KINEPHANOS
Revue d'études des médias et de culture populaire /
Journal of media studies and popular culture

Volume 8, Issue 1
STAR WARS, Expanded Universe, Legend, Canon? « I thought he was a myth! »
June 2018 29-45

A Bridge and a Reminder:
The Force Awakens, Between Repetition and Expansion

Ana Cabral Martins
University of Lisbon

Abstract

Reviving the *Star Wars* film franchise, after Disney acquired Lucasfilm, meant kick-starting a new trilogy that worked as a link between the old films and a new phase. The result was *The Force Awakens*, a sequel to a 30 year-old trilogy, whose characteristics are not those of a conventional sequel because it exhibits a very strong connection to the original *Star Wars* film, *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (1977). This essay navigates through the ways that allow for repetition, continuity and change to be intertwined within *The Force Awakens*, as the film fluctuates between designations and does not allow for easy labeling.

Keywords: Star Wars, Cinema, Transmedia, Sequel, Remake

Introduction

This paper is born out of a prompt for this special issue, "STAR WARS, Expanded Universe, legend, canon?", that wondered whether *The Force Awakens* (J.J. Abrams, 2015) should or could be called *A New Hope* 2.0. A quote from its director, J.J. Abrams, positions the new *Star Wars* film – the first of a new trilogy after the Lucasfilm and Disney merger – as both a "bridge" to the future of the franchise and a "reminder" of what made it so beloved by its fans and engaging to its audience. While *The Force Awakens* positions itself as a sequel, it is not a conventional one, as it comprehends a combination of continuity, repetition and change, additionally encompassing attributes of "blockbuster nostalgia" and narrative expansion. The connection to the original 1977 film (directed by George Lucas) is felt as *The Force Awakens* consistently borrows imagery and character beats, even mimicking the broad strokes of that original's film narrative. At the same time, the film is a clear continuation of the original trilogy and a relevant illustration of what Matt Hills calls "generational seriality".

This article, then, will engage with theoretical concepts regarding media narrative repetition, continuity and change in order to demonstrate the ways in which *The Force Awakens* either oscillates between or combines multiple tendencies – taxonomy-wise – and, hopefully, will be adding to our current understanding of sequels, remakes, reboots, revivals and other multiplicities. The film is in a suitable, though not unique, position to exemplify some of the trends in contemporary Hollywood storytelling, including the penchant for mining nostalgia in contemporary blockbusters.

Star Wars and nostalgia

In *Flickers of Film: Nostalgia in the Time of Digital Cinema* (2015), Jason Sperb writes specifically about nostalgia as it relates to Hollywood produced blockbusters. The author uses *TRON: Legacy* (2010) as a specific case, but only as a symptom of a larger trend. According to Sperb, the Hollywood film industry has endeavoured to "negotiate a powerful nostalgia for the 1980s that pervades a great majority of high-profile films, while also reflecting in explicitly visual ways the *affective* power of such anachronistic nostalgia". As a result of this trend, the Hollywood film industry's blockbuster production favours an endless number of "reboots, remakes, sequels, and prequels that continually attempt to exploit (…) the value of existing media franchises in ways that both foreground and elide their own nostalgia" (Sperb, 2015: 36).

Similarly, Kathleen Loock, in her chapter "Retro-Remaking: The 1980s Film Cycle in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema" (2016), also explores this cycle that "consists of high-concept blockbusters based on feature films and televisions series of the 1980s" (Loock, 2016: 277), underlining how both the film and television industries have been comparably influenced. The author's use of "remaking" in this chapter is significant as the author uses it, not in a conventional or restricted sense concerning the production of a film remake, but as a (lucrative business) "practice that generates different cinematic formats of innovative reproduction, such as the film remake, the sequel, the prequel, or the spin-off" (Loock, 2016: 278). This general practice of nostalgic reproduction is one that has enabled the production of *The Force Awakens* and the rejuvenation of the *Star Wars* transmedia franchise.

