

‘Holy crap, more *Star Wars*! More *Star Wars*? What if they’re crap?’: Disney, Lucasfilm and *Star Wars* online fandom in the 21st Century

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Abstract:

In October 2012, Lucasfilm, the home of *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones*, joined Marvel Comics, Pixar and *The Muppets* under the Disney corporate umbrella in a \$4.05 billion dollar deal. For many years, Lucas himself had been insisting that *Star Wars* was over, as a film series at least. Now, with the announcement of a new trilogy in the works and a spate of other *Star Wars*-related activity on the horizon, news reports began multiplying exponentially on the World Wide Web carrying the disgruntled, disillusioned, and indignant voices of fans ‘crying out in terror’.

This article seeks to provide a temporal snap-shot of a cultural moment. Firstly, through an analysis of fan activity on TheForce.net and, secondly, through an e-mail questionnaire distributed among 100 *Star Wars* fans on the website, the aim and objective is to illustrate the gamut of responses experienced by fans in relation to the next phase of the *Star Wars* mythos in cinema. Following Matt Hills’ notion of ‘affective mapping’ (2012), the results demonstrate a varied and variable spectrum of responses that indicate that media outlets’ reportage of pessimism and outrage oversimplify a complex and complicated process of emotion and affect.

Introduction

On October 30th 2012, *Star Wars* was the furthest thing from my mind. As I sat at home watching the BBC News at 6pm, the announcement that George Lucas had sold Lucasfilm to the Disney Empire for a reported \$4.05 billion awakened a part of me that had lay dormant for some considerable time. Like many around the globe, I cite *Star Wars* as a major influence on my formative years and subsequent cultural/ aesthetic development. More pointedly, my love of cinema began with *Star Wars* and it is not too much of a stretch to claim that, without *Star Wars*, I would not be sitting here writing this article as an academic.



My first reaction to the news was sheer, unadulterated excitement; for not only did this mean that Lucas had relinquished his iron fisted grip on the franchise that, for many people, represents ‘the single most important cultural text of their lives’ (Brooker 2001: xii), but the news – accompanied by the traditional 20th Century Fox drum-roll and John Williams’ score – came furnished with the rather more surprising revelation that the film series would continue with new instalments beginning with *Episode VII* in 2015. CEO of Disney, Roger Iger announced that,

The *Star Wars* universe now has more than 17,000 characters inhabiting several thousand planets and spanning 20,000 years, and this gives Disney infinite inspiration and opportunities to continue the epic *Star Wars* story. [In addition to *Episode VII*] there will be more feature films, as well as consumer products, television projects, games and theme park attractions (quoted in Edwards, 2012: 10).¹

My own *Star Wars* fandom began in the 1970s as a young boy, primarily through the first film and through action figurines. I still remember my favourites with nostalgic glee: Luke Skywalker in an X-Wing fighter pilot outfit, Chewbacca, C3-P0 (with removable limbs) and Bib Fortuna, Jabba the Hutt’s henchman. I wore *Star Wars* pyjamas, had *Star Wars* bedding and read *Star Wars* comics. But most of all, and more importantly, I played *Star Wars* with my friends and it acted as a strong adhesive, a communal glue that provided me with many hours of innocent entertainment and fun.

But then something happened: after *The Return of the Jedi* (1983), the denouement of the “Original Trilogy” – it would be sixteen years until *Episode I: The Phantom Menace* (1999) - things began to calm down and friends started playing with new toys and new cultural artefacts: the *Masters of the Universe* cartoon and toys captured our imagination alongside BMX bikes, *Transformers*, *Batman*, *Thundercats*, *Action Force* and, as I entered my teenage years, *2000AD*, *Judge Dredd*, hip hop and heavy metal music. And, of course, girls.

For some fans, I may be described as a Judas, a traitor, a fickle human being who never really loved *Star Wars* in the first place. No, I loved *Star Wars*, still love *Star Wars*; but after the (what seemed like) final act of the trilogy - Luke won the battle, defeated the Emperor, saved his father and lived happily ever after in a galaxy restored to peace – I drifted away. The story was over, after all, and I did not traverse the Expanded Universe of comics, novels and others. For me, *Star Wars* was complete and finite. The rest was apocryphal nonsense and “made up” – as if the *Star Wars* films “actually happened”.

In the hierarchy of fans, then, I would occupy the lowest strata of order – *Star Wars* was a formative part of my childhood years: an exciting triumvirate of texts that remains a key component of my psychology and cultural memory. I have read few Expanded Universe novels, few comics, have since bought no toys or played any games (PC, games console or otherwise). I did watch all of the so-called “Prequel Trilogy” at the cinema and thought that I had been right all along: the story was over, and this was trampling all over my memory of it. I didn’t hate *Star Wars*, but *Star Wars* was in the past, or, rather, my past and I’d cherish *that* memory, not this facile, facsimile. Secretly, and then publicly, I started to hate George Lucas.

When the Disney takeover was announced, my excitement caught me off guard. I reached for the telephone and contacted two of my colleagues at the University of Sunderland, Andrew Smith and Justin Battin, to ask if they’d heard about the news. This precipitated a conversation which is still going on over five weeks later: who will write? Who will direct? Will it be about Luke and Leia? Will Han die this time? What involvement would Lucas have in his role as “creative consultant”? (Hopefully none). Oh no, not Matthew Vaughan!

The internet and daily newspapers began carrying the story; reports stated that Twitter and Facebook had been run amok with fan voices expressing discontent, indifference and, at times, downright indignation. On October 31st, 2012, Simon Brew claimed that

the internet seemed to shake to its very foundations with the out-of-nowhere news that Disney was to acquire Lucasfilm...One part of the announcement was the confirmation that *Star Wars Episode 7* was being readied for 2015. This has met with, it’s fair to say, less than upbeat reactions’ (Brew 2012: online).

Ross McGuinness, writing for the free daily UK newspaper, *Metro*, stated that ‘the prospect of fusing traditional fairytales with those set in space has many *Star Wars* fans feeling a disturbance in the force...a million voices cried out in terror. On Twitter’ (2012: 13). He continues: ‘Many *Star Wars* fans believe the move to make more films is as clumsy as it is stupid, saying the saga was permanently damaged by the prequels...’ (ibid).

The online version of Fox News (foxnews.com) posted an article which features a number of Twitter feeds from pessimistic fans who vocalised their impassioned concerns.

For example, vikishus states that he is ‘literally [sic] crying about this Disney Star Wars thing guys...just...I don’t want this *Sobs*’; chocolatefudgeyou agrees: “so apparently disney is buying lucasfilms for 4billion USD and then going to make a star wars 7. JUST NO’. Courtneysmovieblog says, quoting James Earl Jones (Darth Vader):

“NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!” I don’t want a new movie. *Star Wars* has had enough movies. And they can’t cast new people to be Han, Leia and Luke. The original cast members are too old for this stuff, unless...this will be like *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. No. Dear God. No. George Lucas, you are now officially the biggest sell-out in the universe.

Gbeats offers a more laconic and aphoristic message – ‘FUCK YOU DISNEY!’ – while kaptainbaconfox decries the news in apocalyptic fashion: ‘the world really is ending! Disney bought *Star Wars* for over 4.5 million dollars and making more. We’re doomed’.

I felt somewhat irked by these stories, perhaps because I had spoken to a few people who, like myself, all seemed optimistic and excited, but, also, because I truly believed that the stories were non-representative of the *Star Wars* community given the comments I had viewed on forums which seemed more varied and complex; and so I decided I would try to drill down into a segment of the *Star Wars* community and seek to map how fans have reacted to the news and how they feel about the narrative extension of the cinematic *Star Wars* as opposed to the textual matrix of novels, comic books and other transmedia entities that are already in circulation that comprise the vast and complicated *Star Wars* universe.

