

ABSTRACT

PARTIN, JOSEPH DANIEL. The Commodification of Nostalgia: *Star Wars*, Advertising, and *The Collectors* and *The Collectors* (18 min.). (Under the direction of Devin Orgeron).

“The Commodification of Nostalgia” and the documentary *The Collectors* analyze the *Star Wars Saga* and the marketing practices employed by Kenner and Lucasfilm to sell *Star Wars* toys to young and old generations. Both works examine the effect of advertising on adult males and their continued desire to collect (and hoard) *Star Wars* products. I contend that the early commercials enabled the toy manufacturer the opportunity to instill consumerism in young children; and that the prequel films relied on the nostalgic desires of adult male audiences to buy the new commodities. The recent toys allowed the adult male public – that grew up with the old films—the chance to relive their childhood by purchasing new *Star Wars* merchandise. I argue that this practice exemplifies the emptiness and superficiality of current consumer culture.

The Commodification of Nostalgia: *Star Wars*, Advertising, and *The Collectors*

and

The Collectors (18min.)

by

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all of my family and friends who provided me with continued love and encouragement throughout the making of this film. I would also like to dedicate this project to my late aunt Choci who never had the opportunity to see any of my work, but her continued support is always felt. She was my biggest fan.

BIOGRAPHY

Joseph Daniel Partin was born in Raleigh, NC in August 1980. When he was three years old, his parents took him to see *E.T.* Unfortunately, he cried when the lights went down and was quickly escorted out of the theater in his mother's arms. However, his next film-going experience would prove to be more impressionable. In late 1983, his parents brought him to see *Return of the Jedi*; and it would be this film that would forever change his life (and the amount of money in his wallet). From this moment on, Joseph was hooked. In middle school, he was probably the only individual his age that had any familiarity with the films of Stanley Kubrick. In high school, he and his best friend Mike would spend countless Friday and Saturday nights watching C-grade horror and cult films, while the rest of their peers socialized. During his undergraduate years, Joseph worked as a disc jockey and co-music director for WKNC 88.1. He also wrote several film reviews for the Technician. In December 2003, he received his Bachelor of Arts in Communications from North Carolina State University. In May 2007, Joseph received his Master of Arts degree in English from North Carolina State University. After graduation, he intends to work in various teaching and production jobs.

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Nostalgia is a growing phenomenon in American popular culture in the twenty-first century. Cable programming relies on shows like *I Love the 70's and I Love the 80's* to give the American public superficial access to a past they may or may not have experienced. Over the years, consumers have been granted access to their past through a nostalgic discourse proving that selling nostalgia to the masses is still a viable marketing technique. In February of 2007, American consumers were promised a reunion tour by The Police, who broke up in 1984 and have not made an album of new music together since 1983's *Synchronicity*; and the possibility of a Van Halen reunion tour with original singer David Lee Roth turned out to be a nostalgic desire that would go unfulfilled. Movie studios and production companies have also tapped into this culture consumed by nostalgia. In April 2007, filmmakers Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino will release their splatterhouse double feature, *Grindhouse*, which pays homage to the bloody drive-in horror of the 1970's; and the summer of 2007 promises to fulfill every Gen X male's desire to see the Autobots and Decepticons duke it out in Michael Bay's live action *Transformers* movie.

Current nostalgia trends allow individuals who grew up in the seventies and eighties the opportunity to long for their past. A similar trend occurred in the seventies when audiences were nostalgic for the 1950's however, as the decades pass, the existence of nostalgia is becoming increasingly problematic. In the seventies, adult audiences longed for the classic cars and soda fountains of their 1950's youth, but in the 2000's, adults long for Optimus Prime, He-Man, and *Atari*. The *Atari* generation longs for commodities created by advertisers for the sole purpose of selling vast amounts of product. This is not to say that past generations' nostalgia for their youth is any less

troublesome, but the current nostalgia trends rely on marketing massive amounts of unnecessary product to the public. According to Roland Barthes, this increase in plasticity exemplifies a culture built on emptiness. Like plastic, consumer society loses all of its attributes and meaning to an “unyielding” hollowness (98). One phenomenon that is illustrative of this nostalgic trend is the *Star Wars Saga*.