Jason Sperb deepens the debate around the continuous exploration of older IPs, and, thus, of the nostalgia well, by de-centering the discourse away from questions of originality (or lack thereof) and focusing on "the much more elusive and powerfully real affect of nostalgia" (Sperb, 2015: 36). As mentioned above, although Sperb focuses on *TRON: Legacy*, the recognition of particular "interconnected historical and theoretical contexts" that led to this film are ones that equally frame the re-launch of the *Star Wars* transmedia franchise under the Disney banner[1]: the general "ubiquity of nostalgia for the 1980s in Hollywood popular culture", evidenced by the consistent revitalising of cultural objects of that era (the original *Star Wars* trilogy was released between 1977 and 1983); the fact that nostalgia had, in turn, already fuelled and informed the 1980s film production (*Star Wars* was heavily influenced by Flash Gordon and early cinematic serials) that Hollywood and audiences feel nostalgic for; and, lastly, Disney's consistent and historical "dependence on the aesthetic and industrial value of nostalgia" (Sperb, 2015: 120), which has similarly informed its recent output of live-action remakes of old, beloved animated films (such as *Jungle Book*, 2016, or *Beauty and the Beast*, 2017).

Regarding *Star Wars*, the franchise has been able to maintain its phenomenon-status and remains one of the most enduring and alluring narratives of the last century. According to Henry Jenkins, in the blog post "'I Have a Bad Feeling About This': Reflections on Star Wars, Fandom, and Transmedia" (2017) at *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, the *Star Wars* transmedia

[1] Disney bought Lucasfilm from George Lucas in 2012, for €4 billion, placing Kathleen Kennedy as president of Lucasfilm, reporting to Walt Disney Studios' Chairman Alan Horn.

franchise is a unique case given that "[no] other science fiction property [has] so totally saturated a generation's media experiences". In Will Brooker's *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (2002), the author defines *Star Wars* (and, specifically the original trilogy), in relation to himself as well as many other fans, as "the single most important cultural text of our lives" (Brooker, 2002: xii). The author depicts the cinematic saga as "one of the key cultural benchmarks of the last thirty years", which has afforded the films with a broad appeal that "also runs deep" among its fan base. According to Brooker, this is exactly what constitutes the uniqueness of *Star Wars*, as it engenders "full-on fan commitment at the same time as it continues to operate as a multi-million dollar global franchise" (Brooker, 2002: xv).

Additionally, various authors have comprehensively documented the intense engagement of audiences, at large, and of fandom, in particular, as well as the place held by the *Star Wars* franchise as an object with a strong connection to both memory and childhood, as well as a globally influential, pop cultural text (Brooker, 2002; Harvey, 2015; Hassler-Forest and Guynes, 2017; Jenkins, 2015; Proctor, 2013). Specifically regarding this franchise, nostalgia has worked as powerful affecting force that is lucrative due to its cultural importance, its generational appeal and widespread audience willingness to continue to engage with the world of *Star Wars* (Proctor, 2013). In William Proctor's article "'Holy Crap! More *Star Wars*? *More Star Wars*? What if They're Crap?' Disney, Lucasfilm and Online Star Wars Fandom in the 21st Century" (2013) – which was an attempt at mapping and illustrating "the gamut of responses experienced by fans in relation to the next phase of the *Star Wars* mythos in cinema" (Proctor, 2013: 198) – the author discerned that, in response to questions regarding the continuation of the film saga, while some fans didn't necessarily agree with the purchase of Lucasfilm by Disney, they were "buoyant about the potential for new films and other products" (Proctor, 2013: 219), so as long as they stayed "true" and faithful to the "spirit" of the Star Wars universe" (Proctor, 2013: 223).