***Star Wars* Fans on TheForce.Net**

My first port of call was TheForce.Net in the early days following the news and I was taken aback by the creative activities of *Star Wars* fans which ranged from memes, posters, and title and treatment proposals for the new trilogy.² (TheForce.Net webmaster, Phillip Wise, informed me that site traffic had increased by over 600% following the news). What surprised me was the level of activity in mere days, sometimes even hours, after the Disney-Lucasfilm news spiralled across the world-wide web. Perhaps I should not have been so taken aback. In *Convergence Culture* (2006), Henry Jenkins discusses *Star Wars* fan activities blurring the distinction between producer and consumer like never before in history. The digital zeitgeist has allowed fans to create ‘new versions of the *Star Wars* mythology. In the words of *Star Wars* or *Bust* director Jason Wishnow, “This is the future of cinema – *Star Wars* is the catalyst”. Jenkins (2006:131) continues:

The widespread circulation of *Star Wars*-related commodities has placed resources into the hands of a generation of emerging filmmakers in their teens or early twenties. They grew up dressing as Darth Vader for Halloween, sleeping on Princess Leia sheets, battling with plastic lightsabers, and playing

with Boba Fett action figures. *Star Wars* has become their “legend,” and now they are determined to remake it on their own terms.

What became abundantly clear was that my own ideas about *Star Wars* possessing a finite history located firmly in the halcyon days of the 1970s and ‘80s, then corrupted and defrauded by a monolithic tyrant in the late 90s and early 00s was obviously erroneous and a personal perspective only (and actually more to do with my own ideas about canonicity and continuity which we will come to later). Given that the last *Star Wars* film, *Revenge of the Sith*, hit theatres in 2005, I mistakenly believed that was indicative of the end, or, rather, the decline of *Star Wars*. Of course I was aware of the EU (Expanded Universe) series of novels, *The Clone Wars* TV series and the much-touted, highly-anticipated *Star Wars: Underworld* TV series (which is reportedly to be set between the events of *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* and *Episode IV: A New Hope*); but, on this occasion, I misjudged the power of the Jedi Knight Fans’ consumption and immersion in the *Star Wars* universe *post*-Prequel Trilogy. *Star Wars* may have ended for me, but that is hardly evidence of the death of a franchise. The *Star Wars* matrix of texts is not simply six films, but an incredibly complex and vast system of official novels, Dark Horse comic books, computer/console games, toys; and so-called unofficial fan projects that range from films, fiction, posters, and much, much more.

Star Wars continues to exist despite the lack of feature films which act as a kind of linchpin that connects the entire web of activity and interactivity together. For many fans, the films provided the entry-way into the *Star Wars* matrix, but, also, for many fans, *Star Wars* does not stop with the six feature films; in fact, the number of *Star Wars* stories existing within the EU system of texts far exceeds the six feature films by a significant margin (for example, the EU novels have over one hundred and fifty volumes which span over 20,000 years and construct a labyrinthine history. From this perspective, the films represent little more than a splash in a veritable ocean of stories.)

So, then, given the wealth of activity, participation and *interactivity* on the world wide web, can it be posited that the “text” of *Episode VII* had already started to manifest itself through fan productions?

In *Show Sold Separately* (2010), Jonathan Gray highlights a research project undertaken in early 2001 which he describes as ‘peculiar’ (2010: 119). Gray, in collaboration with Bertha Chin, ‘examined audience interpretation of Peter Jackson’s *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* nine months before the film was released’. The film itself, still in ‘the throes of production’, had obviously not been seen by anyone, nor even completed, but was ‘bathed in hype: amidst continuing and excited press releases, magazine articles, and official website updates, the movie had announced itself long before its Christmas 2001 release’ (ibid, 119-120). Upon further investigation, Gray and Chin discovered that

On the internet in particular, dedicated *Lord of the Rings* web discussion sites were thriving, often with multiple posts a day, producing a curious situation in which people were congregating to discuss a text that seemingly did not exist, often in great detail...Chin and I saw this as a golden opportunity to study how textuality begins, where it comes from, and how the text and audience meet (2010: 120).

For Gray and Chin, the “text” of *Lord of the Rings* had already begun despite the fact that the actual release of the film was months away. Posters online dialogued about their hopes and fears, which ranged from ‘[o]utright fealty to the books’, a ‘fear of “Hollywoodification”’ and scepticism that Tolkien’s ‘vision’ would be compromised (ibid: 122-23). All online posters were Tolkien fans first and foremost, who had ‘come together as an online community with their love of the books as a common factor’ (ibid: 123) Furthermore, a ‘sense of anxiety was particularly evident in the many postings that made predictions regarding specific scenes or characters’ (ibid).

This “pre-textual” text is interesting in relation to the Star Wars community as a similar activity is demonstrated on fan forums such as TheForce.net. But what is different here is that *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* is clearly an adaptation of an already existing source: the novel by J.R.R Tolkien. Where *Star Wars* fan activity differs is that Disney/Lucasfilm have not offered any information regarding the narrative trajectory of the new films nor what direction the series will take beyond the quixotic “original story” suggestion: will the EU novels be a factor? Will Luke, Han and Leia return? Who will be the new enemy given the Empire’s ignominious defeat at the hands of the Rebellion (with cuddly assistance from the furry Ewoks)? What will the title be? The lack of information regarding future storylines has influenced some fans to take to the online world and create their own “versions” of how they believe the franchise will be best served. One thing is certain, however: the textuality of *Star Wars Episode VII* has already begun.

For example, on TheForce.net, Hooklineandsinker proposes a number of titles ranging from *The Desolation of Passel Argente*, *The New Empire* and the rather more cynical *The Search for More Money*. The Loyal Imperial suggests *The Adventure Continues* while polymath conflates the *Star Wars* universe with Nolan’s *Batman* films by suggesting, ‘*Star Wars: The Dark Jedi Rises*, directed by Christopher Nolan’, and includes a footnote which paraphrases Bane from *The Dark Knight Rises*: ‘When Coruscant is ashes, you have my permission to die’ (Coruscant, the Republic City replaces the city of Gotham). Although this post may be interpreted as humorous rather than serious, perhaps polymath is suggesting that a transposition of Nolan’s dark and sinister idiom is a required prerequisite for success. However, some posts clearly adopt a comedic rhetoric evidenced by such title proposals as: *Wat Tambor’s nipple twisting adventure*; *Rise of the Technounion*; *Electric Boogaloo*; and *Jar Jar’s Big Adventure*. Many posts, as well as many memes and posters, display an ironic juxtaposition of Disney properties with *Star Wars* iconography. Clone_Cmdr_Wedge offers: *Beauty and the Wookiee*, *The Ewok King*, *The Hunchback of the Jedi Temple*, and the

Emperor's New Groove – which is actually a “real” Disney film but works well as an in-joke and can be interpreted as an ironic fear of a “Disneyfication” of the *Star Wars* myth. Clearly, the idea that Emperor Palpatine, Dark Lord of the Sith, would suddenly begin dancing to “a new groove” is both humorous and horrifying in equal measure to many fans.