In the early 1980’s, postmodern critic Fredric Jameson argued that *Star Wars* was representative of a new form of cinema: the “nostalgia film.” In his article, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” Jameson contends that films of this sort fulfill the desires of the audience to revert back to a more “innocent” time in their lives. According to Jameson, *Star Wars* allows the adult audience member the opportunity to return to the days of the Saturday Afternoon Serials, while the adolescent audience embraces the film as a fun adventure yarn (1966). In the twenty-first century, one can take Jameson’s theory and apply it to the adolescents who grew up around the time of the original *Star Wars* trilogy. Recognizing the merchandizing potential of their concept, the original *Star Wars* films aggressively advertised a line of toys and related products, creating, in the process, a generation of children eager to experience the world of *Star Wars* in the confines of their homes.

The successful marketing of *Star Wars* products in the late 1970’s and early 1980’s has had a profound effect on the continued popularity and relevance of the *Star Wars* concept. In addition, the more recent prequel films serve two distinct but related functions: (1) they fulfill Lucas’ career-long desire to finish the *Star Wars* narrative; and, perhaps more critically (2) they energize a fan base of potential consumers. The new toys and films allow the older generation (children at the time of the original series) an

opportunity to relive their childhood through a brand name they grew up with when they were younger.

In the spring of 2006, I decided to produce a short documentary about adult *Star Wars* toy collectors –*The Collectors*— and I was intrigued by the similar responses I was receiving from these subjects about why they collect. All of the individuals claimed that collecting *Star Wars* was “nostalgic” for them and that they continued to collect in their adult lives because it reminded them of their childhood. However, in order to relive their childhoods, these individuals amass a substantial amount of product tied to the *Star Wars* name. Instead of buying the toys to play with them, the subjects collect the figures and vehicles in an attempt to recapture their pasts. Unfortunately, their longing is only briefly fulfilled when they purchase a new toy. After the purchase, most of the collections are stored away in various boxes and closets throughout their homes. This move exemplifies the superficiality and emptiness associated with current consumer culture. Once the instant gratification of finding and buying the product dissipates, the individual is left with a house full of inanimate, plastic objects.

***Star Wars* and Nostalgia**

In order to understand the concept of the nostalgia film, it is necessary to turn to past media forms. In the spring of 1977, George Lucas’s *Star Wars* was an instant hit with both critics and audiences, some of whom were beginning to analyze the film’s relationship to earlier television and film narratives. Some of these critics found the film to be problematic because of its lack of originality and its reliance on recycled aesthetics. In his 1997 article about the *Star Wars Special Editions*, Will Seabrook claims that the films’ many borrowings have provided critics with evidence that Lucas failed as a

filmmaker (48). In other words, a new text, which relies so heavily on past forms, is difficult to assess by its own artistic merits. Even before Fredric Jameson wrote his critique on *Star Wars* as a nostalgia film in 1983, audiences were already starting to see the film's dependence on past narratives (Brooker 301). Lincoln Geraghty posits that Lucas took pre-existing myths "and transformed them into a new package...taking a postmodernist approach of looking to the past to explain the present" (197). Through these "borrowings," Lucas created *Star Wars* with the intent to transport himself and his audience to their past, but more specifically, the Saturday Afternoon Serial. Seabrook contends that the original film was developed with the concept of nostalgia built into its structure, which explains why Lucas relies so liberally on the serial's aesthetic (41). According to Jameson, it is this particular style that makes *Star Wars* a successful nostalgia film. Jameson argues that "*Star Wars*' reliance on creating a universe of alien villains, true American heroes and heroines, and the cliffhanger ending are all reminiscent of early *Buck Rogers* serials of the 30's, 40's and 50's" (1965).

Jameson also contends that an adult audience immediately picks up on this aesthetic and is instantly transferred back to their childhood, even if they have only maintained a fleeting familiarity with the serials. Like his film *American Graffiti*, Lucas attempted to recapture the audiences' youth, which falsely presents the past as being more innocent than the present day. In fact, *Star Wars* was created at the time of the Watergate scandal and the end of the Vietnam conflict, both of which created discontent and distrust of the American political system. Perhaps this is another reason why *Star Wars* initially resonated with a broad audience because the film allows for hope in the

modern world. The early success of *Star Wars* rests with the audience, and their willingness to leave their brains at the door and revert back to more “innocent” times.

