
Between Textuality and Materiality: Fandom and the Mediation of Action Figures

Philipp Dominik Keidl

Volume 42, Issue 2: *Film and Merchandise*, November 2018

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/fc.13761232.0042.207> [<http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/fc.13761232.0042.207>]

 [<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>]

Abstract

Taking Star Wars as a case study, this article analyzes action figures as complex media texts that are consumed through a diverse range of media beyond the actual tangible objects available in toy stores. While earlier discussions of action figures have predominantly explored the relationship between character toys and the narrative of a fictional text, this article foregrounds the mediation of toys as playthings through fiction and non-fiction fan productions—including fan-fic, videos, cosplay, production histories, guidebooks, and podcasts on the past, present, materiality, and playability of action figures.

Based on the premise that “film has never been (just) film, nor has television ever been (just) television,” Jonathan Gray argues that “we need an ‘off-screen studies’ to make sense of the wealth of other entities that saturate the media, and that construct film and television.” [1][#N1] Action figures have been popular objects of investigation in this scholarly turn off-screen. Gray himself has investigated action figures as paratexts, whilst others discussed them in relation to media convergence, participatory culture, franchising, transmedia, the media mix, collecting, play, customization, or mimetic fandom. [2][#N2] Despite their heterogeneous approaches, these studies share a predominant interest in the relationship between toys and the narrative of a fictional text, comprehensively outlining how intangible storyworlds become tangible off-screen. What these studies neglect is the question of how the materiality of toys is represented across a wide range of media, such as advertisements, print and online publications, podcasts, videos, and others. This article argues that a better understanding of action figures and their role in contemporary media culture will remain incomplete without the recognition of their diverse mediation in what this article defines as *action figure media*. In this regard, the following argument is also a plea that the call for an off-screen studies needs to be accompanied with research on those media in which the action figures are shown as what they have been produced for: playthings.

Action figure media contains non-fiction and fiction formats and genres. Since the emergence of early collectible guides on popular material culture in the 1950s, [3][#N3] career and amateur historians have produced books, blogs, videos, documentaries, podcasts, museum exhibitions, and TV shows on action figures. These histories share a common interest in the materiality and playability of the toys. They highlight issues such as articulation, size, and accessories, and also feature biographies of designers and managers, production materials, molding techniques, packaging design, and prototyping. Moreover, these histories address unrealized toy concepts, distribution, advertisements, marketing, bootlegging, licensing contracts, region-specific variants between lines and national markets, as well as memories of play and the hobby of collecting. In terms of fiction, fans of toys pay homage to action figures across a wide range of practices usually associated with fandom of fictional texts; for example, by writing fan-fic starring playthings, producing toy stories set in domestic spaces, and performing in action figure cosplay at conventions. Even though these texts star media-themed playthings, they never lose their focus on the material culture of the toys. Together, non-fiction and fiction action figure media shine new light on the relationship between the textuality and materiality of toys and

other merchandise that has found little acknowledgment in film and media studies with its concentration on the textual relationship of action figures to fictional storyworlds.

This article focuses primarily on the mediation of action figures as playthings in fan-produced action figure media. Through *Star Wars* as a case study, action figures are shown to be complex media texts that are consumed beyond the actual tangible object available in toy stores. This article therefore introduces a new set of fiction and non-fiction texts and fan practices into scholarship on the “object/text ecosystem” of fandom. [4]. Drawing from previous research treating action figures and other toys as distinct objects of fandom, this article provides a more elaborate analysis of fans’ textual productivity of action figure media that has not been covered in as much detail as issues of collecting, customization, and play. [5]. The first section integrates action figure media into definitions of action figures, and explores fans’ interest in the wider material culture of the toys beyond the actual plaything and their mimetic and thematic connections to fiction texts. Fans stimulate and satisfy this interest, this section argues, through the consumption of media covering these aspects. The second section surveys a variety of fiction and non-fiction action figure media, dividing them into the categories of toys-come-to-life-as-toys stories and action figure histories. Moreover, the second section will address how action figure media has been recognized by the cultural industries, which have begun to produce, distribute, and market fiction and non-fiction action figure media to more mainstream audiences. Finally, the last section discusses action figure fans as a sub-community with their own hierarchies, skills, and knowledge that operate side by side and in relation to other fan groups coming together under the umbrella of the *Star Wars* franchise.

The Mediation of Action Figures

Action figures have been highly mediated toys with close ties to the media industries since their inception in the 1960s, long before the release of George Lucas’s *Star Wars: A New Hope* in 1977. [6]. The unprecedented success of Kenner’s action figure line, however, created a new boom in the production of media-themed toys. The synthesis of toy and media industries peaked when the Reagan administration abolished FCC regulations prohibiting product-based programming for children in 1983. Action figure lines like *Masters of the Universe* and *Transformers* were released alongside commissioned television shows that advertise the toys to children in addition to conventional marketing campaigns. [7]. Many scholars have approached with ambivalence the increasing synergy of media and toy industries, and the consequential narrativization of playthings, throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The few scholars who take an optimistic perspective consider mimetic toys as opportunities for children to access, adapt, and expand themes addressed in fictional storyworlds through the three-dimensional materialization of otherwise two-dimensional images. [8]. The larger camp of pessimistic critics framed media-themed toys as mere promoters and symptoms of a mindless consumer culture. [9]. In film and media studies, similar conceptions reduce toys and other merchandise to tangible afterthoughts, produced for the benefit of a “parasitic industry” that does not possess any creative agency of their own. [10].

More recent research has provided alternative readings of toys, moving the discussion from how media influences play to questions of how toys impact or change the interpretations of a film or show. Gray’s study of paratexts has been one of the most influential in this regard, claiming that “toys [...] have never merely been ‘secondary’ spinoffs or coincidental: they have played a vital role in, and thus have become a vital part of, the primary text and its unrivalled success.” [11]. Also using the *Star Wars* franchise as an example, Gray argues that the toys refined and accentuated certain themes and meanings of the films. Through play, children were able to develop their own narrative using marginal characters in the text that were available as action figures. [12]. At the same time, the popularity of certain action figures also had an impact on the development of the films’ diegesis. According to Gray, the rare and popular action figure of Boba Fett contributed to the bounty hunter’s cult status among many fans, and the character’s central role in the prequel trilogy can be attributed to this embodiment as a plaything. [13]. However, the conception of toys as paratexts does not extend to action figure

media that are self-referential rather than reliant upon Lucas's storyworld. Just as action figures challenge such binaries between film and merchandise, action figure media challenge the notion of "primary" and "secondary" texts with regards to action figures as texts.