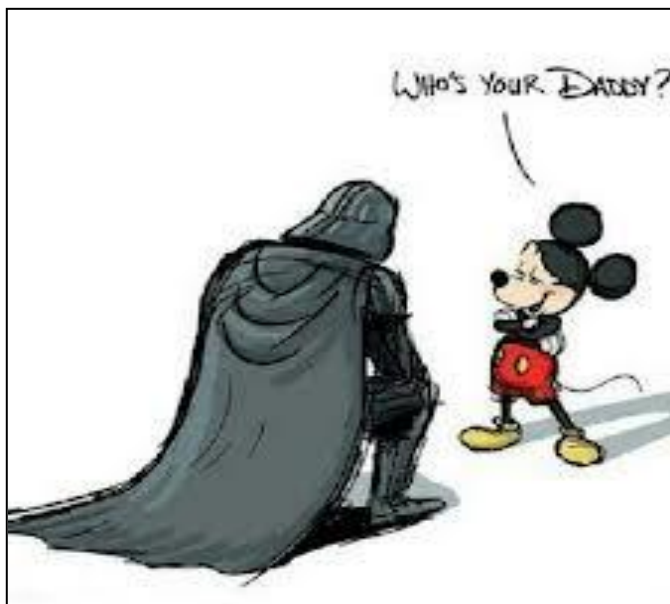
Given the in-roads offered audiences by the digital zeitgeist, described by Jenkins above as a powerful tool in the hands of fans that confuses simplistic one-way notions of consumption and production, it should also come as no surprise that many people have already created their own version of the “crawl” of the non-existent *Episode VII*, complete with text, title and story arc. I discovered many of these “pro-fan” videos on YouTube and mistakenly believed that these had been uploaded following the Disney-Lucasfilm merger. However, upon closer inspection I recognized that many of the videos had been created *before* October 31st, in some cases, a number of years earlier.

To illustrate: guimsieben claims that his video illustrates ‘the opening scene of my new project “Star Wars 7”’. The video was uploaded on October 9th, 2009. On June 23rd the following year, UmbrellaCorp1138 uploaded a trailer for the seventh instalment by stitching together scenes from *Blade Runner*, the *Star Wars* films and console/PC games such as *Mass Effect 2*, *Deux Ex 2*, *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, and *The Old Republic*. While there is not enough space here to do justice to the wealth of fan creations circulating the internet and on sites like YouTube, it is enough to suggest that *Episode VII* began spinning its textual web long before the announcement that the *Star Wars* series would continue and may be impossible to map with any accuracy.

It is important to point out that these few examples hardly illustrate the wealth of fan activity on TheForce.net alone, not counting the plethora of other sites and fan productions. In order to analyse all instances of fan activity and participation since the Disney-Lucasfilm announcement would be a mammoth, if not impossible task to document. I decided that I needed to speak to the fans directly and track their thoughts, emotions and opinions in relation to the next era of *Star Wars*.

Methodology

Following Will Brooker’s methodological strategy documented in Chapter One of *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (2001) I contacted webmaster Philip Wise at TheForce.net – one of the central online hubs for the *Star Wars* fan community – and asked if I could post a call to fans to participate in a research project which focused on the future of *Star Wars*. Unlike Brooker, however, who asked fans to respond via email detailing ‘their age, occupation, location, and a paragraph about why the films were important to them’ (2001: xiii), I posted a document with eleven questions which included more pointed questions, among some general ones, about the Disney takeover such as: How do you feel about the news that Lucasfilm has been acquired by Disney and the creation of a new film trilogy?



Examples of fan memes/posters:

The methodological approach taken here is internet based - a method that is increasingly becoming known as “netnography” (Kozinets 2010). This was necessary for the time-sensitive nature of this project which aims to capture affective reactions as close as possible to the ‘fan-event’. Matt Hills (2002: 141) describes this as ‘just-in-time-fandom’ whereby online forums and social networking sites, for example, are utilized to demonstrate fan commitment and devotion due to the ‘timeliness’ of their actions. This method allowed me to gain access to a high volume of fans in a short period of time which hopefully provides a detailed insight into the affective dimensions at play. Still, the usual caveat remains: as with all small-scale research projects, it is difficult to ascertain if the results are representative of the large community. The people who responded to my call for volunteers may represent a small percentage of ‘full-on fan commitment’ and it is important to note that some fans may not vocalise their thoughts and opinions on online forums such as

TheForce.net and others, but may still consider themselves as fully-fledged *Star Wars* fans. As such, this project is limited by its focus on TheForce.net users and should be recognized as an analysis of online *Star Wars* fans who engage with the various activities – forums, etc - available on the website.

As the old adage would have it, “the more things change, the more they stay the same”. It is remarkable that eleven years after Brooker posted his request on TheForce.net and received over one hundred replies in little over two hours that my experience was incredibly similar. My call for “subjects” to fill out a questionnaire which focused on the Lucasfilm announcement was put up on TheForce.net message board at around 6pm on November 2nd. I did not check my email until the next morning and found it to be overloaded with completed questionnaires and requests for a copy to be sent as the link on the website to a word document had broken. I had over one hundred completed questionnaires and asked webmaster Philip Wise to take the notice down due to the overwhelming response. Due to the nature of an article as opposed to a book, I aimed for fifty, but decided to follow Brooker and keep the first one hundred responses. One respondent, Tim Meacher, informed me that he was part of Brooker’s audience research over a decade ago and is included in the completed book in ‘Chapter Two: Watching Star Wars Together’ (2002: 29-63).

This article provides an analysis of my findings in order to construct an ‘affective map’ of fan reactions to the news that their object of affection/ affectation (Hills, 2012). The term ‘affective mapping’ comes from Matt Hills who kindly answered a short questionnaire regarding his own response following the news. Hills’ comments are interesting and valuable so it is worth quoting from the e-mail at length:

As an aca-fan or scholar-fan, I actually think it’s less important – in this case – to focus on my own feelings and more important to attempt an ‘affective mapping’ of wider fan responses. When a beloved fan object becomes, literally, a ‘transitional object’, with a new phase or new hope being offered to audiences, then this seems to very much become a moment of heightened fan feeling, and anxiety. In a sense, what’s important about this sort of news, and its consumption by always-on, 24/7 fandom, is that it highlights not just how fans “pre-read”, but how they respond to *projected and counterfactual* texts. It’s almost as if fandom starts to exist in a quantum, undecidable state: whether one feels excitement, indifference or optimism depends, in large part, on the version of Star Wars that’s been imagined and projected. As a result, franchises that undergo these momentous changes – a new era – start to branch out into counterfactual, alternative possibilities, not at the level of fanfic, but instead at the level of fans’ industrial imaginations. So, as an aca-fan, I’m excited about what fan responses might tell us about how passionate audiences imagine and project their fan objects, I suppose...

In a follow up email, I asked Hills if he could expand on the notion of ‘affective mapping’. Drawing upon Fredric Jameson’s concept of ‘cognitive mapping’, Hills (2012) describes ‘affective mapping’ as the following:

I mean that rather than aca-fans focusing on their own emotions, it may be more use to assess the fan-cultural terrain in order to look for patterns in fans’ emotional responses more broadly, as well as considering what meanings/ evaluations/ self-narratives or projects of self are correlated with specific affects. So, which audiences are excited (and how/why); which are “indifferent” (how/why...) which are anxious (and this affect could take on a range of colourations); which are pleased...also, what compounds of affects are commonly expressed, e.g. ‘excitement tempered by nervousness’, or ‘sadness with an undercurrent of optimism’.

Hills’ notion of ‘affective mapping’ is a concept that he is currently developing ‘rather than something that is embedded in a body of work’ (ibid) and it is to his credit and to my benefit – and hopefully this article’s - that he chose to share these thoughts and give me permission to use them. With this in mind, and with many thanks to Hills, this article provides an analysis of my research findings in order to construct an ‘affective mapping’ of fan reactions to the Disney-Lucasfilm merger and hopefully expand and enhance our understanding of the *Star Wars* online fan community in the twenty-first century. The following section provides a brief overview of the debates surrounding affect, emotion and cognition while detailing how I am using the term in this article.