Another primary inspiration for the film comes from Akira Kurosawa’s film *Hidden Fortress* (1958). Though Lucas adamantly denies that Kurosawa’s film was one of the primary influences for *Star Wars*, the striking similarities between the two texts cannot be ignored. Both films deal with princesses (*Fortress*: Yuki, *Star Wars*: Leia) who enlist the aide of former generals (*Fortress*: Makabe, *Star Wars*: Obi-Wan Kenobi) to protect them from evil lords (*Fortress*: Nagakura, *Star Wars*: Darth Vader). During their trek to safety, they are accompanied by two lowly characters, which both filmmakers use for comic relief (*Fortress*: Matashichi and Tahei, *Star Wars*: C-3PO and R2-D2). The problem with comparing *Hidden Fortress* and *Star Wars* is the former’s lack of familiarity with audiences. Apart from the art-house crowd, very few general audiences would have been familiar with Kurosawa’s film because it was not readily available to them. To the average film-goer, *Star Wars* is a wholly original fantasy film, which happens to have a serial aesthetic. In this regard, Lucas is able to convince a mass audience that he has created a new world, complete with original characters and stories.

Adult audiences inevitably embraced the film because it resonated with some aspect of their lives and provided them with a link to their past. However, in the process of doing so, the film(s) re-worked and recycled past narratives in an attempt to create something “new” and original; and to make the old aesthetics more palatable for a mass audience to consume. To the children viewing the film for the first time, *Star Wars* was an original and thrilling adventure story about a young farm boy who learns magic and

becomes a hero at the end of the day. As Will Brooker states in his article about the nostalgic effects of *Star Wars*:

[The film] was no doubt, for many of its young viewers, the occasion of their first visit to the cinema, and its myths were of the first order rather than a self-conscious recycling... The young audience left the cinema having swallowed all the popular narratives that had thrilled their parents in one gulp; and the unprecedented, across-the-board marketing meant that for the first time children's lives were invaded by the film at every level of consumption from crisps to pajamas to toys to lampshades (301).

Brooker's assertions express the early stages of *Star Wars*' eventual move from nostalgia film to commodity; a move which would have a profound effect on the franchise (and future films) and the individuals that grew up with it. Because *Star Wars* was the first motion picture to fully embrace its marketing potential, the advertising of the film worked simultaneously with the marketing of the product. This dramatic shift allowed for the move from motion picture event to the commodification of the movie. The advertising for the film became invested in selling both movie tickets and toys. This trend continued throughout the late seventies and eighties and would re-surface in the form of *Star Wars* in the late nineties when individuals embraced their nostalgia for the films by purchasing the products. In the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, *Star Wars* films and the products were being used by consumers to re-capture their pasts. In an interesting assessment of French toys, Roland Barthes argues that children "identify themselves as the owner and user of the toy and never the creator" (54). The creation of toys allowed *Star Wars* to be "used" by consumers, which in turn had a deep-seated effect on future films (including the *Star Wars* prequels) and how they are advertised. In the toy collector's case, the meaning of the film(s) is subsumed by the primal desire to own the object. The film accentuates the product and provides the individual with a

tangible connection to the fantasy worlds of *Star Wars*. In order to live out the adventure, the person must possess the commodity.

***Star Wars* and Early Advertising**

Star Wars has always been a male driven phenomenon. This is not to say that women are excluded from the films' continued cultural relevance, but the products have always been geared toward the adolescent and adult male populace. Such assertions are illustrated in the early market research for the original film. In the summer of 1976, market researchers took a sample of a potential audience and concluded that by the title and description of the film, young males under the age of twenty-five were going to be the primary attendants (Kramer 3). Because *Star Wars* was one of the first films to rely on market research to shape its narrative, this information helps provide the justification for male-directed toy commercials. The early commercials (and recent commercials) are always aimed at young boys playing with the toys. Ellen Seiter contends that toy commercials featuring adolescent boys, utilize an action-adventure approach where the subjects are engaged in the adventure. There are also close-ups of hands handling the toys and impersonations of characters (130). These early *Star Wars* toy commercials are no exception. In them, the adolescents are seen and heard, but the primary focus throughout is the toy. Dan Fleming argues that Kenner decided on the three and three quarters height of the figures in order to make more vehicles to fit them into, thus creating a new type of toy known as the "action figure" (99).