Toy scholars also focus on connections to fictional texts and tend to exclude the mediation of toys as playthings in their definitions of action figures. So, then, non-fiction productions like the fan-made documentary *Plastic Galaxy: The Story of Star Wars Toys* (Brian Stillman 2014), reviews of new releases published on video channels like *Analog Toys*, specialized fan-magazines like *Action Figure Resource*, or the recent Netflix production *The Toys That Made Us* (2017-present) are overlooked. Consider Sharon M. Scott's definition of action figures as:

miniature toys made to represent living individuals and fictional characters. They are made of plastic and have articulated body parts such as arms that bend and heads that turn. The action figure usually functions within a larger narrative in which a number of other characters have specific roles. Within these fictions, which are provided by comic books, television, and real life drama, the figures are likely divided into groups of heroes and villains who reenact the battle between Good and Evil. [14].[#N14]

Although *Star Wars* action figures cannot be wholly separated from the fictional texts they are based on, their presentation as *miniature plastic toys with articulated body parts* in action figure media operates at one remove, or at least is not strictly dependent upon the narrative "mothership" of the *Star Wars* storyworld. A definition of action figures that includes their mediation as playthings provides a better understanding of questions about why and how action figures are consumed, both independently and in relation to other franchise texts. Critics of mimetic toys may see a toy's attractiveness as increasingly dependent on its connection to characters from a fictional text and the consequent possibility to reenact narratives. [15].[#N15] But action figure media with its focus on the materiality and playability of toys demonstrates that consumers still care about a toy's intrinsic appeal as a plaything beyond its mimetic and narrative qualities.

Promotional materials are the oldest form of action figure media. In their marketing between 1978 and 1983, Kenner focused on how *Star Wars* action figures enabled play rather than on establishing elaborate connections to the film's characters, settings, and themes beyond combat. Television commercials emphasized the size of the figures, which at 3.75 inches was considerably smaller than the industry standard of 12 inches. Moreover, these commercials emphasized special features such as weapons and vehicles. They showed children holding the figures, placing them in easy-to-handle spaceships, and moving them effortlessly from one place to another. Reference to the film's content and themes functioned more as a trigger for "action" than as a guideline for screen-accurate reenactments of iconic scenes. In turn, toy catalogues and stores staged the figures, play sets, and vehicles in complex dioramas that children could admire onsite or in print, thereby also delivering information on the latest toy releases, as well as suggestions on how the figures could be posed and arranged at home.

The impact of such texts becomes evident in fans' childhood recollections published in their autobiographies, which often contain sections dedicated to memories of television commercials and print advertisements. In *A Long Time Ago: Growing up with and out of Star Wars*, Gib van Ert describes how looking through toy catalogues was a central activity for him and his friend during their childhood, and how central Sears catalogs and Kenner's booklets were for their engagement with action figures. [16].[#N16] The value given by fans like Van Ert to these texts is also evidenced by the fact that promotional materials are themselves seen as collectibles and are regularly covered in price guides or collector's meetings.

The attention fans pay to ephemera is symptomatic of their wider interest in the material culture of action figures, a practice covered by the term action figure media. In addition to the finished toys one can buy in stores, action figure media also addresses objects and materials related to a toy's

production, such as licensing contracts, production notes, concept art, maquettes, prototypes, proof cards, store displays, and patent records, among other things. Action figure media therefore provides a much more complex image of toys as objects, and challenges established definitions based on simple connection to fictional texts. Fiction and non-fiction action figure media focus on the different incarnations and materialities of the toys that are rarely discussed in scholarship on the intersection of media and toy culture. As such, action figure media indicates how the playthings are consumed through media about toys and their material qualities, therefore making their consumption independent of actual ownership of the toys themselves.

Toys-Come-to-Life-As-Toys Media and Action Figure Histories

Fans have been some of the most productive and creative producers of action figure media, bringing together skills and knowledge on the *Star Wars* storyworld and its material culture that often exceed in style and creativity that of industry-run promotional campaigns. Action figure media can be divided into two broad categories. *The first category* is toys-come-to-life-as-toys media, which should be understood as a subset of the toys-come-to-life genre in which playthings become animated characters without human interference. [17]. [N17]. Fan and media scholars have addressed the animation of toys in relation to photoplay and vidding for storytelling, for instance. [18]. [N18]. However, in these examples toys are first and foremost animated as the characters they mimic. Hence, a toy's specificity as a plaything is often neglected in favour of representational accuracy in the remaking, expansion, or parody of popular media texts. The examples of fan-fic, vidding, and cosplay discussed below bring toys to life as playthings. In these works, the toys may or may not contain character traits familiar from fiction, but never lose sight of action figures' material qualities beyond mimeses. *The second category* is fan-produced histories of a given action figure as a design object, commodity, plaything, object of fandom, and collectible. They chronicle what design historian Victor Margolin calls the full cycle of a product that "begins with its conception, planning, and manufacturing, moves to its acquisition and use, and ends with its disassembly or disposal." [19]. [N19]. Fan-produced histories therefore present a toy's past apart from the release of new media texts that often structure the appearance of action figures in *Star Wars* historiography.

Toys-come-to-life-as-toys media

Although relatively small in comparison to fan-fic archives and databases contain works in which toys come to life and interact either with each other, their owners, or with characters from other franchises. Examples like *Welcome to the Dollhouse* notably negotiate the relationship between *Star Wars* texts and the material culture of the franchise. [20]. [N20]. It tells the story of a longing Qui-Gon Jinn action figure, who waits every night for the arrival of his beloved apprentice, rejecting sexual advances from Ken dolls living in the same place. The pleasure of reading this text lies in the transference of the close relationship between Qui-Gon Jinn and Obi-Wan Kenobi portrayed in George Lucas's *The Phantom Menace* (1999) into the space of a kid's bedroom, where the queer potentialities of the Jedi mentor-pupil relationship are explored. Just like fan-fic and fan speculations on the topic, *Welcome to the Dollhouse* challenges readers to think differently about typical heteronormative portrayals of Jedi relationships in the films. [21]. [N21]. In addition, the story can also be read as a critique of the gendered and hyper-masculine branding of action figures as boy toys. [22]. [N22]. While "the strict gender coding of toys does not necessarily predestine them for stereotypical uses in play," [23]. [N23]. merchandise still positions female fans in discourses of beauty and romance, and action figures remain geared toward heterosexual male consumers. [24]. [N24]. By queering action figures, fan-fic authors challenge the still-present gender politics "in a contemporary media environment where culture industries gendercode their media products as 'for boys' or 'or girls'," including toys. [25]. [N25]. Instead of focusing on masculinized themes of combat, fan-fic authors emphasize love and vulnerability, thereby providing an alternative form of action figure consumption outside heteronormative iterations of *Star Wars* that primarily target male consumers. In other words, action figure fan-fic is a form of resistance to

dominant cultural norms and practices that reduce *Star Wars* and its toys to a “boys’ game of action figure combat” and neglects, marginalizes, and prohibits alternative modes of play. [26][#N26]