A new phase of the *Star Wars* franchise

The purchase of Lucasfilm by Disney led to "multiple new directions for the franchise, ahead of the launch of the seventh film in the main saga and various spinoff films", as Colin B. Harvey addresses, in *Fantastic Transmedia – Narrative, Play and Memory Across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds* (2015). Lucasfilm created a story group to control all narrative

development in an effort towards a more integrated approach to transmedia storytelling than ever before. While the six films directed by George Lucas and the series *Clone Wars* and *Rebels* are canon, the Expanded Universe, whose influence continues to be acknowledged, was "repositioned under the new *Legends* banner to separate it from the new canonical, integrated crossmedial material" that has been successively released (Harvey, 2015: 146).

As a result of the "negative reception by older fans of the prequel films and also of George Lucas's edits and re-edits of the original trilogy in the late 1990s and early 2000", the *Star Wars* franchise faced new branding challenges as it entered its current phase of transmedia history, which Hassler-Forest and Guynes describe as beginning with "the franchise's return to mainstream cultural presence in the Disney era" (Hassler-Forest and Guynes, 2017: 13). As Henry Jenkins discusses in the foreword of their *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling* (2017), when it comes to the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy, "there's an increased sense in first-generation *Star Wars* fans that something was taken away from them" (Hassler-Forest and Guynes, 2017: 22). Similarly, in "The Star Wars franchise, fan edits, and Lucasfilm" (published in a special issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures*), for instance, Forrest Phillips describes other instances of discontent with the Prequels and the author writes about how the "fan edit" of *The Phantom Menace* (George Lucas, 1999), *The Phantom Edit,* which removed many elements of the original film and was "presented as an attempt to turn cinematic lead into gold" (Phillips, 2012) – Proctor and Brooker's work is also a good source regarding the complex relationship that *Star Wars* fans have with the Prequel trilogy, how it led to feelings of unrecognizability, and how the fandom experienced vigilant optimism regarding the departure of Lucas from the authorial control of the franchise.

Ultimately, the acquisition by Disney of the *Star Wars* franchise led to a new cinematic approach that reflected fundamental changes from past practices: both in terms of a conception of a "more diverse" audience and fan base (Hassler-Forest and Guynes, 2017: 25); but also in terms of a "more enlightened, more progressive, more responsive version of the franchise in its relationship to media audiences" (Hassler-Forest and Guynes, 2017: 30). One way that marked "the franchise's return to mainstream cultural presence" was *The Force Awakens*' return to a quality possessed by original *Star Wars*, which was a certain perceived tangibility or "tactility", an approach that distinguished the new Disney films from the Prequel Trilogy (1999-2005),

infamous for Lucas's comprehensive use of green-screen and digital technology. This emphasis on an observable tangibility is part of an "equation, throughout fan discourse, critical discourse and on the part of the storyworld's creators, between emotional connection and tactility" (Harvey, 2015: 161), insofar as that which seems tactile, feels real and more engaging. As Colin B. Harvey points out, this "speaks to a nostalgic, playful cultural memory" experienced by older (and possible newer) fans that the cinematic universe of *Star Wars* is, at its core, a "tactile franchise which must look and sound real" (Harvey, 2015: 161) – which brings us back to a fan desire that the new era of the franchise remain "faithful" to what are considered as core characteristics of the films.

Consequently, a strategy employed in order to usher in the new phase of *Star Wars* films rested squarely with the rationale that informs this quote from director J.J. Abrams:

> ['The Force Awakens'] was a bridge and a kind of reminder; the audience needed to be reminded what 'Star Wars' is, but it needed to be established with something familiar, with a sense of where we are going to new lands, which is very much what 8 and 9 do. The weird thing about that movie is that it had been so long since the last one. Obviously the prequels had existed in between and we wanted to, sort of, reclaim the story. So we very consciously — and I know it is derided for this — we very consciously tried to borrow familiar beats so the rest of the movie could hang on something that we knew was 'Star Wars' (Anderton, 2016).

