

Authorship and Contemporary Hollywood Franchise Cinema

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Abstract

This study focuses on the context of contemporary Hollywood franchise cinema to explore the use, and reconstruction, of the concept of authorship alongside commercial filmmaking. This thesis comprises three chapters that analyse three case studies, including Peter Jackson and the Middle-earth franchise with which he is closely associated, J.J. Abrams who was trusted to take charge of the reboot franchises *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, and the Marvel Cinematic Universe that has been carefully created by Marvel Studios. The idea of the film author is integral to the marketing strategy of franchise films, even though they are multi-authored texts. This context influences the way in which the authorial status of relevant directors, film studios, or other filmmakers involved in the franchise, is established. Through a wide-ranging analysis of film reviews, film making-of materials, and film texts, as well as an integrative discussion of the idea of stardom and authorship, this thesis presents a detailed account of how authorship functions within franchise cinema. I argue that the context of the franchise can provide a close environment for establishing a recognizable authorial status similar to film auteur, but also distinctly different in that it does not rely on artistic value, which introduces a new concept of the post-auteur film author. Authorship is attributed, depending on the requirements of the franchise, to a designated representative – not necessarily a single figure. However, there are contradictions and instabilities that emerge through this process as the status of the author is tied to the success of the franchise, furthermore, the author may not be a fixed figure as long-running franchises offer the opportunity for inheritance of authorial control. Authorship remains a continued concern in film studies and filmmaking, but the idea of the author is not fixed. Therefore, this thesis presents the idea of the franchise author to discuss authorship within franchise cinema.

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Introduction

As franchise cinema has gradually dominated the film market, discussions questioning the artistic contributions of franchise films have emerged. When Timothy Corrigan applied authorship to the study of the Hollywood film industry from the late 1960s to the 1990s in his book, *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies And Culture After Vietnam*, he argued that ‘the historical adaptability of auteurism’ was mainly reflected in identifying ‘the desire and demand of an industry to generate an artistic aura during a period when the industry as such needed to distinguish itself from other, less-elevated, forms of mass media’.¹ Based on this open-minded attitude towards the understanding and application of authorship, this thesis aims to explore and discuss authorship in the context of franchise cinema. Through three case studies, which are Peter Jackson and the Middle-earth franchise, J.J. Abrams and two rebooted franchises (*Star Trek* and *Star Wars*), and the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) franchise, this thesis seeks to answer questions about how the concept of authorship has been applied and reconstructed within franchise cinema and to introduce the idea of the franchise author.

This thesis provides a valuable study of authorship in contemporary Hollywood, particularly in franchise cinema. In-depth studies that place authorship in the context of franchise cinema, to explore the re-understanding and reconstruction of the concept of authorship, have not emerged in recent research. The fundamental reason for this can also be traced back to Corrigan’s argument on authorship. One function of authorship is to be used to ‘distinguish itself from other, less-elevated, forms of mass media’, and the franchise is considered one of the ‘less-elevated’ forms of mass media.² Although they were made after this thesis was conceived, Martin Scorsese’s comments on Marvel films provide an intuitive example that can confirm this situation. In October 2019, a news article was published entitled ‘Martin Scorsese Compares Marvel Movies to Theme Parks: ‘That’s Not Cinema’’.³ This piece

¹ Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.101-102.

² Ibid, p.102.

³ Zack Sharf, *Martin Scorsese Compares Marvel Movies to Theme Parks: ‘That’s Not Cinema’*, 2019 < <https://www.indiewire.com/2019/10/martin-scorsese-marvel-movies-not-cinema-theme-parks-1202178747/>> [accessed 12 August 2020].

generated much attention and discussion among viewers, critics, filmmakers, and scholars.⁴ As per the title, when Scorsese was asked his view about Marvel's films, he responded 'I don't think they're cinema' going on to say he considered film franchises like Marvel to be 'theme parks'.⁵ This resulted in debate about the comparison between film works from directors like Scorsese, and franchises like Marvel. For example, James Gunn, the director of Marvel films *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014) and *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (2017), stated that Scorsese 'just kept coming out against Marvel so that he could get press for his movie'.⁶ Meanwhile, other directors and stars from Marvel, like Joss Whedon, Robert Downey Jr., Chadwick Boseman, and Scarlett Johansson, all politely offered their views to support Marvel films, while showing their respect to Scorsese.⁷ Correspondingly, Scorsese also received support from directors like Francis Ford Coppola, who said 'he's right because we expect to learn something from cinema'.⁸

Almost a month after that news article appeared, Scorsese published an article in *The New York Times*, to explain his understanding of cinema and franchise films. He emphasised that he believes 'cinema was about revelation — aesthetic, emotional and spiritual revelation', and the critical point is that 'it was an art form'.⁹ In his opinion, franchises like Marvel are 'perfect products manufactured for

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Adam B. Vary, *James Gunn Clarifies Statement on Martin Scorsese and Marvel in Two-Year-Old Story That Just Won't Die*, 2021< <https://variety.com/2021/film/news/james-gunn-martin-scorsese-marvel-the-suicide-squad-1235034907/>> [accessed 31 May 2021].

⁷ Ramin Setoodeh, *Scarlett Johansson, Chris Evans on the 'Sad' Marvel Scorsese Debate*, 2019< <https://variety.com/2019/film/news/chris-evans-scarlett-johansson-marvel-scorsese-debate-1203399129/>> [accessed 31 May 2021].

Jacob Stolworthy, *Chadwick Boseman suggests Martin Scorsese 'didn't get' Black Panther because he's white*, 2019< <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/chadwick-boseman-black-panther-martin-scorsese-marvel-mcu-21-bridges-irishman-a9198016.html>> [accessed 31 May 2021].

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Joss Whedon, 4 October 2019 < <https://twitter.com/joss/status/1180028110915420160> > [accessed 1 March 2021].

⁸ Catherine Shoard, *Francis Ford Coppola: Scorsese was being kind – Marvel movies are despicable*, 2019< <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/oct/21/francis-ford-coppola-scorsese-was-being-kind-marvel-movies-are-despicable>> [accessed 31 May 2021].

⁹ Martin Scorsese, *Martin Scorsese: I Said Marvel Movies Aren't Cinema. Let Me Explain.*, 2019 < <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/04/opinion/martin-scorsese-marvel.html>> [accessed 12 August 2020].

immediate consumption' based on market research and audience-test, so that those franchise films are good consumer products, but what they lack is 'the unifying vision of an individual artist'.¹⁰ Scorsese's remarks draw on the concept of film author and implicitly put it on the opposite side to the film franchise. With such viewpoints, the concept of authorship is used to distinguish film, as an art form, from franchise cinema.

Rather than exploring whether franchise cinema can be defined as an elevated artistic mass media through authorship, this thesis seeks to explore the relationship between authorship and franchise cinema from a different perspective. In other words, this thesis studies the use of authorship within the marketing and promotion of franchise films, instead of pitting them against each other. Despite a perceived tension between theories of authorship and franchise filmmaking and marketing, the idea of an authorial voice, or authorial brand, is inherent in the way in which franchise cinema is written about, marketed and reviewed. Therefore, based on Corrigan's suggestion of auteurism's 'historical adaptability', this thesis aims to explore how the concept of authorship has been used to create the 'artistic aura' for franchise cinema.¹¹ This is a further step in the study of the adaptability of authorship.

Franchise films have always been a significant part of the Hollywood film market. A notable sign of this is their box office success. According to figures from Box Office Mojo, in the past decade (2010-2019), five Marvel films have topped the US domestic yearly box office rankings.¹² The other top five films also come from a film franchise or are about to be developed into a franchise.¹³ Before that, the

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls*, p.102.

¹² Boxofficemojo, Domestic Yearly Box Office, <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/?ref=bo_nb_di_secondarytab> [accessed 1 November 2021].

The box office figures are based on the calendar grosses.

The five Marvel films are: *The Avengers* (USA, dir. Joss Whedon, 2012), *Iron Man 3* (USA, dir. Shane Black, 2012), *Guardians of the Galaxy* (USA, dir. James Gunn, 2014), *Black Panther* (USA, dir. Ryan Coogler, 2018), and *Avengers: Endgame* (USA, dir. Anthony and Joe Russo, 2019).

¹³ Ibid.

They are *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (dir. Rian Johnson, 2017), *Finding Dory* (dir. Andrew Stanton, 2016), *Jurassic World* (dir. Colin Trevorrow, 2015), *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2* (dir. David Yates, 2011), and *Avatar* (dir. James Cameron, 2009).

number one films of the US domestic yearly box office rankings were also often accompanied by names such as *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars*, *Spider-Man*, *Superman*, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, *Batman*, and *Transformers*.¹⁴ These franchise films have also attracted academic attention. Scholarship has analysed the franchise from different perspectives, such as adaptation and franchise, the fandom established around the franchise or the formation of media conglomerates behind the franchise production. For example, Thomas Schatz suggested that franchises, such as the *Star Wars* or *Jaws* films, ‘had tremendous legs’ in terms of the box office results in his research into the New Hollywood.¹⁵

An existing body of literature demonstrates interest in studying the authorship of these films. However, this has predominantly been when the films were directed by independent directors such as Tim Burton, Christopher Nolan and David Yates, or famous directors like George Lucas and Steven Spielberg. Although this kind of scholarship has used theories of authorship, such as Erin Hill-Parks’ article ‘Developing an Auteur through Reviews: The Critical Surround of Christopher Nolan’ (2015) and Will Brooker’s book *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-first Century Batman*, they only focus on a sole director and therefore become a traditional auteur study.¹⁶ Some scholars study cases of Lucas or Spielberg within the context of New Hollywood, but still focus on emphasising how their creative control proves

¹⁴ Ibid.

The data in Box Office Mojo on the Domestic Yearly Box Office only goes back to 1977. Through the 33 years from 1977 to 2009, franchise films that have topped the box office are: *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (dir. Michael Bay, 2009), *The Dark Knight* (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2008), *Spider-Man 3* (dir. Sam Raimi, 2007), *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man’s Chest* (dir. Gore Verbinski, 2006), *Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith* (dir. George Lucas, 2005), *Spider-Man* (dir. Sam Raimi, 2002), *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (dir. Chris Columbus, 2001), *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace* (dir. George Lucas, 1999), *Batman Forever* (dir. Joel Schumacher, 1995), *Batman Returns* (dir. Tim Burton, 1992), *Batman* (dir. Tim Burton, 1989), *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* (dir. Richard Marquand, 1983), *Superman II* (dir. Richard Lester, 1980), *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (dir. Irvin Kershner, 1980), *Superman* (dir. Richard Donner, 1978), *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (dir. George Lucas, 1977). Apart from these 15 films, there are also films like *Back to the Future* (dir. Robert Zemeckis, 1985) and *Jurassic Park* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1993) which also belongs to franchises.

¹⁵ Thomas Schatz, ‘The New Hollywood’, in Julian Stringer (ed.), *Movie Blockbusters* (London and New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), pp.15-44, p. 30.

¹⁶ Will Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight: Twenty-first Century Batman* (London: I.B. Tauris. 2012). Erin Hill-Parks, ‘Developing an Auteur through Reviews: The Critical Surround of Christopher Nolan’, in Jacqueline Furby and Stuart Joy (eds.), *The Cinema of Christopher Nolan: Imagining the Impossible* (London: Wallflower Press, 2015), pp.17-30.

their auteur status. For example, Warren Buckland highlighted Spielberg's multiple positions in the industry, such as 'producer, director, studio co-owner, franchise licensee' to argue for his auteur status.¹⁷ Still, such research focuses on demonstrating the director's auteur status by highlighting their creative participation or artistic contribution. Additionally, scholars have focused more on the form of franchise, such as Owczarski's case study "'More Than Meets the Eye": Transformers and the Complexities of Franchise Film Production in Contemporary Hollywood' (2015) and Jerome Christensen's article 'The Time Warner Conspiracy: JFK, Batman, and the Manager Theory of Hollywood Film' (2002), but their concern has been with the importance of the studios or conglomerates for commercial success.¹⁸

Despite the concept of authorship appearing in those scholars' studies, they do not further discuss the understanding of authorship in the context of the franchise cinema. Instead, these studies still rely on textual analysis with auteurist approaches to analyse specific directors or films, to demonstrate the artistic value of those directors or the films themselves. This method of applying authorship theories seems out of step with the progress of contemporary authorship studies. Scholars like Corrigan and Thomas Schatz started to expand authorship studies to consider the links among the industry, the filmmakers and the film content from a historical perspective. For example, Schatz analysed the historical background of the American film industry, including the 'defensive market tactics' during the mid-1970s and the 'rapidly expanding global entertainment market' in the 1980s, which has influenced the development of Hollywood franchise cinema.¹⁹ However, the application of authorship in franchise cinema is still largely limited within the textual analysis of film texts. Research on authorship within franchise cinema should not

¹⁷ Warren Buckland, 'The Role of the Auteur in the Age of the Blockbuster: Steven Spielberg and DreamWorks', in Stringer, Julian (eds.), *Movie Blockbusters* (London, England: Routledge. 2003), pp.84-98, p.87.

¹⁸ Kimberly A. Owczarski, "'More Than Meets the Eye": Transformers and the Complexities of Franchise Film Production in Contemporary Hollywood', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 32:8 (2015), pp.675-694.

Jerome Christensen, 'The Time Warner Conspiracy: JFK, Batman, and the Manager Theory of Hollywood Film', *Critical Inquiry*, 28.3 (2002), pp.591-617.

¹⁹ Thomas Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', p.27 & p.31.

ignore the influence of the film industry, or even the wider industrial context around franchise cinema. Thus, this thesis will primarily further analyse and renew the understanding of authorship within franchise cinema, by exploring the commercial use of the concept of authorship via three case studies, which are already recognised as commercial successes.

Film authorship is a topic that has continually been debated by scholars since the notion of film auteur first emerged. Since it was introduced as the '*Politique des auteurs*' by the *Cahiers du Cinema* critics in the 1950s and then translated into the auteur theory by American scholar Andrew Sarris in the 1960s, theories of authorship are constantly being discussed and reconstructed. The notion of authorship has now frequently been used in academic studies, film marketing, critical reviews, and even within cinephiles' discussions. Scholars have also discussed the idea of commercial use of author status, such as Corrigan, Geoff King, and Jon Lewis, especially with case studies of New Hollywood directors, like Lucas and Spielberg. King suggested that directors like Spielberg have earned substantial authority, so that their names can be used in film marketing.²⁰ Inspired by Hitchcock, Lewis also argued that auteurism is being applied in a similar way to celebrity in the film industry.²¹ Similarly, Shyon Baumann pointed out that since the 1980s, it has become the norm that directors' names frequently appear in film reviews, and this is also related to the widespread use of the concept of authorship.²² These studies are gradually focusing on the commercial value of the film auteur, which encourages this thesis to further study and consider whether contemporary cinema has welcomed a new age of understanding the film auteur, what could be termed a post-auteur age. This is an idea that can help emphasise the fact that this thesis does not agree with the statement that the author is dead. Instead, this thesis argues that the idea of authorship or auteur still exists and has been applied wider. The idea of post-

²⁰ Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p.92.

²¹ Jon Lewis, 'The Perfect Money Machine(s): George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and Auteurism in the New Hollywood', in Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin (eds), *Looking Past the Screen: Case Studies in American Film History and Method* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007), pp.61-86, p.68.

²² Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007).

auteur suggests that the artistic and commercial value of a filmmaker can be considered separately so that the artistic value is no longer the primary criterion for defining an author. Also, commercial value, or actions taken to enhance commercial value, are no longer opposed to the concept of authorship. Therefore, the exploration of authorship within franchise cinema should not only focus on textual analysis of film text and artistic auteurism, but also needs to examine other functions that the concept of authorship can offer. Therefore, the exploration of authorship within franchise cinema should not only focus on textual analysis of film text and artistic auteurism, but also needs to examine other functions that the concept of authorship can offer.

Building upon the existing discussions on authorship, this thesis will further discuss multiple uses of authorship within the context of franchise cinema. Discussions of individual directors also occur in the research of this thesis; however, unlike studies that attempt to prove a director or film has artistic value, this analysis aims to explore the particular roles that the concept of authorship can play in the post-auteur age. The approach of this thesis is to take authorship as a tool to examine its different functions within franchise cinema and reconstruct the understanding of authorship through its applications in typical cases to propose the idea of the franchise author. Therefore, besides the discussion around the concept of authorship to achieve this goal, this thesis also applies star theory, in addition to the textual analysis of film and ancillary materials, such as film reviews and making-of documentaries. It relies upon research into the production and reception of selected cases to create a framework containing both discourse analysis and textual analysis to offer a holistic analysis of authorship and franchise cinema.

Defining the Research Project

The term franchise cinema in the title is integral to this study's primary research context. Film franchise has a long history and accounts for a large part of Hollywood's output. Kristin Thompson suggested that 'film franchises are not new'

and its history can be traced back to the 1920s.²³ Schatz argues that when Hollywood had an 'upswing in defensive market tactics' there was 'notably an increase in sequels, series, reissues, and remakes'; since the mid-1970s, the film franchise has snowballed in Hollywood.²⁴ The definition of the concept franchise from the *A Dictionary of Film Studies* (2012) is 'an agreement or licence between different parties that allows a film (or series of films) to be used as a key component within a wider set of commercial enterprises'.²⁵ King suggested that franchise film is 'the product of an industrial regime that has come to dominate Hollywood, the world of giant media corporations into which the industry has been absorbed'.²⁶ Although franchise films are associated with a broader range of multimedia industries than the film industry, the focus of this thesis remains on the cinematic context. Franchises are often based on existing intellectual property, and this further complicates questions of authorship. Franchise films included as part of a multimedia franchise can be original works, derivative works or adaptations. Scholars offer different views on the original film and derivative/adapted film, when considering the concept of authorship. For example, in Clare Parody's article 'Franchising/Adaptation' (2011), she argues that adaptation in the franchise is the 'distinct variant of the practice' as 'part of market strategy', which weakens the authorial voices of the adaptor (or the director of the adaptation).²⁷ Furthermore, this thesis considers these factors in order to analyse, and demonstrate how, the notion of authorship has been exploited differently within the franchise for such cases.

Specifically, this thesis will explore franchise cinema in the context of contemporary Hollywood cinema. The phrase contemporary Hollywood in this thesis mainly refers to Hollywood cinema in the post-2000 period. Schatz suggested that the 1980s and the 1990s saw the process when 'the New Hollywood steadily

²³ Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo franchise: the Lord of the rings and modern Hollywood* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2007), p.4.

²⁴ Thomas Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', p.27.

²⁵ Annette Kuhn, and Guy Westwell, *A Dictionary of Film Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.520.

²⁶ Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, pp.49-50.

²⁷ Clare Parody, 'Adaptation essay prize winner: Franchising/adaptation', *Adaptation*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (2011), pp.210-218, p.212.

morphed into Conglomerate Hollywood', and by the mid-2000s, Hollywood has been deeply influenced by the 'conglomeration, globalisation, and digitisation'.²⁸ Corrigan introduced that within the Hollywood cinema, the studio system is essentially kept 'intact' with some 'structural changes and mergers reshaped', because those studios 'shifted focus from in house production of movies to distribution'.²⁹ Meanwhile, with the aim of exploring the diversity for more audiences, the big studios developed or merged several film production companies, covering different types of film production, such as independent film and blockbuster films.³⁰ Corrigan believed that the American film industry in the 2000s made changes to adjust 'to increasingly expanding markets and more actively discriminating viewers'.³¹ Schatz explained that because of 'the combined effects of digitisation and media convergence', 'the franchise mentality' has developed into a new level that has 'significantly impacted both production and formal-aesthetic protocols'.³² Furthermore, 'Hollywood fashions its top films for a worldwide marketplace' due to the effects of globalisation during the 2000s.³³

Scholars, including Corrigan, Schatz, and Allen Scott, have studied the globalisation of Hollywood from the perspectives of the global market, 'cultural collisions', and the international trade policy from the US government.³⁴ The concept of Hollywood has gone beyond the geographical meaning it originally represented. Therefore, the first case study in this thesis, Peter Jackson and the Middle-earth franchise (includes *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003) and *The Hobbit* trilogy (2012-2014)), can fit in this set, even though its films were filmed based in New Zealand and co-funded by New Zealand film industry. The case study of Jackson and the two trilogies provides an example of how a director's authorial

²⁸ Thomas Schatz, 'New Hollywood, New Millennium', in Warren Buckland (eds), *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp.19-46, p.19.

²⁹ Timothy Corrigan, 'Introduction: Movies and the 2000s', in Timothy Corrigan (ed.), *American Cinema of the 2000s: Themes and Variations* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2012), pp.1-18, p.7.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Thomas Schatz, 'New Hollywood, New Millennium', p.30.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Allen Scott, 'Hollywood and the world: the geography of motion-picture distribution and marketing', *Review of International Political Economy*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2004), pp.33-61, p.57.

status is established when he is involved in directing an entire series of films from a franchise. This case study was chosen because Jackson had worked mainly in independent films before the Middle-earth films and was not then a well-known director. Given this, his involvement in the production of the Middle-earth franchise films can be seen as a gradual process of building his authorial status in audiences' minds. This case study will analyse how Jackson handled the relationship with the original creator, J. R. R. Tolkien, during the adaptation, which challenges the general understanding of authorship and adaptation by reducing the tension between the originality from auteur and the fidelity from adaptor.

The second case, analysing J.J. Abrams, mainly focuses on two franchises, *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*. His involvement in these two franchises has been in rebooting the existing ones, founded by Gene Roddenberry and George Lucas, respectively. This case presents a situation full of tension and collaboration between Abrams' participation and the existing attributes of the franchises. Abrams' different experiences within these two franchises can also provide a horizontal comparison between two franchises with different kinds of creators. This case study aims to break the long-standing pattern of authorship analysis, in which the director and the films they direct are the analysis subjects, and instead apply the notion of collective authorship in a way that is adapted to the franchise cinema. Following on from the discussion of collective authorship in the previous chapter, the final case study will examine the MCU franchise to study the collective relationship and control within. This franchise was chosen because it had numerous films released in a short period (twenty-two films from 2008 to 2019) and had significant box office success. In addition, unlike the other two cases, the MCU involves many directors, and Marvel Studios and its president Kevin Feige are the focus of their promotion and notes by the media. This is a fitting case to study the use of authorship within the unique context of the film franchise.

Thesis Structure

This thesis contains three case studies, each of which is presented as a separate chapter that studies authorship within franchise cinema from a different viewpoint.

The understanding and application of authorship within the particular context of franchise cinema has had little academic attention. However, the relatively complex relationship between the film and the director or other participants within the franchise provides a setting that merits further studying authorship. The three cases outlined above offer three directions, each a little more complex than the previous one, each subsequently deepening the analysis of authorship within franchise cinema. Rather than the debate about whether the concept of authorship is still relevant in such commercial products as franchise films, this thesis is more concerned with how the concept of authorship can be applied and understood differently in franchises. The reason for ignoring the former is the fact that this thesis has observed that the use of the idea of authorship is still prevalent in franchise films among critical reviews and the press.

Although the eventual goal of this research is to go beyond the limitations of authorship applied only to directors in order to introduce the idea of the franchise author, this thesis still begins its discussion of authorship and franchise cinema with the analysis focusing on the director in the first chapter. Thus, Chapter One will provide a case study of Peter Jackson, exploring his role as the 'author' of the Middle-earth franchise. These six films create an ideal closed range for an analysis of Jackson. The relationship of one director corresponding to multiple films in this case study provides a framework similar to the analysis of a director's authorial status, using traditional approaches of authorship. The main question set for this chapter is to explore what special support the context of franchise cinema can provide for a director to build up their authorial status. Then follows a further exploration of how this authorial status differs from the original understanding of the film author. In order to examine the process of establishing authorial status and the distinctive features it exhibits, this chapter also introduces star theory to study Jackson through the Middle-earth franchise in the context of authorship theory. This work's analysis of Jackson is different from other studies that have aimed to prove a director is or is not an auteur. Instead, this chapter examines the relevance of this process to authorship, on the premise that the director is already known to the public as a trustworthy director. With this premise in place, the chapter explores the

particular process of focusing on Jackson's authorial persona, the role of franchise cinema in this process, and the instability of this authorial status. Rather than a textual analysis of the films, this case study will focus on the making-of documentaries to analyse how the subjective viewpoint of the director, or the studio, has helped, and influenced, the formation of the authorial status.

Chapter Two continues the exploration of director and authorship within franchise cinema, but has more directors and franchises involved. The case study of J.J. Abrams and two film franchises (*Star Trek* and *Star Wars*), in which he has participated, focuses on the director engaged in many already-famous film franchises. Through the case study of Abrams, this chapter explores the relationship between the authorial voice and the franchise, together with the function of directors within it. Whilst this case study focuses on Abrams, unlike the first chapter, Chapter Two does not examine how his authorial status was established. Instead, it directs attention to how he deals with the authorial status of the original creators of the franchise (George Lucas and Gene Roddenberry), as well as their authorial traits, which are already regarded as being closely related to the franchise. The audience's different reception of Lucas and Roddenberry, compared to Abrams' personal attitude to these two creators, also influenced how he dealt with these two reboots. In a case study that covers more than one director, this chapter introduces the concept of collective authorship but discusses it within the context of franchise cinema to help explain the idea of the franchise author and its multiple possibilities. Furthermore, this case study will analyse film reviews from several media sources to explore the critical receptions of Abrams and the original creators. This chapter aims to present a different understanding of collective authorship in terms of the franchise and apply it to analysing Abrams' rebooted films. This chapter notes that authorial features can be separated from the director who owns them and inherited by another director, due to the demands from the same franchise. This idea is further developed into the argument that the authorial voice, or authorial traits, can be separated from its owner or creator and be used for the franchise's needs; this then leads to the last case study in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Chapter Three will present a case study of the MCU franchise exploring the idea of collective authorship promoted by Marvel Studios and the studio's authorial role. The MCU franchise is an example with many directors involved. Meanwhile, Marvel Studios also plays an important role in the development of the franchise. This chapter will analyse the tension and collaboration between filmmakers and Marvel Studios through twenty-two MCU films. Furthermore, this case draws attention to the study of the studio and its president Feige, who is also the producer of all the MCU films, to break through the limitation of associating authorship with the director within the context of franchise cinema. The cases of Abrams and Jackson address the importance of maintaining the authorial voice in a franchise, whilst the collective authorship promoted by Marvel Studios is an example that questions this importance. To this end, the studio itself, instead of directors, becomes one of the core creative figures for the franchise. As such, this chapter mainly focuses on the studio and how it fits the idea of authorship. This may challenge the understanding of collective authorship and highlight the exclusionary application of authorship during the franchise's production. The primary materials this chapter will analyse are film reviews from several media sources of the twenty-two MCU films. The analysis will focus on the critical film reviews' attitudes towards the director, the studio, and Feige. In the analysis, Marvel Studios, Feige, as well as key groups of directors involved in the MCU will be discussed, as the chapter attempts to examine their authorial roles in this franchise using the concepts of authorship and collective authorship, in order to further update the understanding of authorship.