One of the primary criticisms aimed at the *Star Wars* saga is the films' over-reliance on merchandizing and advertising, which commodifies the film for consumer consumption. *Star Wars* was the first film to fully tap into its marketing potential and it

proved to be a successful venture for Lucasfilm and the various manufacturers who make *Star Wars* products. According to Seabrook, the *Star Wars* films “inaugurated modern merchandizing as we know it,” turning film merchandizing into a big business and creating a previously untapped resource for studios and manufacturers (40). By the release of the final film—*Revenge of the Sith*— in May of 2005, the *Star Wars* franchise had already generated an unprecedented nine billion dollars in retail sales (McCarthy 2b). The successful marketing and merchandizing of the original trilogy to children in the seventies and eighties has allowed *Star Wars* to continue to earn large sums of money on a yearly basis. However, can the relevance and longevity of this particular phenomenon be fully explained?

Dan Fleming’s book *Powerplay* –which analyzes the marketing of toys to children— argues that early *Star Wars* commercials created a new genre of advertising. Kenner toys used what Fleming refers to as “play scenarios” to market the product to children (104). Because the advertisers and toy companies had a popular film to embrace, they made sure to tap into the film’s narrative in order to sell the toys. If young children believed that they could become a part of the adventure by purchasing the toys, then they would inevitably go to great lengths to try and collect all that they could. By owning all of the toys, boys could play out all of the possible *Star Wars* scenarios while simultaneously creating new discourses for their action figures. It is precisely this notion of creating narratives that Fleming believes was always “built into the product” in order to sell the toys (104). When I asked one of my subject’s in *The Collectors*, Matt Grzebien, if he believed that advertising had shaped his desire to collect, his initial response was no, but as the interview progressed, he started to believe the opposite. It

can be assumed that Matt did not want to admit to the influence of advertising because it would change his thoughts about why he collects. Initially, he believed that his desire to collect was a conscious decision made without the influence of advertising. However, as I started asking him more questions and talked to him about the commercials, Matt came to the realization that advertising was at least partially responsible for his interest in collecting *Star Wars* toys.

In order to bring children back into the *Star Wars* world, advertisers relied on the use of familiar scenes and characters from the films. Throughout these commercials from the seventies and eighties, various characters attempt to sell the *Star Wars* product to consumers young and old. In one of the early *Star Wars* toy commercials, C-3PO and R2-D2 are walking across what looks like the Tatooine desert from the beginning of *A New Hope*. By using a familiar location from the film, Kenner creates an artificial longing in the adolescent to return to the fantasy world of *Star Wars*. Seiter contends that toy commercials like these early *Star Wars* commercials are shown to “be at odds with the world” (117). By placing the characters in a world similar to the one they inhabit in the film, Kenner is showing that children can re-enter a fantasy world through their toys. Fleming states that: “the toys have to provide children with the opportunity to re-create the film as they saw it in theaters” (99). The opportunity to re-create the events and worlds of *Star Wars* through the toys is what becomes most problematic about these early advertisements. Seabrook contends that children’s dreams about the *Star Wars* world were being turned into a desire to inhabit that world and that this desire was being made into products for them to consume (40).

In all of the commercials, the narrator states that the toys are sold separately. Selling the toys separately from one another was a successful marketing strategy for Kenner, but it also created the illusion that these toys were needs and not wants. For example, it would be impossible for a child to *fully* re-create the Cantina scene from *Star Wars* without Han Solo or Chewbacca; or the fateful duel between Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader without both figures. The toys' relationships to each other have already been established in the film, thus creating the need to own all of the characters. By the time the original *Star Wars* line of toys ended its production run in 1985, Kenner had released approximately 115 figures, 26 vehicles, 14 playsets, and 5 creatures (rebelscum.com/vintage.asp). In order for a child to engage in the complete *Star Wars* adventure, their parents would have had to spend an exorbitant amount of money.

This “needs versus wants” dichotomy is further exemplified by the way in which the toys are advertised. In many of the commercials, Kenner chooses to single out two products at a time, yet throughout the commercial there are other products being advertised simultaneously. For example, a commercial from *The Empire Strikes Back* toy line focuses specifically on the Luke Skywalker and R2-D2 figures, but as the ad progresses, the Yoda and Obi-Wan Kenobi figures make cameo appearances. At the end of the commercial, the narrator returns back to the initial two products being advertised. Through the structure of this commercial, Kenner has successfully sold the viewer on not two, but four action figures. In order to complete the adventure on Dagobah, Kenner is creating the need to own all four characters. This marketing technique instills the idea that in order for a child to engage in the full adventure, they must own every piece.