Archives of Feeling

Academic work on affect and emotion crosses numerous disciplines whilst marshalling a wide range of approaches which, at times, both coalesce and conflict thus illustrating the complexity of hypothesising the affective spectrum. In *Media Audiences: Television, Meaning and Emotion* (2009: 55 - 71), Kristyn Gorton draws attention to analyses of affect in cultural studies, feminist theory, sociology, neurology, psychoanalysis and biochemistry (which is by no means an exhaustive list). More than this, however, Gorton discusses a bifurcation between concepts of affect and emotion: ‘[s]ome argue that emotion refers to a sociological expression of feelings whereas affect is more firmly rooted in biology and in our physical response to feelings’ (ibid: 56). Elspeth Probyn argues that ‘emotion refers to cultural and social expression, whereas affects are of a biological and physiological nature’ (quoted in Gorton 2009: 56). This binary distinction is arguably rather unhelpful and tends to lead towards the oft-cited distinction between nature and culture in place of a dialectical relationship between affect/emotion operating hand in hand as two sides of the same coin. Things are rarely simple enough to split into dissenting camps especially when traversing something as intricate and “knotty” as the emotional spectrum.

Similarly, Panksepp (2000:50) argues that emotion is an ‘umbrella term for all the behavioural, expressive, cognitive and physiological changes that occur’ whereas affect is ‘the conscious experience of emotion.’ Given that the respondents who have agreed to partake in this research project are discussing the ‘conscious experience of emotion’ – ergo, affect, according to Panksepp’s delineation – does this mean that emotion is not to be included as a factor? Is not ‘conscious emotion’, emotion after all which leads back into Panksepp’s notion of the ‘umbrella term’ which inevitably feeds back into his definition of affect in a tautological relay? If emotion is not affect (which is conscious), does this mean that emotion is *unconscious* thereby problematising any attempt to discuss it as it is not readily available to either interviewer or respondent?

In *Fan Cultures*, Matt Hills discusses the analytical split between affect and emotion but also brings into play another binary, this time invoking a discourse of ‘affect versus cognition’ (2002: 93). Furthermore, Hills suggests that in the various schools of psychoanalysis – of which there are ‘almost as many...as there are fan cultures’ – ‘no two psychoanalytic approaches completely share a view of affect’ (ibid: 95). It is more than enough to state that hypothesising affect/ emotion/ cognition and the debates surrounding this issue are many and contentious. As Forgas and Smith point out (2003: 51), ‘[t]he very definition of what we mean by “affect” and “emotion” remains problematic, and the relationship between affect and cognition continues to be the subject of debate.’

Going one step further, Hills argues that one need consider ‘affect as playful, as capable of “creating culture” as well as being caught up in it’ (ibid) which goes some way to explaining the examples cited above where *Star Wars* fans are actively engaged in building cultural texts of their own such as trailers for non-existent texts and spinning euphemistic and humorous title suggestions that evidence this notion of “play” explicitly. As Jonathan Gray (2008: 51) points out, Janice Radway and John Fiske ‘found evidence of audience members using programs actively and in ways other than those seemingly proscribed by the texts themselves’ which Brooker examines in *Using the Force* focusing on Fan Fiction (‘Slash and Other Stories’; see also Jenkins (2006:131 – 168)). Roland Barthes, speaking about the literary text, argues that play is central to a reader’s textual pleasure (1993).

The notion of play is an important consideration here, but also highlights another factor that must be subsumed when analysing the multifaceted affective field which would seem, based on the complications and contradictions cited above, to avoid any unified, singular definition without backing oneself into a conceptual quandary. Perhaps it would be best to approach affect as a site of struggle between all of these forces and factors? Is affect, therefore, a conflation of emotional, physiological, psychological, cognitive and more? Is it even possible to separate and compartmentalize these issues into neatly labelled boxes? More importantly, how am I using the concept of affect in this article?

For the purposes of this article, I bow to Jonathan Gray’s explanatory concision who views affect as ‘the realm of feelings, emotion and impressions’ (2008: 46). Similarly, in *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (2005: 67), Cornel Sandvoss avoids demarcating between affect and emotion without interrogating the perceived differences. ‘Fans’ emotion,’ he

states, is aligned with ‘what Laurence Grossberg describes as “affect”’ thereby implying that they are conjoined entities rather than mutually exclusive. Furthermore, Gray (2008: 46) does not ‘see affect divorced from cognition and rationality’ and I would like to add that I do not view emotion as detached from affect. Dividing the emotional and rational into simple oppositions ‘between reason and pleasure’ (Buckingham 2000:112)³ misses the point somewhat; Hills argues that it ‘requires rethinking’ and does not significantly address ‘the ambivalences and complexities of these emotional connections’ (Hills, 2003 75).

For the purposes of this article, I use affect to mean the wide array of emotions and thoughts brought into play by the research participants in order to create an ‘archive of feeling’ (Cvetkovich 2003) or, rather, ‘affective map’, to use Hills’ terminology. As with all research methods, I am acting as an interpreter of data and, as a result, cannot lay claim to any epistemological precision or “pure” objectivity (Stokes, 2003). My analysis is based upon questionnaire dissemination and therefore remains within the arena of textual examination. The creation of categories may be based upon the data received, but is also based upon my *interpretation* of the data and the recognition of affective patterns is based within my inherent – and thus unavoidable – subjectivity. Any problems/ issues with the method employed or the interpretative schema are mine and mine alone. The next section looks at the research findings and provides an affective map based upon the results with all the caveats listed above.

If You Cut me Open, I’ll Bleed *Star Wars*!

Out of the 100 respondents selected for this project, an overwhelming 94% were male. And while this is only indicative of the fans who took the time to complete the questionnaire (sometimes having to email me for a copy due to a faulty link on the website), this does tally with Brooker’s research findings in 2001. There are clearly female fans of *Star Wars* “out there” and I can make no assumptions regarding their level of involvement in participatory culture or other fan activities/ interactivities. As Brooker (2002: 199-220) argues in his chapter on *Star Wars Chicks*, despite the male-saturated cast of characters and the combination of ‘two traditionally males genres – science fiction and war’ (ibid: 199), the fact remains that ‘women and girls are into *Star Wars*’:

Online, female-run communities attract thousands of hits per week. The webmistresses of sites like *Star Wars Chicks* have loved the saga since they were young and found ways to explore it in make-believe games and fiction during their childhood, despite pressure to ditch *Star Wars* and conform to more traditional gender roles (ibid).

This information challenges the notion of *Star Wars* as a “boy’s film”, but, also, may corroborate Brooker’s analysis of female fans negotiating male-oriented gender politics in different ways (such as writing slash fiction and other pursuits). My research findings do, however, point to the possibility that “playing” in the online field of TheForce.net, for

example, is gendered masculine as a brief survey of individual posters would seem to support.

A large portion of my respondents were based in either the United Kingdom or the United States of America – only 2% lived outside those geographical locations: one from Hungary and one from the Ukraine (both female). Moreover, 25% of respondents belong to the 16-25 age group (although only 1 person is 16 and 1 person is 18); 31% are aged between 25-33; 35% in the 34-42 category and, finally, 9% in the 42-48 with 48 being the highest age of any respondent (1%). Additionally, all participants agreed that their words could be used in this study although the opportunity to opt out or remain anonymous was offered.

Of the one hundred respondents, the range of employment roles was staggeringly versatile and difficult to place in significant clusters. Furthermore, based on the information given, class does not seem to be a determining factor in *Star Wars* fandom with people operating in various and often divergent positions such as: Glass Artist; Corporate Sales; Freelance Writer; Law Enforcement; Psychologist; Carpet Installer; Factory Worker; Costume Prop Maker; Writer; Truck Driver; Writer/ Director/ Producer; Actor; Theatre Tech; Teaching; Museum Collections Manager; Professional Sculptor and a whole range of other roles. A close analysis suggests that some respondents worked in administration roles (6%) but as many worked in the Information Technology sector; the most frequented category was student (15%). One respondent (Craig Sardinha) classified his role as a “bounty hunter” which I mistakenly interpreted as a joke, perhaps a reference to his favourite character being Boba Fett. However, Craig insists that the reason he became a bounty hunter is completely due to his love for the *Star Wars* films. (It is noteworthy to point out that a Bounty Hunter is not a mercenary who is employed to seek and find certain individuals in order to execute them as many popular cultural texts may suggest. A Bounty Hunter works in conjunction with Law Enforcement to find and detain a suspect who may have broken the conditions of his bail.)