This thesis argues that, within franchise cinema, the figure of the franchise author emerges. This figure is similar to the auteur in that they are the figurehead associated with the franchise, but they are not an auteur in the same ways as it has traditionally been used because their role as author is not predicated on artistry or artistic control. The presence of the franchise author is to bring coherence to the franchise and its films. This kind of coherence is not only applied to the film text for the coherence of narrative or visual style but also for the effective accumulation of marketing and continued development of the product. The franchise author offers a new approach to analysing and promoting the film under the context of franchise

cinema but does not aim to interpret the personal traits of an individual like the film auteur. The function of the franchise author is to highlight the name of the franchise, although as an additional result most of them could also establish or improve their own status at the same time. Also, identifying the franchise author already goes far beyond the director, even beyond the discussion of the possibility that anyone else from the cast and crew of the film could be identified as the film author. In the context of franchise cinema, the franchise author could be an important figure in the franchise who, even if not involved in the creation of one of the franchise films, is still taken into account while analysing it. Or, it could be the studio rather than any individual which represents specific creative features within one franchise.

However, the emphasis of the idea of franchise author is different from the branding or brand identity and is more specific. The franchise author is more like multiple authorial objects with different traits and different functions under franchise brands. The franchise author is not only considering the brand of franchises like Marvel Studios but also concerns the individuals like Peter Jackson who contributed to the franchise's development or gained their own authority through establishing the franchise. Furthermore, it is also different from Geoff King's case study of Will Smith, which uses one star to explore how he converted himself into his own franchise property.³⁵ The franchise author is the key figure or studio that helps to ensure or develop the property of franchise. Also, individuals or studios are already portrayed as an author habitually through promotional materials and critical reviews, which still preserves the space and possibilities for the individual authors that are important in these franchises. As the three case studies present step by step in the next three chapters, the idea of the franchise author does not limit itself to highlighting or identifying a particular person or a group of people or studios but is paratextually and collectively exploring the complex relationships that form among them within the context of franchise cinema.

³⁵ Geoff King, 'Stardom in the Willennum', in Thomas Austin, and Martin Barker (ed), *Contemporary Hollywood stardom* (London : Arnold, 2003), pp.62-73.

Literature Review and Methodology

Given the conditions of media conglomeration that have been gradually rising in contemporary Hollywood, the notion of authorship, which is often limited to highlighting the director's contribution or debating the tension between individuals and collectives, is difficult to apply without reconstruction. In response to existing studies rarely considering the specific context of franchise cinema, this thesis is specifically situating authorship within the context of contemporary Hollywood franchise cinema and introducing a concept of the franchise author to fit the context. This is done to challenge the understanding of authorship and how it has been applied. For this purpose, while the literature review for this thesis is interested in the frontiers of authorship study, it is more importantly concerned with the relevant applications in franchise cinema.

This literature review takes both thematic and chronological approaches to assess relative scholarship on film authorship. The focus is on the scholarship of authorship and Hollywood cinema, except for the first section that introduces the history of auteur theory and how it spread to American cinema. This chapter aims to trace the development of authorship studies, especially when related to the industry and marketing, to discuss the 'historical adaptability' of authorship highlighted by Timothy Corrigan, who expands the concept of auteurism to coin a new term, 'the commerce of auteurism', that can fit into the context of the film industry.³⁶ Additionally, this adaptability naturally promotes the necessity of the concept of film authorship's renewal in the context of contemporary Hollywood franchise cinema. Therefore, this chapter aims to examine a selection of case studies on films and directors from film franchises, exploring a framework to specifically study authorship within franchise cinema in subsequent chapters. Furthermore, this chapter will explain the rationale of the methods used in this thesis.

Auteurism and Auteur Theory

Although this thesis only focuses on authorship within contemporary Hollywood franchise cinema, it is necessary to start this literature review with a brief

³⁶ Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam*, p.101.

introduction to some of the main arguments and debates that have developed from the early establishment of auteurism and auteur theory. Alexandre Astruc's idea of *camera-stylo* in 'The Birth of a New Avant-garde: La Camera-stylo' (1948) claimed film as a new artistic language of expression.³⁷ After that, the *Cahiers du Cinéma* journal editors turned the idea of emphasising the film artists into the *politique des auteurs*, in which François Truffaut's work 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema' (1954) was identified as the key point.³⁸ In his article, Truffaut challenged the *Tradition de qualité*, which highlights the writers, with the idea of *cinéma d'auteur*, thereby highlighting the directors.³⁹ As such, the *politique des auteurs* was used to identify the artistic directors whose personalities and individual creative intentions can be interpreted through the style or themes in their films. The *Cahiers'* critics contributed many practical film reviews based on this approach from multiple aspects. For example, Claude Chabrol's review of *Rear Window* (USA, Dir. Alfred Hitchcock, 1954) particularly noted the similarities between this film and Hitchcock's earlier films, such as the characters with a similar 'thriller element' and the usual theme of showing 'the power of love'.⁴⁰ Additionally, in André Bazin's article 'Beauty of a Western' (1956), he analysed how Anthony Mann applied landscape as 'an atmosphere' in his Western films and kept the theme of 'contemplation' in such a violent film genre.⁴¹

From its inception, there were criticisms of the *politique des auteurs*, by some insiders from the *Cahiers*, for its 'lack of flexibility', such as Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, although the *Cahiers* widely used the *politique des auteurs* at the time.⁴² The primary concern was that critics would take this approach to an extreme if they only paid attention to the directors and ignored 'the circumstances of collaboration, of

³⁷ Alexandre Astruc, 'The Birth of a New Avant-garde: La Camera-stylo', in Peter Graham, and Ginette Vincendeau (eds.), *The French new wave: critical landmarks* (London: BFI, 2009), pp.31-37.

³⁸ John Caughie, *Theories of authorship: a reader* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul in association with the British Film Institute, 1981), p.35.

³⁹ François Truffaut, 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema', in Peter Graham, and Ginette Vincendeau (eds.), *The French new wave: critical landmarks* (London: BFI, 2009), pp.39-63.

⁴⁰ Claude Chabrol, 'Serious Things', in Jim Hillier (eds.), *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp.136-139, p.137 & p.138.

⁴¹ André Bazin, 'Beauty of a Western', in Jim Hillier (eds.), *Cahiers du Cinéma: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp.165-168, p.167.

⁴² Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, quoted in *Theories of authorship: a reader*, p.35.

genres and formulas, and schools of filmmaking'.⁴³ In another of Bazin's articles, '*La Politique des auteurs*' (1957), he related *politique des auteurs* to the *Cahiers*' film reviews and pointed out that if a director and their works could be considered as one, then even a poor film could be seen as an expression of its' director.⁴⁴ Bazin's concern was that the overuse of this method can lead the director to intentionally build up their personality and creativity in the pursuit of being an auteur.⁴⁵ Moreover, British film critic Ian Cameron also expressed concern in his article 'Films, directors and critics' (1962), suggesting that auteurism is a critical method used to understand the film via the director's intentions, and limits our understanding of the audience's experience of watching a film.⁴⁶ Such concerns were mainly, on one hand, that the auteur-director becoming a standard could lead some directors to intentionally portray themselves in this way and, on the other, that the popularity of this standard might limit the audience's understanding, since the meaning could be fixed by the filmmaker. These debates and concerns about the limitation of auteurism at this early stage have persisted and continue to this day.

American scholar Andrew Sarris was the first to introduce auteurism into American film criticism. Influenced and inspired by the concept of '*politique des auteurs*', he further took the notion of auteur and established another concept 'the auteur theory' in his article 'Notes on the auteur theory in 1962'.⁴⁷ Sarris uses the auteur theory to judge directors and their films, and he set up three premises as three concentric circles, which from the outside to the inside are 'technical competence', 'distinguishable personality', and 'interior meaning', for judging them.⁴⁸ His theory, while standardising a formula for identifying an auteur, reinforced the concerns mentioned above. Scholars, including Edward Buscombe

⁴³ Janet Staiger, 'Authorship Approaches', in David A. Gerstner, Janet Staiger (eds.), *Authorship and Film* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.27-57, p.37.

⁴⁴ André Bazin, '*La Politique des auteurs*', in Peter Graham, Ginette Vincendeau (eds.), *The French: New Wave: Critical Landmarks* (London: British Film Institute, 2009), pp. 130-148, p.131-132.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.144

⁴⁶ Ian Cameron, 'Films, Director, and Critics', in John Caughie (eds.), *Theories of authorship: a reader* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul in association with the British Film Institute, 1981), pp.50-58, p.51.

⁴⁷ Andrew Sarris, 'notes on the auteur theory in 1962', in Leo Braudy (eds.), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.561-564.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, pp.561-562.

and Pauline Kael, doubted the rationality and universality of Sarris's judgment criteria, especially after Sarris named it a 'theory'. Kael criticised Sarris' auteur theory for being 'a rather odd pragmatic statement', which became a rigid formula to 'perceiving' film.⁴⁹ Similarly, Buscombe refuted that the original *politique des auteurs* 'was meant to define an attitude to the cinema' which is 'somewhat less than a theory'.⁵⁰ A significant contradiction within the notion of the auteur comes from how to explain and apply it. The *Cahiers*' critics only applied auteurism as a critical method to the films or directors that they already highly appreciated.⁵¹ However, Sarris' auteur theory aims to set up a standard for the whole industry of directing. Although Sarris reiterated that the auteur theory does not mean a director could take all the credit for the film's creativity in another article, 'Toward a Theory of Film History' (1963), the direction of his theory largely confirms the concerns of editors from the *Cahiers*, like Bazin, that the concept of auteur has the potential to develop into an extreme dogma.⁵²

Meanwhile, British scholars like Peter Wollen took the *politique des auteurs* in another direction with the concept of auteur structuralism (or cine-structuralism). This originated in structuralism and mainly aimed to use a director as the key code to decipher the film.⁵³ Unlike Sarris, Wollen suggested that 'a great many features of films analysed have to be dismissed as indecipherable because of 'noise' from' the people other than a director who is involved in the film production.⁵⁴ As Wollen argued, the understanding of structuralism can not only 'rest at the perception of resemblances or repetitions', 'but must also comprehend a system of differences and oppositions'.⁵⁵ To apply the code of auteur when deciphering the film, Wollen

⁴⁹ Pauline Kael, 'Circles and Squares', *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No.3 (spring, 1963), pp.12-26, p.14.

⁵⁰ Edward Buscombe, 'Ideas of authorship', *Screen*, Vol.14, no.3 (1973), pp.75-85, p.75.

⁵¹ Andre Bazin, Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Roger Leenhardt, Pierre Kast, 'Six Characters on Search of auteurs: A Discussion about the French Cinema', in Jim Hillier (eds.), *Cahiers du Cinema: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) pp.31-46.

⁵² Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and directions, 1929-1968* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996).

⁵³ Peter Wollen, 'The auteur theory (extract)', in John Caughie (eds.), *Theories of authorship: a reader* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul in association with the British Film Institute, 1981), pp.138-151.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.143.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.139.

suggests comparing different films by directors, not only their classics but also their films that 'may seem odd'.⁵⁶ Therefore, Wollen's method gives greater emphasis to the importance of the director. Wollen's theory has been challenged. Brian Henderson criticised it as an empirical method based on structuralism and semiotics, which ignored the particularity of film as multimedia and unilaterally isolated the text from the film.⁵⁷ Even the *Cahiers* critics argued, through the collective essay by the editors of *Cahiers on Young Mr. Lincoln* (USA, Dir. John Ford, 1939) in 1970, that a director's filmic traits cannot be summarised as a unifying feature, which reflects the contradictory nature of the application of auteur structuralism.⁵⁸ However, auteur structuralism, like auteur theory by Sarris, still developed into a branch of theory that extended from the *Cahiers' politique des auteurs*.

The discussion of the auteur once reached a point where it escalated to a debate on whether the author's intentions could actually be analysed. Led by Roland Barthes' famous article 'The Death of the Author' (1967), there are still discussions about theories and practices of the auteur. Two years after 'The Death of the Author', Michel Foucault published his article 'What is an author?', which agreed with Barthes' idea but rethought the concept of the auteur by analysing the author's function in discourse.⁵⁹ Foucault suggested that one of the functions is that the author 'is assigned a 'realistic' dimension as we speak of an individual's 'profundity' or 'creative' power, their intentions or the original inspiration manifested in writing'.⁶⁰ In the context of cinema, at this stage, the person who has been considered as the author that represents the creative power is the director. In terms of the application of the idea of auteur, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith concluded that the understanding of the 'so-called auteur theory' can be done in three ways: (i) 'as a set of empirical assertions to the effect', which holds that the director is solely responsible for every detail of the film; (ii) 'as a standard of value' stipulating that

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Brian Henderson, 'Critique of cine-structuralism (part 1)', in John Caughie (eds.), *Theories of authorship: a reader* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul in association with the British Film Institute, 1981), pp.166-182.

⁵⁸ *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 'John Ford's Young Mr Lincoln: A collective text by the Editors of Cahiers du Cinéma', *Screen*, Vol. 13, no.3 (1972), pp. 5-44.

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', *Screen* (London), Vol.20, no.1 (1979), pp.13-33, p.20.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.21.

the film as *cinema d'auteur* is good, otherwise, it is bad; and (iii) 'as a principle of method, which provides a basis for a more scientific form of criticism than has existed hitherto'.⁶¹ Whichever way the idea of auteur is understood, these discussions, studies and debates are framed in a fixed relationship between the director and his/her film(s), with the aim of analysing the artistic value of the director.

Nonetheless, as Corrigan highlighted, authorship has the adaptability to fit into different historical contexts. In the process of these theories complementing or questioning each other, the understanding and application of the auteur have gone beyond Truffaut's original intent.⁶² Meanwhile, as a loose concept that has led to endless debates, it has also generated a richer and more diverse discussion in the course of subsequent research examining it. These studies, which will be discussed in subsequent sections, have further inspired this thesis to explore the adaptation of the idea of auteur within the context of Hollywood franchise cinema.

When Aesthetics Meet Commercialism – Authorship Applied in Hollywood

When Corrigan raised the concept of the commerce of auteurism, he criticised how in the 1990s, all those 'early theories and practices of auteurism' were 'mostly disconnected from its marketing and commercial implications'.⁶³ Although notions of the auteur arose from theoretical film criticism it does have implications for the industry. In David Sterritt's interview, Sarris pointed out that many people believe that 'foreign films were the serious cinema, and American movies were just fun' during the classical Hollywood period.⁶⁴ The introduction of auteur theory has become one way to discuss American movies seriously; however, the focus of discussion has shifted from film to director. Based on his auteur theory, Sarris classified American directors according to their level of importance and explained

⁶¹ Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'Visconti (extract)', in John Caughie (eds), *Theories of authorship: a reader* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul in association with the British Film Institute, 1981), pp.136-138, p.137.

⁶² Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls*, p.101.

⁶³ Ibid, p.102.

⁶⁴ David Sterritt, 'A Previously Unpublished Interview with Andrew Sarris, 1995', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, Issue 30:1 (2003), pp.1-3, p.2.

those directors' unique features separately in his book *The American Cinema: Directors and directions, 1929-1968* (1968). For example, he emphasises the technical breakthrough behind the 'apparent simplicity' of Charlie Chaplin's art; that John Ford is good at telling stories and creating outstanding images; and how Alfred Hitchcock contributed to the technique of the cinema, and his characteristic style.⁶⁵ In Sarris' opinion, the proponents of auteur theory should focus on the features that can highlight the directors' own personality, because 'the strong director imposes his own personality on a film; the weak director allows the personality of others to run rampant'.⁶⁶

Sarris' idea of the auteur underpins film criticism in American cinema and begins to celebrate the director as the most important voice in filmmaking, even under the studio system. However, it is worth noting that auteurs have been seen to exist in Hollywood since the studio system, particularly evident in the Hollywood Renaissance as a time of more personal filmmaking influenced by art-house cinema. Therefore, scholars nowadays, like Geoff King and David A. Cook, prefer to consider the impact of the *Cahiers'* idea of *politique des auteur* on film production of the Hollywood Renaissance, the era that 'has been understood partly in terms of the 'artistic' expression of a new generation of filmmakers'.⁶⁷ When artistic directors made films under the influence of auteurism during the Hollywood Renaissance, they received more attention from the studio and the public so that they could ask for more creative control under the studio's power. After the Hollywood Renaissance, since the late 1980s, as Hollywood cinema moved towards a new period, the concept of authorship has become more relevant to the film industry. Therefore, during the late 1980s, when the blockbuster dominated the box office, auteurism was transformed into a 'marketing tool' by Hollywood.⁶⁸ The argument concerning the commerce of auteurism emerges from a group of scholars, including

⁶⁵ Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema*, p.40, p.49, p.57-60.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.31

⁶⁷ Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, p. 86.

⁶⁸ Jon Lewis, 'The Perfect Money Machine(s): George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and Auteurism in the New Hollywood', in Jon Lewis and Eric Smoodin (eds), *Looking Past the Screen: Case Studies in American Film History and Method* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007), pp.61-86, p.69.

Corrigan, King, Thomas Elsaesser, Jon Lewis, and Thomas Schatz.⁶⁹ Just as Corrigan put forward, the notion of authorship needed to be furthered and redefined within the new context of 'contemporary industry and commercial trajectories'.⁷⁰

King argued that directors obtained more authority through their fame, and their name could be a marketing strategy, like that of a film star.⁷¹ Since a director's name could bring more revenue, a famous director could secure a big-budget more easily than others and have more freedom regarding creation and production such as Steven Spielberg and the film *Schindler's List* (1993).⁷² Warren Buckland's research on Spielberg and his company DreamWorks also suggested that in contemporary Hollywood, an auteur should control the production process and have the power of control over the distribution and exhibition.⁷³ In the context of the film industry, the framework of auteur criticism changed from film criticism to the celebration of the director. Once a director has been considered as an auteur, nearly all their films could become masterpieces, or a 'signature product'.⁷⁴

Studies of film directors have been developed to explore the commercial status of the author, and an example of this is Hitchcock. The general agreement given above not only applies to the study of contemporary directors but also led to scholars reviewing directors from the classical Hollywood age again. As one of the most written about classical Hollywood directors, scholarship on Hitchcock echoes wider trends on authorship study. Scholars, such as Marilyn Fabe, followed the traditional cognition of auteur theory and argued for Hitchcock as an auteur by

⁶⁹ Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls*.

Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema*.

Thomas Elsaesser, *The Persistence of Hollywood* (New York/London: Routledge, 2012).

Jon Lewis, 'The Perfect Money Machine(s)'.

Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood filmmaking in the studio era* (New York: Pantheon, 1989).

⁷⁰ Timothy Corrigan, 'Auteurs and the New Hollywood', in Jon Lewis (eds.), *The New American Cinema* (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp.38-63, p.42.

⁷¹ Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*, p.92.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Warren Buckland, 'The Role of the Auteur in the Age of the Blockbuster: Steven Spielberg and DreamWorks', in Stringer, Julian (eds.), *Movie Blockbusters* (London, England: Routledge. 2003), pp.84-98.

⁷⁴ Jon Lewis, 'The Perfect Money Machine(s)', p.68.

exploring all his films' commonality.⁷⁵ These works focused on his recurring narrative style and theme or made observations on the details of *mise-en-scène*, such as camera placements, costume, colour, lighting, or analysing his editing techniques. Their conclusion relies on the study of multiple films directed by Hitchcock, with Robert E. Kapsis having noted that some of Hitchcock's films, such as *Vertigo* (1958), were not considered classics until many years after their release.⁷⁶ Kapsis' study not only aesthetically analysed Hitchcock's films but also explored his marketing strategies.⁷⁷ He suggested it was Hitchcock's self-promotion that helped him build his reputation by marketing himself as an auteur.⁷⁸ Nicholas Haeffner recorded that Hitchcock had a PR company to establish his persona, such as purposefully arranging interviews and reports that sought to highlight his image 'as the jovial, rotund, black magician of the cinema', always dressing in his 'trademark business suit' to be recognisable to the public, and even making appearances in his TV show *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (1955-1962).⁷⁹

From Bazin's interview to the critical reviews by American critics, Hitchcock became one of the most important cases of auteur research. Contemporary studies on him have not only covered the aesthetic value but also explored his business motive, in addition to the approaches that sought to achieve their business purpose. Lewis stated 'auteurism and celebrity intersect in interesting ways' since the early 1970s, but the case of Hitchcock inspired the idea that this intersection can be traced back to the classical Hollywood era.⁸⁰ From Thomas Leitch's viewpoint, film auteurs like Hitchcock, who are recognised by the public, 'are made' by several 'marketable factors' rather than 'born' to be auteurs.⁸¹ Leitch summed up these conditions as including 'thematic consistency', 'association with a popular genre', 'an appetite for

⁷⁵ Marilyn Fabe, 'Hollywood Auteur -- Alfred Hitchcock's Notorious', in Fabe, Marilyn, *Closely watched films: an introduction to the art of narrative film technique* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2004), pp.192-213.

⁷⁶ Robert E. Kapsis, *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation* (Chicago, Ill.; London: University Chicago Press, 1992), p.122

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.17.

⁷⁹ Nicholas Haeffner, *Alfred Hitchcock* (Harlow: Longman, 2005), p.29.

⁸⁰ Jon Lewis, 'The Perfect Money Machine(s)', p.68.

⁸¹ Thomas Leitch, *Film adaptation and its discontents from Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), p.256.

the coordination and control of outsized projects', 'sensitivity to the possibility of broad appeal in such disparate media as movies, television, books, magazines, and T-shirts', and 'public persona'.⁸² Furthermore, Corrigan suggested that an interview 'is one of the few, documentable extratextual spaces where the auteur, in addressing cults of fans and critical viewers, can engage and disperse his or her own organising agency as auteur.'⁸³ This implies that the auteur image can be created, through marketing, to set up an excellent artistic persona for the director. Correspondingly, the director's name can become a new marketing point to ensure a film's quality, and with it comes a great deal of quality and profitability. Kapsis explained that this kind of strategy is 'part of standard European and American industrial and advertising practices'.⁸⁴ These arguments have encouraged this thesis to examine film authorship in the context of contemporary Hollywood franchise cinema, which is closely linked to the industry and business and further to introduce the idea of the franchise author to explain the new understandings.

Beyond the director

The studies on authorship beyond the director can be divided into two categories. The first still pays attention to the director, but there are directors like Lucas and Spielberg, who also have other duties besides directing, such as post-production, and producing. In his book *American Films*, Lewis named these 'industry auteurs' and describes this as the 'new Hollywood auteurism' that is based on 'the goals of the studios (to make movies that appeal to the widest possible audience) and which has coincided with the producer-directors' own ambitions'.⁸⁵ The second explores other people involved in a film's production, besides the director, with much of the research focusing on the discussion of collective authorship, or the authorial voice of writers and the studio. The scholarship explored in this section not only maps out the development of authorship outside the director discourse but

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls*, pp.107-108.

⁸⁴ Robert E. Kapsis, *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation*, p.17.

⁸⁵ Jon Lewis, *American Film: A History* (New York/London: W.W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), p.372.

also provides the basis for some of the research in this thesis.

Lewis suggested that ‘the first-wave auteurs’ of the Hollywood Renaissance mainly concentrated on *mise-en-scène* and took pride and care in directing actors during the production phase’, while ‘Lucas and Spielberg are almost exclusively post-production directors’.⁸⁶ Lewis gave the example of the *Star Wars* films that were not directed by Lucas but still share his visual style to explain how the author’s traits emerge through post-production.⁸⁷ Furthermore, Lewis’ study on authorship within contemporary Hollywood also considered the protégés of Spielberg and Lucas who directed similar films.⁸⁸ His study highlighted the idea of the inherited author trait, from the master to their protégés. In *American Film*, Lewis pointed out that the auteur traits from postproduction directors also occur in those films when they are producers, and even in films made by their production companies.⁸⁹ Lewis argued that ‘their auteur status was built not on a transcendence of the commercial power structure in New York and Hollywood but on a deft accommodation of that power structure in the very production of their films’.⁹⁰ Although he explained that this kind of auteur status building ‘need not cheapen’ their creative strength, this suggests that the establishment of their auteur status can go beyond their talent in directing.⁹¹ Lewis’ work demonstrates the possibility of a producer or production company being integral to the creation of an authorial style, thereby opening up the possibility for a wider understanding of film authorship.

The idea of the studio having an authorial presence emerges in the work of Jerome Christensen, who reconsiders the idea of authorship within the commercial context of studios. Just as scholars like Leo Rosten and Thomas Schatz put forward the view that a film belongs to both art and industry, Christensen’s research took one step further, specifically exploring the relationship between a studio’s value and a film’s value to establish the connection between the economic studies and

⁸⁶ Jon Lewis, ‘The Perfect Money Machine(s)’, p.70.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Jon Lewis, *American Film*, p.372.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.376.

⁹¹ Ibid.

aesthetic film studies within the Hollywood industry.⁹² Compared to the usual understanding of auteur criticism, which analyses a film through the director's style, Christensen suggested it can be understood as expressing the studio's identity and values too.⁹³ In his opinion, the premise that the director's personal views can be expressed is that all their ideas and decisions have to be recognised by the studio, so the reason some directors, such as Hitchcock, could project their ideas is that the studio offered them the power.⁹⁴ Given this, Christensen believes that the studio's authorship comes from the control the studio has, based on the idea that everything that the film expresses actually comes indirectly from the studio's choice.

Christensen's research is based on two approaches. One is a study of the history of MGM and Warner Bros. from the 1920s, focusing on management and film production. The other is the analyses of individual films, which focuses on combining the themes and attitudes of the film with the producers and executives. Christensen concentrates on the studios, but ignores the contribution from directors and others, which avoids the tension between a studio's demands and those of individuals. As a result, Christensen's work is limited since it does not recognise the tensions that appear when directors with an assumed authorial voice collaborate with a studio that also functions as an overarching author.

Similar to Christensen's argument, C. Paul Sellors offers a more in-depth discussion about this relationship among different participants sharing similar values in filmmaking and introduced the concept of collective authorship.⁹⁵ However, unlike Christensen's argument, which only considers the studio's participation and control, Sellors introduced the concept of collective intention from philosophy into the study of film authorship to draw his definition of collective authorship.⁹⁶ Based on philosopher John Searle's work about intentionality, Sellors argues that collective intentionality emphasises that individuals are 'actual or potential members of

⁹² Leo Rosten, *Hollywood: The movie Colony, the movie makers* (New York: Arno Press, 1970).

Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System*.

Jerome Christensen, *America's Corporate Art: The Studio Authorship of Hollywood Motion Pictures* (Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁹³ Jerome Christensen, *America's Corporate Art*.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ C. Paul Sellors, *Film authorship: history and theory* (London: Wallflower, 2009).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

cooperative activity' in social reality.⁹⁷ Sellors established his definition of collective authorship by combining the idea of collective intention with Berys Gaut's argument, which believes that not only directors but everyone in the filmmaking process could leave their traits in the film because 'most films are highly collaborative, and collaborative in ways that affect their artistic properties'.⁹⁸ Meanwhile, other than the philosophical understanding of collective authorship, scholars, such as Bordwell and Tom Gunning explain collective authorship from the perspective of the film's production, arguing that individuals, other than directors, also contribute to the film including actors, editors, and cinematographers.⁹⁹ The idea of collective authorship has a close relation to this thesis' study because the franchise always involves more people's contributions. However, given that this thesis studies authorship in the context of franchise filmmaking in which multiple directors work together on a long-term project, an understanding of collective authorship becomes more.