From an overall perspective, *The Force Awakens* was so much more than purely a film, or even a simple sequel to a beloved franchise. It was, at the same time, a booster and a lynchpin[2], "serving as the foundation for an entire cottage industry" (Lowry, 2015). Citing Henry Jenkins, the film did exactly "what it needed to do to set Star Wars on the right path for the next decade or so". According to the scholar, the movie accomplished the task of both revitalizing[3] the franchise and paving the way for the future (Jenkins, 2015). The film was, then, successful in

[2] In the months leading up to its release, Lucasfilm launched a publishing initiative titled "Journey to *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*" comprised of novels and comics. These were written by a myriad of authors with the endorsement of the Lucasfilm Story Group, that contained content related to the film, much of it providing connective tissue between *Return of the Jedi* and this first film of the new trilogy

[3] The film broke a multitude of box office records and became (without making adjustments for inflation) the highest-grossing instalment in the franchise, the highest-grossing film of that year, and the third-highest-grossing film of all time, with a worldwide gross of more than $2 billion.

building a "bridge" between the previous and the future instalments, while serving as a "reminder" of those nostalgic sentiments connected to childhood. So much so, that the path to revitalizing the franchise, paved by a return to the familiarity of the original film trilogy, has resulted in voluminous discussion (among fans and critics) regarding the aforementioned question on whether *The Force Awakens* borrows too much from the original *Star Wars* film, *A New Hope* (1977) – just a few examples of this can be gleamed here, here or here.

It is valuable, however, to underline how *The Force Awakens* can, inarguably, be considered a polysemic text that can be read for similarities *or* differences. For instance, Austin Thomas asserts that in an economic and industrial setting that is "tightly diversified and vertically integrated", such as the Walt Disney company is, film production favours what Thomas Schatz notes are texts "strategically 'open' to multiple readings", which exemplify what Austin Thomas defines as "dispersible text". Nevertheless, the dispersible text is not "unstructured or infinitely open" (Thomas, 2002: 29), and it's a definition more concerned with the dynamic between "symbolic forms and commodities", encompassing satellite texts, the film itself and spin-off goods (Thomas, 2002: 30). On a meta-reflexive level, what is at stake when reviewers and fans valorize (or denigrate) *The Force Awakens* for closeness to *A New Hope* or its lack of originality is both a "vanguardist suspicion of popular forms and pleasures" (Thomas, 2002: 31), as well as "heightened fan feeling, and anxiety" (Proctor, 2013: 221). While this discourse of sameness can be used as a way of devaluing franchise logics and repeating a long-established cultural denigration of the "blockbuster" (Sperb, 2015), I think it can also lead to a substantive debate about textual variation, as well as of taxonomic considerations that brush against fixed definitions. As William Proctor writes, historically, any kind of "recycling, repackaging and 'revisioning' has often been criticized as evidence of creative exhaustion, but it is important to recognize that [it] has always been a feature of the cinematic landscape" (Proctor, 2012: 2). In *The Hollywood Sequel: History & Form, 1911-2010* (2014), Stuart Henderson acknowledges, for example, "the prevalence of confused, imprecise writing about the sequel" precisely because there are many "exceptions to any rule governing the form of the sequel" (Henderson, 2014: 5). It is necessary then, while recognizing that "there *are* boundaries", to consent that definitions of terms such as the sequel are "historically dynamic", with "highly porous boundaries" (Henderson, 2014: 5). Therefore, *The Force Awakens* can exist in a fluid space that incorporates characteristics of various definitions of narrative extension (through repetition, continuation or

change), namely those of the sequel and of the remake. Allow me, then, to explain the plot. Just like *A New Hope*, *The Force Awakens* features the introduction of a trio (Poe, Finn and Rey[4]) and a masked antagonist to that trio (Kylo Ren/Ben Solo), who serves a dark master (Supreme Leader Snoke). Rey hails from the desert planet Jakku (the equivalent to Luke Skywalkers' home planet Tatooine). The action is set in motion after a droid is confided with an electronic message in need of urgent delivery. Rey is a Force-sensitive scavenger, abandoned on the desert planet of Jakku, who, as she encounters Finn, a former stormtrooper on the run, is thrust into an adventure. In broad strokes, the plot is very similar to that of *A New Hope*: a lovable droid is carrying a crucial electronic file, a would-be Jedi who's grown up on a desert planet dreams of something more, while exhibiting skill as a pilot, there is a stop at an extravagant bar in search of means of transportation, as well as a new Emperor and a new Empire, this time in earlier stages of seizing and controlling the galaxy (Supreme Leader Snoke and the First Order). The Rebellion is now translated into the Resistance, and there is a Resistance-led assault on an enemy base with planet-destroying weaponry that is only dissimilar to the original Death Star in gargantuan size.