Echoing Brooker, I asked ‘what does *Star Wars* mean and what part does it play in your life?’ which, once again, revealed many examples, but, more pertinently, also fit into clusters and patterns, the most popular rationale attributed to childhood and/or family ,i.e watching with parents when young (34%). Arguably this ties in with D.W Winnicott’s object relations theory whereby the fan object acts a ‘primary transitional object’ which ‘create[s] a veritable sense of home’ (cited in Gray 2003: 55). As Gray goes on to explain:

Winnicott writes of the key period in a baby’s development when it must be separated from its mother, a period of uncertainty and risk for an infant whose mother has until then always been its provider. To cope with this transition, infants often embody the warm, comforting feelings of motherly safety and belonging into a transitional object, whether a beloved teddy bear, a blanket, or favourite toy (ibid).

Star Wars, therefore, can be viewed as acting in a similar manner for some fans: 'Curling up on the sofa, under a blanket, with a familiar program [or film] is a calming experience for many of us' and 'their mother-like ability to calm us at the end of the day' may be a prevailing feature of the affective dimension of the text (Gray: *ibid*).

4% described *Star Wars* as analogous to religion while 12% evoked escapism and/or entertainment as the prevailing factor of their attachment. Once again, it is rather difficult to fit the varied responses into objective clusters with an interpretative dimension playing a part, especially given the levels of affection and affectation on display through the language adopted.

For example, Matthew Bortolin, a 38 year old Marketing Writer states that

Aside from biological imperatives and overall cultural factors, there is nothing that has influenced me, coloured my perception of reality, or shaped my approach to life as much as *Star Wars*. If you cut me open, I bleed *Star Wars*.

For Matthew, *Star Wars* is an integral part of his identity which he sees as a composite of biology, culture and *Star Wars*. The metaphor of *Star Wars* being contained within his blood as an intrinsic part of his biology and DNA may sound hyperbolic, but it expresses the level of affection and deep connection he feels to the text and the part it plays in identity formation (Gray, 2008: 45-73).

Daniel Isenberg, a 30 year old psychologist, speaks of *Star Wars* as

A comfortable, safe, and reliable escape from the stresses and pressures of everyday life. I can escape into the stories and characters of SW and it takes me to a familiar world separate from reality, reminiscent of excitement and joy from my childhood. It is a universe that has provided a metaphor to teach many important life lessons, such as patience, determination, focus, humility, and compassion.

Daniel's experience operates in symmetry with that of Craig's, although different language and expression is utilized to demonstrate his connection. For Daniel, the link to childhood is an intrinsic part of his experience and, like Craig, *Star Wars* has become a feature of his identity. Where Craig speaks about influence and the impact *Star Wars* had on shaping 'his perception of reality', Daniel speaks of 'important life lessons' which are similar in theme if not rhetorical delivery.

18% of respondents describe *Star Wars* as meaning 'everything' and we can see how certain patterns of emotion overlap and interconnect. For Matt Mendres, for example, *Star Wars* is 'part of the "soundtrack" of my life' while Randall Snyder says that 'it has been a part of my life literally since I was born (I was born May 26, 1977, 4 hours after the release date of ANH [A New Hope]'. For many people, then, *Star Wars* is so much more than a group of films and ancillary texts: it is a vital component of personality, identity and the meaning

of life itself. It is nothing less than a ‘transcendental presence’ (Brooker, 2001: 4). This corroboration and substantiation with Brooker implies that analysing fan cultures such as *Star Wars* can yield dividends and illustrates that patterns do emerge even when conducting projects over a decade apart. Like I said, the more things change, the more they stay the same.

I feel it is extremely important to point out that individual responses vary accordingly due to language utilization, grammatical and rhetorical delivery and I have only touched upon some of the examples here given the focus of this project. The information offered above is simply to provide some background to how much *Star Wars* means to these people which will inevitably act as a barometer regarding affective responses to the next era of the fan object. To simply state that fans “care” about *Star Wars* not only underestimates the affective value of the text, but significantly misinterprets this phenomenon and fails to dig deeper into these profound emotional investments. This next section analyses the responses to both the Lucasfilm/Disney amalgam and the continuation of the *Star Wars* saga in film.

‘It left a bad taste in my brain’

Utilizing Hills’ notion of ‘affective mapping’ detailed above, I set out to detect trends, patterns and clusters in the questionnaires in response to the following questions: ‘How do you feel about the news that Lucasfilm has been acquired by Disney?’; and ‘How do you feel about the news that the series will continue with episodes 7, 8 and 9?’ The similarity between the questions may cause one to infer that responses would be similar if not exact but this was not the case. Some people, for example, express concern regarding Disney’s motivations – i.e, profit ahead of aesthetics – but are excited about the possibility of new adventures in the *Star Wars* sandbox; while some respondents feel that the property is in good hands, citing Disney’s treatment of other acquisitions, notably Marvel comics and the film adaptations (*The Avengers* and Joss Whedon being the usual default position with some mention of Pixar and *The Muppets*). However, at times, there was some correlation between both questions.

Mapping emotional/ affective responses is always an act of interpretation, but what strikes me as an interesting factor is the similarity of some of the responses: phrases such as ‘cautiously optimistic’, ‘excited’, ‘surprised’ alongside a gamut of mixed emotional responses – ‘excited but concerned about continuity’ [with the already established EU universe], ‘shocked then thrilled’ and ‘shocked then cautiously optimistic’. This provides an opportunity to offer a degree of accuracy – of course taking into account with the usual provisos regarding emotion, affectation and subjectivity; that is, accuracy and emotion are not easy bedfellows.

The majority of the respondents (44%) communicated a spectrum of emotions when learning of the Disney/Lucasfilm news. Jonathan L. Bowen, a 29 year old writer/director/producer (who has written several non-fiction books on the *Star Wars* saga

but ‘just filled this out as a die-hard fan’) reacts similarly by detailing his first reaction followed by a series of affective ‘updates’.

My initial reaction was shock and disappointment, because I couldn’t believe that Lucasfilm wasn’t independent anymore and that Lucas had just given away his life’s work. I was nervous that Disney could turn *Star Wars* into just any other franchise, but *Star Wars* is special...At the present, I am more focused on the excitement of more *Star Wars* movies and less worrying about Disney owning Lucasfilm.

Jonathan articulates a spectrum of emotions: first, ‘shock and disappointment’, followed by nervousness and, eventually, settling on a more optimistic note, ‘excitement’ about the films and ignoring his pessimism about Disney.

Similarly, Matt Mendres, a 44 year old college professor, says that

Initially, it left a bad taste in my brain, much like when I learned Michael Jackson had acquired the publishing rights to all those Lennon/ McCartney songs. But Disney seems to have kept out of dictating content to their other acquisitions (Marvel, Pixar), so maybe it’ll be a better fit than I thought at first. I just don’t want to see *Star Wars* “Disney-fied”.

Here, Mendres is putting across a range of responses: firstly, the ‘bad taste’ (with the Jackson/ Beatles analogy utilised as support), followed by a “working out” whereby evidence of Disney’s lack of dictatorial control over other corporate purchases (again, Marvel and Pixar) and his anxiety about the potential of a ‘Disney-fication’ of the fan object. This illustrates a series of emotions that go through several stages that finally settles on “anxious ambivalence” (‘maybe it’ll be a better fit than I thought at first’).

The sub-category of “anxious ambivalence” goes some way to illustrate the different ways that admixtures of emotions can be described. Rather than settling upon a generalised map cluster of “mixed emotions”, a more nuanced and analytical category is necessary to bring attention to the *range* of ambivalences rather than locate them beneath one, broad-spectral category. Although 44% of the respondents described ambivalences and emotional admixtures in a variety of ways, a further breakdown into sub-clusters within that analytical compartment is more indicative and indexical. By recalculating the responses based upon a more detailed analysis, the following sub-clusters can be mapped:

Anxious Ambivalence: A combination of positive and negative concerns weighing towards pessimism [9%]

Open Ambivalence: A strong admixture of good and bad sentiment [21%].