Authorship in Franchise Cinema

Studies of authorship and franchise cinema have started to turn their attention to paratextual material and discourses. The existing scholarship mainly explores how franchise cinema related to authorship can be divided into several categories. First, a group of case studies aims to identify the authorial voice from the director within franchise films. James Russell used the *Harry Potter* film series to explain how authorship becomes more complicated within franchise cinema. In his article 'Authorship, Commerce, and Harry Potter' (2012), Russell considers writer J. K. Rowling when discussing authorship. He argues that the adaptation process could be seen as one in which 'one auteur passes on their work to another'.¹⁰⁰ Russell references Jonathan Gray's argument that the author of the film is the 'paratextual veneer of artistry, aura and authority', and concludes that it is difficult to determine

⁹⁷ John Searle, quoted in C. Paul Sellors, p.125.

⁹⁸ Berys Gaut, quoted in C. Paul Sellors, p.119.

⁹⁹ David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Jeff Smith, *Film art: an introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 2016).

¹⁰⁰ James Russell, 'Authorship, Commerce, and Harry Potter', in Deborah. Cartmell (ed.), *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, Mass.: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), pp.391-407, p.392.

an auteur within a blockbuster film franchise because the assumption of the authorship always needs to identify an individual author.¹⁰¹ This is evident in scholarship such as Kimberly A. Owczarski's case study of Tim Burton and the *Batman* films (*Batman* (1989) and *Batman Returns* (1992)), Will Brooker's study on Christopher Nolan and *The Dark Knight* Trilogy, as well as Martin Flanagan's case study on Ang Lee's *Hulk* (2003).¹⁰² Meanwhile, their studies, to some extent, also reflect the idea of researching directors' authorial voice from the commercial perspective, instead of from the aesthetic perspective.

Erin Hill-Parks suggested auteur criticism in contemporary Hollywood no longer sticks to critical film analysis, but starts to 'blend the divisions between high art and mass culture'.¹⁰³ This shift in the critical method also helps build a bridge between the academic word 'auteur' and the commercial word 'brand' for the director. In Leora Hadas's article 'A New Vision: J. J. Abrams, *Star Trek*, and promotional Authorship' (2017), she offers another definition, that of promotional authorship, which brings to 'the forefront certain elements in the text' through different kinds of media industries.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Leora Hadas's study of Marvel's TV series *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013-2020) also analysed how Joss Whedon, director of the Marvel film *The Avengers*, has been used by the studio to promote this TV series with his authorial reputation.¹⁰⁵ However, the starting point of these case studies still focuses on identifying certain directors as the authors to further analyse what their authorial reputation can bring to the film or franchise. This ignores the fact that

¹⁰¹ Jonathan Gray, quoted in James Russell, 'Authorship, Commerce, and Harry Potter', in Deborah Cartmell (ed.), *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, Mass.: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), pp.391-407, p.393.

¹⁰² Kimberly A. Owczarski, *Batman, 'Time Warner, and franchise filmmaking in the conglomerate era'*, (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Texas at Austin, 2008)

<<https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/handle/2152/17995>> [accessed 28 November 2020].

Will Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight*.

Martin Flanagan, 'The Hulk, an Ang Lee Film', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 2:1 (2004), pp.19-35.

¹⁰³ Erin Hill-Parks, 'Developing an Auteur through Reviews: The Critical Surround of Christopher Nolan', pp.19-20, p.18.

¹⁰⁴ Leora Hadas, 'A New Vision: J. J. Abrams, *Star Trek*, and Promotional Authorship', *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (2017), pp. 46-66, p.48.

¹⁰⁵ Leora Hadas, 'Authorship and authenticity in the transmedia brand: The case of Marvel's Agents of SHIELD', *Networking Knowledge: Journal of the MeCCSA Postgraduate Network*, 7.1 (2014), pp.7-17.

some of the directors' author brands emerge from the environment created by franchise cinema. Furthermore, within such commercial discourse highlighted by franchise cinema, some of the directors' authorial brands may conflict with the franchise's own demands which could result in not marketing a film with a director's authorial brand, or building a director's authorial voice with a film. Therefore, this thesis chooses not to go into detail to analyse if the director is the author or identify who the author is. Instead, this thesis explores the film franchise's function that helps create an author status or authorial image from the standpoint of franchise cinema.

Secondly, other than the studies focusing on individual directors, research on studios is also an aspect. As Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray highlighted the factors of 'control, power, and the management of meaning and people' within the studies of authorship, lead scholars like Owczarski to focus on the control and management from the studio in order to study authorship within franchise films.¹⁰⁶ However, the studies of franchise cinema and studio are a normal focus in the discussion of the film's production that involve the question of ownership and authorship at the legal level, which relate to not only the film studio but other corporations. For example, Owczarski's case study of *Transformers* (USA, dir. Michael Bay, 2007) mainly focused on the ownership and authorship across different companies, not only including the study of the film industry but also toy companies and motor corporations.¹⁰⁷ Owczarski suggested that internal creative tensions are mostly based on commercial tensions, as the creation of a franchise is complicated because it is always based on a well-known property.¹⁰⁸ As such, the production of the franchise films is closely related to distribution and marketing, and the production needs to consider the distribution and marketing needs.¹⁰⁹

Other studies that analyse a studio's authorship seek to demonstrate its

¹⁰⁶ Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray, 'Introduction: The Problem of Media Authorship', in Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray (eds.), *A Companion to Media Authorship* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), pp.1-19, p.4.

¹⁰⁷ Kimberly A. Owczarski, "'More Than Meets the Eye': Transformers and the Complexities of Franchise Film Production in Contemporary Hollywood', *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, 32:8 (2015), pp.675-694.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

authorial identity and identify it as the only authority. This continues the logic from early studies of proving the director's authorial status. When Christensen applied his theory of the studio as author to his case study of *Batman* films, in 'The Time Warner Conspiracy: JFK, Batman, and the Manager Theory of Hollywood Film' (2002), he received criticism from other scholars because his arguments only highlighted the studio's importance and not the director's or that of other individual's.¹¹⁰ For example, Peter Havholm and Philip Sandifer's critical response to Christensen's article pointed out that features in the film are inherited from the comics and acknowledge the contribution from the authors and editors of the comic books.¹¹¹ These discussions all attempt to define who exactly is the author of the film.

Finally, there are also studies that take into account other people besides the director who are often involved in a film's production. For example, through the study of the same case as Russell, Tino Balio explored the complexity of discussing the auteur in franchise cinema from another angle. With four different directors having directed all eight *Harry Potter* films, and while seven of the scripts were written by the same screenwriter Steve Kloves, and the lead designers never changed, such as production designer Stuart Craig and set decorator Stephenie McMillan, Balio suggested that 'the auteur tradition' has been mixed with 'the industrial approach to film making' during contemporary Hollywood's film franchise production.¹¹² Scholars like Hill-Parks, Balio and Russell have shown that even though franchise cinema, which contains adaptations through multiple media forms, is easy to define as low culture, its artistry cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, their studies inadvertently isolate the study of authorship from the film industry, leaving aside the link between authorship and commercialism in Hollywood as suggested by, for example, Corrigan.

With the growing number of different directions in the discussion of authorship and the increasing diversity of definitions of authorship, identifying an author of a

¹¹⁰ Jerome Christensen, 'The Time Warner Conspiracy: JFK, Batman, and the Manager Theory of Hollywood Film', *Critical Inquiry*, 28.3 (2002), pp.591-617.

¹¹¹ Peter Havholm and Philip Sandifer, 'Critical Response I Corporate Authorship: A Response to Jerome Christensen', *Critical Inquiry*, 30.1 (2003), pp.187-197.

¹¹² Tino Balio, *Hollywood in the New Millennium* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p.41.

film, especially a mainstream one, is vulnerable to challenge. However, this thesis does not aim to discuss the question of authorship attribution and whether they are worthy. Instead, it tends to explore how the franchise produced the authorial figure/name during its development and examine their differences from the film author. Inspired by Corrigan, who brought out the concept of the commerce of auteurism to fit the context of film industry, this thesis identifies these authorial figures/names that were established through franchises as the franchise author in order to fit the context of franchise cinema.

Methodology

To answer the question of how authorial voices are established within franchise cinema, this thesis builds upon the existing scholarship around authorship within contemporary Hollywood cinema, to further explore how it functions and is reconstructed in franchise cinema. Therefore, instead of seeking to prove some individuals' author status, this thesis explores the different ways in which authorial figures are formed through franchise cinema. To combine the artistic and commercial aspects, this thesis does rely on Corrigan's study of the commerce of auteurism as well as the idea of the auteur-star. Meanwhile, considering the unique context of franchise cinema, the case studies in this thesis are selected and studied by franchise rather than individual directors. This means there exists the possibility of involving individual authorship and/or collective authorship in different case studies. Additionally, this thesis utilises ancillary materials, such as film reviews, interviews, and making-of documentaries, together with the application of Foucault's arguments of the author's function and Richard Dyer's study of the significance of stardom.¹¹³ This is done to create a framework within which the authorial figure can be understood from the perspective of critical reception.

Although the study of author and star were two directions that diverged from each other in earlier studies, the film industry provides a context that leads to both the author and star being commodified in addition to becoming involved in the

¹¹³ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author'.

Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: BFI, Macmillan, 1987).

marketing and publicity strategies. Amongst stardom studies, Dyer's research can be described as ground-breaking scholarship. He suggested that to understand the viewers' belief in them, studying stars needs to bring textual analysis together with intertextual analysis to examine a star's influence within the ideological and historical contexts.¹¹⁴ Dyer's studies focus on the actors as stars. However, when Corrigan expounded the study of the auteur in the commercial environment, he pointed out that Meaghan Morris presented the auteur 'in language similar to Richard Dyer's description of stars'.¹¹⁵ According to Dyer, a star's image not only relies on the film but also includes 'the promotion of those films and of the star through pin-ups, public appearances, studio hand-outs and so on, as well as interviews, biographies and coverage in the press of the star's doings and 'private' life'.¹¹⁶ Similarly, Morris suggested that 'the primary modes of film and auteur packaging are advertising, review snippeting, trailers, magazine profiles – always already in appropriation as the precondition and not the postproduction of meaning'.¹¹⁷ Corrigan's comparison between Morris and Dyer has inspired this present work's exploration of how the star-director is established through the film franchise. Just as Dyer highlighted that 'images have to be made' in his study, this thesis will be guided by this view to examine how authorial images of the franchise author are made within contemporary Hollywood franchise cinema.¹¹⁸

To study how authorial images are established, textual analysis of film reviews and marketing materials is one of the primary methods for the three case studies in this thesis. Martin Barker elaborated on the importance of 'secondary, ancillary or satellite texts' for 'interpretations of films' in his article 'News, reviews, clues, interviews and other ancillary materials – A critique and research proposal' (2004).¹¹⁹ Barker suggested that these materials can be considered the 'guide' and

¹¹⁴ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*.

¹¹⁵ Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls*, p.106.

¹¹⁶ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, pp.2-3.

¹¹⁷ Meaghan Morris, quoted in Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls*, p.106.

¹¹⁸ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, p.4.

¹¹⁹ Martin Barker, 'News, reviews, clues, interviews and other ancillary materials – A critique and research proposal', *Scope: an online journal of film studies*, Feb (2004) <<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/scope/documents/2004/february-2004/barker.pdf>> [accessed 12 November 2020].

can ‘help construct’ the approach to understanding films.¹²⁰ Barker’s study focused on how ancillary materials affect how viewers watch and understand films.¹²¹ For blockbusters, in particular, Barker believed that ‘films are not self-contained texts’ but the ‘most important component in the package’ under the marketing strategies for high concept films.¹²² Suman Basuroy, Subimal Chatterjee and S. Abraham Ravid also suggested that critical reviews could predict consumers’ tastes and influence consumers’ behaviours.¹²³ Based on Corrigan’s argument that links authorship with commerce, all these related materials for film’s promotion can be linked to the establishment of authorial figures. Furthermore, within different kinds of materials, film reviews become one of the key materials used to undertake textual analysis and discourse analysis, since it both reflects the film’s reception by critics and can be used for the film’s promotion.

In regard to associating the analysis of ancillary materials with authorship, some scholars have already linked film reviews to author status in their case studies. For example, Hill-Parks’ case study of Nolan is based on Corrigan’s argument that the auteur status is built up by the film reviews rather than being established by the text.¹²⁴ Hill-Parks uses statistics on movie reviews to analyse Nolan’s auteur persona, such as how many times his name has been mentioned.¹²⁵ Brooker also tracked the different reviews received by Nolan’s films and concluded that Nolan was mentioned more frequently because of his former films’ success, and his recognition as an auteur also increased considerably.¹²⁶ Scholars like Brooker and Hill-Parks applied textual analyses to film reviews to count the number of times the directors were mentioned, then analysed the discourse that mentioned them. This thesis borrows their approach, but the key issues discussed have different emphases depending on different cases, to be more applicable to franchise cinema.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p.2.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid, p.4.

¹²³ Suman Basuroy, Subimal Chatterjee, and S. Abraham Ravid, ‘How critical are critical reviews? The box office effects of film critics, star power, and budgets’, *Journal of Marketing*, Vol.67, no.4 (2003), pp.103-117.

¹²⁴ Erin Hill-Parks, ‘Developing an Auteur through Reviews’.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Will Brooker, *Hunting the Dark Knight*.

In order to highlight the potential franchise author, the case studies of this thesis do not only focus on the director's name but also discover other names that are mentioned in the film reviews. The keywords that emerge in the selected film reviews put forward a series of specific ideas of who takes the responsibility for the film production (this is not limited to individuals, it could also be, say, the studio). This framed a suggestion to connect the specific names (individual person or the studio) to the idea of author. These names could be the creator of the franchises, such as J. R. R. Tolkien, George Lucas, and Gene Roddenberry, or directors who are not the director of the film under review but is the director of another film in the same series, or the names of studios such as Marvel Studios. The studies on film reviews distinguished who (including the studio) has been mentioned at first, then analysed the discourse surrounding this figure/name. Also, the specific content from the film reviews that have been picked out to analyse is mainly the opinions of the film texts' narrative, visual aesthetics, theme, and motifs around the potential franchise authors, which are elements easily constituting coherence between films. The discussion of these contents in this thesis is not intended to mark whether I agree with them, but rather is an attempt to explore how these potential franchise authors have been understood and explained.

Apart from identifying the potential franchise authors based on the film reviews, the analysis also draws on Barker's 'three-stage mode of enquiry' to combine it with star theory in order to apply it to the analysis of authorial figures, rather than the film itself.¹²⁷ Barker's three-stage mode of enquiry includes three questions: how the ancillary materials 'constitute a discursive framework around a film'; how this framework participates in the viewing experience of different audiences; 'how the actual encounter with the film leads to fulfilment of expectations, or disappointment, or surprise, or frustration'.¹²⁸ Instead of studying the ancillary materials around a film, this thesis aims to study the franchise's ancillary materials around authorial names (individual figures or studios). It includes how the marketing materials set up an authorial figure for the film or the film

¹²⁷ Martin Barker, 'News, reviews, clues, interviews and other ancillary materials – A critique and research proposal', pp. 8-9.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

franchise, and the actual critical reception after the film's release. The case studies in this thesis will further focus on how this discursive framework around the authorial figure has been changed, or continues, within the development of a film franchise.

Most of the ancillary materials (interviews, reports, making-of documentaries, behind-the-scenes videos) chosen for this thesis are free resources available online.¹²⁹ This ensures that these materials are used as part of the publicity materials to reach the public, which can be more reflective of film marketing strategies. As for the actual critical reception, film reviews and the scores from review-aggregation websites, like Rotten Tomatoes, are two key sources used to study the public's acceptance of authorial figures. It is worth noting that the role of film review analysis in this thesis goes beyond researching a film's reception. All the film reviews for textual analyses are from eight sources: *Empire*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *The New York Times*, *Variety*, *The Hollywood Reporter*, *Screen International*, and *Sight & Sound*. All the journals and newspapers are from the United Kingdom and the United States. Furthermore, they are well-known, influential and published across a wide geographical range. Among all these eight sources, four are film targeted journals: *Empire*, *Screen International*, *Sight & Sound*, and *The Hollywood Reporter*. They are either for film fans or industry-focused publications. The American magazine *Variety* is widely considered a film industry trade publication. In addition, *The New York Times*, *The Telegraph* and *The Guardian* are general daily newspapers (the first is from America and the other two are from Britain). These sources cover all different levels of readership, from daily reading to cinephile reading. Most importantly, these sources consistently use the same critics to maintain their film reviews' style and are all freely accessible online. The recurring film critics allow for a more unified view when this study is conducted for long term cases of franchise films. Also, the free online access ensures a large and relatively wide-ranging readership.

Although this thesis argues that the understanding of franchise authors needs

¹²⁹ The Middle-earth film franchise's making-of documentaries are come from the extended edition DVD, but most of the clips can still be found online.

to go beyond film texts, the analysis of film texts in specific cases is still needed to challenge its applicability and dominance in the context of franchise cinema. The textual analysis of film texts concentrates on the narrative (structure, character journey, themes and conflict) and motif. Therefore, the analysis of film texts will discuss questions such as the following. Compared to the original works of literature, such as *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, does the film reflect the themes of the original works, does it continue the character traits of the original characters, and what adaptations have been made to the narrative to suit the film format? Compared to the original film or television series, such as *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, in addition to the aspects mentioned above, the analysis should also be made of any similarities in visual styles, such as mise-en-scène, editing, and composition. In addition to comparing the originals, it is also worth noting the similarities and differences between the films in the same franchise. As for the differences, it is necessary to further consider whether these different themes, characterisations, or distinctive visual styles come from the director's personal habits. One of the traditional methods for analysing a director's personal style is to summarise the directors' films' similarities or repeated traits. Within franchise cinema, the similarities and repeated traits can be provided by the demand for unity across the film franchise, which can challenge a director's ability to establish an authorial voice. Given this, the textual analysis in this thesis explores the similarities and repeatable traits, then further analyses whether they are repetitions from directors or appear for other reasons. For example, in the *Middle-earth* films, similarities can come from loyalty to the original novels, even though Jackson adapted it. In Abrams' *Star Wars* films, the similarities can also be drawn from the fanaticism of the fans for the original version. Additionally, the similarities within MCU films could come from the studio's overall control. Therefore, the textual analyses in this thesis aim to support the discussion of the diversity of authorial figure types within franchise cinema and the unique way they are formed.

The above approaches are used throughout the three case studies in this thesis and will vary in the specific analysis. The case study of Peter Jackson and the Middle-earth film franchise in Chapter One undertakes a discourse analysis of the making-

of documentaries of those six films. These documentaries can be found in the Extended Edition Box Set or on online video-sharing websites like YouTube. Dorothee Birke and Birte Christ discussed the concept of the paratext as presented by Gerard Genett and concluded that one of the functions of the paratext is its 'interpretive function', which can 'suggest to the reader specific ways of understanding, reading, interpreting the text'.¹³⁰ Based on Genett's concept of the paratext, Birke and Christ suggested that the paratextual materials, such as interviews and making-of documentaries, can 'explicitly articulate the ideas and intentions' and 'claim some degree of authority in guiding the viewer towards a specific understanding of the film'.¹³¹ By combing through the relevant literature on text, paratext, and metatext (proposed by Henry Jenkins), Jonathan Gray also argues that 'DVD bonus materials' has amassed 'its own paratextuality' and become a 'meaningful object' in constructing the text.¹³² Therefore, the discourse analysis mainly focuses on how the interviewees in the making-of documentaries from the DVDs, especially Peter Jackson, introduced and discussed Tolkien, as well as explained their adaptations during the filmmaking. By analysing the discourse around Tolkien and adaptation, this case study presents the establishment of Jackson as a franchise author by connecting himself to Tolkien. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the discourse analysis of film reviews in this case study around the author, both the original author Tolkien and the potential franchise author Jackson, is not the purpose of proving Jackson's authorial status in a traditional way. Instead, the analysis aims to identify Jackson's franchise author status by examining how Jackson's authorial image was established based on the original author Tolkien's enormous fan base, and how it changed during the further development of *The Hobbit* trilogy. The case study of J.J. Abrams in Chapter Two and the case study of the MCU franchise in Chapter Three focus more on the analyses of the film reviews than the first chapter, but they also differ. The Abrams case study also contains two

¹³⁰ Dorothee Birke, and Birte Christ, 'Paratext and digitized narrative: Mapping the field', *Narrative*, volume 21, no.1 (2013), pp.65-87, p.67.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p.73.

¹³² Jonathan Gray, 'Bonus material: The DVD layering of *The Lord of the Rings*', in Ernest Mathijs (ed), *The Lord of the Rings: Popular Culture in a Global Context* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2006), pp.238-253, pp.241-242.

films' reviews that were not directed by him but still will be analysed since they belong to the franchises and have close links with other films from these two franchises that Abrams directed. A little more complex than Jackson's case, the analysis of six films' reviews, from both the reboots of *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* franchises, will also pay attention to other directors who have worked on films from these two franchises. This is done to discuss the relationship and interaction between their authorial voice and that of Abrams.

The case study of the MCU franchise will also look at how the studio's franchise author status is built up through film reviews. However, the case study of MCU is more focused on analysing the discourse content related to two sides, individual directors and the studio, across the critical reviews of the first twenty-two MCU films. Due to the large number of films involved and the corresponding number of reviews to be analysed, this case study relies on discourse analysis and textual analysis to discuss the studio's potential of being the franchise author. This analysis set up two similar criteria for analysing the content and discourse around the studio and the directors, each with three factors of progressively increasing relevance to establishing who is considered to have authorial authority and can be identified as the franchise author. Firstly, this discourse analysis takes authorship as a starting point and addresses the names of potential authors, mainly focusing on the names of directors of each MCU film as well as the names that can represent Marvel Studios, such as words and phrases like 'the studio', 'Marvel', and 'Kevin Feige'.¹³³ This is a fundamental piece of data to support the introduction of Marvel Studios into the discussion of franchise author. Further, the analysis also considers if the film reviews mentioned the director's other film works and, correspondingly, the other MCU films. This is closer to the regular approach to auteurism, where authors' works are studied together, and their communal characteristics are discussed. This study also remains an intuitive yes-or-no question for suggesting whether Marvel Studios and individual directors have the potential to be understood as a franchise author. The relatively

¹³³ It is important to clarify here that not every word of 'Marvel' represents Marvel Studios, sometimes it represents the original comic, which is not to be included in this analysis. Similarly, the study on Kevin Feige's name also needs to consider whether his name here represents the studio or just regular information about himself.

important and complex analysis focuses on identifying whether the film review contains the discourse that tries to describe the individual or the studio's personal traits by critical reviewing film texts' narrative, visual, and thematic aesthetics. This is not only a yes-or-no question but also requires further analysis of specific content in order to understand how the critical reviews portray the authorial persona in the context of franchise.

More details, including a detailed explanation of each factor, as well as the analysis of some of the typical discourse from the critical reviews, are present in the 'Marvel Studio as the authorial control figure' section from Chapter Three. Also, during the analysis, eight tables corresponding to the eight sources of film reviews are listed and are attached in Appendix A of this thesis. The tables are designed in a checkbox style, and six questions are asked for each of the reviews. Three of the six questions are directed at the director of each film and three at Marvel Studios. Each question corresponds to one of the above factors. Therefore, the eight tables reflect the numbers of how many film reviews (among 176 film reviews from eight sources): A. mentioned the name of individual filmmakers and the studio; B. mentioned the individual filmmakers' other film work and other MCU films; C. analysed the details of the individuals' stylistic or thematic traits and the MCU films' common traits. Additionally, an extra table with a summation of data from the eight previous tables is added at the end of Appendix A, reflecting how many times these factors have been met in total. All these tables are meant to provide a very straightforward comparison in terms of data about the number of times individual directors and Marvel Studios are mentioned and analysed, respectively. These data and certain key textual contents can then provide a series of discussions on the research question of this case study, how Marvel Studios is understood as the franchise author.

In addition, each chapter will address some other specific methods. Given the close relationship between Middle-earth films and their original books, Chapter One will introduce the study of adaptation and authorship to discuss the case of Jackson further. Academic interest in adaptation and authorship largely comes from the

tension between the fidelity of adaptation and the originality of the film's author.¹³⁴ Normally, case studies from this perspective are based on a comparison through textual analysis between the original text, screenwriting, and the film text. The case study of Jackson in Chapter One also considers the relationship between adaptation and authorship. However, instead of textual analysis covering the structure, narrative form, or other significant symbols, this chapter examines the attitudes of existing case studies of Jackson and Middle-earth films, combined with the star theory and the analysis of the films' ancillary materials. This is done to investigate and study the process of establishing the authorial figure rather than admit Jackson as the author, which leads to further discussion on the franchise author. Meanwhile, the study of Jackson also depicts the variable status of the auteur within a film franchise, by studying the different receptions of the franchise and Jackson at different stages.

The case study of Abrams in Chapter Two includes two franchises, *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, which both have very solid and loyal fan bases. Considering the fanbases' involvement during the franchises' development, this chapter also introduces Henry Jenkins' study of fan culture and authorship, as well as Foucault's definition of the author's functions. Based upon Jenkins' studies of how fans influence who is given authorial credit for the films, this chapter will focus on how Abrams has dealt with the situation whereby the franchises in which he has participated already have the author figure, and the fanbase already has the original author figure in which they believe. Alongside the idea of fanbase's involvement, the case study of Abrams will also pay attention to how an author's functions, defined by Foucault, are applied to him and how he carries over the existing author's

¹³⁴ There is always a certain conflict between authorship criticism and the fidelity criticism of adaptation films, which also draws on the tension between personal creativity and faithfulness to original texts. Fidelity criticism, according to Jack Boozer's explanation is that film reviews tend to more in favour of compare the films with the originals and judge their loyalty. In her book chapter 'Film Authorship and Adaptation' (2012), Shelly Cobb suggested that the film auteur has the 'ability to be faithful to himself' during the adaptation process so that their traits can emerge through 'the unfaithful moments'.

Jack Boozer, 'Introduction: The Screenplay and Authorship in Adaptation', in Jack Boozer (eds), *Authorship in Film Adaptation* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2008), pp.1-30, p.9.
Shelly Cobb, 'Film Authorship and Adaptation', in Deborah Cartmell (eds.), *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, Mass.: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), pp.105-121, p.112.

functions from the original authorial figures. Different from the first two chapters, Chapter Three has many individuals involved. As such, it will analyse the authors included in the MCU franchise and the relationship between them, referencing the concept of collective authorship. Chapter Three will first apply Sellors' theory of collective authorship to the MCU franchise, to study the collective authorship within the franchise. This chapter will also further question the reasonableness of this kind of collective authorship, since the whole project is controlled by Marvel Studios.

Although the methods employed in each chapter will vary slightly, overall, this thesis intends to analyse and structure using the same steps. The first step is to identify these authorial figures that are intentionally portrayed by the film promotion or actively perceived by the critic by analysing selected ancillary materials. Through this process, the discursive framework to establish the authorial figures can be shaped. After identifying the authorial figures and the discursive framework, the second step is to analyse them alongside current understandings of authorship. This analysis leads to two different levels of further discussion. One is the diversity of authorial figure types within franchise cinema, whilst the other is the uniqueness of the process of forming an authorial figure within the context of franchise cinema. These are the features that make the concept of the franchise author different from the traditional sense of author and authorship.

Chapter One: Case study of Peter Jackson and the Middle-earth franchise

This thesis starts with a case study of Peter Jackson and the Middle-earth film franchise to explore authorship within a franchise where all films are led by one director. The Middle-earth film franchise is based on the eponymous novels (*The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*) written by J. R. R. Tolkien. The key films in this case study were all directed by Jackson, namely: *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (NZ/USA, 2001), *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (NZ/USA, 2002), and *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (NZ/USA, 2003), *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* (NZ/USA, 2012), *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* (NZ/USA, 2013), and *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies* (NZ/USA, 2014). This chapter aims to explore how Jackson's authorial status was established, further functioned, and turned unstable via franchise films. This kind of authorial status is different from the traditional auteur. In order to explore this difference and determine how it is formed, this chapter will introduce Richard Dyer's star theory and the study of the commerce of auteurism from Timothy Corrigan to analyse Jackson's authorial status.