These early advertising practices have had a profound effect on individuals who grew up with the original *Star Wars* films because they directly correspond to their purchase of the product twenty-two years later. Even if their conscious desires rest in some other realm, their language about why they collect later in life echoes the language found in these early commercials. For example, in *The Collectors*, I contend that I collect the new toys because I had the opportunity to buy everything that I wanted when the new films came out. In order to engage in the complete adventure, I felt the need to collect them all, even though I had no intention of opening the boxes. Subconsciously, the early advertising of *Star Wars* goods has affected and influenced these current collectors.

***Star Wars* in the 21st Century**

Fredric Jameson's claim that *Star Wars* is representative of a nostalgia film because it allows the adult audience to revert back to their youth has evolved to include the younger generation who grew up around *Star Wars*. This new adult audience is looking to the past to recapture moments when they were *Star Wars* fans as children. In fact, the new toys are overwhelmingly purchased by men in their late twenties and thirties (Seabrook 40). Instead of being nostalgic for past media forms, these individuals are nostalgic for *Star Wars* and the toys. However, because *Star Wars* was turned into a commodity in the seventies, the subjects' nostalgia for the past has become increasingly problematic. In a reference to early criticisms of *Star Wars*, Peter Kramer makes the following assertion:

Star Wars is indeed aimed at the "kid in everybody"... it invites adult spectators to regress to an earlier phase in their social and psychic development and indulge in infantile fantasies of omnipotence and oedipal strife as well as nostalgically returning to an earlier period in history (the 1950's) when they were kids and the world around them could be imagined as a better place (1).

A similar argument can be made about the individuals who continue to collect *Star Wars* toys into their adult life. Many of these men long for their past and their vintage *Star Wars* toys, a longing that was created by early advertisements. However, this longing is problematic because of its association with consumerism. In this case, nostalgia is a construct of consumer culture and not an innate desire on behalf of the individual.

In 1997, Lucasfilm re-released the original *Star Wars* trilogy in theaters with new footage and revamped special effects. The *Star Wars Trilogy Special Editions* went on to gross an unprecedented two hundred and forty one million dollars domestically. The original *Star Wars* alone made one hundred and thirty eight million dollars compared to the thirty five million dollars that the re-release of *E.T.* made in 2002 (boxofficemojo.com); and by the time of *The Phantom Menace*'s release in May of 1999, *Variety* had already proclaimed it “the most widely anticipated and heavily hyped film of modern times” and concluded that “those most looking forward (to it) are mostly people—now in their 30’s—who were kids when episodes four through six were released” (Kramer 1).

According to Will Seabrook, this phenomenon is attributable to the audiences' need for nostalgia: “A movie that was designed to appeal to a feeling like nostalgia in the first place would be revisited by people seeking to feel nostalgic for that experience” (41). Two years prior to the re-release of the original trilogy, Hasbro re-released an entire line of re-vamped vintage action figures. This move allowed individuals who grew up with the later films an opportunity to have their own Han Solo and Luke Skywalker in *New Hope* garbs.

One of the primary concerns for collectors is the notion that they have to collect everything they can now because when they were children, they were unable to control the amount of toys they were given by their parents. These individuals feel the need to complete their collections, so that they can experience the worlds of *Star Wars* in their entirety. However, these collectors leave most of their figures and vehicles in the boxes, allowing only a select few to leave the confines of their packaging.

Pam Danzinger argues that: “Men want to appear very rational when it comes to collecting and will cite the investment opportunities, but under the surface is the same emotional reaction that drives a ten year old boy” (Powers 1). Danzinger’s point is well stated, but of the four people interviewed for *The Collectors*, only one acknowledged that he collected the toys for a future investment. The other three subjects collect them to own a tangible link to their childhood. In fact, beyond “sentimental value” the current toys are worth less than the retail value because of the magnitude of product released to consumers (McCarthy 2b). Most collectors are aware of this fact and collect because they enjoy it and it brings back memories of their past. Matt Grzebien—a self-proclaimed “completist” and the primary focus in the film—states that his family did not have a lot of money when he was growing up and he was unable to obtain all of the toys he desired. In one moment during the film, Matt displays a toy he has recently purchased and states: “It was this toy and the AT-AT that I really wanted as a kid and never got, so I bought the new ones when they came out.” Matt’s statement is illustrative of the adult *Star Wars* collector who purchases the products for nostalgia purposes instead of monetary gain. The attachment to the product is so profound, that possessing the toy

fulfills (if only briefly) a repressed need that was not satisfied as a child. In other words, beyond fulfilling this desire, the toy has no value.