Optimistic Ambivalence: A combination of positive and negative concerns weighted towards optimism [6%].

Positive Ambivalence [8%]: A mix of emotions that begin in a negative state then go through a series of negotiations to conclude, more or less, with optimism. Once again, I must reiterate the interpretative element here as being my own and it is possible that other analysts may arrive at different conclusions. Even working within the same emotional descriptors, interpretations can vary – in fact, most certainly *will* vary – and thus arrive at divergent conclusions. I hope, however, that the resulting affective nodes significantly problematise media narratives that split fandom into two, opposing camps as simple and binary rather than the complicated emotional entanglement we are discussing here.

Following the majority category, 37% of fans expressed optimism regarding Disney and the Lucasfilm acquisition. Bill Hitchcock, a 38 year old research scientist, says that he is ‘very excited. Smart way to pass the torch and secure its future before Lucas becomes one with the Force’. Joseph Menna, Professional Sculptor agrees but articulates his optimism by waxing lyrical:

Hearing that there would be a sequel to Jedi [*Episode IV: Return of the Jedi*] was the most important news of my life beyond anything involving my family or career. The Further Adventures of Luke Skywalker were what it was all about to my generation and the possibility of seeing Mark Hamill take up a lightsaber again is almost too cool to contemplate!!

As we can see from these two respondents, both are positive about the future of *Star Wars*, but they express themselves in different ways. Bill communicates that he is ‘very excited’ and focuses on the merger as a ‘smart way to pass the torch’ while Joseph is less restrained and more evocative citing the news as ‘the most important’ of his life outside of family and work. This is not to suggest that *Star Wars* means more to Joseph than to Bill, but to bring attention to the manner of communication adopted which may cause one to infer that they are.

Similarly, Mark Weller thinks that the news is

great. George Lucas once said that when he was young his only career ambition was to one day be a ticket taker at Disneyland. So it’s a good fit. And I have liked how Disney have handled *The Muppets* and the *Marvel Comics* franchise.

Heath Holland, a 33 year old banker states that it is

Fantastic news and I think that the *Star Wars* franchise will be in excellent hands...With the news of the sale, *Star Wars* not only has life again but will be more viable than ever before, even since the original 1970s craze because Disney has a marketing power to make *Star Wars* one of, if not, the biggest franchises FOR YEARS to come, not centred around one trilogy.

As these four examples illustrate, these respondents are all positive about the Disney takeover of Lucasfilm but express their emotions in different ways. But Heath, Mark and Bill share a lot in common by using words to describe how they feel like 'great', 'fantastic' and 'very excited' and offering reasonable examples to justify their position (Marvel/*The Muppets* success; Disney's marketing power; the notion of 'passing the torch' to ensure *Star Wars* cinematic survival). But this is not to imply that Joseph is unreasonable compared to his peers. All of these respondents are optimistic/ positive about the Disney acquisition, but convey their emotions in different ways. However, this should demonstrate the problems when interpreting data of this kind that deals with a varied and variable range of affective possibilities and, as a result, a group of sub-clusters allows a more nuanced distinction to be made:

Emotional Positivity [4%]: More than strong optimism that uses emphatic language to illustrate the level of affect in operation (as with Joseph Menna above who cites the news of another *Star Wars* film as 'the most important news of my life beyond anything involving my family or career' – this may also be performative which can operate to express in no uncertain terms the level of commitment to 'full-on fandom.'

Definite Positivity [32%]: Expresses positivity but using less emotionally-charged language that does not become impassioned. (Mark Weller's comment above uses 'great' to express his positivity but does not use emphatic language in the same way as Joseph Menna).

Objective Positivity [1%]: Expresses positivity without recourse to communicating emotion beyond 'good news'; more 'objective'. It is interesting that most respondents do indeed use language to signify emotion rather than remaining objective and dispassionate.

Out of all 100 respondents, only 7% indicated a wholly negative response, all based within the category of "George Lucas Anti-Fandom". One female fan, however, offers the most vitriolic example of all the results and illustrates a number of concerns. Michelle Kinkead, a 44 year old Financial Consultant feels very strongly about George Lucas describing him as

Sell out. Selfish. Ungrateful. Bites the hand that feeds him. I feel the way Obi-Wan did when he was telling Anakin that he was the chosen one, he was his brother, etc. Watch that speech in *Revenge of the Sith*. That is how I feel. I want to feel differently. I do. I really do. Instead, I have a bad feeling about this. He's done something I'm not sure I can forgive him for. He knew he was gonna do it. He could've at least given us what we wanted.

Michelle does not expand on 'what we wanted' (my italics) in relation to this statement, but does communicate that she wants Original Trilogy "stars" rather than EU characters, namely, Mara Jade:

They need to put in the Big Three. They need to keep Han and Leia together, Chewie alive, Luke a Jedi and not a Sith oh and not married to some Force-forsaken boobiful (not a typo there) red head. Mara? PUKE!! PUKE!! PUKE!!

The possibility that Luke Skywalker's wife from the EU series of novels, Mara Jade, may be included in the new trilogy incenses Michelle somewhat. However, some respondents (14%) cite Mara Jade as a character they would love to see transferred into the *Star Wars* cinematic universe. As for the news that Disney now owns Lucasfilm, Michelle is overwhelmingly pessimistic and rather caustic:

My first reaction was a sickening feeling that he sold out. It made me very angry after all the time and money I and tens of thousands of others spent on his franchise giving him the freedom to do as he pleased in this world in return for the hope of him caring about it. I was extremely disappointed when he didn't release the original versions in the blu-ray dvds when he was completely aware of how much us older fans wanted them. You know, the ones who have been spending generations of money (our parent's, ours, and now for our kids) on Star Wars. When people complained, he basically said he was sick and tired of it and basically said it was all his to do as he please and fuck the rest of us, especially the complainers. Well, I wasn't one of the complainers at the time, but with him selling out to Disney, count me in. I don't trust Disney. Sure they do good stuff, but as soon as they took over Pixar, it wasn't the same neither with the muppets, and so on. Sure the Avengers was good, but it's total action fluff. Star wars always had meaning to it not just action. So, I feel screwed by Lucas. What? Lucasfilm wasn't big enough to just let someone else run it, he had to go fucking hand it to Disney on silver platter? It makes me physically ill to think of Princess Leia being caught up in that Disney princess crap. The reason Princess Leia was so incredible was that she wasn't some dumb blonde damsel-in-distress waiting

around for Prince Charming. It gave real girls a real role model and she still got to be a princess...

...Fuck! Just fuck!