However, not all forms of action figure media lend themselves to such readings. The practice of action figure vidding also plays with the fantasy of what toys get up to when we aren’t looking. These productions are primarily set in domestic spaces or playgrounds and tell stories about toys living in them. They often star generic characters such as Stormtroopers and have titles that provide vague information and are structured around simple references to battles, rescues, or fights. These movies begin as quickly as they end and often advance without substantial dialogue. For example, *Star Wars Stop Motion Zombies* shows a fight between different *Star Wars* toys, in which action figures fight between their own packaging on what looks like a kitchen or dining room floor. [27][#N27] Even in movies with more advanced scripts, the toys first and foremost come to life as playthings. *Star Wars The Force Shorts: How To Deal With Haters* shows how new action figures arrive and disturb the peaceful atmosphere among older toys from the *Star Wars*, *Transformers*, and Marvel universes. [28][#N28]. In all of these cases, the videos document the toys’ potentialities for play by acting out themes of war and battle from their source text. With their obvious setting in domestic spaces and staging of battles, these videos pick up on commercials in which the action figures are first and foremost toys for playing out conflicts. They reinforce the sexed and gendered perceptions of the franchise and its toys that *Welcome to the Dollhouse* tries to break. Therefore, these videos become a site for the reassertion of dominant gender roles in fictional storyworlds as well as material culture.

The videos discussed above differ in their emphasis on toys as playthings from what Henry Jenkins’ describes as action figure movies and cinema respectively: “movies which may lovingly recreate the specific images the filmmakers remembered from the source material but may also playfully evoking the mixing and matching of characters that were part of toyroom play.” [29][#N29] Action figure cinema is dedicated to character development or world-building, that uses the toys as an “authoring system [...] to make up their own stories about these characters.” [30][#N30] In turn, action figure vidding brings toys to life as toys, and while character traits and storylines may potentially overlap, the films nevertheless always make clear that the viewer is watching *Star Wars*-toy stories and not *Star Wars*-stories told with toys. In the case of the film *Blue TIE Blues-Tie Fighter*, toys are even portrayed by humans. The short film tells the story of several vehicles gathering for a poker game that end up discussing the exclusion of Blue Tie Fighter from the Kenner line for *The Empire Strikes Back* (Irvin Kershner, 1980) more than thirty years after its release. [31][#N31] Toys do not stand in for humans, but humans function as doubles for the playthings— an uncanny reversal of roles that makes the overly predictable masculine approach to the portrayal of the vehicles an ultimately (but probably unintended) queer endeavour.

Finally, images taken at recent conventions feature cosplayers in costumes based not on actual characters from films but instead on corresponding action figures, emphasizing vintage toys’ bulky materiality. For example, an Obi-Wan Kenobi cosplay is based on the abstract light-brown costume of the 1978 action figure, including the telescopic lightsaber and unwieldy plastic vest. Recreating the stiff look of an action figure, the cosplayer avoids any expression that would fall outside the expressive capacities of the toy. [32][#N32] If cosplayers “use their bodies explicitly to display their affection for certain narratives,” the above indicates a fandom for displaying their intimate knowledge and appreciation of very particular qualities of a specific material object. [33][#N33] In addition, images from conventions show life-sized replicas of action figure packaging in which fans can pose, thereby transforming cosplayers of media texts into action figures. [34][#N34] The cosplayers’ detailed costumes become an indirect reference to the parallel existence of material and textual incarnation of characters, as well as the increasing screen-resemblance of action figures enabled by more refined technologies. Action figure cosplay therefore emphasizes the possibility of mimesis while simultaneously stressing the limitations of action figures in achieving absolute screen accuracy or the illusion of aliveness. Performing without any facial expression or fluid movements, the cosplayers are

a come-to-life promise of play as advertised in catalogues. They are not, crucially, attempting to represent or embody on-screen characters.

Action Figure Histories

When it comes to action figure fans' engagement with the past, collecting might be the first thing to come to mind. Collecting has been one of the most visible and widely discussed fan practices associated with material culture. Scholars have examined how fan collections transition from private into public spaces by becoming part of established archives and museums, as well as how fan collections have been presented through individual exhibitions. [35].[#N35] In many regards, historical work of fans begins where collecting ends. As historians, fans do not solely work with their own collections or gather and archive already existing and available data and information. Rather, they produce their own original research as they venture into archives, conduct interviews with people from the toy industry and collectors, and read literature written by professional and amateur historians. Thus, they contribute considerably to knowledge production and take on an active role as agents in what historians describe as "participatory historical culture": the writing of history as a social process and everyday practice outside academia and established heritage institutions that introduces different meanings and uses of the past. [36].[#N36] In the case of the three examples outlined below, fan historians show particular interest in preserving and documenting the material culture of action figures.

Fan historians have explored the history of action figures and other merchandise from various angles, often focusing on one specific production step. For instance, Mattias Rendahl's objective with his self-published *A New Proof: Kenner Star Wars Packaging Design 1977–1979* is "to assemble the most complete and comprehensive information about *Star Wars* packaging as possible" and to "understand the crazy amount of work that went into creating toy packaging and how it was done." [37].[#N37] Rendahl does so by providing a thorough account of how the packaging was devised, including interviews with designers, prints of different stages of package design for each figure, and accounts of how the packaging designs entered the collectors' market and specialized community developed around it. His work makes original and auratic materials from the conception and production of toys accessible that were not mass produced and sold in stores. In many instances, toy companies would dispose of these materials, and would keep only a few of them in their company archives as references before eventually disposing of them altogether. Hence, the preservation of these materials is also the result of fans, who collected them by dumpster diving, visits to flea markets, and directed searches online. Their publication in books makes these otherwise rare objects—which are often excluded in commercial collectible guides or Lucasfilm-produced histories—available to a wider audience.