Due to the fact that similarities between *A New Hope* and *The Force Awakens* are conceded and acknowledged by the director of *The Force Awakens*, and have been thoroughly analyzed abundantly online, I believe it is useful to consider, while recognizing the inescapable polysemic nature of *The Force Awakens*, these narrative similarities as a relevant feature of the film, underscoring its position as an unconventional (or atypical) sequel. Therefore, the taxonomic possibilities of the film are worth exploring.

The taxonomic possibilities of *The Force Awakens*: as sequel

In *The Hollywood Sequel*, Stuart Henderson debates how "the question of definition", when it comes to the sequel, is beseeched by scholarly discourse that is "largely speculative and cursory". As an example, Henderson singles out Carolyn Jess-Cooke's definition as one that "arguably mystifies more than clarifies" (Henderson, 2014: 3). According to Jess-Cooke, series (and serials) "defy change" and entail consistency and uniformity, whilst sequels encourage "difference, progress and excess". This author reasons that *Star Wars* is a series and, therefore, its narrative scheme stays "constant" (Jess-Cooke, 2009: 5). Henderson, however, disputes this

[4] In *The Force Awakens*, Rey is the true female protagonist *Star Wars* hadn't yet had and Finn is the first ethnically diverse protagonist of the cinematic saga

by stating that while *Star Wars* is, in "*some* respect committed to reiterating a particular narrative scheme", it's quite clear that it also has storylines that "develop from one film to the next" (Henderson, 2014: 3). This counterargument by Henderson does provide some ground to my consideration of *The Force Awakens* as a sequel with fluid boundaries, because it illustrates the possible twofold nature of a film insofar as it can, at the same time, be "committed to reiterating a particular narrative scheme" (the mirror plots of *The Force Awakens* and *A New Hope*), while still developing new storylines of its own.

Stuart Henderson's work in *The Hollywood Sequel* clears away "some of the semantic clutter" that surrounds the definition of the sequel, especially when it comes to its conjunction or interchangeability with notions of series, serial, franchise, saga, trilogy, and "*on occasion*" the remake [my emphasis]. To the author, the "defining characteristic", terminologically speaking, of the sequel is its "acknowledgement of a chronological narrative relationship with a prior instalment" (Henderson, 2014: 3). The author distinguishes sequels by asserting that they, unlike series, "maintain narrative continuity from one instalment to the next" (Henderson, 2014: 3). Furthermore, the sequel's "chronological narrative relationship" is both textual (showing events that proceed those in the previous instalment) and extratextual (having been produced and released after the previous instalment)[5] – these characteristics certainly apply to *The Force Awakens*, exemplified by the appearance of characters from the original trilogy (Han Solo, Leia Organa, Luke Skywalker). Finally, Henderson specifies that the Hollywood sequel is "perennially faced with the challenge of delivering familiar pleasures in a new guise" (Henderson, 2014: 163). This certainly pertains to *The Force Awakens* as it retrieves actors and characters from the original films in order to usher in a new generation of heroes to be followed onward. The film utilizes familiar characters (symbolizing a continuing narrative), story beats and a parallel conflict between a domineering, militarized force that outnumbers a scrappy group of rebels that resist galactic oppression. At the same time, it inserts variation and textual newness by adding new characters and dynamics, specifically regarding the familial bonds between Leia, Han and Ben Solo/Kylo Ren.