It seems that we can extrapolate the reason for Michelle's invective here and it concerns Lucas' refusal to release the original versions of *Star Wars* as part of the blu-ray collection (a point of contention for a lot of fans). It is important to point out that Michelle's feelings and fury are not shared by many of my research respondents, but this is not to imply that they do not exist in the fan community at large. Brooker (2002: 79-99) documents many responses from fans who believe Lucas' treatment of the *Star Wars* mythos, following the release of the first prequel, *Episode I: The Phantom Menace* in 1999, let them down in some way 'with everything from a vague sense of disappointment to a feeling of outright betrayal' (ibid: 79). Also noted by Brooker, following the release of *The Phantom Menace*, the fan community split between two warring factions: the "gushers" on one side of the divide – people who loved *The Phantom Menace* and acted as guardians of Lucas' stature as a visionary storyteller – and "bashers" – or, in other words, the "betrayed" – who believed that *The Phantom Menace* did not represent the true "spirit" of *Star Wars* and other perceived "crimes" such as: digitally altering the Original Trilogy, refusing to release the films in their original state, or, perhaps worst of all, corrupting the legacy of *Star Wars* by controlling the prequels in a dictatorial vice-like grip analogous to the Emperor Palpatine himself (ibid: 94-99). Further evidence of the 'fan betrayed' has been captured in the documentary film *The People Versus George Lucas* (2010), through TV texts like the British Comedy, *Spaced* (1999-2001) and a song by Hot Waffles called *George Lucas Raped Our Childhood* (2010) - with the line 'Han steps on Jabba's tail/ The old versions aren't for sale' linking in with Michelle's comments regarding the original edits being unavailable despite fan demand). However, the majority of respondents to this research project express gratitude, respect and sometimes familial affection ('Good Ol' Uncle George', 'like a father figure', 'I named my son Lucas') with a dialectic of feelings ('Brilliant, but not the most talented writer', 'Revolutionary but lost the sense of what *Star Wars* is about', 'Genius/control freak') while only 2% articulated disappointment ('I don't think he's a very intelligent scriptwriter or director and he surrounded himself with 'yes men' during the prequels').

Henry Jenkins (2012), in a personal email conversation, claims that the 'best news contained within the announcement may be that George Lucas himself is stepping back from direct control over the future of the franchise':

[A]fter the first trilogy was created....he [Lucas] lost the capacity for self-censorship and thus put every idea that caught his fancy, good and bad, on the screen or elsewhere into the franchise. And as this happened, he became increasingly embattled with his fans, refusing to bow to popular pressure in any form, and reading it more or less as the same thing as pressure from the

studios, that is, as a compromise to his own artistic vision...There could be no way forward for *Star Wars* as long as Lucas remained at the helm.

Jonathan Gray (personal email, 2012) states that 'Star Wars is such a huge powerhouse that I can't see Disney trying to do anything stupid to damage its integrity as a franchise. Besides, didn't George do that already?' Will Brooker (personal email, 2012) feels that Lucas is 'a bad artist – he shows bad artistic taste and it is a shame he has been allowed to exercise it so freely'. Thus, Michelle is not a lonely individual spouting highly charged invective for the sake of it and I do not want to single her out for disdain or anything remotely negative. What we can see here is how emotionally invested she is in the *Star Wars* universe and how decisions regarding ownership and refusal to listen to fan demands disappointed Michelle considerably (i.e, releasing the original trilogy unedited without digital ornamentation, something Lucas steadfastly refused to do claiming the originals 'did not exist anymore').

Still, Michelle expresses her love for *Star Wars* in a positive manner:

It plays a large part of my life. It has even decided where my (and now my husband's as well) vacation money and toy money goes...it's my escape, my entertainment, and nowadays it feels like home no matter where I go...The original cast feels like they're old friends of mine in a way.

The phrase 'feels like home' and the attachment to the original cast as 'old friends' demonstrates how connected Michelle is to Lucas' mythology and the fan object as 'transitional' (see above). She goes on to cite *Episode III: Revenge of the Sith* (2005) as her third favourite film and that she finds 'parts of the prequel trilogy enjoyable' except 'the pure piece of shit known as PM [*The Phantom Menace*]'. Finally, Michelle signs off that she considers herself 'a fan of all *Star Wars*. It's like pizza: even bad pizza is still pizza'.

The entire gamut of Michelle's emotional responses is incredibly complex and demonstrates many affective dimensions including, for example: betrayal, commitment, anxiety, hate, love, life-affirmation, irritation, anger and familial connection. Unlike the news headlines quoted above detailing so-called fan indignation, it seems that things are infinitely more complicated and complex than a simple system of upset and anger

In response to the question regarding the continuation of the film saga with what is now being described as the Sequel Trilogy (as opposed to the Original Trilogy and The Prequel Trilogy), 47% of the respondents expressed positive emotions - 'excited', 'euphoric', 'thrilled' 'optimistic' 'elated' are common descriptors. 24% reported open ambivalence ranging from, for instance, 'cautiously optimistic', 'ecstatic but wary', 'excited but anxious about storylines' and 'excited and afraid' while only 4% convey only negative feelings (the same 4% reacted negatively to Disney's new role). As discussed above, 37% of respondents reacted positively to the Disney takeover with 44% feeling ambivalent, sometimes detailing a varied range of emotional responses while only 4% reacted negatively. These results

suggest that some *Star Wars* fans may not necessarily agree with Disney acquiring Lucasfilm, but are more buoyant about the potential for new films and other products.

Furthermore, many of the people who responded with “hyperdiegetic ambivalence” put across their concerns regarding canonicity and continuity. As discussed above, the EU-Expanded Universe of novels/ comics books have extended the *Star Wars* mythos to include a 20,000 year history much larger, complex and intricate than the two film trilogies combined by a significant margin. For many EU fans, a sequel to *Episode IV: Return of the Jedi* already exists: ‘The Thrawn Trilogy’ by Timothy Zahn which comprises *Heir to the Empire* (1991), *Dark Force Rising* (1992) and *The Last Command* (1993) is set approximately five years after *Episode IV*. The further adventures of Luke, Han and Leia continue post-Thrawn and includes crucial events in the mythos. For example: Luke marries Mara Jade and they have a son, Ben Skywalker (named after ‘Ben’ Kenobi, Luke’s former master); Han and Leia marry and have Jedi twins, Jacen and Jaina. The EU continues in the future with descendants of the Skywalker family continuing the ongoing struggle against evil: brothers, Kol and Nat Skywalker (also known as ‘Bantha’ Rawk) and, later, Cade Skywalker, son of Kol. (This short précis does not do justice to the vast array of stories operating across the EU matrix which is simply gargantuan).

The debates surrounding the “actuality” of the EU novels (described as the ‘canon wars’ by fans on TheForce.net) has been an ongoing point of contention for many years among fans and some of these discussions – often heated arguments – are documented by Brooker in his chapter on canonicity (2002: 101-115). For many fans of the EU, their commitment to the mythos beyond the films – with some of my respondents claiming they have read all of the novels, an exercise many years in the making with new “episodes” released every month – should be rewarded by an acknowledgment that it all ‘actually happened’. Canon and continuity is, for many fans, a serious bone of contention in many fictional storyworlds; from *Batman* and other comic book properties, most notably those of the DC and Marvel variants (Proctor, 2012), to *Dr. Who* (Parkin, 2007) and *Star Trek*. In many respects, continuity is a considerable preoccupation of fandom (Levitz 2009: 190). Discussing comic book fandom, Putsz (1999) writes that ‘Information based on continuity becomes the source of discussion, jokes and arguments, making it the raw material for the interactive glue that holds comic book culture together’. Reynolds points out that “‘continuity’ ...forms the most crucial aspect of enjoyment for the committed fans’ (1992: 38). I would argue that the commitment, devotion and economic cost of keeping up-to-date with one’s favourite ‘hyperdiegesis’ (Hills 2002: 137), whether in *Batman*, *Stargate*, or, indeed *Star Wars*, can threaten a fans’ ‘ontological security’ regarding the object of their affections.

Lynne Phillips, a 36 year old Museum Collections Manager, is a fan of the EU novels and is concerned. For Lynne, canon is ‘extremely important’ and that she is impressed by the coherence of the *Star Wars* mythos, so much so, that ‘it has become part of the canon in fans’ minds over the past 30+ years’:

I worry that all of that hard work by authors and illustrators – which was all sanctioned by Lucasfilms – is going to fall by the wayside. We've already seen many contradictions with *The Clone Wars* [TV series] which is extremely frustrating for someone who has enjoyed the EU and taken it to heart. Why bother keeping the EU coherent if you're just going to chuck it?