National histories of *Star Wars* merchandise outside the USA have been another popular topic. They provide detailed information on what kind of *Star Wars* merchandise is sold internationally, how this merchandise differs from merchandise sold in the USA, and toys advertisements and promotions. Stéphane Faucourt's *La French Touch: The Definitive Guide to French Star Wars Collectibles 1977–1987* delivers detailed information on how the marketing office of French toy company Meccano developed retailer catalogues that explain how the action figures should be advertised, what action figures were depicted on the covers, how many pages were dedicated to the *Star Wars* toys, as well as how customer catalogues advertised the toys in formats such as regular booklets or folding posters added to magazines. Moreover, Faucourt offers insights into the kinds of advertising strategies that were used, as well as how the toys were promoted in the national toy magazine *La revue du jouet*, and through promotional materials like greeting cards, store displays, giveaways, and special-offer announcements. [38].[#N38] In this regard, *La French Touch* is also a testament to the work that went into selling hundreds of millions of action figures, sales that cannot simply be attributed to the success of the films.

Finally, fans also collect, preserve, archive, and share stories of how the action figures were played with. On a material level, the importance of play becomes evident in videos of action figure restorations. They provide information on how to restore used toys as close to mint condition as possible, but also on how to preserve traces of play. Indeed, the preservation series *Toy Polloi* and

RetroBlasting include videos that expressively highlight the need to preserve these traces, and also feature reviews of vintage toys and what kind of play they would offer. [39].[#N39]. On the personal level, fans have been active designers of oral history projects. By interviewing other fans about their memories of play, these projects prioritize local and personal stories of everyday fan practice over immense production numbers and revenues. The blog *I Grew Up Star Wars* contains several hundred of images, submitted by fans, that depict children playing with action figures or other merchandise. In a podcast featured on the blog, select fans explain the background of these images, locating their fandom within the context of their everyday lives as children. [40].[#N40]. Similarly, on the podcast *My Star Wars Story*, fans recollect their first encounters with the *Star Wars* films and toys and how their fandom has developed through the years. [41].[#N41]. As such, these fan-produced histories connect individual stories to a larger historical narrative of the *Star Wars* franchise and fandom that is mapping, distinguishing, and diversifying approaches to what, who, and where *Star Wars* history is written.

Mainstream Action Figure Media

The cultural industries have taken notice of toy fandom and the vast interest of fans into action figure media. They have begun to produce works for action figure fans that borrow in form and content from the work of fans. Jenkins argues that “the aesthetic of action-figure cinema gave rise to Adult Swim's successful *Robot Chicken* series, which also mixes and matches characters or recasts them to achieve desired effects.” [42].[#N42]. But the themes and aesthetics of action figure vidding have also found wider distribution in mainstream media. Hasbro celebrated the 40th anniversary of *Star Wars* by producing an elaborate toys-come-to-life-as-toys advertisement in which vintage toys from Kenner and their Black Series come alive. The commercial shows a fight between the Rebellion and the Empire in which vintage Kenner toys pair up with their contemporaries from Hasbro's Black Series to fight the enemy, with the latest, bigger Hasbro figures creatively using their ancestors as weapons. By bringing the toys from different periods together, Hasbro celebrates the original toys while advertising the improved accuracy and flexibility of their own line through modes of animation that document these characteristics.

In terms of non-fiction, Hasbro has begun to produce promotional materials called *Designer Desks* featuring toy designers who give insights into the making of action figures. [43].[#N43]. Moreover, Lucasfilm hired *Star Wars* fan Stephen J. Sansweet to write several books on the franchise, among others on toys and collectibles. Particularly Sansweet's book *Star Wars: From Concept to Screen to Collectible* has had considerable resonance among action figure fans. Published in 1992, the book was at the time the most detailed and well-researched history of the films and its toys to date, and treated merchandise as an integral and irreplaceable factor in making *Star Wars* the pop cultural phenomena it is today. [44].[#N44]. It marked the beginning of a wide range of other fan-made histories, especially on issues like packaging design that Lucasfilm has not addressed in similar detail in their official publications on the topic. In this respect, there is room for fans to fill the gaps with their own work, thereby making them unofficial labourers of *Star Wars* historiography.

Production companies other than Lucasfilm or toy producer Hasbro have begun to capitalize on toy fandom, as well as the ubiquity and recognition value of action figures in popular culture. In December 2017, Netflix released the first season of *The Toys That Made Us (TTTMU)*, which in four episodes explores the history of *Star Wars* and other iconic toy lines. In form and style, the show resembles the genre of making-ofs, usually produced to advertise the release of a new film or TV show, or to celebrate their anniversaries respectively. While such productions primarily refer to toys' sales figures to highlight the success of a film or series, *TTTMU* dedicates the entire 45 minutes of each episode to the design, production, distribution, and reception of the playthings. References to related films or TV shows serve only as a means to introduce crucial developments for the toy lines, never taking center stage. By putting the history of the toys and their makers at the center of the show, *The Toys That Made Us* deemphasizes the notion that toys are merely tangible afterthoughts to popular media texts. Putting emphasis on toys also keeps production budgets low. By focusing on the toys and not on films

or series, *TTTMU* can keep their use of scenes from films and series to a minimum, thereby saving expensive licensing fees.

The success of *TTTMU* demonstrates the potential appeal of action figure media for mainstream audiences. Since the release of the show, Netflix has renewed *TTTMU* for a third season, and added similar productions to its library, such as *Power of Grayskull: The Definitive History of He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* (Randall Lobb & Robert McCallum, 2017) and *The Great Canadian Toy Story* (Summer Love & Jane Michener, 2014). Producer Brian Volk-Weiss developed *TTTMU* knowing that he would need to reach a larger audience than toy fans and collectors. As he explained in an interview: “the whole goal of the show is that someone like us [toy fans and collectors] could watch an episode and love it, but someone like my wife, who doesn’t care at all about *Star Trek*, would enjoy it just as much.” [45].[#N45] The overall recognition value of a brand played an important role in the selection process of the toys for each episode:

I had an idea in my head of like the Mount Rushmore of toys, and I wanted to make sure that every character we did could be on the Mount Rushmore of toys. My wife doesn’t know anything about *Transformers*, but if you show her a picture of Optimus Prime, she knows who that is. That’s what I call the Mount Rushmore factor. [46].[#N46]

In other words, even if someone has not played with the toys featured in the show, potential viewers have most likely heard of them, or at least seen them in a store or a playground. In the case that no familiarity with the toys exists, their connections to popular franchises like *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* might nevertheless attract curious audiences.