In "100+ Years of Adaptation, or, Adaptation as the Art Form of Democracy", from the edited volume *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation* (2014), Deborah Cartmell argues that

[5] Unlike prequels whose chronological relationship is solely extratextual.

sequels and prequels are defined by "expanding on rather than compressing or rearranging 'original' narratives" (Cartmell, 2014: 10). Regarding this definition, I would argue that *The Force Awakens* both expand on *and* rearranges the original's film narrative (i.e., Luke's part now belongs to a female character). From the same collection, Martin Zeller-Jacques, in the chapter "Adapting the X-Men: Comic-Book Narratives in Film Franchises", cites Geoff Klock's argument that when a serial narrative has been running for decades, reinterpretation of the same narrative can become part of its enduring code (Zeller-Jacques, 2014: 148). This occurs in *The Force Awakens*, which can be regarded as having reinterpretation as part of its code, given how it is constantly in dialogue with *A New Hope*.

The taxonomy possibilities of *The Force Awakens*: as remake

For the purposes of this article and its analysis, it is also relevant to discuss Constantine Verevis' notion of the "cinematic remake", described in *Film Remakes* (2005), as it is a "particular case of repetition" (Verevis, 2005: vii). Furthermore, Verevis presents the various existing definitions of the remake: "as 'films based on an earlier screenplay', as 'new versions of existing films' and as 'films that to one degree or another *announce* to us that they embrace one or more previous movies'" (Verevis, 2005: 1). Citing David Wills, Verevis states that the most accurate distinction by which to judge the remake is not the existence of repetition alone, but the institutional and structural forms in which repetition occurs, even as citation (Verevis, 2005: 1). Relevant to my examination of *The Force Awakens* is Verevis' notion of "cinematic remaking" as an industrial category, given that "remakes can be understood as industrial products, located in 'the material conditions of commercial filmmaking, where plots are *copied* and formulas forever *reiterated*'" [my emphasis] (Verevis, 2005: 3). As seen above, film remaking is also described as a trend that is encouraged by the commercial orientation of Hollywood's conglomerate business practices. Through them, Hollywood studios seek to emulate past successes and minimise risk by accentuating the *familiar* – "recreating with slight changes films that have proved successful in the past" (Verevis, 2005: 4). Understood as an industrial category, the remake then becomes a "particular instance not only of the *repetition effects* which characterise the narrative structure of the Hollywood film, but also of a more general repetition – of exclusive stars, proprietary characters, patented processes, narrative patterns and generic elements" (Verevis, 2005: 4-5). Through this prism, *The Force Awakens* can certainly be seen as an example of such form of repetition and, therefore, of cinematic

remaking. The film does contain repetition effects, as it purposefully mirrors a previous instalment, from the stars and characters, to the repeated narrative patterns.

Additionally, I would like to discuss two examples of films that occupy the space between sequel and remake. In *Second Takes: Critical Approaches to the Film Sequel*, Constantine Verevis and Carolyn Jess-Cooke describe the fluid boundaries between sequel and remake, this time regarding *Dawn of the Dead* (Zack Snyder, 2004). The authors cite a description by Gregory Waller, who places the film as both a *re*consideration of the main themes of earlier films, and therefore a *remake*, and as an expansion of the story, and therefore a *sequel* (Jess-Cooke and Verevis, 2010: 5). In *Film Remakes, Adaptations and Fan Productions* (2012), Kathleen Loock authors the chapter "The Return of the Pod People: Remaking Cultural Anxieties in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*", where she writes about "repetition, variation and *continuation*" in the 1978 Philip Kaufman movie (Loock, 2012: 140). Here, Loock references Thomas Leitch's writing on the "fundamentally different appeal" of sequels and remakes: regarding sequels, the audience wants to know what happened after the story was over; regarding remakes, the audience wants the same story again, only a bit different (Loock, 2012: 138). In her analysis, Kathleen Loock demonstrates how certain elements of the *Body Snatchers* remakes bump up against definitions of the sequel. Leitch, in fact, underlines how Kaufman's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* is one of the infrequent remakes that encompass features of sequels (Loock, 2012: 138). Similarly to the films above-mentioned, *The Force Awakens* could too, then, be considered as that sporadic sequel that contains elements of the remake as it, too, utilizes repetition, variation and continuation: repeating the narrative format, having variations when it comes to dynamics and pairings, and being a continuation of the cinematic franchise, in direct dialogue with the (diegetically speaking) previous film. Using the film's score as a representation of the entire film, strengthened by the return of the authorial hand of John Williams, it utilizes and reconsiders the main themes of the original trilogy, and introduces variations on those themes as well as wholly new ones (i.e., "Rey's Theme"), expanding the existing corpus of *Star Wars* music.