The anxiety here is that new filmic entries in the Star Wars universe will render all of those EU novels and/or comic books obsolete thereby erasing them from the continuity altogether. For someone like Lynne who has spent many hours and money devoting herself to a universe – however fictional – it is extremely crucial for a lot of fans that it all makes sense in a causal manner. This is true for many fans of serialised narratives and Lynne is not alone in this regard. Moreover, Lynne states that if EU novels are written out of continuity, and therefore rendered non-canonical is 'a bad idea and it's disrespectful to the fans, the authors and the Lucasfilm continuity gurus'.

Student, Michael B. Caldwell is also anxious about the fate of the EU:

My real worry here is that they will TRASH a 30-some year history of EU that we've already had to retcon [retroactive continuity] after the prequel trilogy. I don't know if I can take it again...that is the real reason most EU fans are worried. There is already an extensive account of what happens after *Return of the Jedi*, and that material is under SERIOUS danger. I think it would be a horrible business move to alienate all of the hardcore fans for a generation of new ones.

The rhetoric here, and a tone that is employed by many fans of the EU, is that this world is under threat of extinction ('under SERIOUS danger'). The fact that the books still exist and can be read again does not matter as much as securing the fate of causality, canonicity and continuity. Many fans desire a logical narrative progression within a spatio-temporal system of cause and effect. The fictional aspects of the text have consequences in "the real world" and this is a legitimate cause for concern and a significant peril for a fan's ontological existence. (Although I would like to point out that canon is not "written in stone" or lore but is a contentious issue that many fans grapple with. Simply put, canon is not a fixed, immutable entity but something which is argued over rigorously and religiously).

At the beginning of this article, I expressed my fandom as finite even though I was aware of the EU novels, and that the continuation of the saga that I believed was over, intimidated *my* ontological security about the *Star Wars*-fan object that I simply disregarded them as apocryphal stories that were not "real". Many fans also take this stance, too, and this is not to argue for the validity of one perspective over another, but to document the commitment and dedication in accepting different, sometimes contradictory, "versions" of events. DC and Marvel comics implemented the idea of a multiverse – a nexus of parallel worlds – where hypothetically everything counts as canon as contradictory storylines may

exist due to multiple timelines (Proctor, 2010). Perhaps in future this concept will be adopted by fans in the *Star Wars* universe, too.

For the moment, however, the *Star Wars* fan community operates within a “multiverse” of affectation, opposition, acquiescence and a wide and varied array of emotional commitments: to the fans, all of them are real and true; all of them are important.

Conclusion: Limitations and Concerns

As discussed earlier in this article, I expressed a difficulty with negotiating affect and emotion; or, more pointedly, constructing a “map” that could act as a barometer of responses to the news that Lucasfilm had been merged with Disney and the announcement that the *Star Wars* film series would begin again with a new trilogy and further instalments beyond that. But what I have recognised is that the mass of affect/emotion that fans express may be interpreted and put into generalised boxes in order to formulate percentages but may not fully do justice to the wealth, contradiction, passion, gambit of ambivalence and emotional attachment/ investment (alongside many inter-related areas) that fans exhibit. I have to be honest here. In my ambition – some may say hubris – I should have reduced the number of respondents considerably in order to focus on a smaller percentage that may have enhanced the project’s interpretative dimensions. I would like to give *all* of my respondents the opportunity to vocalise their inner selves, but research such as this inevitably involves selection and arbitration. But I take some solace from Hills who, in the preface to *Fan Cultures* (2002: xii-xiii) argues that ‘[a]ny reader firmly committed to a model of culture as non-contradictory, and who believes that “the real world” is composed of clearly definable entities...will probably need to put this book down...’

On the other hand, this research project illustrates a maelstrom of affective/emotional factors that are difficult to quantify, but does act a counter-point to how some media outlets reported the distress of fans in reductive and over-simplified terms. That the *Star Wars* fan is committed to their fan-object (which may also be one of many such objects) is nothing new; but I hope that this article provides some insight into the reactions that occur when ‘a beloved fan object becomes, literally, a ‘transitional object’, with a new phase or new hope being offered to audiences, then this seems to very much become a moment of heightened fan feeling, and anxiety’ (Hills, 2012). Rather than a simple two-way system between ‘like’ and ‘dislike’, this article demonstrates that things are infinitely more complex and more difficult to track and, consequently, to map.

One final point: in *Dark Knight Triumphant: Fandom, Hegemony and the Rebirth of Batman on Film* (2013), I argue that the disillusionment many fans felt towards Joel Schumacher’s *Batman* films – *Batman Forever* (1995) and, more notably, *Batman and Robin* (1997) – began to be documented across the World Wide Web which provided a blueprint for Warner Bros that could be used to steer future film instalments. To be clear, this was not only about financial dividends. *Batman and Robin* made a substantial windfall at the box office and taking into account “paratextual” factors such as merchandising, toys and theme

park rides, the profits far exceeded the film's budget by a large margin. But the sheer volume of fan discontentment acted in digital solidarity and forced the blockbuster franchise into hibernation for almost a decade. One thing became clear: fans wanted Batman to be dark and serious, more like the "dark knight" of Frank Miller comic books than the "camp crusader" of the 1960s TV show and Schumacher's exploits. The result? Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight Trilogy* (2005-2012) which many commentators cite as a victory for the Bat-fan (Proctor, 2013). This is not to act celebratory and push aside the hegemonic factors at work here – Hollywood in general and, in this instance, Warner Bros in particular, clearly have the upper hand; after all, they legally own the *Batman* film franchise and brand. However, at times,

fandom clearly has a voice and, at times, the volume is turned up so loud that the stability of the Hollywood hegemony can be loosened from its axis. In short, the 'powers that be', at the top of the spectrum, take note of the cacophony of voices bellowing from beneath (Proctor, 2013)

In *Using the Force*, Brooker (2002: 98) informs us that the *Star Wars* fans – whether 'gushers' or 'bashers' – do not believe that 'they have any power to affect the *Star Wars* saga', a factor that also crops up in Tulloch's argument in *Science Fiction Audiences* (1995: 144-72) describing *Dr. Who* fans as a 'powerless elite'. Jenkins argues that '[f]ans are the most active segment of the media audience, one that refuses to accept what they are simply given, but rather insists on the right to become full participants' (2006: 131). Citing cultural anthropologist and industry consultant, Grant McCracken, he points out that 'in the future, media producers must accommodate consumer demands to participate or they will run the risk of losing the most active and passionate consumers to some other media interest that is more tolerant' (ibid:133).

Given the wealth of material on offer online in relation to the next phase of the *Star Wars* mythos and fan vocalisations, it will be interesting to see if Disney adopts the tyrannical position that Lucas has now relinquished; or if fans can make themselves heard among the cacophony of voices across the internet. At the time of writing, Michael Arndt has been announced as writer for the next film, something that the fan community seems optimistic about due to his work on *Toy Story III* (2010) and *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006); but, certainly not a fan-favourite. Only time will tell if Disney-Lucasfilm learns from the lessons of the *Batman* 'war' and starts to listen to the *Star Wars* fans: after all, they are loud enough. It is time to start listening.

Post-Script

Since this article was written based upon research carried out *before* the news that J.J Abrams was announced as director for the next *Star Wars* instalment, I would like to take this opportunity to indicate. Interestingly, 12% of respondents cited Abrams as a good choice for the director's chair, 13% favoured Joss Whedon, 16%, cited Steven Spielberg.

There is some cross-pollination in the results with some commentators favouring all three as possible choices; but over 20% expressed a desire for someone who stays “true” and faithful to the “spirit” of the *Star Wars* universe which, they felt, was more important than any single director who may or may not corrupt the *Star Wars* “vision”.

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Notes:

¹ This research was carried out prior to the news that J.J Abrams would be the director for Episode VII.

² Theforce.net was used primarily because it is a well-known central hub of Star Wars fan activity online. Additionally, this also follows Brooker's strategy in *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (2002) which successfully attracted the attention of over one hundred people.

³ I first encountered this quote in Hills (2003: 76)