Lucasfilm and Netflix make use of the fan cultural capital of Volk-Weiss and Sansweet for their production of action figure media, but they can also draw from Sansweet and Volk-Weiss’s career in media. Before joining Lucasfilm, Sansweet worked as a journalist for *The Wall Street Journal*, and Volk-Weiss produced several comedy specials for Netflix before it green-lighted *TTTMU*. Their careers give them credibility as authors and filmmakers, and provide them with the experience and skills to turn subcultural interests into entertaining narratives with a reach beyond their respective fan communities. In the case of *TTTMU*, this results in fast-paced narratives that combine nostalgia for old toys from the past with the harsh realities of working in the toy industries in each episode. Rather than catering to dedicated collectors and their interest in every small detail of individual objects, the show presents toy history as a heightened drama. Rapid commercial success is followed by threats of bankruptcy, product innovation ends in creative stagnation, collegial collaboration turns into estrangement, and seemingly dead toys are profitably resurrected – or not. In the case of Sansweet, the history of *Star Wars* action figures is packaged into glossy coffee-table books with witty and informative texts and descriptions of the vast material culture of *Star Wars*. However, Lucasfilm also made no secret about hiring Sansweet as Director of Content Management and Head of Fan Relations in 1996 because of his good reputation among fans. As Jim Ward, former president of LucasArts and vice president of marketing at Lucasfilm, explained: “getting the message out to the influential fans who can then disseminate that information to the whole fan base is not as easy as you might think [and Sansweet] has relationships that can create a groundswell among our fans on a mass basis to go out and celebrate *Star Wars*.” [47].[#N47]

In turn, Sansweet and Volk-Weiss have been able to transform their fan cultural capital into economic capital. Matt Hills argues that fan-producers of commemorative works are more likely to commodify their works than fan-fic authors, who are met with more criticism from their peers when they retail their works. [48].[#N48] However, although fan historians often sell their self-published works, Sansweet and Volk-Weiss are exceptions rather than the norm. It is debatable whether histories such as Rendahl’s *A New Proof* improve the author’s economic capital as much as it increases his reputation among his peers. The book’s acclaim has given Rendahl a reputation as a specialist, not only among fans but also within the toy industry. Hasbro, for instance, invited him to give a presentation at a

special event celebrating the 40th anniversary of *Star Wars* in Berlin. Yet, it is likely that the potential revenues from self-published book sales and occasional talks at best cover the costs and hours invested in building a collection, researching, writing, editing, photographing, proof-reading, designing, advertising, selling, and shipping books; it is less likely that they translate into actual profits. Nevertheless, these examples of entrepreneurial fan activities indicate that some fan historians are able to move between formal and informal economies, thereby achieving a special standing within both action figure fan communities and the cultural industries. [49].[#N49]

Action Figures as Objects of Fandom

The consumption of action figures as media texts not tied to specific fictional narratives, and the role of fans as action media producers, further expands our understanding of action figures as objects of fandom. Two specific questions are of interest in this discussion: First, what kind of skills and knowledge differentiates action figure fans from film and television fans? Second, how can we position action figure fans within the larger *Star Wars* fan community? According to Cornel Sandvoss, all objects of fandom should be understood as mediated texts. No matter if “we find our object of fandom in Britney Spears, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or the Boston Red Sox, these are all read and negotiated as (mediated) texts by their fans.” [50].[#N50] Of course, fans are more likely to own an action figure than their own sports team like the Red Sox, but even though action figures are produced in the millions, not all individual figure designs are equally available or affordable. The understanding of toys as mediated texts shifts our understanding from the idea of collecting physical toys to the consumption of action figures through media. In other words, it foregrounds the idea that some fans are not solely dedicated to “owning” an object or an image of action figures, but are interested in the stories told about them.

Consider the case of Kenner’s original design for the first Boba Fett action figure: the company had advertised the action figure as a giveaway before the release of *The Empire Strikes Back*, particularly promoting the missile that could be fired from Fett’s back. Due to concerns that children would be able to swallow the little rocket, the figure was never produced as advertised. [51].[#N51] Nevertheless, this unproduced version of the toy has become one of the mediated toys in *Star Wars* action figure history. The figure regularly appears across different media through prototype images, advertisements, bootleg copies, or fan recollections of the excitement for the figure. Therefore, action figure media is at times the only means with which rare toys and related objects may be available and consumable for fans, and a means to engage and negotiate their object of fandom through media. [52].[#N52]

The content of action figure media also indicates how toy fan communities have developed alongside and independently from those of fans of the films. They have produced distinct forms of knowledge and skills that are communicated and documented through action figure media. Fans of toys are not necessarily concerned with a corresponding text’s diegesis, its characters, or the creative minds behind it. Rather, they have extensive knowledge of different forms of plastic and their characteristics, changes in the production technologies of toys, as well as the factories in which they were produced. They research the biographies and work of toy designers, the different steps involved in the making of toys, as well as the way individual toys or their respective lines change from first sketch to final product. Toy fans know how to identify, appraise, restore, preserve, and display toys, and it is precisely through action figure media that fans acquire their knowledge and skills. As Kristen N. Bryant et al explain, adult toy fans bring an “erudite, age-related accumulation of knowledge about a toy’s aesthetic elements, including its circumstances of design or manufacture, to their appreciation of toys as objects of play.” [53].[#N53] It is through action figure media that fans acquire their knowledge and skills.

