, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, Accession 11-072, Box 1, National Air and Space Museum, Exhibits Design Division, Exhibit Records, 1991-1999, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C., 1.

30 License Agreement, 2.

31 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 95.

We can thus think of exhibition curatorial teams as transmedia co-authors, mediating collective memories, rewriting franchise history, and generating fan commentary within the limitations of copyright and licensing agreements that regulate the process. As Jenny Kidd explains, contemporary exhibition practices are transmedial and are enmeshed in the processes of scripting and distributing information through different media forms such as films, museum labels, audio guides, interactive games, and online platforms, among others.<sup>32</sup> In translating Star Wars films from the screen into the museum's transmedial immersive environments, curatorial teams make use of descriptions (labels, audio guides, texts), images (stills, set photography, concept art, film excerpts, and additionally produced materials), sounds (sound effects, dialogue passages, scores), and interactive elements (games, displays that have to be activated, hands-on activities). *Identities* featured short explanatory films and interactive games that used original footage from the first two trilogies and animations and charts, each providing insight and expounding different aspects of the exhibition's themes of subjectivity and psychology. In *The Magic of Myth*, the narrative was less structured around immersive media installations, yet it also included a film produced specifically for the exhibition that showcased interviews with the main actors and Lucas, excerpts from the first trilogy, and films Lucas drew inspiration from.<sup>33</sup> Curators developed this "museum movie" so that visitors could make transversal connections between the objects and the Star Wars films.

Exhibition media and interactive elements encourage visitors to participate in the expansion of the storyworld. Edutainment activities invite visitors to use their creativity (within the boundaries of approved canons and selective historical accounts of its past). In *Where Science Meets the Imagination*, MOS included smaller creative tasks. The exhibition put visitors into the role of engineers, who were asked to design their own virtual cyborgs, droid characters, levitating vehicles, spaceports, moisture farms, and walled Jawa towns at different workstations. *Identities* went even further and made an interactive game the driving force behind its exhibition narrative. The exhibition was entirely structured around an "Identity Quest" where visitors were asked to translate their personality traits into a new

32 Jenny Kidd, *Museums in the New Mediascape: Transmedia, Participation, Ethics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 3.

33 Meta Filmworks, Exhibition proposal and bid for film project, 1995. *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, Accession 11-072, Box 1, National Air and Space Museum, Exhibits Design Division, Exhibit Records, 1991-1999, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C.

Star Wars character. In twelve steps, visitors built their avatars by selecting their characters' species, gender, family, culture, homeworld, mentors, friends, defining life events, occupation, and values, and ended by choosing whether they wanted to give in to the dark side or not. Before visitors left the exhibition, their character's biography was visualized on a large screen, with references to the choices made throughout the quest. Character images and biographies were later available for download via email.

Lucasfilm's right to veto curatorial proposals as expressed through licensing agreements also impacts the range of activities and participatory elements present in the exhibitions. When the Smithsonian's educational department proposed the activity "Write the next episode," which invited visitors to speculate about what happens after *Return of the Jedi*,<sup>34</sup> Lucasfilm rejected the proposal and referred to potential intellectual property (IP) infractions, as visitors would have relied on copyrighted materials.<sup>35</sup> This decision also resonated with Lucas's ambiguous relation to fan fiction, especially works with graphic descriptions of sex, violence, and substance abuse.<sup>36</sup> The main "Identity Quest" in *Identities* could be interpreted as an opening toward user-generated content, even though restrictions in the avatar's circulation and use point more towards a refinement of IP control. Before visitors could access their avatars and personal biographies, they had to agree to hand over all image rights to Lucasfilm. They could share their avatars online if they did not modify them or remove the trademark, thus contributing with their own labor to the exhibition's promotional gain through social media. Of course, agreement to terms and conditions does not necessarily mean user compliance, but it is still important to note that this form of directed user-generated content comes closer to "fanagement"<sup>37</sup> than to collaborative authorship and participatory spectatorship.