Jackson is a suitable case for this study because he has a clear career path that integrates with the whole Middle-earth franchise. Moreover, the two trilogies have brought him different receptions, raising a legitimate question about his authorial status. In general, Jackson received recognition from the industry owing to the high box-office success of the *LOTR* trilogy and received much praise and many awards, including Academy Awards for Best Director and Golden Globe for Best Director. The *LOTR* trilogy has been considered 'the grandest and most widely viewed adaptation[s]', with its popular success helping to 'revitalise the blockbuster franchise production model in the early 2000s'.¹³⁵ Several years later, when Jackson became involved in the adaptation of *The Hobbit*, his authorial voice, established by the *LOTR* trilogy, was clear in the production of the new trilogy. Although none of them achieved first or second place in terms of the yearly box-office revenue as the *LOTR* films had, *The Hobbit* trilogy still achieved impressive box-office profits.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Carolyn Michelle, Charles H. Davis, and Ann L. Hardy, *Fans, Blockbusterisation, and the Transformation of Cinematic Desire: Global Receptions of The Hobbit Film Trilogy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p.2.

¹³⁶ *The Fellowship of the Ring* took second place in the 2001 Worldwide Box Office with \$880,839,846. *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King* rank first in 2002 and 2003, with the box

However, intuitive factors that make Jackson's authorial reputation precarious include the fact that none of *The Hobbit* films received significant awards or the wide acclaim, either from critics or fans, that the *LOTR* trilogy had.

In this chapter, the study of Jackson's author status is based on the analysis of the production and the reception of the six Middle-earth films. The main related materials are the film reviews of these six films, ratings from the review-aggregation website such as Rotten Tomatoes, and various paratextual primary sources, including 'making-of' documentaries and Jackson's production diary vlogs. This chapter will focus on the topic of Jackson and authorship but will not address the simple arguments of whether he is an auteur or a *metteur en scène*. Instead, this case study aims to contribute a new framework to study the franchise authors within franchise cinema, which provides a way of analysing the establishment of authorship from the perspective of non-artistic value. The tension between the demands of fidelity to the original text and the authorial voices will often emerge during the development of a franchise. However, Jackson balanced them in his Middle-earth films, especially in the *LOTR* trilogy. Meanwhile, based on the different reception for the *LOTR* trilogy compared to *The Hobbit* trilogy, this chapter puts forward an argument that Jackson's authorial status is unstable because of his unusual path of establishing his authorial voice. Accordingly, this leads to the idea that the authorial persona of the director in the post-auteur age is generally combined with the star persona. Furthermore, the case study of Jackson explores the extent to which this unusual path of an authorial voice's establishment is influenced by the context of franchise cinema. To achieve its aims, this chapter is structured in three steps with a brief introduction on Jackson at first, and then the study on the *LOTR* trilogy and *The Hobbit* trilogy separately. The analysis of the *LOTR* trilogy focuses on summarising Jackson's images, which helped to build the authorial voice for him and

office of \$936,689,735 and \$1,140,682,011 respectively.

Boxofficemojo, Domestic Box Office For 2001, < <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2001/> > [accessed 1 July 2019].

Boxofficemojo, Domestic Box Office For 2002, < <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2002/> > [accessed 1 July 2019].

Boxofficemojo, Domestic Box Office For 2003 < <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/year/2003/> > [accessed 1 July 2019].

provided him with a star-director status following the successful reception of the trilogy. The analysis of *The Hobbit* trilogy examines how his authorial voice functioned during the pre-production and production period, in addition to how it changed with the release of every film in this trilogy. Then, with the previous study of the *LOTR* trilogy, it will explore both the continuity and instability of Jackson's authorial status.

Peter Jackson and his 'incredibly independent spirit'¹³⁷

Most of the fans of *The Lord of the Rings* are probably not that familiar with my earlier films, so they may have the impression that I popped up out of nowhere and was suddenly directing this huge movie-project. But, from my perspective, I certainly didn't pop up out of nowhere. If I had, I never would have been equipped to direct *The Lord of the Rings*.¹³⁸

Peter Jackson made the above remarks in an interview with Brian Sibley, who wrote the biography *Peter Jackson: A Film-Maker's Journey* (2006). The fans to which Jackson was referring were those of the epic fantasy works about Middle-earth, created by Tolkien. Before Jackson's *LOTR* trilogy was released, they were the only fan group of Tolkien's Middle-earth fantasy world. Nowadays, twenty years after the first film, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, was released, Jackson's version of the *LOTR* has already become part of the authority of the Middle-earth fantasy world. Fans can buy a wide variety of merchandise based on the film from Weta Workshop, which is the special effects and prop company that supported the film's production. The online reunion of the cast and crew from *LOTR* raised almost \$80,000 for charity during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹³⁹ The reunion video also achieved over 6 million views on YouTube.¹⁴⁰ Even Amazon's *Lord of the Rings* TV series is considering continuing to use New Zealand as the film location, as Jackson did.¹⁴¹ Jackson earned

¹³⁷ Brian Sibley, *Peter Jackson: A Film-maker's Journey* (New York: HarperCollins Entertainment, 2006), p.324.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p.5.

¹³⁹ Josh Gad, 1 June 2020 < <https://twitter.com/joshgad> > [accessed 1 March 2021].

¹⁴⁰ Josh Gad, *One Zoom to Rule Them All | Reunited Apart LORD OF THE RINGS Edition*, 2020 <https://youtu.be/l_U0S6x_kCs> [accessed 1 March 2021].

¹⁴¹ Bryn Sandberg, '*Lord of the Rings*' TV Series to Film in New Zealand, 2019 < <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/lord-rings-tv-series-film-new-zealand-1240550> > [accessed 1 March 2021].

high appeal among Middle-earth fan groups after the *LOTR* films were released and has built up a new group of Middle-earth fans for his film franchise.

It can be seen, from what Jackson said, that the success of the *LOTR* trilogy seemed unlikely at first, because his film career had started far away from Hollywood blockbusters, both geographically and economically. Before the *LOTR* trilogy, this New Zealand director had directed five feature films, which are *Bad Taste* (NZ, 1987), *Meet the Feebles* (NZ, 1989), *Braindead* (NZ, 1992), *Heavenly Creatures* (NZ, 1994), and *The Frighteners* (NZ/USA, 1996). His first feature film, *Bad Taste*, was filmed with his friend on Sundays in their spare time, and it was finally sold at the 1987 Cannes Film Festival. From then, Jackson officially launched his filmmaking career.¹⁴² His subsequent films, *Meet the Feebles* and *Braindead*, followed the splatter horror film genre of the first film. Jackson took his film to 'various horror and fantasy festivals' and 'spawned a cult following'.¹⁴³ Within Hollywood, his career then was that of an independent foreign director only excelling with cult films for the public; indeed, he was only known to a small number of viewers, limited to a certain genre.

Kristin Thompson argues that the psychological drama *Heavenly Creatures* was a turning point for Jackson.¹⁴⁴ Even though the film only earned over \$3 million at the box office, with a \$5 million budget, it achieved critical success for Jackson, earning him some awards and even a nomination at the Academy Awards for Best Original Screenplay.¹⁴⁵ *Heavenly Creatures* achieved high scores on Rotten Tomatoes with 92% in the Rotten Tomatoes Score, including 52 film critics' reviews and 83% in the Audience Score with more than 25,000 votes.¹⁴⁶ It is worth noting that compared to the first *LOTR* film with more than 230 reviewers, *Heavenly Creatures* is still not a widely known film. Considering the film's impact on Jackson's entire career, what this film brought him has been not only praise, but also,

¹⁴² Jeremy Kagan, *Directors Close Up: Interviews with Directors Nominated for Best Film by The Directors Guild of America* (Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2005), p.10.

¹⁴³ Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*, p.21.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Boxofficemojo, *Heavenly Creatures (1994)* <
https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt0110005/?ref_=bo_se_r_1> [accessed 12 November 2020].

¹⁴⁶ Rotten Tomatoes, *Heavenly Creatures*, 1994 <
https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/heavenly_creatures> [accessed 4 March 2021].

according to Thompson, the other ‘two factors’ that led to his further development in his filmmaking.¹⁴⁷ The factor of Miramax having been the American distributor of *Heavenly Creatures* is the direct link to Jackson becoming involved in the *LOTR* production.¹⁴⁸ Another factor was that Jackson realized ‘the future of special effects lay in computer-generated imagery (CGI)’ after Steven Spielberg’s *Jurassic Park* (1993).¹⁴⁹ This factor influenced his following film, *The Frighteners*, as well as the development of Weta Digital, which started its digital business for Jackson’s *Heavenly Creatures*.¹⁵⁰

Looking at Jackson’s film releases in chronological order, *King Kong* (NZ/USA, 2005) was his project after the successful *LOTR* trilogy; however, it occurred earlier than the *LOTR*. In 1996, Jackson had two opportunities aside from *The Frighteners*: the remake of *King Kong* and the remake of *Planet of the Apes*.¹⁵¹ According to Jackson, the reason he refused to remake *Planet of the Apes* came from his ‘incredibly independent spirit’.¹⁵² He believed that the appointed producer James Cameron and the star Arnold Schwarzenegger, at that time, would weaken his filmmaking control.¹⁵³ This point was echoed in another interview he gave to Jeremy Kagan after the *LOTR* trilogy. Jackson claims to have been inspired by Ray Harryhausen, however, he believed that to become an animator or a special effects person who has ‘to do what other people told you to do’ is ‘frustrating’.¹⁵⁴ Although Universal Pictures cancelled the *King Kong* project in 1997, then re-started it after Jackson’s success with the *LOTR* trilogy, Jackson’s practice of choosing *King Kong* and giving up the *Planet of the Apes* remake emphasised his attitude of maintaining control of filmmaking as the director. This attitude carried over into his later work

¹⁴⁷ Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*, p.22.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Steven Finlay, ‘Weta Ltd: A case study’, *Competitive Advantage New Zealand (CANZ): Wellington*, March 2006, p.22.

This is a case study of ‘Weta Ltd’ that includes both a case study of Weta Workshop and a case study of Weta Digital; however, according to the Weta Workshop’s official website (<https://www.wetaworkshop.com/faq/>), Weta Workshop and Weta Digital ‘are two separate companies who operate independently of each other’.

¹⁵¹ Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*, p.23.

¹⁵² Brian Sibley, *Peter Jackson: A Film-maker’s Journey*, p.324.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Jeremy Kagan, *Directors Close Up*, p.10.

on the *LOTR* trilogy. Thompson notes that Jackson refused to have Saul Zaentz as the producer of the *LOTR* trilogy because he did not want any people 'sitting over his shoulder'.¹⁵⁵

The Lovely Bones (USA/UK/NZ, 2009) is the only film directed by Jackson between *LOTR* and *The Hobbit*, other than *King Kong*. *The Lovely Bones* received mixed reviews. It had more than 230 film reviewers as well as over 250,000 audience members willing to rate it on Rotten Tomatoes, but only 32% of the critic reviews were positive and the audiences' reception was not good either.¹⁵⁶ However, Jackson started to try roles other than as a director within his film production company. In 2009, the film he produced, *District 9* (NZ/USA/RSA, dir. Neill Blomkamp), became a financial success, making more than \$210 million at the worldwide box-office, and earned high praise from critics and audiences.¹⁵⁷ He also worked with Steven Spielberg on *The Adventures of Tintin* (USA/NZ, dir. Steven Spielberg, 2011) as one of the producers. Leaving aside, for the moment, these films' reception, the scale and the production of these films already demonstrate that Jackson had stepped into Hollywood's sights and had effective cooperation with Hollywood.

At this stage, Jackson had become more than just an industry-friendly director. The films he produced also involved his company WingNut Films. Other than his film production company, his digital visual effects company, Weta Digital, also became involved in several Hollywood films, such as *I, Robot* (USA, dir. Alex Proyas, 2004), *X-Men: The Last Stand* (USA, dir. Brett Ratner, 2006), *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian* (USA/UK, dir. Andrew Adamson, 2008), *Avatar* (USA, dir. James Cameron, 2009), and *The Avengers* (USA, dir. Joss Whedon, 2012). Weta Digital is an example of a smaller company achieving awareness in Hollywood. From United Artists during the Classic Hollywood era, Zoetrope Studios during the New Hollywood period, then

¹⁵⁵ Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*, p.76.

¹⁵⁶ Rotten Tomatoes, *The Lovely Bones*, 2009 < https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1189344-lovely_bones > [accessed 4 March 2021].

¹⁵⁷ Boxofficemojo, *District 9*, 2009 < https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt1136608/?ref_=bo_se_r_1 > [accessed 1 July 2019]. Rotten Tomatoes, *District 9*, 2009 < https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/district_9 > [accessed 4 March 2021].

to companies founded by famous directors like DreamWorks in the 1990s, there have been multiple companies attempting to diversify away from big studios. United Artists was founded by actors to represent their interests. According to King's argument, Zoetrope Studios was 'a haven for new and older generations of auteurs', but companies like Lucasfilm and DreamWorks have blended well with Hollywood.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, King suggested that the special effects companies, such as Industrial Light and Magic, are 'at the heart of the economy of New Hollywood' and even 'more central to the blockbuster business of the major studios'.¹⁵⁹

Jackson developed a friendly relationship with Hollywood, but he is not just known as a famous Hollywood director. Deborah Jones suggested that Jackson has combined a 'national identity' of New Zealand with the global 'new economy themes of creativity, technological innovation, and entrepreneurial skills'.¹⁶⁰ In an interview with *The New Zealand Herald*, during the post-production of *The Desolation of Smaug*, Jackson claimed that he would like to 'step off the Hollywood blockbuster thing for a while' after *The Hobbit* trilogy.¹⁶¹ When *Empire* reported Jackson was to give up on directing *Mortal Engines* (NZ/USA, dir. Christian Rivers, 2018), it commented that 'Jackson was out of battery' after *The Hobbit* Trilogy.¹⁶² Jackson's answer to this was 'I wasn't in the right frame of mind, I just thought I could either direct the movie in an exhausted state or I could give it to someone who is young and has a bit more energy, and simply help them'.¹⁶³ He also turned down the superhero film *Aquaman* twice claiming he is not a 'superhero fan' and would not 'really anticipate making another theatrical film for a year or two'.¹⁶⁴ Instead, Jackson directed two documentaries after the end of his Middle-earth film franchise,

¹⁵⁸ Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, p.102.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Deborah Jones, "Ring Leader": Peter Jackson as 'creative industries' hero', in Harriet Margolis, Sean Cubitt, Barry King and Thierry Jutel (eds.), *Studying the event film: The Lord of the Rings* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp.93-99, p.98.

¹⁶¹ The New Zealand Herald, *Peter Jackson: Return of the king*, 2013 <<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/entertainment/peter-jackson-return-of-the-king/C5FDXSRM6N62PVGBNCRFB7QJ5Y/>> [accessed 2 March 2021].

¹⁶² Ben Travis, and Ian Nathan, *Why 'Exhausted' Peter Jackson Passed On Directing Mortal Engines – Exclusive*, 2018 <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/news/exhausted-peter-jackson-passed-directing-mortal-engines-exclusive/>> [accessed 2 March 2021].

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ian Nathan, 'Empire 30: Peter Jackson', *Empire*, Summer 2019, pp.92-97, p.97.

which are *They Shall Not Grow Old* (UK/NZ/USA, 2018) and *The Beatles: Get Back* (UK/NZ/USA, 2021).

Scholars praised *They Shall Not Grow Old* in that it breaks the model of the documentary genre via Jackson's 'technical virtuosity'.¹⁶⁵ Jackson and his team digitally restored and colourized old footage of World War I from the Imperial War Museum, also adding sound effects and voice acting. The film referenced 'more than six hundred hours of oral history interviews preserved and archived by the BBC' and relied on lip-reading to identify 'the actual dialogue spoken in the restored film clips'.¹⁶⁶ According to the data from Rotten Tomatoes, the film also received high praise from critics and audiences, scoring 99% and 91% respectively.¹⁶⁷ Jackson's views and practices on technology combined with filmmaking have frequently been the focus of attention. For example, *The Hobbit* trilogy was filmed in 48 fps (frames per second) instead of the normal 24 fps. Ben Affleck praised Jackson as a 'technical pioneer... as well as artist...'.¹⁶⁸ Jackson has repeatedly expressed the idea that technology can make movies more entertaining and suggested that 'it's important that filmmakers look at technology available and think of how we can use it to make that experience in the cinema a little bit more exciting'.¹⁶⁹

Although Jackson did not undertake much directing after *The Hobbit*, he expanded his film-making business in both New Zealand and America. As a New Zealand director, Jackson has been considered as a 'creative industries hero...who is a global player while staying at home'.¹⁷⁰ From 2012 to 2018, he tried to set up a movie museum located in Wellington.¹⁷¹ However, this museum was put on hold

¹⁶⁵ Jessica Meyer, 'Sound and Silence in Peter Jackson's *They Shall Not Grow Old*', *The American Historical Review*, Volume 124, Issue 5(2019), pp.1789–1792, p.1789.

¹⁶⁶ Robert P. Wettemann, 'They Shall Not Grow Old', *The Oral History*, Volume 47, Issue 1(2020), pp.118-119, p.119.

¹⁶⁷ Rotten Tomatoes, *They Shall Not Grow Old*, 2018 <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/they_shall_not_grow_old> [accessed 4 March 2021].

¹⁶⁸ Peter Jackson, 'Ask the Editor', *Empire*, January 2015, pp.62-67, p.64.

¹⁶⁹ HeyUGuys, *The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies Press Conference in Full* (Jackson, Armitage, Serkis), 2014 <<https://youtu.be/dm3AZFcXg74>> [accessed: 29 February 2021].

¹⁷⁰ Deborah Jones, "'Ring Leader': Peter Jackson as 'creative industries' hero", p.99.

¹⁷¹ Javier Pes, *Peter Jackson's Movie Museum Is Scrapped Due to Epic Costs, But the 'Hobbit' Director Isn't Giving Up on His Quest*, 2018 <<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/peter-jackson-movie-museum-1333106>> [accessed 2 March 2021].

According to the record on <https://opencorporates.com/companies/nz/3752764>, The Movie Museum Limited was registered in 2012.

and did not build as successfully as the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art in Los Angeles, which is scheduled to open in 2023.¹⁷² In 2017, he extended his business field into AR (Augmented Reality) with WingNut AR.¹⁷³ In June 2020, one of his co-owned companies, Weta Digital, announced the launch of Weta Animated, which aims to produce original films and TV shows.¹⁷⁴ Compared to the difficulties in communicating with the New Zealand government for the museum and the lack of news for WingNut AR, this new branch of Weta Animated seems to have received more attention. Jackson's statement explained that this offers opportunities to 'filmmakers and storytellers who might not otherwise be given the chance to show what they can do'.¹⁷⁵ The statement put him in a position to build a platform to cultivate his protégé. The word 'protégé' has been widely used through the press to describe *Mortal Engines'* director Christian Rivers, who has worked with Jackson since *Braindead*.¹⁷⁶

Looking back at the history of Hollywood cinema, what Jackson has done is reminiscent of other key figures, such as Lucas and Spielberg. King described Spielberg as 'the most powerful creative player in the business' because of 'a series of enormously successful films' he directed alongside gaining 'considerable power and freedom in the New Hollywood framework'.¹⁷⁷ Similarly, throughout his career, Jackson has voiced his own opinion on filmmaking and wants the initiative of direction. He also encourages young directors to explore their career and offers help. Meanwhile, he is actively involved in the film industry with his companies. Jackson obviously has not yet reached Spielberg's influence in the film industry, but he has clearly utilised a similar framework to Spielberg. What is unique about Jackson is that most of his career achievements in Hollywood came during his time with the

¹⁷² Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, *About the Museum* <<https://lucasmuseum.org/museum/>> [accessed 2 March 2021].

¹⁷³ Unreal Engine, *Wingnut AR Unreal Engine Demo on iOS | WWDC 2017*, 2017 <<https://youtu.be/S14AVwaBF-Y>> [accessed: 29 January 2020].

¹⁷⁴ James White, *Peter Jackson Launching Weta Animated*, 2020 <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/news/peter-jackson-weta-animated/>> [accessed 2 March 2021].

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Patrick Brzeski, *With 'Mortal Engines,' Peter Jackson Passes the Baton to His Protege*, 2018 <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/features/mortal-engines-peter-jackson-passes-baton-his-protége-1166097>> [accessed 2 March 2021].

¹⁷⁷ Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, p.92.

Middle-earth franchise. This experience also enabled him to be considered a star-director with personal style and likeable characteristics. Therefore, the Middle-earth franchise has played an important role in the establishment of Jackson's authorial status.

Jackson's status within the film industry changed with his success in the *LOTR* trilogy, which suggests that he could be a franchise author whose authority is established based on the specific franchise and at their best within this franchise. This is one of the most successful film franchises, according to Thompson, because it is 'strong enough to maintain its commercial potential and yet self-contained enough as a narrative not to beget a series that outstays its welcome'.¹⁷⁸ Thompson's argument offers a premise to study Jackson's authorial status establishment, within such a commercially successful franchise, through the *LOTR* trilogy. From the franchise's perspective, the trilogy keeps its close relationship with the originals, so that Tolkien fans welcomed it. Meanwhile, Jackson received recognition and transformed from an independent cult film director to a Hollywood director who earned both critical and commercial success. From one perspective, the *LOTR* trilogy won seventeen Academy Awards, from which they were nominated for a total of thirty.¹⁷⁹ From another, as a blockbuster franchise, each film in the trilogy achieved box-office success: *The Fellowship of the Ring* took second place in the 2001 Worldwide Grosses rankings while *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King* ranked first in 2002 and 2003 respectively.¹⁸⁰ Since it was through the key point of his career, the *LOTR* trilogy, that Jackson established his authorial voice within Hollywood and worldwide, this chapter will first study how this trilogy helped him build that voice so that he could become the franchise author here.

Fidelity and originality in adaptation

Jackson's adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* was not the first film adaptation

¹⁷⁸ Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*, p.7.

¹⁷⁹ The categories include: Picture, Director, Supporting Actor, Adapted Screenplay, Art Direction, Cinematography, Costume Design, Film Editing, Makeup, Original Score, Original Song, Sound Editing, Sound Mixing Visual Effects.

¹⁸⁰ Boxofficemojo.

of Tolkien's novel. Before the *LOTR* trilogy, several people had tried to adapt it into animation such as Forrest J. Ackerman. There are also completed adaptation cases, such as *The Lord of the Rings* (USA/UK, dir. Ralph Bakshi, 1978) produced by Saul Zaentz. As the trademark holder, Zaentz's company Tolkien Enterprises produced different tie-in products, including games, toys, and collectables. According to Thompson, this animation received neither positive critical feedback nor commercial success.¹⁸¹ When the *King Kong* remake was cancelled by Universal Pictures in 1997, Jackson moved to the *LOTR* films. As a sequel to Tolkien's children's fantasy novel, *The Hobbit*, the novel *The Lord of the Rings* comprises three volumes, entitled *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*. The films were planned to be a two-film version when Jackson proposed them to Miramax with his first draft script, but Zaentz suggested he put them together as one film.¹⁸² Then, Jackson came to New Line Cinema, and it finally became a film trilogy, which follows the novel's three volume structure.¹⁸³

Here, the auteur theory meets its first challenge, in discussions around whether the film adaptation still needs its own authorial voice, since the adaptation of a film involves the comparison with its source. The question of adaptation and authorial voice emerged in auteur criticism as early as 1962, when François Truffaut interviewed Alfred Hitchcock.¹⁸⁴ In that interview, Truffaut praised Hitchcock for successfully turning adapted films into 'a Hitchcock creation' by refashioning them in his 'own manner'.¹⁸⁵ Similarly, scholars like Corrigan, James Naremore and Shelley Cobb have also discussed the possibility of identifying an authorial voice within adaptations. Cobb pointed out that adapted films directed by auteurs broke free from the shackles of the original texts and show the loyalty to the auteurs' own authorial voice.¹⁸⁶ In their opinion, film auteurs' characteristics can challenge the

¹⁸¹ Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*, p.20.

¹⁸² Ibid, pp.28-30.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ François Truffaut, *Hitchcock: A definitive study of Alfred Hitchcock* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985), p.91.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Shelly Cobb, 'Film Authorship and Adaptation', p.107.

James Naremore, 'Introduction: Film and the Reign of Adaptation', in James Naremore (ed), *Film Adaptation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 2001), pp.1-18.

originals so that the adapted films can be considered as their own film work instead of reproductions made by *metteurs-en-scène*. Paisley Livingston argued that the film adaptation has to contain ‘the distinguishing and characteristic features’ of the source, such as ‘the title, setting, main characters, and central elements of the plot’.¹⁸⁷ Meanwhile, ‘total or overall fidelity’ is impossible in adaptation because adaptation must ‘be intentionally made to diverge from the source’ so that it can be different from ‘copies’ or ‘reproductions’.¹⁸⁸ Based on this argument, the discussion of adaptations focuses on determining the extent to which an adaptation is different from the original. This view emphasises the importance of the authorial voice in the adaptation.

Moreover, scholars, including Linda Hutcheon and Mireia Aragay, have argued that the success of an adapted film depends on explaining and recreating the original texts in another media form, rather than faithfully reproducing the originals.¹⁸⁹ As Dudley Andrew has pointed out, the ‘discussion of adaptation’ always concerns two aspects ‘fidelity and transformation’.¹⁹⁰ Cobb connected this argument with the concept of the auteur and stated that there has always been a tension in adapted films between the ‘expectations of fidelity to the authority’ and ‘expectations for the originality of the art cinema auteur’.¹⁹¹ The former emphasises the comparison between the adaptation and the source materials, while the originality emphasises the comparison between the adaptation and the director’s personal traits. Films from franchises are one of the key components of a commercial enterprise, meaning the films also have to take on another role of marketing other tie-in products. This most basic premise leads to a sensation in some franchise film case studies, where the expression of the director’s authorial voice and the production of the franchise

¹⁸⁷ Paisley Livingston, ‘On the Appreciation of Cinematic Adaptations’, *Projections*, Volume 4, no. 2 (2010), pp.104-127, p.105.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, P.112 and p.105.

¹⁸⁹ Linda Hutcheon, *A theory of adaptation* (New York/London: Routledge, 2006), p.84. Mireia Aragay, ‘Reflection to Refraction: Adaptation Studies Then and Now’, in Mireia Aragay (ed), *Books in Motion: Adaptation, intertextuality, authorship* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2005), pp.11-34.

¹⁹⁰ Dudley Andrew, ‘Adaptation’, in James Naremore (ed.), *Film Adaptation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), pp.28-37, p.31.