'Generational seriality' and the 're-quel'

In the article "Cult TV Revival: Generational Seriality, Recap Culture, and the "Brand Gap" of *Twin Peaks: The Return*" (2018), Matt Hills explores de cult TV revival of *Twin Peaks: The*

Return as an example of "generational seriality". I argue that *The Force Awakens* is an example of a narrative that evidences it as well. Here, Hills begins by stating how "TV seriality has become a matter of not just textual analysis but also *intertextual analysis* as texts from the cultural past are variously revived and reimagined" (Hills, 2018: 310). The author uses the term "re-quel", citing Nick Pinkerton and other critics who have sought to name a trend whose examples "act simultaneously as sequels and as *re*statements of key elements from their previous textual incarnations" [my emphasis]. In both *The Force Awakens* and *Twin Peaks: The Return*, the introduction of "new, younger characters alongside aging favorites" allow franchises to "strategically facilitate a 'baton passage of… [diegetic] worlds from one generation to the next' (Pinkerton 2016, 34)" (Hills, 2018: 310-11). In fact, *The Force Awakens* last shot is a visual realization of this exact occurrence, as Rey and Luke Skywalker face each other, the lightsaber as a token of that baton. According to Hills, who embraces the term, there have ben a number of "re-quels" to emerge from Cult TV due to "established fan loyalty and brand recognition" (Hills, 2018: 311). I find it relevant to establish a connection between cinematic and televisual re-quels or revivals, as is the case of *Twin Peaks: The Return*. Revivals are having a moment in American television franchising and it is appropriate to consider how its "nostalgic storytelling" has moved away from the "rebooted reinvention" (Johnson, 2015b). For the journal *Flow*, Derek Johnson writes, in "Party Like It's 1999: Another Wave of Network Nostalgia" (2015b), about how a new cycle of 90s nostalgia has utilized the *revival* approach instead of the *reboot* approach. Instead of young, fresh interpretations, there's a movement towards "going back to continue what was started and (it now seems) left unfinished" (Johnson, 2015b). Aside from the possibility of translating this practice to the example of *The Force Awakens*, what I find thought provoking here is the possibility of tying it to something else Johnson wrote regarding "Stasis, Change, and Televisual Comic Book Film Franchising" (2015a). In this later article, Johnson argues that "the contemporary comic book blockbuster has given film an increasingly *televisual* quality" (Johnson, 2015a), and it could be interesting to extrapolate this to how other contemporary blockbuster franchises are taking on a *televisual* quality by also eschewing from the practice of "rebooted reinvention" towards something much more akin to a television revival where one goes back to the same characters. Just as the recent *X-Files* (2016) revival caught up with the aged agents Mulder and Scully, so does *Twin Peaks: The Return* reconnect with its characters, and so does *The Force Awakens*.

Theoretical frameworks of contemporary TV series revivals, such as Kathleen Loock's in "American TV Series Revivals: Introduction" (2018), can be useful to discuss the "reviving" practices of film franchises that coalesced into the example of *The Force Awakens*. Loock provides a relevant distinction of "televisual afterlives", differentiating a "*derivative*" afterlife, equated with reboots and spin-offs, and a "*renewed*" afterlife, equated with revivals (Loock, 2018: 4). Revivals, uninterested in creating new media products, maintain a foot in the past and one in the present, *bridging* the lapsed extended period of time, while emphasizing a *return* (usually, of the entire cast" (Loock, 2018: 6-7). Just as "retro-remaking" is a practice that comprehends both films and television series and generates "formats of innovative reproduction" (Loock, 2016: 278), perhaps it is fruitful to compare the televisual and the cinematic revival.