The regulated practices of curation within the controlled space of the museum therefore represent an ambiguous development common for trans-media projects. Visitors to Star Wars exhibitions are invited to partake in the

34 Memorandum from exhibit committee to Mary Henderson, Impact Statement Star Wars, September 30, 1993, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, Accession 11-072, Miscellanea 1, National Air and Space Museum, Exhibits Design Division, Exhibit Records, 1991-1999, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C.

35 Memorandum from Gwen Crider to Nadya Makovenyi, Star Wars Options, December 12, 1995, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, Accession 11-072, Miscellaneous 1991-1997, Folder 2, National Air and Space Museum, Exhibits Design Division, Exhibit Records, 1991-1999, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C.

36 See Brooker, *Using the Force*, 164-171.

37 Matt Hills, "Torchwood's Trans-transmedia: Media Tie-ins and Brand 'Fanagement,'" *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 9, no. 2 (2012): 409-428.

expansion of a universe, although participation is circumscribed to notions of canonicity, and unapproved expansions are legally restricted. Exhibitions are as much a direct answer to fan participation through interactivity and appropriation of collaborative authorship as they are a re-installment of Lucas as main authority. What fans are encouraged to engage with in these exhibitions is determined by Lucas's vision of the canon, and this is equally true for the characters and stories those exhibitions facilitate and allow them to create. Although the museum might not manage "to impose an imagined consensus on a [fan] community that thrives on debate,"<sup>38</sup> visitors who do not participate in fan-specific debates and practices are more likely to remember this version of Star Wars as the authentic one. In this way, exhibitions contribute to consolidating a selective form of collective memory that is nonetheless linked to the franchise's transmedia economy.

## Conclusion

How then can we use these insights on the history and role of Star Wars-themed exhibitions for further investigations into the musealization of transmedia storytelling projects? As Matt Hills writes, the museum has been a site where the "struggle over Star Wars's cultural status can and has been played out."<sup>39</sup> While Hills's approach draws on an understanding of the role of the museum in the discursive separation between economy and culture, our study examines the role of the museum in transmedia storytelling within a constantly growing franchise. Arguably, all of the exhibitions elevate Star Wars's cultural value, but they are also central to understanding the franchise's transmedia economy.

On the one hand, they produce selective cultural memories built around Star Wars's cinematic releases. In doing so, they sideline works that are not sanctioned by Lucasfilm and influence how visitors build up dialogical relationships with non-canonical texts such as those of the EU. In short, what fans and visitors are encouraged to memorize in these exhibitions is determined by Lucas's vision of the canon. On the other hand, the museum is a distinct space in which to investigate the relationship between producers and consumers, and the different stakes and unequal power relations among them. As such, Star Wars-themed exhibitions should not be seen as simply another entry in an already long list of franchise products. Rather,

38 Brooker, *Using the Force*, 113.

39 Hills, "Star Wars in Fandom, Film Theory, and the Museum," 197.

Star Wars-themed exhibitions offer a significant approach to investigating the production of culture as well as the differences between cultures of production, including the interaction among filmmakers, media industries, curators, and visitors. Moreover, Star Wars is not the only franchise that makes use of themed exhibitions. Similar projects based on franchises such as Star Trek, Jurassic Park, The Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, and The Hunger Games have circulated in museum and exhibition venues worldwide, signaling a growing interest in the musealization of transmedia storyworlds.<sup>40</sup> With our focus on authorship, canonicity, collective memory, and visitor participation, our approach offers a model for further research on how curatorial practices materialize in transmedia projects through the exhibition format.

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40 Examples include *Star Trek* (Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, 1992), *Dinosaurs of Jurassic Park* (American Museum of Natural History, 1993), *The Lord of the Rings Motion Picture Trilogy: The Exhibition* (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 2002), *Harry Potter: The Exhibition* (Museum of Science and Industry, 2009), *The Hunger Games: The Exhibition* (San Francisco Palace of Fine Arts, 2016).