In a *New York Times* expose on men who continue to collect toys into their adult-lives, Bill Powers states that [adult collectors] continue to grasp for their childhood because nothing can fill the void of a Han Solo figure (1). If Power's contention is true, then what causes this continued allegiance to the *Star Wars* product? When Matt states that he wants to collect "everything" that he can from the new films because he could not as a child, he is subconsciously referring back to the early commercials, which gave the impression that an individual must own everything in order to take part in the adventure. Unfortunately, it is impossible to own everything because of the constant influx of *Star Wars* product on the market.

The toys are not the only means by which advertisers continue to sell *Star Wars* product to adults. In the marketing blitz leading up to the release of the final *Star Wars* installment, *Revenge of the Sith*, several major corporations tapped into *Star Wars*' cross-generational appeal through the marketing of various "adult" commodities. Cell phone provider Cingular Wireless created a texting campaign that gave contestants the chance to win a Dodge Viper with Darth Vader's image painted on it. In Michael McCarthy's *USA Today* article entitled "*Star Wars* goes utterly commercial," McCarthy quotes Cingular ad director, Vance Overby as stating: "If we're ever going to align ourselves with something this [*Revenge of the Sith*] is it" (2b). Apparently, Overby and the top brass in the Cingular corporation realized that *Star Wars* was no longer just a film that could be marketed at kids, but to an adult audience nostalgic for their youth. It is impossible to know how long *Star Wars* will be a significant part of consumer, but if the three hundred

and eighty million dollar gross of *Revenge of the Sith* is any indication, it may be safe to say that the force is still strong with the franchise and advertisers.

The Collectors Documentary

The Collectors employs several self-reflexive film techniques in order to question the perceived “truth” found in non-fiction works. Documentary films are sometimes viewed as being representative of pure, objective truth, but within every film, the director’s subjective point of view is evident. Several scenes and editing techniques are used throughout *The Collectors* to raise significant questions about the documentary genre. During principal photography, I relied on the creation of “subjective realities” for my subjects. A subjective reality is a sequence, which relies on the expression of a “truth” that is determined and shaped by the camera’s presence. The “construction of the gunship sequence” is an example of a subjective reality. During this segment, *Star Wars* collector Matt Grzebien constructs a *Star Wars* gunship and then places Clones inside of it during the final stages of completion. The sequence is constructed with a similar aesthetic to a fiction film, employing the use of “narrative editing” and lighting to draw attention to the artificiality of the proceedings.

However, the scene is not completely devoid of truth. The construction of the gunship is an event that Matt engages in when he opens a new toy for display. The only difference is that this particular construction was done specifically for the camera. This particular aesthetic practice is used throughout the films of documentarian Errol Morris. In his film *Mr. Death*, Morris chooses to shoot his subject—Fred Leuchter—in a coffee shop. Instead of filming an absolute “truth,” Morris expresses the scene cinematically, taking the opportunity to show Leuchter in a state of isolation. Leuchter’s presence in the

coffee shop is a staple in his life, but the filmmaker uses narrative film techniques to re-create an ordinary day at the café for the camera. Morris relies on this technique to comment on Leuchter's detachment from society.

Another self-reflexive technique employed in *The Collectors* deals specifically with the use of Super 8 film. This footage is used to signify a faux nostalgia. In the film, the individuals who collect *Star Wars* toys continue to make claims that they collect these toys because it reminds them of their childhood. Because Super 8 film stock was used primarily during the 1970's and 1980's in home movies, I decided to utilize this film because it creates the feeling of nostalgia. In my opinion, nostalgia is a construct of an individual's belief in their past; and more often than not, a false construct that gives the illusion of a better time in one's bygone days. By using Super 8 footage to express this idea, I am attempting to make an argument about the falsity of nostalgia. As this footage continues throughout the film, it becomes apparent to the viewer that the Super 8 is shot in the present day and does not represent the subject's past. In several instances, I chose to film the individuals with their vintage toys to express the creation of nostalgia and to expose the artificiality of the subject's desire to revert to their childhood. In my opinion, nostalgia is a creation of popular media and advertising, not a pure longing on behalf of the individual's desire to return to his childhood. Subconsciously, consumers embrace the products of their past because it gives them something tangible to latch on to.