Fan historiography is participatory, and fans can share and acquire knowledge on various platforms. Nevertheless, action figure fans have their own hierarchies in which the work of some fans is particularly valued, and executive fans who establish and run central organizations for the community have considerable influence. [54].[#N54] Besides Sansweet and Rendahl, Gus Lopez has established

himself as a renowned *Star Wars* collector and historian. He is the author of collectible guides, [55][#N55] and founder of the *The Star Wars Collectors Archive* website as well as the influential Seattle Area Lucasfilm Artifact Collectors Club. [56][#N56] Also moving between formal and informal economies, Lopez regularly appears as a *Star Wars* expert on television and documentaries, including *TTTMU* or the fan-made *Plastic Galaxy*. Similarly, Thomas Manglitz, curator of the German fan-run museum Stars of the Galaxy, has acquired the status of a *Star Wars* expert within and beyond the fan community. Fans regularly visit the museum and interview him about his work, as do regional and national television channels and newspapers. [57][#N57] At the top of these hierarchies, then, are distinguished fans whose competences and skills as authors, bloggers, directors, curators, panel speakers, and interviewers are communally recognized and distinguished. The prestige awarded to particularly proficient fans and projects affirms John Fiske's observation that fans "reproduce equivalents of the formal institutions of official culture" in their production, use, organization, and maintenance of cultural capital. [58][#N58] Hence, it is those fans who successfully run these formal institutions who are most likely to move from the "shadow cultural economy" of fandom into the cultural industries. [59][#N59]

What requires further exploration, however, is how toy fandom is positioned within larger media franchises such as *Star Wars*. Especially in the case of Sansweet, it becomes evident that certain fans function as authority figures for several sub-communities or the *Star Wars* community as a whole. As a result of his employment at Lucasfilm, his broad knowledge of the *Star Wars* storyworld, and his vast collection, Sansweet represents a link between different *Star Wars* fan groups. Hence, while the notion of action figures as mediated texts enables toy fandom and its practices and communities to be more clearly differentiated from their narrative "mothership," it should not overshadow the multidimensionality of fandoms in contemporary media franchising. Indeed, considering this variety of textual and material versions of the franchise, the phrase "*Star Wars* fan" at best works as an umbrella term under which different forms of fandom come together and at times intersect. In this regard, one needs to consider how fans of *Star Wars* action figures might also identify with other aspects of the transmedia franchise, albeit not necessarily with all of them.

Hills addresses the multidimensionality of fandom by arguing that conceptions of fan cultures as "isolated and singular" neglect the "extent to which fans of one text or icon may also be fans of other seemingly unrelated texts/icons simultaneously." [60][#N60] He proposes the concept of trans-fandom for the study of fans "who are moving across different fandoms [and are] moving across these different forms of fan knowledge." [61][#N61] While Hills discusses multidimensionality across different franchises, action figure media and action figures as objects of fandom force us to consider trans-fandom within a specific franchise like *Star Wars*. Some *Star Wars* fans may only be interested in one incarnation of the storyworld, such as the films. Other fans may belong to different sub-communities within the franchise, combining their skills and knowledge on the films with the LEGO products, or their interest in the tie-in novels with the video games. And while some fans only focus on the action figures and their role in toy history and culture, others combine material and textual familiarity with the storyworld across different media in their works. In other words, those fans who belong to multiple communities of a franchise like *Star Wars* represent a form of inner-franchise trans-fandom. Action figure media and its consumption and production can therefore function as a conceptual tool to understand the formation, development, and maintenance of such specific sub-communities, as well as how they interact with other *Star Wars* fan groups.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the notion of action figure media in relation to three interdependent phenomena: fans' interest in the wider material culture of the toys beyond the actual plaything and their mimetic and thematic connections to fiction texts; fans as producers of fiction and non-fiction media on action figures and their wider material culture; and action figure fans as a sub-community with its own hierarchies, skills, and knowledge that operates side-by-side and in relation to other fan groups gathered around the *Star Wars* franchise. Gray's call for an off-screen study and the dialectical

relationship between toys and fictional texts inspired this argument. In turn, the idea of action figure media ultimately focused on the relationship between toys and media dedicated to action figures as a plaything. Demonstrating that the manner in which people collect and play with finished toys is only one of many practices in which toy and media culture intersect, this article approached action figures as complex objects that are consumed in various material forms as well as across a variety of media telling different “toy stories.” Thus, action figures should be understood as consisting of three components: actual material objects, textual connections to a fiction storyworld, and action figure media.

And while this essay has focused on *Star Wars* toys, action figure media is also produced on other lines, such as *Masters of the Universe*, *Transformers*, *Jurassic Park*, or *Star Trek*. Indeed, many action figure media and their producers focus on several toy lines, showing the multidimensionality of their fandom. [62].[#N62] For instance, publications like the self-published *Each Sold Separately: Scattered Thoughts on the Action Figure Marketing of the Eighties* by Philip Reed addresses 30 different toy lines and how they were marketed in catalogues, commercials, mail-away specials, store and films and series. [63].[#N63]

Beyond this essay and the specific case study of the *Star Wars* franchise, the notion of action figure media could be used for the following research inquiries. First, the concept can further the study of fans’ textual productivity. Of particular importance here is that (at least in the current moment) non-fiction action figure media outnumbers fiction productions. Since fan studies has primarily focused on fans’ textual productivity and criticism of fiction media, action figure media can function as a useful resource to expand our understanding of non-fiction practices and how they are co-opted by the cultural industries. [64].[#N64] Second, action figure media provides the foundation for writing a more elaborate history of action figure fandom by looking at productions by and for action figure fans, such as early collectible guides, Internet sites, fan clubs, and recent industry productions. Finally, the study of action figure represents a step towards not only writing merchandise objects into film and media history, but also writing a media history of merchandise that gives more attention to the question of how, where, when, with what, and by whom merchandise is designed, produced, distributed, sold, consumed, and eventually mediated.

Author Biography

Philipp Dominik Keidl is a PhD candidate in Film & Moving Image Studies at Concordia University in Montreal, and sessional instructor at the University of Northern British Columbia. His dissertation project *Plastic Heritage: Fans and the Making of History* examines historiography as fan practice, including case studies on publication projects, restoration tutorials, and fan-curated exhibitions. He holds an MA in Preservation and Presentation of the Moving Image from the University of Amsterdam.

Notes

1. Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 4. *.[#N1-ptri]
2. See, among others: Gray, *Show Sold Separately*; Colin B. Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia: Narrative, Play and Memory Across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Henry Jenkins, “Quentin Tarantino’s *Star Wars*? Digital Cinema, Media Convergence, and Participatory Culture,” in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, edited by David Thorburn and Henry Jenkins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), 281-312; Avi Santo, *Selling the Silver Bullet: The Lone Ranger and Transmedia Brand Licensing* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015); Jason Bainbridge, “Fully Articulated: The Rise of the Action Figure and the Changing Face of ‘Children’s’ Entertainment,” *Entertainment Studies* 24, no.6 (2010): 829-842; Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Marc Steinberg, *Anime’s*

Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Lincoln Geraghty, *Cult Collectors: Nostalgia, Fandom and Collecting Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Katriina Heljakka, "Toy Fandom, Adulthood, and The Ludic Age: Creative Material Culture as Play," in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World* (2nd edition), edited by Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and C. Lee Harrington (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 91-105; Victoria Godwin, "GI Joe vs. Barbie: Anti-Fandom, Fashion, Dolls, and One-Sixth Scale Action Figures," *Journal of Fandom Studies* 3, no.2 (2015): 119-133; Victoria Godwin, "Customized Action Figures: Multi-Dimensional Fandom and Fannish Fiction," *Journal of Fandom Studies* 2, no.2 (2014.): 111-125; Victoria Godwin, "Mimetic Fandom and One-Sixth-Scale Action Figures," *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no.20 (2015).♣[#N2-ptri]

3. Scott Herring, *The Hoarders: Material Deviance in Modern American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 57.♣[#N3-ptri]
4. Bob Rehak, "Materializing Monsters: Aurora Models, Garage Kits, and the Object Practices of Horror Fandom," *Journal of Fandom Studies* 1, no.1 (2012): 34.♣[#N4-ptri]
5. See Heljakka, "Toy Fandom, Adulthood, and The Ludic Age"; Godwin, "GI Joe vs. Barbie"; Godwin, "Customized Action Figures"; Godwin, "Mimetic Fandom and One-Sixth-Scale Action Figures"; Kristen N. Bryant, Denise D. Bielby, and C. Lee Harrington, "Populating the Universe: Toy Collecting and Adult Lives," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Fan Cultures*, edited by Linda Duits, Koos Zwaan, and Stijn Reijnders (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 35-46.♣[#N5-ptri]
6. See Santo, *Selling the Silver Bullet*, 9.♣[#N6-ptri]
7. For a comprehensive action figure history see Sharon M. Scott, *Toys and American Culture: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010), 2-6.♣[#N7-ptri]
8. See Dan Fleming, *Powerplay: Toys as Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Ellen Seiter, *Sold Separately: Children and Parents in Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993).♣[#N8-ptri]
9. See Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys and Children's Culture in the Age of TV Marketing* (London: Verso, 1995); Stephen Kline, "The Limits to the Imagination: Marketing and Children's Culture," in *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America*, edited by Ian Angus and Sut Jhally (New York: Routledge, 1989), 299-316; Thomas Engelhardt, "The Strawberry Shortcake Strategy," in *Watching Television*, edited by Todd Gitlin (New York: Pantheon, 1986), 68-110.♣[#N9-ptri]
10. See Jane Gaines, *Contested Culture: The Image, the Voice, and the Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 214.♣[#N10-ptri]
11. See Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix*, 87-135.♣[#N11-ptri]
12. See Ibid., 181-183.♣[#N12-ptri]
13. See Ibid.♣[#N13-ptri]
14. Scott, *Toys and American Culture*, 1.♣[#N14-ptri]
15. See Steinberg, *Anime's Media Mix*, 111-113.♣[#N15-ptri]
16. See Gib van Ert, *A Long Time Ago: Growing up with and out of Star Wars* (Lexington: Sois-disant press, 2012), 61-62.♣[#N16-ptri]
17. See Lois R. Kuznets, *When Toys Come Alive: Narratives of Animation, Metamorphosis, and Development* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).♣[#N17-ptri]
18. See Jenkins, "Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars?"; Godwin, "Customized Action Figures"; Heljakka, "Toy Fandom, Adulthood, and The Ludic Age."♣[#N18-ptri]
19. Victor Margolin, *The Politics of the Artificial: Essays on Design and Design Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 46.♣[#N19-ptri]
20. darthhelloworld, Welcome to the Dollhouse, published August 21, 2014, Archive of Our Own, accessed May 7, 2018, https://archiveofourown.org/works/2175825?view_adult=true [https://archiveofourown.org/works/2175825?view_adult=true].♣[#N20-ptri]

21. See Will Brooker, *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 144-152. ♣.[#N21-ptri]
22. See Suzanne Scott, “#Wheresrey?: Toys, Spoilers, and the Gender Politics of Franchise Paratexts,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 34, no.2 (2017), 138-147. ♣.[#N22-ptri]
23. Seiter, *Sold Separately*, 192. ♣.[#N23-ptri]
24. Derek Johnson, “‘May the Force Be with Katie’: Pink Media Franchising and the Postfeminist Politics of HerUniverse,” *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 6 (2014), 895-911; Scott, “#Wheresrey?”. ♣.[#N24-ptri]
25. Johnson, “‘May the Force Be with Katie’,” 897. ♣.[#N25-ptri]
26. Brooker, *Using the Force*, 200. ♣.[#N26-ptri]
27. Nivrerex Film, “Star Wars Stop Motion Zombies,” YouTube video, 1:46, October 29, 2013, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDA7IUBbjoU> [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDA7IUBbjoU>]. ♣.[#N27-ptri]
28. TheLeoLegendary10, “Star Wars The Force Shorts: How To deal With Haters,” YouTube video, 1:40, September 5, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzwQh--pExQ> [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzwQh--pExQ>]. ♣.[#N28-ptri]
29. Henry Jenkins, “He-Man and the Masters of Transmedia,” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, May 20, 2010, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2010/05/he-man_and_the_masters_of_tran.html [http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2010/05/he-man_and_the_masters_of_tran.html]. ♣.[#N29-ptri]
30. Ibid. ♣.[#N30-ptri]
31. RetroBlassting, “Star Wars Follies: Blue TIE Blues – Tie Fighter,” YouTube video, 7:29, June 17, 2013, https://youtu.be/Or9MKo_LMeo [https://youtu.be/Or9MKo_LMeo]. ♣.[#N31-ptri]
32. Scifi Staff, “Epic Star Wars Obi-Wan Kenobi Action Figure Cosplay,” *Sci-Fi Design*, April 13, 2017, <https://www.scifidesign.com/2017/04/13/epic-star-wars-obi-wan-kenobi-action-figure-cosplay/> [<https://www.scifidesign.com/2017/04/13/epic-star-wars-obi-wan-kenobi-action-figure-cosplay/>]. ♣.[#N32-ptri]
33. Nicolle Lamerichs, “Stranger than Fiction: Fan Identity in Cosplay,” *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 7 (2011). ♣.[#N33-ptri]
34. See Matt Hills, “From Transmedia Storytelling to Transmedia Experience: Star Wars Celebration as a Crossover/Hierarchical Space,” in *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling*, edited by Sean Guynes and Dan Hassler-Forest (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 221. ♣.[#N34-ptri]
35. See Dorus Hoebink, Stijn Reijnders, and Abby Waysdorf, “Exhibiting Fandom: A Museological Perspective,” in “Material Fan Culture,” edited by Bob Rehak, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 16 (2014); Kevin Moore, *Museums and Popular Culture* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1997); Geraghty, *Cult Collectors*; Heljakka, “Toy Fandom, Adulthood, and The Ludic Age”; Sophie G. Einwächter, “Preserving the Marginal. Or: The Fan as Archivist,” in *At the Borders of (Film) History. Temporality, Archaeology, Theories*, edited by Alberto Beltrame, Giuseppe Fidotta, and Andrea Mariani (Udine: Forum, 2015), 359–69; Sarah Baker, ed. *Preserving Popular Music Heritage: Do-it-Yourself, Do-it-Together* (New York: Routledge, 2015). ♣.[#N35-ptri]
36. See David Thelen in Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 190-208. ♣.[#N36-ptri]
37. Mattias Rendahl, *A New Proof: Kenner Star Wars Packaging Design 1977-1979* (Unknown place of publication: Dear Publications 2015), n.p. ♣.[#N37-ptri]
38. Stéphane Faucourt, *La French Touch: The Definitive Guide to French Star Wars Collectibles 1977–1987* (Unknown place of publication: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016). ♣.[#N38-ptri]