¹⁹¹ Shelly Cobb, ‘Film Authorship and Adaptation’, in Deborah Cartmell (eds.), *A Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K.; Malden, Mass.: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), pp.105-121, p.115.

film appear to be difficult to integrate. For example, in their book chapter 'Harry Potter and the Fidelity Debate' (2005), Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan demonstrate the importance of a director's authorial voice to successful adaptations, through the case study of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (UK/USA, dir. Chris Columbus, 2001).¹⁹² In their case study, as a film adaptation of a popular children's book, the film is 'as close a copy as a film can be of a book' so that it only emphasises the fidelity but lacks a director's 'interpretive skills'.¹⁹³

From the aspect of fidelity, Geoffrey Wagner summed up three approaches of adapting film – 'transposition', 'commentary', and 'analogy' – according to the varying degrees of fidelity to the original, based on Béla Balázs' work.¹⁹⁴ An adaptation as transposition is considered to have been translated directly from the original text to the film, while the commentary can alter the original but still follows the original text.¹⁹⁵ Different from the first two, the analogy highlights the artistic perspective, which offers more freedom during the adaptation, so that the film can be considered as an individual artwork from the director.¹⁹⁶ According to the discussion and the classification above, a high-fidelity adaptation can hardly be regarded as individual artwork. Consequently, the relationship between fidelity and originality is almost a binary opposition from the perspectives of film text or filmmaking. This leads to the concept of authorship, which has a close relationship with the originality of the director, standing as an opposite position of keeping fidelity to the original text. However, in the case of Jackson and the Middle-earth films, ignoring the reliance on loyalty to the original text by Tolkien, in favour of highlighting Jackson's originality was not an option to consider from a film marketing perspective. Although at the *LOTR's* pre-production stage Jackson was already appreciated by people from the studios, such as Mark Ordesky from New Line Cinema and Zaentz who has the copyright, he was still a director who 'pop[ped] up

¹⁹² Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan, 'Harry Potter and the Fidelity Debate', in Mireia Aragay (ed), *Books in Motion: Adaptation, intertextuality, authorship* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2005), pp.37-50.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p.46.

¹⁹⁴ Geoffrey Wagner, *The Novel and the Cinema* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press: Rutherford, NJ, 1975), p.222, p.223, p.226.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

out of nowhere' to the Tolkien fans.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, considering Jackson's situation at that time and the popularity of the original book, New Line Cinema's marketing and promotional strategies was aimed at the fans of the original books.¹⁹⁸ Thus, the film adaptations of Tolkien's novels could not abandon their fidelity to the original text in order to emphasise Jackson's personal originality.

It is understandable that the studio would want the support of the original novel's fans. One of the extreme examples of why fans' reactions are important is the story of critic Peter Bradshaw from *The Guardian*. In Bradshaw's review of *The Fellowship of the Rings*, he challenged the popularity of Tolkien's original novel, claiming it had been overrated.¹⁹⁹ He also commented that such a work of children's fiction should not be over-hyped by adults.²⁰⁰ After his film review was published, he was 'deluged with hate mails' from the Tolkien fanbase.²⁰¹ The fans' passion for Tolkien's original novels could clearly not be ignored. Therefore, with such a passionate fanbase, the adapted film had to please them so that it could achieve commercial success. As an adapted project mainly relies on the original author and the original work's fan base support, Jackson's *LOTR* trilogy needed to be able to satisfy fans' demand for a loyal adaptation. However, doing this meant that Jackson, as the director, was pulled away from the definition of authorial voice.

Nevertheless, if the whole period of the *LOTR* trilogy is considered, especially the reception after those films were released, then identifying Jackson as a director without an authorial voice is also inappropriate. Different from Wagner's three categories based on fidelity, Boozer divided the adaptation film into two categories in his book: 'commercial blockbusters' and films that are awarded the Best Adapted

¹⁹⁷ Brian Sibley, *Peter Jackson: A Film-maker's Journey*, p.5

¹⁹⁸ Daniel Biltereyst, Ernest Mathijs, and Philippe Meers, 'An Avalanche of Attention: The Prefiguration and Reception of The Lord of the Rings', in Martin Barker and Ernest Mathijs (eds), *Watching the Lord of the Rings: Tolkien's world audiences* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2008), pp.37-58.

¹⁹⁹ Peter Bradshaw [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of The Ring* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2001), *The Guardian*, 14 December 2001. < <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2001/dec/14/lordoftherings1> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Peter Bradshaw [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2002), *The Guardian*, 13 December 2002. < <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/dec/13/artsfeatures.lordoftherings> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

Screenplay.²⁰² Boozer's classification is due to his focus on screenwriting. However, the category of award-winning films still places an emphasis on the artistic perspective of the film, similar to Wagner's category of analogy adaptation. Apparently, Boozer's classification does not apply to the case of the *LOTR* trilogy since it spans these two categories by its \$2.918 billion box office performance as well as its two nominations and one win on Best Adapted Screenplay, with Peter Jackson as one of the three recipients.²⁰³ By receiving success from both commercial and critical perspectives, Jackson seems to have been placed in the middle of the different kinds of film adaptation categories that Boozer outlined. This factor allows Jackson, who is both writer and director, the opportunity to establish his authorial voice within the context of the films' reception.

Whilst building his authorial voice to become a famous director, Jackson's case has this role as a director with authorial voice but extends it beyond the auteur's function, so that fidelity and originality can coexist. Based on this trait, this thesis hopes that the franchise author can be used to define him as an identity, which is neither auteur nor *metteurs-en-scène*, but an important figure as the director of the *LOTR* trilogy. The establishment of Jackson's authorial voice more relies on the marketing context, which is different from the common understanding of the film auteur. This is similar to the concept Corrigan suggested 'the auteurist marketing' which emphasises the filmmaker's name mainly being used with the 'aim to guarantee a relationship between audience and movie'.²⁰⁴ However, in the case of the *LOTR* trilogy, Jackson's name cannot directly ensure the audience's connection to the film. Instead, part of the function Jackson undertook was to demonstrate the close relationship between the film and the original author, thus further sustaining the connection between the film and the audience. The fact that the original text has a huge fanbase then becomes the key point of letting Jackson get involved in the

²⁰² Jack Boozer, 'Introduction: The Screenplay and Authorship in Adaptation', in Jack Boozer (eds), *Authorship in Film Adaptation* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2008), pp.1-30, p.18.

²⁰³ The screenwriters are Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens and Peter Jackson. Both *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Return of the King* nominated the Academy Awards' Best Adapted Screenplay Award, and *The Return of the King* won the Best Adapted Screenplay Award.

²⁰⁴ Timothy Corrigan, 'Auteurs and the New Hollywood', in Jon Lewis (eds), *The New American Cinema* (Durham, N.C.; London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp.38-63, p40.

marketing process. With the success Jackson accumulated from each *LOTR* film released, his name gradually functioned as the guarantee for his subsequent films. What makes Jackson special, is that in the process, his authorial voice is not established by highlighting the individual artistic values displayed in his *LOTR* films, as he constantly emphasises his fidelity to the original text rather than his originality. In other words, Jackson has established his authorial voice, which is different from the traditional understanding of auteur, by enhancing his commercial value through continually participating in the Middle-earth franchise, which highlights the nature of the authorial figures in the post-auteur age.

Jackson as a loyal Tolkien fan

Jackson's authorial voice as a franchise author was established step-by-step because the context of the film franchise provided a coherent phase from one film to another, continually offering Jackson the opportunity to gain his commercial value. The coherent context, based on the Middle-earth franchise, contains not only the three *LOTR* films but also a range of related material that appears in the timeline of their production, such as different versions of DVDs, film reviews, and press. One way of studying the establishment of Jackson's authorial voice is to explore how he engages with the audience and convinces them of the close connection between the film and the original novels. Apart from the film content, other related materials, including interviews and making-of documentaries, are key to studying Jackson's engagement with the audience. Additionally, film reviews are used to examine the establishment of his authorial voice. Rather than an authorial director who only emphasises his own creative ideas, Jackson has become the spokesman for the franchise to explain how the films portray the original Middle-earth story created by Tolkien. During this process his personality has been highlighted, which has a less direct relation to the artistic value he is supposed to offer to the films, but has still helped him establish a specific authorial voice that can translate into commercial value.

Richard Dyer's seminal work on film stars has been developed by scholars, such as Corrigan and Schatz, to focus on American auteurs as 'celebrity auteurs' or 'star

directors'.²⁰⁵ This idea focuses on famous Hollywood directors, such as Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, John Milius, and Steven Spielberg, to study the commercial value that the author status they established, through their recognizable artistic value, played in their subsequent directing careers. These directors' names have become 'a kind of brand-name vision whose aesthetic meanings and values have already been determined'.²⁰⁶ Corrigan suggests that 'artistic expression of contemporary directors is fully bound up with the celebrity industry of Hollywood', which offers an approach that combines the idea of the star and the director.²⁰⁷ The majority of research about these directors also provides analyses from aesthetic perspectives. However, as a faithful adaptation, the analysis of the *LOTR* trilogy, from an aesthetic viewpoint, can easily be linked to the original text, rather than the artistic style of the director himself. Nevertheless, Jackson has established his authorial status in a different way, relying on the context of the Middle-earth franchise. The establishment of this kind of authorial voice is related to the build-up of star status, which requires returning to Dyer's star theory.

According to Richard Dyer's description of film stars who usually are film actors or actresses, one of the main features is that their image would not only be evident in the film but also in publicity materials. One way is appearing directly, such as undertaking interviews and via magazine coverage. Another way is the comments others make, such as in film reviews and critical comments.²⁰⁸ Unlike actors or actresses, just as Sean Cubitt and Barry King suggested, the work behind the scenes, as well as the people who work behind the scenes, is easily ignored.²⁰⁹ Jackson is not an actor, although he has a penchant for undertaking a small cameo in his own films, so he does not have as many chances as the stars have in Dyer's cases to show his

²⁰⁵ Timothy Corrigan, 'Auteurs and the New Hollywood', p.43.

Thomas Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', in Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Collins (eds), *Film Theory Goes to the Movies: Cultural Analysis of Contemporary Film* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.8-36, p.20.

²⁰⁶ Timothy Corrigan, 'Auteurs and the New Hollywood', p40.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, pp.38-39.

²⁰⁸ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies Film Stars and Society* (London: BFI, Macmillan, 1987), PP.2-3.

²⁰⁹ Sean Cubitt and Barry King, 'Dossier: materials for a study of the Lord of the Rings trilogy and its audiences', in Harriet Margolis, Sean Cubitt, Barry King and Thierry Jutel (eds.), *Studying the event film: The Lord of the Rings* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2008), pp.27-31.

image in films. However, he has opportunities to show up outside the film screen, for example, with making-of documentaries and film reviews. Dyer claims that stars are related to personhood rather than just an image from film and this personhood continues from film to film as well as their personal life.²¹⁰ Jackson cannot establish a vivid image for himself through acting in films, but he could show his personhood through other materials, even though this personhood is also a purposeful display. Joshua Gamson argues that such materials can imply that a star is the same person both on and off screen, aiming to promote a 'coincidence' between 'public and private personae'.²¹¹ As for the case of Jackson, his persona is all established surrounding the Middle-earth franchise rather than public or private. Or, according to Gamson's suggestion, the coincidence between public and private personae for Jackson is his working passion surrounding adapting Tolkien's fantasy works. Inspired by Dyer's work on star images, particularly his arguments about how promotional and publicity materials contribute to creating a star image, this case study argues that Jackson's authorial voice has been established through the promotion of the Middle-earth films. Furthermore, during this establishment of Jackson's authorial voice, the artistic identity, which used to be the core identity for distinguishing the film auteur, has been separated from the authorial status and has become blurred through the promotional actions of the franchise.

Craig Hight introduced an 'increasing trend' of 'two-tier marketing strateg[ies]' in DVD sales.²¹² This strategy always contains two versions of a DVD that are released separately. The first version is normally a two-disc DVD, and the second is a 'more substantial special edition version' comprising making-of documentaries.²¹³ The *LOTR* films also followed this strategy with a theatrical version of a two-disc DVD and a Special Extended Edition DVDs (EE DVD). Each EE DVD contains four discs with two of them being the Special Extended Edition discs, and the other two titled The Appendices. The introduction brochure in the EE DVD of *The Fellowship of the Ring*

²¹⁰ Ibid, p.10.

²¹¹ Joshua Gamson, 'The assembly line of greatness: Celebrity in twentieth-century America', *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, volume 9, no.1, Fall 2005, pp.1-20, p.19.

²¹² Craig Hight, 'Making-of Documentaries on DVD: The Lord of the Rings Trilogy and Special Editions', *The Velvet Light Trap*, Number 56, Fall 2005, pp.4-16, p.5.

²¹³ Ibid.

introduced the special extended edition that contains more than 30 minutes of additional footage, selected by Jackson. To ensure its 'visual effects were completed, dialogue was recorded, sound effects were created', 'Howard Shore composed and recorded a new score' for it.²¹⁴ At the end of this special extended edition's description page, it stated:

The result [special extended edition] is an opportunity for fans of the book to see a cherished world brought to life in even greater detail, and for those new to the legend to gain a deeper appreciation of its wonders.

These words show how this adaptation sought to appeal to Tolkien fans and encourage its own film fans at the same time. Martin Barker suggests that another sign that the director is a star is that studios start to promote content named after the director, such as 'the director's cut', and 'the director's commentary'.²¹⁵ Similarly, King also mentions the 'Special Edition' film re-release with a director's cut version as a sign of an auteur's reputation, when discussing the case of Spielberg.²¹⁶ The director's cut is often considered a more prominent manifestation of the director's personal style. However, in Jackson's case, his director's edition version does not so much emphasise his own involvement. Instead, it offers a version closely following Tolkien's original text, demonstrating that the director understands the fans' expectations. This challenges tensions between faithful adaptations and authorial interpretation because, as I will argue, Jackson's authorial status is closely linked with his ability to faithfully adapt Tolkien's work.

The other two discs in the EE DVD, titled The Appendices, contain numerous supplementary materials about the production process of the film trilogy, such as documentaries and commentaries. Those DVD extras also attempt to closer the relationship with the original by using the same title, The Appendices, which is normally seen in books. The first video (*Introduction*) of the first Appendix started with a fixed medium close-up shot of Jackson introducing the Appendices:

²¹⁴ *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* [Extended Edition DVD] (NZ/USA, dir. by Peter Jackson, 2002)

²¹⁵ Martin Barker, 'Introduction', in Thomas Austin and Martin Barker (eds.), *Contemporary Hollywood Stardom* (London: Arnold, 2003), pp.1-24, p.10.

²¹⁶ Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, p.112.

Hello, Welcome to the Appendices. As you probably know, the book *The Lord of the Rings* got Appendices as well, which Tolkien used to present a lot of the backstory and the origins of how he created the mythology of Middle-earth. And in a sense, our Appendi[ces] is doing the same.²¹⁷

Just like the appendices of the novel *The Lord of the Rings*, which comprises six parts, the three films' EE DVD also contains six discs entitled appendices.²¹⁸ Every two appendices (from one EE DVD) have a similar standard of content structure. They start with a documentary about Tolkien and the original novels, then move to an adaptation-based documentary that focuses on the first step of the adaptation process, from book to script. Of all the appendices, they are the most straightforward materials showing the progress of the adaptation. In these documentaries, the cast and crew from the film trilogy did not hesitate to show their respect for Tolkien and their loyalty to the novel. After the first two documentaries, the remaining materials are about the visualization process, such as costumes and props, special effects, and cinematography. In the three EE DVDs, it is clear from the titles that the first Appendix (*Part One: From Book to Vision*) from *The Fellowship of the Ring's* EE DVD is more related to the adaptation progress. Different types of materials, such as documentaries, galleries with audio, and interactive map footage are offered in this appendix to provide an overview of the whole trilogy's adaptation progress. It is clear from looking at the structure of the EE DVDs and the brochure's introduction, that the highlight of the film trilogy is its faithfulness to the original novels.

Craig Hight argues that the making-of documentaries from DVDs could introduce the 'industrial practices' of film production as well as 'the professional and personal relationships between cast and crew' to the public.²¹⁹ With the *LOTR* trilogy's EE DVD, the content is more than just an insight into the films' production. Other than the cast and crew, another group of people also involved in the making-of documentaries of this trilogy are Tolkien scholars, who focus on Tolkien and his

²¹⁷ Introduction, The Appendices, in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring extended edition DVD*, New Line Cinema, 2002.

²¹⁸ They are *Part One: From Book to Vision*; *Part Two: From Vision to Reality*; *Part Three: The Journey Continues*; *Part Four: The Battle for Middle-Earth Begins*; *Part Five: The War of the Rings*; and *Part Six: The Passing of an Age*.

²¹⁹ Craig Hight, 'Making-of Documentaries on DVD: The Lord of the Rings Trilogy and Special Editions', *The Velvet Light Trap*, Number 56, Fall 2005, pp.4-16, p.9.

creative process, such as Tom Shippey, Patrick Curry, Chris Upton, and Humphrey Carpenter (Tolkien's biographer).²²⁰ These scholars mostly appeared in the three Tolkien-based documentaries: *J.R.R. Tolkien: Creator of Middle-earth*, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Origins of Middle-earth*, and *J.R.R. Tolkien: The Legacy of Middle-Earth* from each film's extended edition DVD. Each documentary lasts almost 30 minutes with Tolkien as the core topic. Jackson and other cast and crew members appear alongside Tolkien scholars to introduce Tolkien's life story as well as how he created the world of Middle-earth. With the professionals' rich knowledge presents, these videos are more like independent documentaries on Tolkien rather than a filmmaking documentary. Furthermore, these Tolkien-based documentaries reaffirm the importance of Tolkien and the original works for this adaptation. Within these documentaries, Jackson put forward much of his own understanding about the original work alongside scholars', thereby depicting him as a convincing Tolkien scholar, which is central to the initial formation of this star persona. As for the *LOTR* trilogy itself, this is also a starting to establish a franchise author figure for the films. At this stage, Jackson's star persona is more like a Middle-earth-limited star persona, which does not aim to highlight his public or/and private life but purposefully links him to the specific context filled with Tolkien.

J.R.R. Tolkien: Creator of Middle-earth starts with Jackson commenting that Tolkien's original story created a new world with its wealth of information. This documentary then introduces Tolkien's early life and how his books became popular once they were published. Jackson shared his knowledge of Tolkien's creative process alongside other scholars, emphasising his identity as a Tolkien fan. This set the baseline for Jackson to further share his understanding of a faithful adaptation, which helped him explain the importance of the novel's theme from Tolkien, in a way that was more likely to be accepted. He then expressed his view that '[honouring] the themes of Tolkien are another way of honouring the book' under the circumstances the film cannot re-create every detail from the novel.²²¹ This is

²²⁰ Tom Shippey also helped to correct the pronunciation of the characters and location names for the filmmaking of the trilogy.

²²¹ *J.R.R. Tolkien: Creator of Middle-earth*, The Appendices, in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring extended edition DVD*, New Line Cinema, 2002.

central to Jackson's approach when adapting Tolkien's works and has been repeated and emphasized throughout the making-of documentaries. These three documentaries, especially *J.R.R. Tolkien: Creator of Middle-earth*, build a background about the film's adaptation. Jackson shows off his knowledge about Tolkien and the original novels through the documentaries, to convey the message about his own loyalty to Tolkien.

Whilst most of the ideas around who is the auteur in an adaptation film focus on the tension between the literary author and the director, Boozer raises another concern – the screenwriter.²²² Boozer argues that the process of adapting scripts is not valued enough, but the situation of the *LOTR* trilogy is different. The plentiful making-of documentaries around Tolkien and adaptation show this scriptwriting process to the public. Especially as each EE DVD has another documentary, after the one about Tolkien, that focuses on the adaptation process. They are titled *From Book to Script*, *From Book to Script - Finding the Story*, and *From Book to Script - Forging the Final Chapter*. Jackson shared the process of adapting the script in *From Book to Script* from *The Fellowship of the Ring* EE DVD, noting that every draft they wrote 'became closer and closer to what was in the book' and 'nearer to Tolkien'.²²³ He suggested that some changes would be necessary during the process of translating a novel into a screenplay, still, he also promised that he and the other writers 'want to be as accurate as possible into putting his thematic material into the film'.²²⁴ This documentary also offers a short interview with Ian McKellen, who mentioned that his 'abiding images' of Jackson were of him 'sitting in his trademark shorts, with unkempt hair, pouring over Tolkien'.²²⁵ Through the interview with Jackson and other people's views on Jackson, what is created is a persona of Jackson as a fan of the novel who was trying his best to make sure the adapted script would be loyal to the original.

The making-of documentaries not only portrayed Jackson as a Tolkien fan to

²²² Jack Boozer, 'Introduction: The Screenplay and Authorship in Adaptation', in Jack Boozer (eds), *Authorship in Film Adaptation* (Texas: University of Texas Press, 2008), pp.1-30.

²²³ *From Book to Script*, The Appendices, in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring extended edition DVD*, New Line Cinema, 2002.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

promote the films, but also described the entire cast and crew as a group of Tolkien fans to highlight the films' loyalty to the source. The documentary *From Book to Script* begins with a montage of several people from the cast and crew talking about the first time they read the book *The Lord of the Rings*.²²⁶ Then their executive producer, Mark Ordesky from New Line Cinema, said 'virtually, everyone in a significant position on the movie knew the books inside out and been obsessed with them for years'.²²⁷ Viggo Mortensen (Aragorn) introduced in the documentary saying that 'even at the end of the last day you'd see copies [of the novels] laying around the set'.²²⁸ Sean Astin (Sam) also shared a story in this documentary that Ian McKellen (Gandalf) told him to remember to hold Elijah Wood's (Frodo) hand in the scene of Frodo waking up in Rivendell, just as the book had described, because 'the fans will be looking for that'.²²⁹ This demonstrates a clear way to strengthen the links with Tolkien fans.

The marketing strategy of this trilogy aimed to sell the film to Tolkien fans as a faithful adaptation. During the marketing process, materials highlight Jackson's status as a Tolkien fan, portraying him as the perfect choice of director for this project. As a result, Jackson's directing ability was, at times, overlooked to accentuate Tolkien's authority, for example, the documentary even has a straightforward comment on Jackson by Christian Rivers (Weta VFX Art director) that 'there were things that sort of happened that I don't think were even within Peter's control that ended up changing the film and making it more like the book... like it was meant to be.'²³⁰ In the latter two films' EE DVD, the key members of the cast and crew are also involved in the Tolkien documentaries, *J.R.R. Tolkien: Origins of Middle-earth*, and *J.R.R. Tolkien: The Legacy of Middle-earth*, to introduce *The Lord of the Rings* books alongside Jackson and Tolkien scholars. As such, instead of building a persona as a creative director full of originalities, Jackson's status as a

²²⁶ The chronological people in this montage are: Peter Jackson, Andrew Lesnie (director of photography), Sean Bean (Boromir), Dominic Monaghan (Merry), Daniel Falconer (designer/sculptor), Alex Funke (visual effects director of photography: miniature unit).

²²⁷ *From Book to Script*, 2002.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

loyal fan has been expanded allowing his authorial authority to be linked to more than his directing skills.

Accordingly, during *The LOTR* period, the loyalty to Tolkien's original work resulted in the film receiving more attention from Tolkien fans, but there are also questions about Jackson's directorial ability in the reviews. For example, for film critics like Kim Newman from *Sight & Sound*, this high fidelity means the films are 'channelling Tolkien' instead of adapting the original work from one medium to another, which diminishes the director's authorial ability.²³¹ From Jackson's own point of view, he seems not to want to deny this practice of transmitting Tolkien through the film. At the very end of *J.R.R. Tolkien: Creator of Middle-earth*, Jackson claimed that as director and writer, he should not bring his own questions into the film but focus on what Tolkien really cared about and said 'this should ultimately be Tolkien's film it shouldn't be ours'.²³² These words from Jackson can easily conjure up a concept – *metteur en scène* – from Francois Truffaut, who used it as the opposite of film author. In Truffaut's opinion, for directors who could be considered as a *metteur en scène*, the creative action is finished as the screenwriting is finished.²³³ Based on Jackson's attitude towards adapting Tolkien's work shown through the above material, his Middle-earth-limited star persona convinces the audience that everything portrayed in the film is from Tolkien and not himself, even though he is one of the screenwriters. In terms of the understanding of the traditional film author, Jackson's statement basically denies that he can be classified as a film author. Still, it highlights his identity as a loyal Tolkien fan who has his own opinion on adaptation, that is, one kind of franchise author.

Jackson as a faithful writer/director to the original

It would be inappropriate to label Jackson as a *metteur en scène* only according to his own declaration of loyalty to the original texts, even though he seems not to

²³¹ Kim Newman [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2002), *Sight & Sound*, February 2003, Vol. 13 Issue 2, p48-51, p.51.

²³² *J.R.R. Tolkien: Creator of Middle-earth*, 2002.

²³³ François Truffaut, 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema', in Peter Graham, and Ginette Vincendeau (eds.), *The French new wave: critical landmarks* (London: BFI, 2009), pp.39-63.

qualify as a traditional auteur. When James Harold discusses the question 'is fidelity good' in his article *The Value of Fidelity in Adaptation* (2018), he argues that 'story fidelity typically does not count as a merit in artworks, but thematic fidelity typically does'.²³⁴ Jackson argues that 'the book is a great book, the story is a great story, the characters are great but it's unfilmable...It's unfilmable if you were to just shoot the book page by page, scene by scene. It would just be a mess.'²³⁵ This also echoes his earlier statement on his definition of a faithful adaptation, which focused on the theme instead of the details. Thomas Shippey, a Tolkien scholar interviewed in the making-of documentaries, also delivered the arguments that some sequence changes or deletions are necessary during the film adaptation, which is better than 'trying to do everything at breakneck pace'.²³⁶ As a part of the filmmaking process that audiences do not usually see, the EE DVD devotes a large part of the documentary to this process. Through every *From Book to Script* documentary, Jackson explained why he made some changes in the adaptation. This kind of explanation aims to carefully convince his audience that the film still follows the original's setting or Tolkien's core theme. Meanwhile, the explanations on Jackson's understanding of the themes of the original novels, as well as the changes in structure and the characters, emphasise the importance of Jackson during this adaptation process.

Jackson emphasized the importance of the original author in the documentary. However, he also offered his own understanding of the originals and explained them through the interviews. Jackson concluded, in *J.R.R. Tolkien: Creator of Middle-earth*, that the books' theme goes beyond the 'straight struggle of good and evil' and becomes 'a struggle over loving the values of your world and being prepared to fight to the death'.²³⁷ Furthermore, in another Tolkien-based documentary *J.R.R. Tolkien: Origins of Middle-earth* from *The Two Towers* EE DVD, Jackson further explained that Tolkien hates the 'futility' and 'waste' of war, as a result of his personal experience

²³⁴ James Harold, 'The Value of Fidelity in Adaptation', *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, Volume 58, Issue 1 (2018), pp.89-100, p.95.

²³⁵ *From Book to Script*, 2002.

²³⁶ Claire E. White, *Talking Tolkien with Thomas Shippey*, 2002

<<https://www.writerswrite.com/journal/thomas-shippey-3021>> [accessed 12 March 2021].

²³⁷ *J.R.R. Tolkien: Creator of Middle-earth*, 2002.

during the First World War; however, he believed that a war for freedom, such as the Second World War, 'had to be fought'.²³⁸ These making-of documentaries that place Jackson in front of the camera both present and let other scholars justify his points, to become a way of burnishing Jackson's understanding of Tolkien as well as his identity as a Tolkien fan.