The most self-reflexive technique used in *The Collectors* is the freeze frame. The freeze frames are used sparingly in moments, which capture the subjects in a perceived state of longing for the past. The freeze frame is an extremely manipulative technique because it reveals the subjectivity of the filmmaker. In *The Collectors*, I do not know if

Matt and Jason are actually longing for their past through their gazes at their collections, but this technique fits neatly with the concept of nostalgia. This of course brings me to the larger question about documentary film and non-fiction works. I hope that through these practices I am able to express the subjectivities of my character. The director/editor of a particular work is the ultimate manipulator of the image. By employing these aesthetics, I want the viewer to engage in the argument I am making about the creation of nostalgia through advertising, but also question the steps and practices taken to make this argument.

During the making of this film, I have referenced filmmakers who have had a profound effect on my filmmaking techniques. During filming, I wanted to ensure that *The Collectors* incorporated a broad range of styles and aesthetics. I decided to rely on several key aesthetic devices to tell the story of four *Star Wars* collectors: traditional interview footage, subjective reality footage and elements of cinema verite. The interview footage is purposefully shot with the view that interviews are, by nature, a creation of the filmmaker for the camera. As I was filming these interview scenes, I was constantly referring to Werner Herzog's film, *Grizzly Man*. In the film, Herzog uses the interviews to comment self-reflexively on the artificiality of the dialogue between filmmaker and subject. In *The Collectors*, I went to great lengths to ensure that the interview footage was visually pleasing. In order to achieve this, I used bright lighting to make the image appear glossy and refined.

I was also influenced by Errol Morris's use of subjective realities in his films to tell subject's stories. I attempted to use this particular aesthetic in order to express "truths" about *Star Wars* collectors. The sequences that employ this technique were

created specifically for the camera, but they are practices that the subjects would normally engage in. These sequences are also carefully lighted and edited, so that a viewer can easily spot them as fictional narrative constructs.

The final aesthetic choice I chose in the creation of this documentary is cinema verite, a style of filmmaking made popular by documentarians Fred Wiseman, D.A. Pennebaker, and the Maysles Brothers' in the 1960's. There are several instances of verite in the film, but the most striking is the footage of Jason Hall selling his collection to Matt Grzebien. I employed verite style for these sequences because it granted me the opportunity to observe the proceedings without being too conspicuous (Nichols 39). This particular mode of filmmaking elicits certain responses and reactions that are difficult to attain when the subject's are always fully conscious of the camera's presence.

Throughout the filming of *The Collectors*, I have learned many things about the art of documentary filmmaking and the difficulties involved in realizing my vision for this project. There have been many obstacles that I have had to overcome in the making of this film, some of which were beyond my control. One of the primary roadblocks during the creation of this project was funding. Because I was incurring all of the costs out of my own pocket, I was unable to fully realize some of my earlier concepts. I also found that potential subjects were particularly reluctant to appear on camera, but this is an element of documentary filmmaking that I was aware of prior to the making of this film. Unfortunately, it became magnified due to the scope of this project. Many of my requests for interviews fell on deaf ears and more times than not I was ignored by potential interviewees. Even when I found subjects who were interested in the work, they were unwilling to appear on camera because they were afraid of appearing "foolish."

This fear is something that documentary filmmakers have to contend with due to the current influx of reality television shows, which portray their subjects unfavorably. Because I was asking individuals to give up their time and image for free, I was at the mercy of their schedules, which did not always work to my benefit.

Another significant problem that has arisen recently is attributable to this earlier predicament. I have found that it is important to obtain all of the footage of an individual at the time of their initial filming because they are usually unwilling to accommodate you more than once, especially if they are appearing free of charge. Overall, the making of this film has been a positive experience because it allowed me the opportunity to look at *Star Wars* from a different point of view and begin to question the advertising practices used by companies to sell products.

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