39. *Toy Polloi*, YouTube video channel, accessed May 8th, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/user/toypolloi> [<https://www.youtube.com/user/toypolloi>]. *RetroBlasting*, YouTube video channel, accessed May 8th, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/user/retroblasting> [<https://www.youtube.com/user/retroblasting>]. ♣[#N39-ptri]
40. "Tag: Figures," *I Grew Up Star Wars: Keeping the Galactic Memories of Our Childhood Alive* [blog], accessed May 8th, 2018, <http://igrewupstarwars.com/> [<http://igrewupstarwars.com/>]. ♣[#N40-ptri]
41. "General," *My Star Wars Story* [blog], accessed August 29th, 2018, <http://mystarwarssstory.com/> [<http://mystarwarssstory.com/>]. ♣[#N41-ptri]
42. Jenkins, "He-Man and the Masters of Transmedia." ♣[#N42-ptri]
43. "Designer Desks," *Hasbro.com*, accessed September 13th, <https://starwars.hasbro.com/en-ca/videos> [<https://starwars.hasbro.com/en-ca/videos>]. ♣[#N43-ptri]
44. Stephen J. Sansweet, *Star Wars: From Concept to Screen to Collectible* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992). ♣[#N44-ptri]
45. Ken Reilly, "Interview: Brian Volk-Weiss and The Toys That Made Us," *Trek Core* [blog], February 1, 2018, *Trek Core*, accessed October 14th, 2018, <http://trekcore.com/blog/2018/02/interview-brian-volk-weiss-and-the-toys-that-made-us/> [<http://trekcore.com/blog/2018/02/interview-brian-volk-weiss-and-the-toys-that-made-us/>]. ♣[#N45-ptri]
46. Preston Burt, "6 Facts We Learned About 'The Toys That Made Us' From Producer Brian Volk-Weiss (Including What's Next)," *Geek Dad* [blog], <https://geekdad.com/2018/02/6-facts-learned-toys-made-us-producer-brian-volk-weiss-including-whats-next/> [<https://geekdad.com/2018/02/6-facts-learned-toys-made-us-producer-brian-volk-weiss-including-whats-next/>]. ♣[#N46-ptri]
47. Jim Ward cited in Michael Joseph Gross, "The Force Is with the Fans (One Superfan, in Particular)," *The New York Times*, May 15, 2005. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/15/movies/the-force-is-with-the-fans-one-superfan-in-particular.html> [<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/15/movies/the-force-is-with-the-fans-one-superfan-in-particular.html>]. ♣[#N47-ptri]
48. See Matt Hills, "Doctor Who's Textual Commemorators: Fandom, Collective Memory and the Self-Commodification of Fanfac," *The Journal of Fandom Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 45. ♣[#N48-ptri]
49. See Matt Hills, "Fiske's 'Textual Productivity' and Digital Fandom: Web 2.0 Democratization versus Fan Distinction?," *Participations: Journal of Audience & Reception Studies* 10, no. 1 (2013): 138. ♣[#N49-ptri]
50. Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 8. ♣[#N50-ptri]
51. Sansweet, *From Concept to Screen to Collectible*, 68-70. ♣[#N51-ptri]
52. See Geraghty on the sharing of images online and digital collecting, *Cult Collectors*, 158-160. ♣[#N52-ptri]
53. Bryant et al, "Populating the Universe," 31. ♣[#N53-ptri]
54. See John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience*, edited by Lisa A. Lewis (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 30-49; Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge 2002), 20-36. ♣[#N54-ptri]
55. Duncan Jenkins and Gus Lopez, *Gus and Duncan's Guide to Star Wars Prototypes* (Unknown place of publication: Completist Publications, 2010). ♣[#N55-ptri]
56. See "Collector Interview #10: Gus Lopez", *Vintage Star Wars Collectors: A Blog by a Collector about Collectors*, May 21st, 2017, <http://vintagestarwarscollectors.com/collector-interview-10-gus-lopez/> [<http://vintagestarwarscollectors.com/collector-interview-10-gus-lopez/>]. ♣[#N56-ptri]
57. Articles and reports about the museum have appeared in the *Rheinische Post*, *Westfälische Rundschau*, *Der Westen*, the public broadcaster Westdeutscher Rundfunk, the regional section of

- the private broadcaster RTL, as well as several fan blogs and video channels. ♣. [\[#N57-ptr1\]](#)
58. Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," 33. ♣. [\[#N58-ptr1\]](#)
59. Ibid. , 30. ♣. [\[#N59-ptr1\]](#)
60. Hills, *Fan Cultures*, xvi. ♣. [\[#N60-ptr1\]](#)
61. Matt Hills, "Fandom as an Object and the Objects of Fandom," interview with Clarice Greco. *Matrize* 9, no.1 (2015), 158-159. ♣. [\[#N61-ptr1\]](#)
62. See Godwin, "Customized Action Figures," 113-114. ♣. [\[#N62-ptr1\]](#)
63. Philip Reed, *Each Sold Separately: Scattered Thoughts on the Action Figure Marketing of the Eighties* (Unknown place of publication: Self-published, 2015). ♣. [\[#N63-ptr1\]](#)
64. See Hills, "Doctor Who's Textual Commemorators," 32. ♣. [\[#N64-ptr1\]](#)

Copyright of Film Criticism is the property of Film Criticism and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.