Returning to Matt Hills' "generational seriality", what distinguishes the seriality of the *Twin Peaks* revival is "its invocation of discourses of generationality (as key characters from the original run are shown to have children of their own and/or are represented in terms of visibly aging)" given that there is an "unusual 'gap' in seriality" (Hills, 2018: 311). This is something that also distinguishes the reviving of the *Star Wars* franchise, with actors from the original trilogy returning to their roles and not only having children, but also showing visible signs of the passage of time. As Stuart Henderson explored, in regards to the employ of this temporal gap in film, the synchronizing of time lived by both characters and audience creates a "more nuanced and richer engagement between [them]" (Henderson, 2014: 165-66). In both *The Force Awakens* and *Twin Peaks: The Return*, "generational seriality" is displayed by the "emergence of legacy characters' children" and by moving "a number of previously youthful characters into parental roles" (Hills, 2018: 315-16). In *The Force Awakens*, this is evident by the reveal that Han Solo and Leia had a child, Ben Solo, who is placed in the position of "legacy character child" and assigning both Han Solo and Leia to the role of parents. In *Flickers of Film*, Jason Sperb's analysis cocnerning the connection between nostalgia and blockbusters underlines a trend in the "current glut of nostalgia blockbusters" while discussing elements that pertain to early *Star Trek* films, which possessed an "explicit narrativization of nostalgia, of regret and time passing", but also, interestingly, a notion of a "'real' generation that nonetheless grows up with and within this diegetic 'pseudo-history'" (Sperb, 2015: 127). Again, this is an occurrence that is also very much present in *The Force Awakens*, as evidenced by Han Solo and Leia's

interactions, which demonstrate the passage of time and acknowledge regrets not portrayed in the original trilogy, while placing both actors in stark contrast to their youthful representations in the 1980s:

> Leia: You know, no matter how much we fought... I've always hated watching you leave.
> Han Solo: That's why I did it. So you'd miss me.
> Leia: I did miss you.

Conclusion

Hopefully, I've been able to illustrate the fluid nature of *The Force Awakens* in relation with the original *Star Wars* film *A New Hope*. As Hollywood continues to utilize business practices that focus on recycling intellectual properties, characters and narratives, it is relevant to consider the arguably increasingly varied nature of franchise expansion. Like the exemplary cases of *Dawn of the Dead* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *The Force Awakens* positions itself in an "in-between" space – the revival of a film franchise, branded as a sequel – incorporating features that place it along on a spectrum between the sequel and the remake. Among the taxonomy that divides contemporary films into porous categories, such as "remake", "reboot", "sequel" or "revival", it is important to allow for discourse that can illuminate the increasing variations regarding franchise-related definitions. At the same time, it is pertinent to consider how similar practices within film and television industries can lead to the mirroring of practices of narrative extension, such as the revival. The dual, or at least complex, nature of *The Force Awakens*, shown through the display of features that can be ascribed to both sequels and remakes, can illustrate potential new forms of narrative expansion at the disposal of the Hollywood film industry and broaden the possibilities when it comes to re-launching or reinvigorating previously established properties or narratives in a contemporary Hollywood dominated by nostalgic storytelling and recycling practices.

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Ana Cabral Martins works as a research assistant for the project "Portuguese Women Directors" at ICS/ University of Lisbon. She has a PhD in Digital Media, relating to cinema, and her dissertation was titled "Cinema in the Age of Digital Technology: A New Architecture of Immersion". Some of her recent work includes a chapter on comics and movies in the volume *Visions of the Future in Comics: International Perspectives* (2017, McFarland).