Boozar acknowledged the screenplay's importance in an adaptation film is because it can convey the 'practical specificity' to the director, which the original text cannot.²³⁹ Additionally, according to Harold's point, Jackson's adaptation that was faithful to the novels' themes can be understood as a way of adding an artistic quality to the process of adaptation, at least at a theoretical level. With Jackson one of the co-writers, alongside Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens, the making-of documentaries demonstrated how he was involved in the screenwriting process, which is also the process of adding artistic qualities. However, practically, different critics will interpret this fidelity from various perspectives. Todd McCarthy from *Variety* believes Jackson dealt well with Tolkien's theme of good versus evil in his film reviews of *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers*.²⁴⁰ Others, such as Elvis Mitchell's review from *The New York Times*, have similar comments.²⁴¹ In his review of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Mitchell points out that even though it is difficult to adapt such a huge novel, Jackson clearly understands that 'what propels the story forward are the battles between the forces of good and evil'.²⁴² However, the faithful adaptation also leads to questioning from some critics. Newman's review of *The Return of the King* points out that faithful adaptations present difficulties in reviews, as it is hard to distinguish whether the positive or negative

²³⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien: *Origins of Middle-earth*, The Appendices, in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers extended edition DVD*, New Line Cinema, 2003.

²³⁹ Jack Boozar, 'Introduction: The Screenplay and Authorship in Adaptation', p.5.

²⁴⁰ Todd McCarthy [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of The Ring* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2001), *Variety*, 3 December 2001. < <https://variety.com/2001/film/awards/the-lord-of-the-rings-the-fellowship-of-the-ring-3-1200552410/> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

Todd McCarthy [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2002), *Variety*, 5 December 2002. < <https://variety.com/2002/film/awards/the-lord-of-the-rings-the-two-towers-3-1200544488/> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

²⁴¹ Elvis Mitchell [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of The Ring* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2001), *The New York Times*, 19 December 2001, Section E; Column 2; The Arts/Cultural Desk; p.1.

²⁴² Ibid.

comments are due to the film or are simply in reference the novel itself.²⁴³ Newman raises the question in his review, confirming that such comments on the film, especially the comments on themes, cannot be straightforwardly summarised as the director's characteristics.

Apart from the expression of the theme within the *LOTR* trilogy, judging by some of the reviews and the interviews from the making-of documentaries, the main controversies and explanations about the adaptation focus on two points: one is that the narrative order of the film adaptation is not exactly the order of the novel itself, and another is the changes in characters. The most significant narrative structure change happened in the adaptation of the second book, *The Two Towers*. The original book *The Two Towers* contains two separate sections – *The Treason of Isengard* and *The Ring Goes East* – with three different storylines, but in the film these were interlaced with cross-cutting.²⁴⁴ Also, they cut the final four chapters from the second book and moved them to the final (third) film. The making-of documentary *J.R.R. Tolkien: The Legacy of Middle-Earth* has Tolkien scholars quoting Tolkien's own view: the book is 'unfilmable' and 'highly unsuitable to the process of dramatization'.²⁴⁵ Immediately after these pessimistic comments on the film adaptation, Jackson gives his explanation of how they re-structured the original novel's chronological order. He explained it from a Tolkien fan's perspective that lists the chronological order in which everything happens in the story to show his knowledge about the original.²⁴⁶ All these comments and discussions around screenwriting – whether from scholars, other crew, or Jackson himself – pave the way to emphasise that Jackson is the right director, or even the only director, who could have adapted the film in a respectful way. Some critics also noted this, for example, Mitchell offered his positive comment, again, on this second film in his

²⁴³ Kim Newman [review], *Lord Of The Rings: The Return of The King* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2003), *Sight & Sound*, February 2004, Vol. 14 Issue 2, p52-54, p.53.

²⁴⁴ J.R.R. Tolkien: *Origins of Middle-earth*, 2003.

²⁴⁵ J.R.R. Tolkien: *The Legacy of Middle-earth*, The Appendices, in *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* extended edition DVD, New Line Cinema, 2004.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

review.²⁴⁷ He believes that as a bridge film, *The Two Towers* had to make such changes to keep enough story for the final film.²⁴⁸ Another critic, Mike Goodridge from *Screen International*, praised this second film because it ‘eradicates the tedium of Tolkien’s prose’.²⁴⁹ As such, while this conveys the assurance that the film adaptation is faithful to the original text, it also emphasises the importance of Jackson, which is another way to show his authorial voice during this adaptation process.

Compared to the narrative structure, the changes in characters led to more controversial discussions. A group of ‘diehard fans’ expressed their dissatisfaction with the ‘deviations from the book’s plot’, such as the character expansion of Arwen (Liv Tyler) and the deletion of Tom Bombadil.²⁵⁰ Janet Brennan Croft claims that ‘Arwen, Faramir, Denethor, Théoden, Treebeard, Gimli, even Frodo, Sam, and Gollum are all demonstrably different from the characters in the books in their personalities as well as their actions’.²⁵¹ In order to continue with their marketing strategy of the Tolkien-fan-friendly film adaptation, the filmmakers needed to provide an effective and reasonable explanation here. In *J.R.R. Tolkien: Origins of Middle-earth*, Astin shared the story of how the director explained the core of the novel to him, which is the importance of the relationship between Frodo and Sam.²⁵² From the first film’s making-of documentary, the cast and crew of the *LOTR* trilogy conveyed the idea that literal adaptations would not work in this case, and that keeping the book’s core theme was the only way to adapt it. The friendship between Frodo and Sam is one of the core themes according to Jackson. This emphasis is recognised by critics, for example, John Hiscock spoke highly of *The Return of the*

²⁴⁷ Elvis Mitchell [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2002), *The New York Times*, 18 December 2002, Section E; Column 4; The Arts/Cultural Desk; p.1.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Mike Goodridge [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2002), *Screen international*, 6 December 2002. < <https://www.screendaily.com/the-lord-of-the-rings-the-two-towers/4011478.article> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

²⁵⁰ Claire E. White, *Talking Tolkien with Thomas Shippey*.

²⁵¹ Janet Brennan Croft, ‘Jackson’s Argon and the American Superhero Monomyth’, in Janice M. Bogstad and Philip E. Kaveny (eds.), *Picturing Tolkien: Essays on Peter Jackson’s The Lord of the Rings Film Trilogy* (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, 2011), pp.216-226, p.261.

²⁵² *J.R.R. Tolkien: Origins of Middle-earth*, 2003.

King in his review for *The Telegraph*, commenting that compared to the spectacle, the most important point of the film, as well as Jackson's 'outstanding achievement', is that he could keep the audience caring more about the fate of the protagonist than such 'epic battles and special effects'.²⁵³ After affirming the special effects and film spectacle Jackson brought to *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Christopher Howse, from *The Telegraph*, highlighted that what he deserves most credit for is his ability to deal with characters' emotions.²⁵⁴ Similarly, Sukhdev Sandhu (*The Telegraph*) and Peter Bradshaw (*The Guardian*) both pointed out that *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy is not like other Hollywood fantasy blockbusters that focus on visual spectacle, but instead there is an emphasis on character arc and the theme behind the story.²⁵⁵

As mentioned, the main relationship the trilogy focuses on is the buddy relationship between Frodo and Sam. Nevertheless, the romantic relationship between Arwen (Liv Tyler) and Aragorn (Viggo Mortensen) is also discussed in the making-of documentaries, which is also the most controversial relationship in the film. From the screenwriters and other supporters' viewpoints, the story around Arwen is well documented from the novel. Some Tolkien scholars like Richard C. West referenced the book's appendix (Appendix A, section I, part v) to prove the relationship in the film was not compiled out of thin air and analyse the film adaptation from the perspective of fidelity.²⁵⁶ Jackson and his co-writers also gave the same explanation in the making-of documentaries.

²⁵³ John Hiscock [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Return of The King* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2003), *The Telegraph*, 5 December 2003. < <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3607867/Its-the-biggest-and-the-best.html> > [accessed 22 May 2019].

²⁵⁴ Christopher Howse [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship Of The Ring* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2001), *The Telegraph*, 11 December 2001. < <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4726958/Tolkienes-ideals-come-shining-through.html> > [accessed 22 May 2019].

²⁵⁵ Sukhdev Sandhu [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2002), *The Telegraph*, 18 December 2002. < <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/3587243/As-dark-as-hell.html> > [accessed 22 May 2019]. Peter Bradshaw [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2002), *The Guardian*, 13 December 2002. < <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/dec/13/artsfeatures.lordoftherings> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

²⁵⁶ Richard C. West, 'Neither the Shadow Nor the Twilight: The Love Story of Aragorn and Arwen in Literature and Film', in Janice M. Bogstad and Philip E. Kaveny (eds.), *Picturing Tolkien: Essays on Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings Film Trilogy* (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, 2011), pp.227-237.

Additionally, critics have given different interpretations in respect to the adaptation. There are critics like David Hunter who noted that ‘the filmmakers went to the appendix’ to find the romantic story between Arwen and Aragorn.²⁵⁷ Another critic Christopher Howse, a Tolkien fan, believes that this romantic relationship in the movie corresponds to the Beren and Luthien story from Tolkien.²⁵⁸ Meanwhile, other film critics saw this as Jackson’s difference from Tolkien’s original text and used it to praise Jackson’s skill in handling the film’s plot and characters, as well as his focus on female characters. For example, Colin Kennedy comments on this romantic plot as a ‘corrective influence on Tolkien’s often oblique and female-sparse source material’.²⁵⁹ Another critic, Emanuel Levy, also believes that the Arwen storyline in the movie makes up for ‘the paucity of female characters’ in the original novel.²⁶⁰ The first view confirms the familiarity of the film adaptors (Jackson and his co-writers) with the original, suggesting they explored the appendices of the novel or even other works of Tolkien to develop their script. The second view, however, emphasizes how the filmmakers gave the film new content and perspectives during the adaptation process, thus enriching the female characters as well as the related plot. These kinds of views and interpretations are both based on the comparison between the adaptation and the sources, even though they ultimately came to very different conclusions based on the degree of knowledge about the original novels and Tolkien.

Meanwhile, it is worth mentioning that there are also critics, like Peter

²⁵⁷ David Hunter [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2002), *The Hollywood Reporter*, 6 December 2002. < <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/lord-rings-two-towers-review-2002-movie-1068800> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

²⁵⁸ Christopher Howse [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of The Ring* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2001), *The Telegraph*, 11 December 2001. < <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4726958/Tolkiens-ideals-come-shining-through.html> > [accessed 22 May 2019].

²⁵⁹ Colin Kennedy [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship Of The Ring* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2001), *Empire*, 1 January 2001. < <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/lord-rings-fellowship-ring/review/> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

²⁶⁰ Emanuel Levy [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship Of The Ring* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2001), *Screen international*, 5 December 2001. < <https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/the-lord-of-the-rings-the-fellowship-of-the-ring-review/407695.article> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

Bradshaw, who hold a different view from the above, arguing that the female characters were not given any room for development in *The Fellowship of The Ring* and trying to directly define this film as a 'men-only affair'.²⁶¹ The term men-only in Bradshaw's review is perhaps too exasperated, but the meaning behind it merits discussion. The character expansion of Arwen leads her to become part of the love story of another hero in this trilogy, Aragorn. On the one hand, this increases the role of a female character, who is brave enough to save Frodo and offer her help to others. On the other hand, it has to be said that the reason for her character development could also be more reasonably understood as existing as a function to fill into another male character's development. In Bradshaw's comment, the marginalization of Elf-Queen Galadriel and Arwen has not been used to accuse that the film is embarking on the Hollywood convention, even though the film's setting follows the common setting of the genres like buddy films, adventure films, or epic fantasy films.²⁶²

In fact, the changes in narrative or character settings may be evidence of Jackson's creative skill, but they also can be understood as the engagements of Hollywood blockbusters' norm, focusing on buddy relationships and romance. For example, Emily Auger suggested that the 'interlace by cross-cutting is a principal technique' in film, but it was a unique technique in novel writing for Tolkien in order 'to mythologize his narrative and amplify significant events'.²⁶³ As such, it is difficult to argue whether the cross-cutting in *LOTR* films is a choice based on loyalty or just a common formulaic cinematic approach. For the characters, the trilogy considered several characters to be key, such as Frodo and Sam, so they deleted some non-relevant scenes from the original to keep the focus on them. The three films consist of a chain of events and effects around the protagonist Frodo, starting with his new journey and ending with Frodo. However, film reviews' focus is more generally on the comparison between the film and its original, rather than the Hollywood

²⁶¹ Peter Bradshaw [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of The Ring* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2001), *The Guardian*, 14 December 2001. < <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2001/dec/14/lordoftherings1> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Emily E. Auger, 'The Lord of the Rings' interlace: the adaptation to film', *Mythlore*, 30, no. 1/2 (2011), pp.143-162, p.152.

convention. This is also a sign that the emphasis placed on the original novels during the film's promotion, or the attention given to the original novels in the film reviews, has made the reviews less concerned with comparing the film to other Hollywood blockbusters in the same genre. This helps portray Jackson as a franchise author who services the franchise only in terms of Tolkien-related materials, rather than following the Hollywood blockbusters' convention.

Jackson's changes are further commented on as being faithful to Tolkien through interviews with Christopher Lee (Saruman). He is the only member of the cast or crew who had met Tolkien and who had the habit of reading the novel once a year. In *From Book to Script*, Lee comments that those changes to the characters are 'improvements' because 'they are scenes that do have to be seen and they add a lot to it'.²⁶⁴ For being hailed in the media along with Ian Holm, Ian McKellen, and Cate Blanchett as 'typically Tolkienesque', they were easily accepted by the Tolkien fan base.²⁶⁵ Thus, these comments conveyed a sense of authority and authenticity that Lee brings to the adaptation because of his link to Tolkien and his love of the books. Through the *LOTR* trilogy from 2001 to 2003, Jackson's authorial voice was heavily associated with his authority on Tolkien. This may have been a marketing ploy or a purposeful attempt to shape his image. Nevertheless, his image, for either film audiences or Tolkien fans, is not only that of a die-hard Tolkien fan but also someone who can assume the responsibility of adapting excellent films whilst still being faithful to the original. In such a situation, whether he is treated as an author or a *metteur en scène* is no longer the point. Jackson is seen as the author of the *LOTR* trilogy, which means that he is a franchise author limited to this franchise and not an author in the popular sense.

Jackson as the director for the Middle-earth film franchise

Although Jackson's authorial persona is closely linked to his status as a Tolkien fan, the making-of documentaries paint a more complex picture. Through those

²⁶⁴ *From Book to Script*, 2002.

²⁶⁵ Daniel Biltereyst, Ernest Mathijs, and Philippe Meers, 'An Avalanche of Attention: The Prefiguration and Reception of The Lord of the Rings', p.41.

documentaries, Jackson was portrayed as someone who values collaboration but also claims total control of the filmmaking. As Thompson introduced, the *LOTR* trilogy is an independent project consisting of 'the largest independent producing films', so it is 'very likely' that the production process would aim to keep costs down.²⁶⁶ In order to take full control of the production, Jackson chose to film it in New Zealand, and refused to have Zaentz as the producer.²⁶⁷ Having dealt with these external factors, he had the opportunity to develop a clear picture of what he wanted for the *LOTR* trilogy, setting it apart from a standard Hollywood production. Jackson was very clear in the making-of documentary about his attitude on design: 'I didn't want movie design. I didn't want fantasy movie...Hollywood's sort of style of design. I wanted something that felt authentic.'²⁶⁸ Following his instructions, the making of props and costumes was undertaken by contracted craftsmen, such as the artisans for furniture and pipes, or silversmiths. This authenticity is not only reflected in the production of props and costumes, but also in the relationships formed between the actors who resemble their characters. For example, Jackson asked the four actors who play the four hobbits Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin, to live together for two months before shooting to get to know each other.²⁶⁹

Even though the film adaptations simplified the original's huge narrative and complex character relations, they keep the 'sense of the complexity of the original' through the visual and aural design to visualize the fantasy world of Middle-earth.²⁷⁰ In the making-of documentary, Jackson makes this speech to the design crew:

Look, we've been given the job of making *The Lord of the Rings*. But I wanted... from this point on, I want to think that *The Lord of the Rings* is real that it was actually history that these events happened. And more than that, I want us to imagine that we've been lucky enough to be able to go on location and shoot our movie where the real events happened. Those characters did exist, and they wore costumes and I want the costumes to be totally accurate to what the real people wore. Hobbiton still exists. It's overgrown with weeds, and it's been run down and

²⁶⁶ Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*, p75.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p.76.

²⁶⁸ *Designing Middle-earth*, The Appendices, in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* extended edition DVD, New Line Cinema, 2002.

²⁶⁹ *The Fellowship of the Cast*, The Appendices, in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* extended edition DVD, New Line Cinema, 2002.

²⁷⁰ Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise*, p75.

neglected for the last three or four hundred years, but we're gonna go back in there and clean it up. With the luckiest film crew in the world, we were able to shoot in the real locations of these real events actually took place in.²⁷¹

The making-of documentary tries to emphasise that Jackson gets himself involved in every step of the filmmaking process, checking every detail. He participated in various stages of the design, such as the conceptual graphs, drawings and models. Grant Major (Production Designer) introduced a special stamp during the making of the *LOTR*, which is designed to mark out the design works that Jackson has approved.²⁷² The stamp is a star shape with the word "APPROVED" in upper case letters in the centre and the capital letters "P." and "J." in the lower corners of the star (Figure 1); this is a symbol of Jackson's filmmaking control. Additionally, this very visual expression emphasises the importance of Jackson to the trilogy and conveys this message through the making-of documentaries.



Figure 1. The stamp of 'APPROVED' that shows in the documentary *The Fellowship of the Ring - Designing Middle-earth*.

Alex Funke (Miniatures Director of Photography) noted that Jackson 'basically pre-visualized every shot' when preparing for the filming.²⁷³ He was also involved in every shot during the filming process. During the filmmaking of *The Two Towers*, the cast and crew separated into different units to film at the same time. There were follow-up news reports that at least three crew members (John Mahaffie, Rick

²⁷¹ *Designing Middle-earth*, 2002.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ *Storyboards and Pre-Viz*, The Appendices, in *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* extended edition DVD, New Line Cinema, 2002.

Porras, and Christian Rivers) participated in the directing work of the *LOTR* films.²⁷⁴ Eleven years after *The Return of the King* was released in 2014, this report describes them as crew members ‘who had the guts but sidestepped the glory when they stepped up to help Peter Jackson direct his Middle-earth sextet’.²⁷⁵ This situation was initially explained early on in *The Two Towers* EE DVD in 2003. The making-of documentary specifically features the equipment used by the production team that allowed Jackson to synchronise remote monitoring of the filming to demonstrate his absolute control over the filming, thus allowing ‘the picture to have ... unity’.²⁷⁶ However, Jackson’s control shown in the documentary is not intended to emphasise that he is dictatorial or he appropriates the achievements of others for himself. Instead, the content from the making-of documentary, especially from other staff’s interviews, intends to describe Jackson as a director who is full of admirable dedication to his work. The cast and crew members, such as Zane Weiner (Unit Production Manager), Andrew Lesnie (Director of Photography), and John Rhys-Davies (Gimli) also highlighted that Jackson’s humble personality during the filming encouraged the cast and crew, in addition to having created a good creative atmosphere.²⁷⁷ These aspects also become part of Jackson’s authorial identity. Mahaffie, Porras, and Rivers all expressed their praise for Jackson and how they tried to live up to him on set.²⁷⁸ Even Ian McKellen, in his journal/blog, said ‘we are all encouraged to contribute’ even as part of such ‘a large crew and cast’.²⁷⁹ Jackson’s working style of collaborating with his team, as well as his friendly personality, has been shown in nearly every kind of making-of footage.

Jackson has been portrayed as a director who does not like to be limited and prefers to take control of everything himself. However, the documentaries also highlight that he is willing to draw on different talents to achieve his creative goals.

²⁷⁴ Helen O’Hara, and Dan Jolin, *The Secret Peter Jacksons: Who Else Directed Middle-earth*, 2014 <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/secret-peter-jackson-directors/>> [accessed 2 March 2021].

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ *Cameras in Middle-Earth*, The Appendices, in *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* extended edition DVD, New Line Cinema, 2003.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ian McKellen, ‘Blog | 25 January 2000 | Hobbiton; Beard Adjustments’, *Sir Ian McKellen*, 2000 <<https://mckellen.com/cinema/lotr/000125.htm>> [accessed 4 March 2021].

Through more than 28 hours of making-of documentaries, it is clear from the titles of each documentary that they cover every step of the film, from preparation to completion. Given this, numerous people from the production team, not only the department heads or other key persons of the film but also less important people in the filmmaking process, had the opportunity to come forward to the camera to show their work during the filmmaking. In one way, this shows how seriously Tolkien's fantasy world was treated, but they, in fact, correspond to another authorship-related concept, namely collective authorship. Half a century after Truffaut and Bazin discussed the cinematic auteur in terms that exalted the individual vision of the director, the idea of collective authorship emerged, recognising the possibility of multiple 'authors' working together on one film. In 2009, C. Paul Sellors published his book *Film Authorship: Auteurs and Other Myths*, which offers a more detailed analysis of his definition of collective authorship, based on his former article 'Collective Authorship in Film' (2007):

Filmic author = the agent (or agents) who intentionally token(s) a filmic utterance to communicate a meaning. 'To token' refers to any relevant action, an intended function of which is to compose a filmic utterance; a filmic utterance is the material film constituting an expression conveying a meaning; and communicate implies the possibility of an audience capable of understanding such an expression.²⁸⁰

Sellors' definition was influenced by Paisley Livingston's article 'Cinematic Authorship', written in 1997, and offers a revised definition of collective authorship based on Livingston's. The discussion around collective authorship has been developed since then, and mostly has been treated as the antithesis of the personal cult of the director (or film auteur). Theoretically, collective authorship supports that the contribution to the film by many people on the production team, other than the director, also deserves to be recognised. As such, a common understanding of this concept is that the creative process of filmmaking emphasises the creativity of the group's labour and diminishes the importance of the individual position of the director. In Jackson's case, however, the emphasis on collective authorship, or a collective filmmaking process, instead helped him establish his image. Jackson has never appeared to have a problem praising or showing his trust to his production

²⁸⁰ C. Paul Sellors, *Film authorship*, p.110.

team in front of the camera in the making-of documentaries. Furthermore, Jackson recruited people he often worked with, such as Richard Taylor and Dan Hennah, and those who he thought would be needed for the film adaptation, such as the two conceptual designers Alan Lee and John Howe.²⁸¹ Combined with his image of a director who would like to control the whole production process, Jackson's image has been portrayed as a director who can unite all those talents and establish a collective intention for the team to reach collectively. Furthermore, the collective intention in the *LOTR* trilogy is faithfulness to the original novels, in order to build an authentic and believable Middle-earth fantasy world.

In the *Designing Middle-earth* documentary, Jackson tells of how he contacted Alan Lee and shows part of his letter to Lee,²⁸² in which he wrote:

As you can imagine, making this film is an enormous responsibility and I intend to do my utmost to attempt to capture the magic of Tolkien's world.

I am writing in the hope that you would consider being involved as a conceptual design artist. Your visualizations of Middle-earth have been hugely inspiring to me during the development of this project. The gentle beauty and earthy reality of your art portrays the Middle-earth that I would like to create on film.²⁸³

The letter was mailed to Lee with two DVDs of Jackson's films: *Heavenly Creatures* and *Forgotten Silver* (NZ, 1995). Again, the letter shows he thinks very highly of Tolkien's original work, and he considered this faithful adaptation as a responsibility. Moreover, the letter's content, as shown in the documentary, reinforces Jackson's likeable, humble personality. Meanwhile, the cooperative willingness he showed to his team in the documentary does not mean that he would give up his production control to offer them complete creative freedom. Later in the documentary, John Howe described the design process as quite stressful because

²⁸¹ Richard Taylor is the creator Weta Workshop. Other than the six Middle-earth films, he also participated in other films directed by Jackson, such as *The Lovely Bones*, *King Kong*, *The Frighteners*, *Heavenly Creatures*, *Braindead*, and *Meet the Feebles*.

Dan Hennah was a production designer, art director, set decorator. He also worked as the art director in Jackson other films, *King Kong* and *The Frighteners*, other than the six Middle-earth films.

²⁸² *Designing Middle-Earth*, 2002.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

Jackson is 'able to make you feel you weren't quite there yet'.²⁸⁴ Howe praised Jackson for having pushed the design work much further. Jeremy Bennett (Visual Effects Art Director) agreed with Howe and admired Jackson, saying he's 'got a very good eye'.²⁸⁵ Such compliments from designers and artists in the production team highlight Jackson as an effective team leader who knows what he wants and sticks to it.

Combined with the loyal fan identity that characterized the previous script's adaptation process, Jackson was portrayed as a more three-dimensional figure during the filming stage, via the making-of documentaries. Jackson's authorial voice is based on his image as someone who keeps a good balance between control and cooperative willingness, which helps build him to a likeable figure. Dyer suggests that star biographies represent the 'rhetoric of sincerity or authenticity' that shows the real-life or even private life of a star.²⁸⁶ In this case, those making-of documentaries help to show Jackson's working style in a similar way. The collective authorship of Sellors emphasises the opportunity for everyone who participated in the filmmaking progress to contribute to the filmic utterance intentionally. The concept of collective authorship in Sellors' suggestion is to highlight the notion that the contribution comes from a group of people who participated the production of the film. In Jackson's case, this idea of collective authorship has been proved; however, it is being used in another way to portray Jackson's persona as a director who would like to accept others' contributions. Sellors' definition of collective authorship claims that there is no need for an agreement of all the members; instead, it emphasises that the 'collaborative agreement takes priority over individual preferences'.²⁸⁷ For Jackson, his collaborative willingness portrayed through his likeable and friendly personality helps emphasise that he is a director willing to create a collaborative atmosphere for all the cast and crew during the filmmaking. Therefore, instead of weakening his personal style, the concept of collective authorship helped Jackson establish his authorial voice and authority as a director,

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies Film Stars and Society*, p.11.

²⁸⁷ C. Paul. Sellors, *Film authorship*, p.125.

beyond the identity of a faithful Tolkien fan director. This friendly authority has also earned him a reputation with fans, both of Tolkien's books and Jackson's own Middle-earth films.

Jackson's authorial identity is further reflected in his respectful relationship with fans of the novels and films, for example, the Figwit phenomenon.²⁸⁸ Fans were captivated by one of the anonymous supporting characters from The Council of Elrond scene in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, and much discussion among fans began. As a response to the fans, Figwit was developed into a character in the trilogy's last film *The Return of the King*, and his role continues in *The Hobbit* trilogy. According to Jackson, this character was developed 'for the fans', and kept the name Figwit.²⁸⁹ Scholars like Dimitra Fimi suggested that Jackson succeeded in 'acknowledging the importance of fans right from the beginning' and that communicating with fans through the Internet was a 'revolutionary thing'.²⁹⁰ By studying the *LOTR* online fandom, Kirsten Pullen also pointed out that this kind of acknowledgement and communication is built on 'fans' desire for information' and 'their desire to be the most authoritative source for that information'.²⁹¹ The friendly communication of Jackson with the fan base is integral to his image, which is also one of the functions the franchise author needs to have. As Pullen described, 'the affectionately dubbed 'Hobbit of Hollywood' seems more approachable than other blockbuster directors like James Cameron, George Lucas, or Jerry Bruckheimer'.²⁹²

It is safe to say Jackson has successfully built a friendly relationship with the many Tolkien fan groups. Meanwhile, the establishment of Figwit is a sign that the film trilogy has established its own film fan base. Jackson's communication with them has also evolved from the initial communication with book fans, especially

²⁸⁸ Figwit was an unnamed elf in *The Fellowship of the Ring* and got attention from the fans. The name "Figwit" stands for "Frodo is grea...who is THAT?!?".

²⁸⁹ Dimitra Fimi, 'Filming Folklore: Adapting Fantasy for the Big Screen through Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings*', in Janice M. Bogstad and Philip E. Kaveny (eds.), *Picturing Tolkien: Essays on Peter Jackson's The Lord of the Rings Film Trilogy* (Jefferson, North Carolina, and London: McFarland & Company, 2011), pp.84-101, p.96.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, p.97.

²⁹¹ Kirsten Pullen, 'The Lord of the Rings online blockbuster fandom: Pleasure and commerce', in Ernest Mathijs (ed), *The Lord of the Rings: Popular Culture in a Global Context* (London and New York: Wallflower, 2006), pp.172-188, p.179.

²⁹² Ibid, p.185.

during the pre-production of the *LOTR* trilogy, to a diversified communication with different fan groups, including the Middle-earth film fans. They are also the primary audience group that is most likely to buy EE DVD for the extras, such that this becomes one part of the circular business within the film franchise. The extras in EE DVD not only meet viewers' needs for this particular film but also lead them to the next one. The first two EE DVDs were released almost one month before the release of the next film. With the success of the *LOTR* trilogy, Jackson has become an important figure within Hollywood and New Zealand cinema.

Jackson as star-director

Following the success of the *LOTR* trilogy, Jackson became an influential filmmaker, and this was cemented in the events of a lawsuit brought by Jackson and his wife and co-writer, Fran Walsh. In 2005, they sued New Line because they believed they had been underpaid by millions.²⁹³ Jackson's suit alleged that 'New Line committed fraud in its handling of revenues' from *The Fellowship of the Ring* in 2001.²⁹⁴ Because of the lawsuit between Jackson and New Line Cinema, on 19 November 2006, Jackson wrote a letter to TheOneRing.net and its fans to explain the lawsuit and the difficulty for the cooperation again with New Line Cinema on *The Hobbit*.²⁹⁵ Only two days after the letter was published online, TheOneRing.net posted another article encouraging fans to support Jackson.²⁹⁶ In January 2007, the founder of New Line Cinema, Robert Shaye, claimed that as long as he was still running the company, Jackson would never direct *The Hobbit*.²⁹⁷ However, MGM, which shares the film rights, had a different opinion.²⁹⁸ Rick Sands, the Chief

²⁹³ Ross Johnson, *The Lawsuit of the Rings*, 2005 < <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/06/27/business/media/the-lawsuit-of-the-rings.html> > [accessed 5 March 2020].

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Xoanon, *Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh Talk THE HOBBIT*, 2006 < <http://www.theonering.net/torwp/2006/11/19/24053-peter-jackson-and-fran-walsh-talk-the-hobbit-2/> > [accessed 1 April 2021].

²⁹⁶ Celeborn, *TheOneRing.net Encourages your reaction to Peter's Letter about The Hobbit*, 2006 < <https://www.theonering.net/torwp/2006/11/21/24052-theoneringnet-encourages-your-reaction-to-peters-letter-about-the-hobbit/> > [accessed 1 April 2021].

²⁹⁷ Nicole Laporte and Dave McNary, *Shaye denies Jackson 'Hobbit' gig: New Line topper says director not welcome*, 2007 < <https://variety.com/2007/film/markets-festivals/shaye-denies-jackson-hobbit-gig-2-1117957128/> > [accessed 5 August 2019].

²⁹⁸ Pamela McClintock, *'Bones' up for bidding: Jackson searches for studio deal*, 2007

Operating Officer of MGM at that time, wrote to fans through TheOneRing.net stating that MGM was willing to work with Jackson.²⁹⁹ Then, in August 2007, Shaye changed his attitude, mainly because New Line's business had seen a 'horrific slump'. Shay stated 'I really respect and admire Peter and would love for him to be creatively involved in some way in *The Hobbit*'.³⁰⁰ At the end of that year, Jackson's manager, Ken Kamins, said Jackson and Walsh would be the executive producers of the film but 'will share with New Line the right to approve all creative elements' to make sure the films can get the 'same level of quality as if they were writing and directing'.³⁰¹ The promise to the public about Jackson, as well as his team, taking charge of the artistic creation was one way of promoting the work as Jackson's. Additionally, this strategy links *The Hobbit* to Jackson's style that had been so successful in the first trilogy of the franchise. Furthermore, this statement helped emphasise the importance of Jackson's signature as a director.

However, what deserves further discussion here is whether the selling point is solely Jackson's film style or something else. Jackson had built his reputation as a director of awards' accolades, as well as fan support. As such, he can be categorised as one of the star-directors or celebrity auteurs so his name can be easily used on promoting his films. Carolyn Michelle, Charles H. Davis, and Ann L. Hardy, focus on the attitude of audiences, especially fans, to the blockbuster films that have a famous cultural property by using the reception study of *The Hobbit* and its worldwide audiences.³⁰² They note that more than half (51.6% of 1000 respondents) of the potential audience was looking forward to *The Hobbit* films before *An Unexpected Journey* (2012) was released, since they are fans of *The LOTR* films.³⁰³ According to the answers from the interviewees, the statements from this significant

<<https://variety.com/2007/film/markets-festivals/bones-up-for-bidding-1117964049/>> [accessed 1 April 2021].

²⁹⁹ Nicole LaPorte, *A tough 'Hobbit' to start: Jackson has other plans before turning to 'Rings' prequel*, 2006 <<https://variety.com/2006/film/news/a-tough-hobbit-to-start-1117951865/>> [accessed 1 April 2021].

³⁰⁰ Patrick Goldstein, 'A midlife crisis at New Line', *The Independent*, 10 August 2007, p.E-1.

³⁰¹ David M. Halbfinger, 'Master Of 'Rings' to Tackle 'Hobbit'', *The New York Times*, 19 December 2007, p.E-1.

³⁰² Carolyn Michelle, Charles H. Davis, and Ann L. Hardy, *Fans, Blockbusterisation, and the Transformation of Cinematic Desire*.

³⁰³ Ibid, pp.61-63.

group of respondents showed strong confidence in Jackson.³⁰⁴ It is worth noting that this study naturally equates the *LOTR* trilogy fans with Jackson fans, so that the *LOTR* fans' confidence in Jackson adapting another Tolkien novel becomes equal to their confidence in Jackson's filmmaking style. According to the response from audiences and fans, the importance of the context of a film franchise has appeared in the establishment of Jackson's authorial status.

Although Jackson's role is cited as a reason why audiences wanted to see *The Hobbit*, according to the worldwide reception study across 2003 and 2004, Jackson's name was not the reason for the audience to go to the cinema for *The Return of the King*.³⁰⁵ The project of exploring audience responses to *The Return of the King* involved 24,739 people worldwide completing the questionnaire.³⁰⁶ In response to this question of 'what was the main source of your expectations?', 59.6% of respondents answered 'the books', whilst 32.8% voted for 'the first two parts of the film'.³⁰⁷ Unlike the research on *The Hobbit*, this study set a separate option for going to see the film 'because of the director', and only 1.5% of respondents said that their expectations originated from the director.³⁰⁸ Comparing these responses, there is an interesting result that even though Jackson directed the first two parts of the trilogy, he was not the main reason for audiences to go and see the last one. Within the film franchise, when equating expectations of the film with expectations of the director, the latter invariably gains reputation from it. As such, Jackson is not a typical star-director or celebrity auteur like Spielberg, who has box office power based on his own name. Jackson's authorial voice has a limitation in that building his reputation via the *LOTR* trilogy's success, Jackson's authorial voice is isolated and identified within the Middle-earth franchise. Comparing him to others, such as Spielberg, whose name is the guarantee of the film's quality, Jackson's name is more like a guarantee of the Tolkien adaptation's quality.

³⁰⁴ Ibid, pp.62-63.

³⁰⁵ Martin Barker, Kate Egan, Stan Jones, and Ernest Mathijs, 'Researching The Lord of the Rings: Audiences and Contexts', in Martin Barker and Ernest Mathijs (eds), *Watching the Lord of the Rings: Tolkien's world audiences* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2008), pp.1-20.

³⁰⁶ *Watching the Lord of the Rings: Tolkien's world audiences*, p.x.

³⁰⁷ The Appendix: The World Data Set in Martin Barker and Ernest Mathijs (eds), *Watching the Lord of the Rings: Tolkien's world audiences* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2008), p.242.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

At a micro level, Jackson's authorial voice was established through the long-term, close relationship between Jackson and the film franchise. Through the *LOTR* trilogy, Jackson's image can be summarised as three key points: a loyal Tolkien fan, a good communicator with audiences, and a director who cherishes talent and treats his cast and crew with humility. Of course, one cannot ignore that he also received several accolades for his directing ability via the *LOTR* trilogy, which may have helped to add a successful director identity to him. However, his film style is not a widely discussed topic. Some critical reviews track back to Jackson's early career to find similarities between the *LOTR* trilogy and his former films. For example, in *The New York Times*' three reviews for each film of the trilogy, Elvis Mitchell mentioned in every review that Jackson has the talent to combine humour with horror in this trilogy just as he has done in his former films.³⁰⁹ Alan Morrison's review of *The Return of the King* for *Empire* said that the film's visual style could be traced back to 'Jackson's roots as a horror filmmaker'.³¹⁰ However, compared to his likeable-Tolkien-fan-director persona, his film style is not the primary factor that contributed to his star-director status. With this status, recognised by the Tolkien fan base, Jackson became the first choice for viewers who wanted to ensure *The Hobbit* could achieve the same success as the *LOTR* trilogy.

The process by which Jackson became a star-director fits well with the process Dyer proposes for shaping film stars. With film (acting) stars, there are two key qualities for them: 'the star really means what he or she says', and 'the star really is what she or he appears to be'.³¹¹ This is not really 'real', it is performative and often carefully managed for the promotion of a star's image. These 'real' personalities of acting stars, recognized by audiences, are inherited from their on-screen characters

³⁰⁹ Elvis Mitchell [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of The Ring* [film].

Elvis Mitchell [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2002), *The New York Times*, 18 December 2002, Section E; Column 4; The Arts/Cultural Desk; p.1.

Elvis Mitchell [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Return of The King* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2003), *The New York Times*, 16 December 2003, Section E; Column 1; The Arts/Cultural Desk; p.1.

³¹⁰ Alan Morrison [review], *Lord of The Rings: The Return of The King* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2003), *Empire*, 1 January 2001. < <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/lord-rings-return-king/review/> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

³¹¹ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies Film Stars and Society*, p.11.

and continue in their off-screen lives. As such, stars' high exposure and the 'continuousness' in their roles lets them maintain what they look like or what they need to be.³¹² For example, Dyer claims that male stars, such as Clark Gable and Paul Newman, were highlighted playing sports like polo, sailing, racing so that they could continue their gentlemanly image from their films.³¹³ In Jackson's case, the long-term and coherent nature of the Middle-earth film franchise provides the opportunity to highlight and repeat his image. The on-screen image of Jackson is based on the making-of documentaries, which could also be considered a way of presenting his personal image. More importantly, his private image is limited to related to the franchise rather than being primarily aimed at establishing his image as an individual director. Therefore, both the on-screen and off-screen images of him were initially built to serve the purpose of selling the films, which the image that set him as a franchise author rather than a film author. As a result, he has ostensibly received similar attention to other celebrity auteurs, but unlike them, the attention has not been based on praise for his directorial abilities. This journey of Jackson's star-director status has bypassed the discussion of his auteurism, since he became a star-director spawned by the context of the film franchise.

At a macro level, this authorial voice's unique establishment is influenced by the contemporary film marketplace. Since the 1960s, the market has changed as the trend towards conglomeration within Hollywood has evolved. Studios in New Hollywood started to seek the 'calculated blockbuster designed with the multimedia marketplace and franchise status in mind'.³¹⁴ Schatz described Shaye as having staked the future of New Line on 'an untried three-film franchise' and 'the talents of a relatively obscure independent filmmaker working halfway around the world'.³¹⁵ The *LOTR* trilogy was a success and Jackson was transformed into an award-winning world-famous filmmaker from having been an obscure independent director. Whether or not the process by which he became a star-director was as distinctive as argued above in this thesis, his commercial value has been tied up with this film

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Thomas Schatz, 'The New Hollywood', p.35.

³¹⁵ Thomas Schatz, 'New Hollywood, New Millennium', in Warren Buckland (eds), *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp.19-46, p.38.

franchise. Given his commercial value as a star-director, *The Hobbit* promotions tend to confirm to audiences that even if Jackson had not directed the film, it would have been of the same quality as his.³¹⁶ Such marketing strategies have portrayed Jackson as a 'name-brand franchise auteur' even though his *King Kong* film was not a success.³¹⁷

The status of the star-director is integral to marketing in contemporary cinema. Schatz suggested several rules for 'governing the creation and marketing' of contemporary Hollywood in his other book chapter 'New Hollywood, New Millennium'.³¹⁸ One of these rules is the 'filmmaking talent', 'particularly directors with indie-film credentials', who share the function as film stars, that can secure the success of a franchise and can be used for the marketing process.³¹⁹ Similarly, Justin Wyatt argues that the 'linkage of a star's persona with a concept' improves marketability for a high concept film, although the star in his context is mainly the actors/actress.³²⁰ In *The Hobbit*, Jackson's status as a star-director directly links to the Middle-earth film franchise, which can offer a guaranteed marketable factor for the film. In this instance, Jackson's commercial value is, to some extent, limited to the context of this franchise. This means Jackson's authorial status within the Middle-earth franchise offers commercial value for its future films but has less connection to the artistic value that is normally explored for the film author.

Schatz believes that Warner Bros, who merged with New Line Cinema in 2008 and took over *The Hobbit* project, planned to have 'more individualistic, innovative directors to enhance the style and complexity of its signature franchise' as was seen within Jackson and the *LOTR* trilogy.³²¹ *The Dark Knight* Trilogy was directed by Christopher Nolan and they appointed Alfonso Cuarón, Mike Newell, and David

³¹⁶ At the early stage of pre-production of *The Hobbit*, Jackson was not appointed as the director of the film. When the studio claimed the Jackson would not be the director of the new Middle-Earth film, *The Hobbit*'s firstly rumoured that the director will become Sam Raimi (*Evil Dead* series (1981-1992), *Spider-Man* trilogy (2002-07)) at first, and then turned out to be Guillermo del Toro.

³¹⁷ Thomas Schatz, 'New Hollywood, New Millennium', p.39.

³¹⁸ Ibid, p.32.

³¹⁹ Ibid, p.33.

³²⁰ Justin Wyatt, *High Concept Movies and Marketing in Hollywood* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), P.10.

³²¹ Thomas Schatz, 'New Hollywood, New Millennium', p.41.

Yates to direct the *Harry Potter* films after Chris Columbus.³²² Accordingly, these directors were chosen by the studios because they have the potential to be, or already are, directors who have their personal style or authorial voice. Or, they can be or already are star-directors, which could then be transformed into industry-friendly commercial value. This implies that the commercial use of the idea of the auteur has led to a post-auteur age closely related to the film market and industry. Leaving aside the title of auteur, Jackson's name was used as part of its promotional strategy when *The Hobbit* project started. However, without auteurist credentials to fall back on, star status and authorial identity were challenged by *The Hobbit* trilogy.

Maintaining Jackson's authorial image within *The Hobbit*

Following the promotional model by *LOTR*, its prequel trilogy, *The Hobbit*, continued promoting Jackson's image that had been set up during the *LOTR* period. Once again, his strengths on the Internet were utilised effectively. During the production period of *The Hobbit* trilogy, Jackson created a YouTube channel to post a series of vlogs about the filmmaking story among this trilogy's pre-production, production and post-production.³²³ *The Hobbit: Production Diary* vlog series contains fourteen videos released between May 2012 to December 2013.³²⁴ Different from *The Lord of the Rings* documentaries, which were more like a formal interview with Jackson explaining the films' details from his perspective as a director, Jackson appears in front of the camera in *The Hobbit* era in a more lifelike state. This trait is also present throughout the later EE DVD releases.

The EE DVDs of *The Hobbit* trilogy have a similar structure to the *LOTR* trilogy, which has two discs of the extended films and two discs of the making-of documentaries. The titles of the making-of documentary discs are a continuation of the previous numbering, starting with *The Appendices: Part Seven*. However, this

³²² Ibid.

³²³ The YouTube account's link is <https://www.youtube.com/user/pjacksonwingnutfilms>. Although there are four trailers of *King Kong*, *District 9*, and another documentary *West of Memphis* (NZ/USA, dir. Amy J. Berg, 2012) produced by Jackson, most of the videos in this channel are *The Hobbit* related. It was last updated in late 2015

³²⁴ Jackson also posts them on his Facebook page. The production diaries that mentioned in this thesis are all *The Hobbit Production Diary*.

time there is no separate documentary about Tolkien or the adaptation process. Instead, relevant content is only mentioned in different documentaries. For example, in *The Company of Thorin Documentary* from *An Unexpected Journey*, when Jackson introduced the character, he and another screenwriter, Boyens, mentioned that not every one of the thirteen dwarves in Tolkien's book is described in great detail in terms of character traits, so they had to develop those character by themselves. In contrast to their previous cautious attitude about making changes during the *LOTR* era, by this time they were able to confidently offer explanations of the changes in the adaptations. During the *LOTR* trilogy period, the filmmakers had to explain their loyalty to the original to earn the Tolkien fans' trust. However, with *The Hobbit*, as Jackson had already been a recognised Tolkien fan, he had more scope to develop other aspects of his authorial images, such as that of a humble filmmaker.

At the beginning of the first video posted on Jackson's YouTube channel, *Production Diary 1*, Jackson walks towards the camera and offers an introduction to the video, then he put on the 3D glasses and jokes to the camera 'oh, you're in 3D'.³²⁵ This relaxed atmosphere continues in the rest of the vlog series. In the first video, the camera follows Jackson through the set and to the lead-up meeting with the artistic team. The camera follows him directing, as well as having a conversation with cast and crew on set, or sitting behind the monitor. Rather than documenting the film production process in chronological order, the videos are planned and arranged by theme. These videos are light-hearted with the selected background music, filmic editing, and even some special effects made specifically for these videos. There are also performances from the cast and crew to make these behind-the-scenes moments more interesting. For example, in *Production Diary 2*, Jackson and Serkis are seen sitting at Bilbo Baggins' writing desk talking about location scouting in New Zealand. At the beginning of *Production Diary 3*, Jackson is still sitting at the same set talking about Serkis as the second unit director, before suddenly realising that Serkis is no longer sitting with him, then he pretends to panic having found out they have changed their location from Stone Street Studios, Wellington to Pinewood

³²⁵ Peter Jackson, *The Hobbit, Production Diary 1*, 2012 < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwYQcKK0lsg&t=13s>>[accessed 12 August 2019].

Studios, England. They even used a relevant style of soundtrack for this part, to set the mood of suspense and horror, with Jackson's performance here making the video diary lively.

The production diaries of *The Hobbit* trilogy have the same producer/director as the extras from EE DVDs, Michael Pellerin.³²⁶ He also produced and directed *King Kong's* (2005) *Production Diaries* for Jackson.³²⁷ Given the regular and steady collaboration between Jackson and Pellerin, it is reasonable to presume that the style of these videos was approved or even suggested by Jackson. On the one hand, these videos help to promote *The Hobbit* trilogy ahead of film is release. On the other hand, the style of these videos contributes to the harmonious and fun atmosphere of the production process and, most importantly, promotes Jackson's humble and fun personality.

In *Edge of the Wilderland Documentary* from *An Unexpected Journey* EE DVD, a large part of the footage is used to portray Jackson as someone with a very likeable personality. It shows him having fun on the set with other people, playing with the props on the set, and playing pranks on set. Also, it has other cast and crew, such as Christian Rivers (Splinter Unit Supervisor), James Nesbitt (Bofur), and Martin Freeman (Bilbo), who described Jackson on camera as 'a twelve-year-old with a beard'.³²⁸ Similar footage has appeared many times and makes for an interesting comparison with the *LOTR* trilogy DVDs. It can be concluded that the key point from the *LOTR* trilogy's making-of documentary is to emphasise the relationship between Jackson and Tolkien, whilst when it came to *The Hobbit*, the key point changed to highlighting Jackson's likeable personality. Other people's comments about Jackson, which appear in these documentaries, also changed from focusing on the fact that he always had the original books in his hands, to describing that he is fun on set.

³²⁶ According to IMDB, Jackson is the producer of *The Lord of the Rings - The Appendices Part 1: From Book to Vision*. Other making-of documentaries and production dairies are all produced and directed by Pellerin.

IMDB, 'The Lord of the Rings - The Appendices Part 1: From Book to Vision', in IMDB <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt9810488/?ref_=nm_flmg_prd_18> [accessed 14 August 2019]

³²⁷ IMDB, 'Michael Pellerin', in IMDB <<http://literature.proquest.com/>> [accessed 14 August 2019].

³²⁸ *Edge of the Wilderland Documentary*, The Appendices: Part Seven - A Long-Expected Journey: The Chronicles of The Hobbit - Part 1, in *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* extended edition DVD, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2013.

Jackson's ability to maintain a good relationship with fans is also retained in *The Hobbit* trilogy's marketing. The beginning of *Production Diary 8* recorded the cast's journey to the San Diego Comic-Con (SDCC), and it contained an excerpt of a fan's speech from the panel of *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* saying: 'I love you guys. I came all the way from Brazil just because of you. I spent all my money on this trip, but it was worth it'.³²⁹ *Production Diary 10* is recorded on the premiere day of *An Unexpected Journey*. In a shot of Jackson's car passing by fans, who are waiting outside the theatre for hours, he says directly to the camera how grateful he feels for the fans.³³⁰ This vlog also shows that Jackson and other cast members joined the party organized by the Tolkien fan site, TheOneRing.net.³³¹ In this part, the vlog contains part of Jackson's speech on stage, particularly when he thanks fans for their support, as well as the fans saying 'THANK YOU' back to him.³³² All this footage conveys and enhances the idea of the importance and popularity of Jackson for both Tolkien fans and *LOTR* trilogy fans.

The Hobbit vlogs also emphasise Jackson as a humble director, who supports his cast and crew. Serkis praised Jackson as 'one of the most collaborative directors' and this is seen in *The Hobbit* videos.³³³ In the first *Production Diary*, when they start to shoot, Jackson makes a speech to the cast and crew:

For a long time, I thought that coming back to the amazing experience of *Lord of The Rings* wouldn't be a good idea, but now I've come completely around because films are stressful and they're hard to make; but ultimately what makes them fun is the people that you work with and the fact that we're going to be working with a lot of the old gang, a lot of friends and obviously making some new friends is really the point of being here. So, I'm extremely thrilled.³³⁴

Furthermore, much like Jackson's insistence that Alan Lee join the *LOTR* production team, Jackson made the decision to change the whole filming schedule

³²⁹ Peter Jackson, *THE HOBBIT: AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY, Production Diary 8*, 2012 <<https://youtu.be/cTUQi8HBlg4>> [accessed 12 August 2019].

³³⁰ Peter Jackson, *THE HOBBIT: AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY, Production Diary 10*, 2012 <<https://youtu.be/OtCOQMfNaLQ>> [accessed 12 August 2019].

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Anne Mavity, *The Hobbit Cast Interview - Ian McKellen, Martin Freeman, Richard Armitage and Andy Serkis*, 2014 <<https://youtu.be/QLFqgBe0E1M>> [accessed 12 April 2021].

³³⁴ Peter Jackson, *THE HOBBIT, Production Diary 1*, 2012 <<https://youtu.be/DwYQcKK0Isq>> [accessed 12 August 2019].

to fit with Freeman's shooting schedule to make sure he was on board in the role of Bilbo.³³⁵ Again, this highlights Jackson's image as a director who is good at collaboration and insists on cooperating with the talented people he believed were the right choice for the film. He did more than just say that, he showed how much he valued and respected them through those production diaries and the making-of documentaries. An example was when one of the production team, Ben Milsom (On Set Art Director), told a story in the making-of documentary about his eight team members having to rebuild a set in a short time, and that everyone on the set from different departments came to help.³³⁶ There is a montage interspersed with images of their daily jobs and their on-the-spot helping, in addition to subtitles giving their name and which department each crew member belongs to.³³⁷ Even though Jackson does not appear in this scene, this footage still helps to portray his persona as a director who places great value on teamwork. There is, therefore, a continuity through both trilogies which is used to underpin who Peter Jackson 'really' is. His image becomes real, or manufactured as 'authentic' for the public. He is a humble director who holds his own opinion on filmmaking but still values collaboration during the filmmaking process, and most importantly, is able to maintain good relationships with his fans.

Same Identity, Different Result

Jackson maintained the same likeable authorial image from the *LOTR* era to *The Hobbit* era. However, his numerous changes from Tolkien's original novel in this latter trilogy seem to undermine the Tolkien authority he has always maintained. According to Michelle's reception study of *The Desolation of Smaug*, even though the data shows that more than half of interviewees still supported Jackson and his film, there are also more than a quarter of interviewees, representing the 'Tolkien

³³⁵ *Mr. Baggins: The 14th Member*, The Appendices: Part Seven - A Long-Expected Journey: The Chronicles of The Hobbit - Part 1, in *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* extended edition DVD, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2013.

³³⁶ *Roast Mutton*, The Appendices: Part Seven - A Long-Expected Journey: The Chronicles of The Hobbit - Part 1, in *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* extended edition DVD, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2013.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

Aficionados', who criticized this film's new characters and storylines that are different from the original novel.³³⁸ Comparing this to the data from *An Unexpected Journey*, Jackson's support declined, with the main reason being that he drifted from the original text. This is an important sign that Jackson's authorial voice is actually unstable and relies on his connection to Tolkien to a great extent. Furthermore, this suggested that the director's further creative works can challenge the authorial voice or star-director status, which was established based on the commercial value, relying on the context of film franchise.

A large part of the making-of documentaries of *The Hobbit* also tries to emphasise Jackson's creative intentions, rather than his personal character traits. *The Journey Back to Middle-earth Documentary* introduced the process of changing the director from Guillermo del Toro to Jackson. Originally, Jackson was not on board as the director of this trilogy, so del Toro determined much of the design work before he left.³³⁹ 'I looked at those designs and I thought this would be an amazing Guillermo del Toro film', said Jackson in the documentary, 'but I can't do that. I can't just step in and simulate another filmmaker'.³⁴⁰ As a result, the pre-production of *The Hobbit* moved to a re-design process, because 'Peter is a director with his own version' according to Richard Taylor (Weta Workshop Creative Director).³⁴¹ Although the making-of documentaries from both the *LOTR* era and *The Hobbit* era highlighted that Jackson holds strong personal opinions, the real discussion around his film style was brief and vague. However, film critics and scholars tried to explore his film style in more detail. In Harmony H. Wu's study on cult movie fandom, she suggested that Jackson's experience on cult film production provided him the ability to break through the limitation of Hollywood norms and to earn success for the *LOTR* trilogy.³⁴² As with the *LOTR* trilogy film reviews that tried to connect the *LOTR* films

³³⁸ Carolyn Michelle, Charles H. Davis, and Ann L. Hardy, *Fans, Blockbusterisation, and the Transformation of Cinematic Desire*, pp.134-140.

³³⁹ *The Journey Back to Middle-earth*, The Appendices: Part Seven - A Long-Expected Journey: The Chronicles of The Hobbit - Part 1, in *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* extended edition DVD, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2013.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Harmony H. Wu, 'Trading in horror, cult and matricide: Peter Jackson's phenomenal bad taste and New Zealand fantasies of inter/national cinematic success', in Mark Jancovich, Antonio Lazaro Reboll, and Julian Stringer (eds), *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste*

to Jackson's early career of horror films, reviews for *The Hobbit* films also endeavoured to do this. Bradshaw describes *The Hobbit* trilogy as having a 'Jackson-Tolkien-rococo style'.³⁴³ Justin Chang believes that there is a sense of 'giddy B-movie exuberance' in the scene where Bilbo and dwarfs escape from Mirkwood in *The Desolation of Smaug* and he describes it as 'vintage Jackson'.³⁴⁴ William Thomas defined this as 'Jacksonian Grace Notes' with the film full of Jackson's old cult-horror style, such as the Goblin Town plot.³⁴⁵

When some film reviews have attempted to find Jackson's personal style in the Middle-earth films, some Tolkien scholars explored the similarities between Jackson's horror interests and the horror elements from Tolkien's novel. D.R. Hall recalled Jackson's earlier horror film history and proposed an analysis of how Jackson's 'obsessive love of the grotesque' fits into Tolkien's fantasy films and shapes them as horror films.³⁴⁶ Hall pointed out the horror elements, such as the inanimate inhuman creatures, in the original book, that have been extended in the film and analysed details, such as the use of close-ups, to create an atmosphere of terror.³⁴⁷ Furthermore, Hall suggested that Jackson applied his horror interests in the film, and there are some elements from Tolkien's book that are suitable for horror, such as crossing 'the border of inanimate and animate'.³⁴⁸ Similarly, another Tolkien scholar, Allison Harl, recognises that Jackson successfully filmed the original book's horror elements in his adaptations.³⁴⁹ Harl's study focused on the monsters in the book, such as The Watcher in the Water, Shelob, and Sauron, and how Jackson portrayed them in the film. Harl suggested that one of the key elements that the

(Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp.84-108.

³⁴³ Peter Bradshaw [review], *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2013), *The Guardian*.

³⁴⁴ Justin Chang [review], *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2013), *Variety*, 6 December 2013. < <https://variety.com/2013/film/reviews/the-hobbit-the-desolation-of-smaug-review-1200919206/> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

³⁴⁵ William Thomas [review], *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2012), *Empire*, 1 January 2012. < <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/hobbit-unexpected-journey/review/> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

³⁴⁶ R. D. Hall, 'Through a Dark Lens: Jackson's "Lord of the Rings" as Abject Horror', *Mythlore*, 25, no. 3/4 (97/98) (2007), pp.55-59, p.55.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid, p.58.

³⁴⁹ Allison Harl, 'The Monstrosity of the Gaze: Critical Problems with a Film Adaptation of The Lord of the Rings', *Mythlore*, 25, no. 3/4 (97/98) (2007), pp.61-69.

monsters in Tolkien's book have in common is they are evil 'watcher[s]' that try to control the 'victims through the power of the visual gaze'.³⁵⁰ In achieving this, Jackson placed the camera at the monster's viewpoint, so the audiences were 'in the position of a voyeuristic, ubiquitous watcher'.³⁵¹

Another focus of scholars and critics on his film style has been his keen interest and creativity in film technique. Harl argued that as a master of filmic technique, Jackson's 'innovative cinematography' and 'ground-breaking' CGI encourage the 'viewer's imagination with highly stimulating effects'.³⁵² Sophie Mayer comments that his passion for special effects and technology follows 'Méliès model of cinema as a realisation of our fantasies', just as Jackson has done in his other films *Forgotten Silver* and *Heavenly Creatures*.³⁵³ Mayer also believes that the collaboration between technology and artistic expression is the 'epic language' that Jackson has developed for the *LOTR*.³⁵⁴ One of the hallmarks of *The Lord of the Rings* documentaries that remains in this trilogy is the focus on special effects and new technologies. *The Hobbit* trilogy was only nominated for six technology-related Academy Awards and won a non-competitive Sci-Tech Award.³⁵⁵ Also, through the behind-the-scenes videos and reports, Jackson's obsession with special effects has become a mark of him.

However, these personal filmmaking interests that have been discussed from the *LOTR* trilogy to *The Hobbit* trilogy have not brought Jackson the same success within *The Hobbit* trilogy. Some critics believe that *The Hobbit* novel does not have enough story to support a trilogy's length and the only reason Jackson and Warner Bros. did this is for abundant profits. Peter Debruge, in his review of *An Unexpected Journey*, describes this as a 'frustrating trend' for film franchise alongside the final

³⁵⁰ Ibid, p.61.

³⁵¹ Ibid, p.66.

³⁵² Allison Harl, 'The Monstrosity of the Gaze', p.66.

³⁵³ Sophie Mayer [review], *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2013), *Sight & Sound*, February 2014, Vol. 24 Issue 2, p80-81, p.80.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ *An Unexpected Journey* was nominated for Makeup and Hairstyling, Production Design, Visual Effects and Sci-Tech Award. The only award they won is Sci-Tech Award, which is a non-competitive award. *The Desolation of Smaug* was nominated for Sound Editing, Sound Mixing, and Visual Effects with no wins. *The Battle of the Five Armies* only nominated for Sound Editing.

book with *Harry Potter* and *The Twilight Saga*.³⁵⁶ Robbie Collin points out that these are ‘incredibly long films’ aiming for ‘vastly inflated box office revenues at the small cost of artistic worth and entertainment’.³⁵⁷ As shown by the data on Rotten Tomatoes (see Table 1.1), the feedback from critics on the *LOTR* trilogy and *The Hobbit* trilogy differed substantially, while audience scores were relatively close. From this, it can be inferred from the data, and the awards’ record, that Jackson’s authorial voice, praised during the *LOTR* era, has not been stable because neither the critics nor the industry provided similar feedback for *The Hobbit* films. For the audience, based on the ratings of the six Middle-earth films, it can be concluded that the director has his own steady appeal in terms of audience or fan base. However, this hypothesis can be easily challenged through the two audience scores for Jackson’s other two films between the *LOTR* and *The Hobbit*, 50% for *King Kong* and 52% for *The Lovely Bones*.³⁵⁸ Comparing the audience score for the Middle-earth film and Jackson’s other two feature films, especially *King Kong* which shares a similar production scale, it could be suggested that the reliance on the Middle-earth franchise for the transformation of Jackson’s authorial voice into the commercial value is strong. Although this case study analyses Jackson’s unusual road to becoming a star-director, this is not to deny his directing style or ability. Jackson is an individualistic director, but the main argument that emerges from this case study is that the attribute of creativity is not the main path through which Jackson achieves the title of star-director. As a result, his authorial voice is neither clear nor strong enough to support his star-director status. Instead of following the film author’s

³⁵⁶ The final *Harry Potter* book has been separated into *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 1* (dir. David Yates, 2010) and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 2* (dir. David Yates, 2011). The final *The Twilight Saga* book has been separated into *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 1* (dir. Bill Condon, 2011) and *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn – Part 2* (dir. Bill Condon, 2012). Peter Debruge [review], *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2012), *Variety*, 3 December 2012. < <https://variety.com/2012/film/reviews/the-hobbit-an-unexpected-journey-1117948867/> > [accessed 21 May 2019].

³⁵⁷ Robbie Collin [review], *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* [film] dir. by. Peter Jackson (New Line Cinema, 2012), *The Telegraph*, 9 December 2012. < <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/9730525/The-Hobbit-An-Unexpected-Journey-movie-review.html> > [accessed 22 May 2019].

³⁵⁸ Rotten Tomatoes, *King Kong*, 2005 < https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/king_kong > [accessed 4 March 2021]. Rotten Tomatoes, *The Lovely Bones*, 2009 < https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1189344-lovely_bones > [accessed 4 March 2021].

growth, Jackson's star-director status relies on the development of his star image within the franchise context.

Table 1.1 The score from film critics and audience from Rotten Tomatoes³⁵⁹

<i>Trilogy</i>	<i>Film Name</i>	<i>Tomatometer (critics)</i>	<i>Audience Score</i>
<i>The Lord of the Rings</i>	The Fellowship of the Ring	91%	95%
	The Two Towers	95%	95%
	The Return of the King	93%	86%
	An Unexpected Journey	64%	83%
<i>The Hobbit</i>	The Desolation of Smaug	74%	85%
	The Battle of the Five Armies	59%	74%

For marketing purposes, the idea of authorship has been used as a strategy that promotes the film through the director's name. As for the individual film, the director's name can be used to identify the film's quality or style, which functions similarly to a label of the film genre but with more emphasis on the artistic aspects. Directors who have their authorial status recognised by the audience can provide a non-formulaic way of categorising films, as the individual films need a way or a label of being recognisable to the audience during the promotion. However, franchise films already have their own label closely related to the franchise brand, such as the Middle-earth world created by Tolkien. With the Middle-earth franchise, Jackson established a unique relationship with this franchise. As represented in the promotional materials like the making-of documentaries, instead of setting up an authorial status to highlight his artistic value, Jackson let himself be involved in the Middle-earth franchise as one of the loyal fans of the original book and its creator Tolkien. This could be considered a way that contradicts the common understanding of a film author; however, he still gains a similar level of attention as a film author. Differently, the individual film can obtain more attention because of its director, while the attention on Jackson relies on his close relationship with the franchise films, at least at the beginning. By establishing his authorial voice based on his loyalty to Tolkien, Jackson seems to solve the tension that often emerges between the demands of fidelity to the original text and the authorial voices. As his authorial

³⁵⁹ Data from <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/> [accessed 10 April 2021].

voice is formed in a different way from that of the ordinary film author and relies on the context of franchise cinema, this thesis considers him to be a franchise author within the Middle-earth franchise.

Jackson's continuous involvement in the franchise has also allowed him to establish a regular persona, that of a loyal Tolkien fan and a likeable nerd director interested in film technology. On the premise of the success of the *LOTR* trilogy, Jackson's high level of activity through the making-of documentaries and close relationship with fans make him a key figure for critics and audiences to identify with. Therefore, he has established his authority on Tolkien adaptation, which provides him with an authorial status similar to the impact that film authors can have. The difference is that this continuation of authority relies on the continuation within the franchise more than the continuation through all of that director's films. This case study offers a possibility of stripping away the artistic values, which are key factors of the common understanding of the film author, from the authorial status, while retaining the commercial value. The context of franchise cinema is key to providing this possibility, because it provides a similar environment to the analysis of the film auteur, that is, a group of multiple films with similar cinematic elements and themes that form a link with a particular director. Thus, Jackson established himself as a star-director relying on his directing of every Middle-earth adaptation. However, the authorial status established in this way can be easily challenged. *The Hobbit* trilogy received a different reception from the *LOTR* trilogy, which indicates that the audience's attitude to Jackson, especially the Middle-earth fans, has changed. Therefore, the function of the author-director's name, as a quality assurance indicator, is challenged.

Chapter Two: Case study of J.J. Abrams

“I’m nothing but lucky and have done nothing but benefited from being associated with those things [*Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, *Mission Impossible*]. And I am thrilled that they worked well enough that they would think to bring me back.” – J.J. Abrams³⁶⁰

Unlike Peter Jackson, who directed the Middle-earth films from the beginning to the end, J.J. Abrams is a director who has worked across numerous franchises including *Mission Impossible*, *Star Trek*, and *Star Wars*. As film franchise’s capacity grows, and it lasts longer, generally more directors are needed to maintain the franchise and meet the studio’s demand for continued commercial success. For example, the *Star Wars* franchise started with the eponymous film in 1977, then expanded into three trilogies and the anthology films *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (USA, dir. Gareth Edwards, 2016) and *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (USA, dir. Ron Howard, 2018). However, as different directors have their own working style, further questions arise regarding authorship and the authorial voice. Usually, the study of authorship always functions on an association between a specific person (normally the director) and the films they direct. Whether the concept of authorship has been used for critiquing the film or marketing the film, the application is to match the director’s personal traits, which have been repeated in their former films, to the target films. During this process, the association between that person and their film style or personal traits is the approach to analysing or selling the film. However, within franchise cinema, the association between an author and their personal style that is based on the idea of authorship could be broken by the needs of continuity within franchise films. J.J. Abrams is the ideal case study to explore how authorship functions in this context as he joined three franchises when they were already well established. How he dealt differently with the authorial voice already established within a franchise offers a new situation in which to study the notion of authorship.

Abrams is not alone in working across multiple franchises; however, most directors who are more involved in multiple franchises have had more significant input into one particular franchise than the other. Examples include Sam Raimi (*Evil*

³⁶⁰ Nicole Laporte and KC Ifeanyi, *Exclusive: J.J. Abrams on Star Wars, Apple, and building Bad Robot into a Hollywood force*, 2019 < <https://www.fastcompany.com/90331236/exclusive-j-j-abrams-on-star-wars-apple-and-building-bad-robot-into-a-hollywood-force> > [accessed 20 May 2020].

Dead franchise since 1981 but was not involved in the reboots, *Spider-Man* trilogy (2002, 2004, 2007)), Bryan Singer (*X-Men* franchise since 2000, and his only DC adaptation film *Superman Returns* (2006)), Justin Lin (*Fast & Furious* films since 2006, and his only *Star Trek* film *Star Trek Beyond* (2016)), and Matthew Vaughn (*Kingsman* since 2014, and his only *X-Men* film *X-Men: First Class* (2011)). Vaughn clearly stated his attitude towards the working pattern of joining an established film franchise: 'I like the idea of doing a franchise that was mine, totally mine. *X-Men*, I was a director for hire. Here [*Kingsman*], this is me'.³⁶¹ Vaughn's working experience with two film franchises reflects the contradiction between the filmmaker's personal style and the film franchise's demand. Peter Jackson, as mentioned above, dealt with this tension by equating his authorial voice to the franchise's need for loyalty to the original texts.

Abrams' case provides sufficient examples to trace how the notion of authorship, as well as collective authorship, works within different film franchises. Before directing his first film *Mission: Impossible III* (2006), he is a famous showrunner who established his production company Bad Robot in 2001. *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* are very well-known and well-loved franchises, with substantial fanbases. For both franchises, Abrams' role might be better described as what Vaughn called 'a director for hire'.³⁶² Thus, instead of trying to fit Abrams into a model of authorship, this chapter will explore how film franchises with this production model challenge what has been acknowledged about authorship, which allows both the original author/creator and current director all to have input as authorial figures through the promotional discourses. This chapter will introduce the idea of inheriting the authorial voice within a film franchise to facilitate the analysis of authorship in this particular context. This idea recognizes the continuity of an authorial voice in one film franchise by different directors. By studying the relationship between Abrams' reboot films and their originals, this case study argues that the authorial voice, with specific traits from one director, can be transmitted to another within a film franchise, according to the demands of the franchise.

³⁶¹ HeyUGuys, *Writer / Director Matthew Vaughn Interview - Kingsman: The Secret Service*, 2015 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bSy0RPdTj1Q>> [accessed: 23 June 2020].

³⁶² Ibid.

J.J. Abrams and film franchise

It is challenging to claim Abrams as an author by analysing his film texts. Most of his films are sequels of cult blockbusters, full of the original's features. The only non-franchise feature film he has directed, *Super 8* (USA, 2011), was criticised as an imitation of Steven Spielberg films, or seen as a fan letter to Spielberg by some reviewers.³⁶³ There are also critics, like Henry Miller, who have questioned Abrams' ability to develop his own film franchise based on the narrative and film style of *Super 8*.³⁶⁴ By criticising that the film is adapting Spielberg's 'visual repertoire', Miller noted that 'Abrams seems perversely to have forsworn the opportunity to start his own franchise'.³⁶⁵ Besides, for the film franchises that Abrams has participated in, his function is more like that of an inheritor of the original author figure, through the filmmaking of those rebooted films. This results in him continuing the franchise's/original director's style, rather than developing his own independent one. However, even if he lacks a unique personal style, as a famous showrunner, film director, producer, and screenwriter, he has been able bring two existing franchises a new promotional aspect. Unlike Peter Jackson, who came to the Middle-earth franchise as an independent director, Abrams was already known to Hollywood. For example, in *Empire's* review of *Mission: Impossible III*, Ian Nathan comments at the beginning that Tom Cruise hired Abrams as 'pop-culture's golden child'.³⁶⁶ Abrams is another example of a famous name in the post-auteur age.

Abrams's reputation in pop culture is also due to his self-marketing. After he won awards for the TV series *Lost* (2004-2010), then wrote and directed the successful blockbuster *Mission: Impossible III*, in March 2007, Abrams did a TED Talk,

³⁶³ Peter Bradshaw [review], *Super 8* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2011), *The Guardian*, 4 August 2011. < <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2011/aug/04/super-8-review> > [accessed 20 September 2020].

Ian Nathan [review], *Super 8* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2011), *Empire*, 31 July 2011. < <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/super-8-review/> > [accessed 20 September 2020].

³⁶⁴ Henry K. Miller [review], *Super 8* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2011), *Sight & Sound*, September 2011, Vol. 21 Issue 9, pp.77-78.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ian Nathan [review], *Mission: Impossible III* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2006), *Empire*, 29 April 2006. < <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/mission-impossible-iii-review/> > [accessed 20 May 2020].

entitled *The Mystery Box*. At the beginning of his speech, he brought up the topic of why he has many works that involve mystery, and shared the story of how his grandfather had led him into this area.³⁶⁷ He brought an item to the TED Talk, named Tannen's Mystery Magic Box, which was a gift from his grandfather that he never opened.³⁶⁸ Then he explained that this box 'represents infinite possibility', 'hope', and 'potential'.³⁶⁹ Abrams claimed that 'mystery is the catalyst for imagination', and sometimes it 'is more important than knowledge'.³⁷⁰ This talk conveyed some of his ideas about film and television production. Additionally, the mystery box that he showed to the audience was described as an inspiration for his career.³⁷¹ The mystery box has been referred to, by critics, many times since that speech. Film news started to use the phrase mystery box to refer to his new work, even his friends and collaborators frequently claimed to the media that this mystery box was the foundation of his successful career. For example, *IGN* reported Abrams' new film project by using the phrase 'one Abrams mystery box opened'.³⁷² *The New York Times* described *Lost* as Abrams' 'most intricate, steadfastly cryptic mystery box'.³⁷³ Compared to Jackson's star persona that established surrounded the franchise, Abrams constructed his public star persona mainly to serve himself. Furthermore, when this star persona builds upon the highlights of his creating style, it also works as an authorial persona since Abrams is a showrunner and film director rather than an acting star.

Scholars also use 'mystery' as a keyword to study Abrams. Leora Hadas captured these keywords from that TED talk and believes that Bad Robot's TV shows

³⁶⁷ TED, *The Mystery Box*, 2007,

<https://www.ted.com/talks/j_j_abrams_the_mystery_box?utm_campaign=tedspread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare> [accessed: 20 May 2020].

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Scott Collura, *J.J. Abrams on Not Directing Star Trek 3*, 2013 <

<https://www.ign.com/articles/2013/09/11/jj-abrams-on-not-directing-star-trek-3>> [accessed 20 May 2020].

³⁷³ Frank Bruni, *Filmmaker J. J. Abrams Is a Crowd Teaser*, 2011 <

<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/29/magazine/filmmaker-j-j-abrams-is-a-crowd-teaser.html>> [accessed 20 May 2020].

share a 'mystery box style of storytelling'.³⁷⁴ Furthermore, she explained this 'mystery box style of storytelling' is 'a central mystery and a multi-layered, hyper-complex narrative'.³⁷⁵ Clearly, Abrams' TV and film career has a strong bond with mystery, from his TV series *Alias* (2001-2006) and *Lost*, to the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* films he was involved in. With this in mind, these connections between Abrams and 'mystery' make it possible to define 'mystery' as part of his authorial voice. However, tracing back to Abrams' early works, these are not limited to the mystery genre. Before directing, his career started as a screenwriter. After writing several screenplays during his college period, he finally had a comedy film made called *Taking Care of Business* (USA, Dir. Arthur Hiller, 1990), which was co-written with his friend Jill Mazursky. With Mazursky's help, Abrams was able to 'go straight from college to Hollywood with no intermediate way stations' and had the chance to experiment with different film genres as a screenwriter.³⁷⁶ His first TV series, *Felicity* (1999-2002), is a drama about college experiences rather than mystery stories. When he did the TED Talk, he was famous for his science fiction TV series, and was also in the early stages of preparing the reboot of science fiction film *Star Trek*. The repetition of mystery and the mystery box in promotional discourses about Abrams enhanced the relationship between mystery and his persona. Whether it was intentional or unintentional, the mystery box was exploited to build up an association between Abrams and his highly imaginative way of creating. Based on this, it appears that the 'mystery' style became a label for Abrams that further enriched his authorial persona.

According to Abrams' career and reputation, he is more than just a filmmaker and showrunner who is good at the mystery genre. Steven Priggé describes Abrams as a 'true Renaissance man of Hollywood', since he participates in different parts of the filmmaking process: writing, directing, producing, and music composing.³⁷⁷ Even

³⁷⁴ Leora Hadas, 'From the Workshop of J. J. Abrams: Bad Robot, Networked Collaboration, and Promotional Authorship', in James Graham and Alessandro Gandini (eds.), *Collaborative Production in the Creative Industries* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2017), pp.87-103, p.95.

³⁷⁵ Ibid, p.95.

³⁷⁶ Wendy Sterba, *J. J. Abrams Vs. Joss Whedon: Duel for Media Master of the Universe* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), p2.

³⁷⁷ Steven Priggé, *J.J. Abrams Interview*, 2005 < <http://www.stevenprigge.com/interviews/j-j-abrams/> > [accessed 20 May 2020].

these roles do not provide a comprehensive overview of his career if considering his participation in the entertainment industry. In 2001, with his collaborator Bryan Burk, he founded Bad Robot Productions, a film and television production company. Most Bad Robot productions also fall within the mystery genre, such as *Person of Interest* (2011-2016) and *Westworld* (2016-present). From a promotional perspective, this is in line with Hadas' description of Abrams and Bad Robot as working in the Renaissance-influenced 'master workshop model' that Hadas argues that the filmmakers or showrunners from Bad Robot are following the style set by Abrams.³⁷⁸ In Bad Robot, Abrams is in the master position, so that all works produced by Bad Robot, whether he participated or not, could be labelled as Abrams' work.³⁷⁹ Under this model, substantial promotional discourses about Bad Robot's works enhance the connection between Abrams and mystery. As a result, mystery further becomes a significant label to describe Abrams' authorial style.

In 2019, Abrams' mystery box re-emerged in an interview with *Rolling Stone*. When questioned by Brian Hiatt about its influence, Abrams said 'It's not a driving force [for his career] at all'.³⁸⁰ Furthermore, in that interview, Abrams explained that his friend Bryan Burk suggested he use the mystery box as the starting point for the speech.³⁸¹ However, whether or not that mystery box was the foundation of Abrams' career, it turned out to be one of the labels associated with him and became part of promotional materials for his TV or film works, as well as for his company. Bad Robot even collaborated with the playing card company Theory 11, to develop a playing card called Mystery Box and Abrams personally participated in its design.³⁸² Although this has little to do with either his TV or film productions, it reiterates the concept of the mystery box, again, as a mark that bonds to the brand of Bad Robot as well as Abrams, whereby Abrams then becomes more associated with a brand

³⁷⁸ Leora Hadas, 'From the Workshop of J. J. Abrams: Bad Robot, Networked Collaboration, and Promotional Authorship'.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Brian Hiatt, *The writer and director on the challenge of ending the saga, fan criticism, and respecting George Lucas' vision*, 2019 < <https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-news/star-wars-jj-abrams-secrets-of-skywalker-912362/> > [accessed 20 May 2020].

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Diane Lindquist, *J.J. Abrams' Bad Robot + Theory 11: Mystery Box*, 2014 < <https://thedieline.com/blog/2014/3/4/jj-abrams-theory-11-m?>> [accessed 30 May 2020].

identity than he does with a filmic style.

Although both Abrams and Bad Robot appear to have an established brand identity, this has been challenged by Abrams. In an interview with *Fast Company* in 2019, he shared his thoughts on the Bad Robot brand when asked if he was worried the brand would be diluted as they are trying more genres, saying: 'I never thought of it as a brand'.³⁸³ Instead of discussing film genres or a recognisable Bad Robot brand, Abrams emphasised that 'incredibly personal and true emotional thing[s]' are what he cares more about.³⁸⁴ Sterba bears out his claim, via an analysis of Abrams' own works from the early TV series *Felicity* up to his recent *Star Wars* films.³⁸⁵ She argues that Abrams was widely praised for being good at portraying characters, rather than for working on one particular genre.³⁸⁶ From Abrams' viewpoint, his work, as well as Bad Robot's works, are not limited to one genre but have to be 'completely emotionally true and moving'.³⁸⁷ Therefore, the label of 'mystery', or the mystery box, seems to have been torn off by Abrams himself. There emerges a contradiction from this. On the one hand, the 'mystery' became a label for Abrams that helped to promote himself and his works, which helped to cement his star status. On the other hand, Abrams' attitude in recent interviews has suggested he is trying to break away from this genre and the limitations placed on himself and his company. Compared to Jackson, Abrams already had his authorial status before joining the franchises of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*. Additionally, similar to Jackson, Abrams' authorial feature of mystery could be easily challenged compared to the common understanding of film auteur. Given this contradiction and his extensive involvement in franchise cinema, this chapter has chosen to examine two franchises in which he has participated, *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, to analyse the tensions that exist here, together with Abrams' role in these two franchises.

³⁸³ Nicole Laporte and KC Ifeanyi.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Wendy Sterba, *J. J. Abrams VS. Joss Whedon*.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.

³⁸⁷ Nicole Laporte and KC Ifeanyi.

Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek*

The original *Star Trek* series was created by Gene Roddenberry, and ran from 1966 to 1969, with only three seasons. It describes an optimistic future world named the United Federation of Planets, in which human beings and other alien races overcome diseases, racial differences, poverty, paranoia and war. Meanwhile, the captains with their crew have the 'continuing mission: to explore strange new worlds; to seek out new life and new civilisations; to boldly go where no one has gone before'.³⁸⁸ After the original series, many related TV series within similar narrative worlds were intermittently developed and dominated science-fiction television in America for a long time.³⁸⁹ In addition to the original TV series, the *Star Trek* franchise has introduced different spin-offs such as feature films, comic books, games, and novels. As one of the most important cult franchises, fandom research on *Star Trek* is a popular topic because of the popularity of the franchise and the active long-term participation of fans, but scholarship has extended beyond this. Chris Gregory analyses Roddenberry and the original *Star Trek* series in terms of the depth of themes, such as 'racism, sexism, economic and political colonialism, the duality of personality, propaganda and media manipulation'.³⁹⁰ There are other arguments that cultural and social issues are the theme for the science-fiction TV series and films, and *Star Trek* is discussed as one of the most significant science-fiction works.³⁹¹ In-depth political and social discussions have always been a key topic associated with *Star Trek*, and these views have been regarded as Roddenberry's ideas; Roddenberry himself also agreed with this view. In Alan Asherman's interview with Roddenberry, the creator of *Star Trek* said many times that he wanted to 'infiltrate' his ideas into this science fiction series under the 'terrible restrictions of television'.³⁹² As such, the original series can be seen as the 'compromise' between Roddenberry's personal expression and the commercial

³⁸⁸ This is from the introductory sequence for *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. In the *Star Trek: Original Series*, it was 'five-year mission' rather than 'continuing mission'.

³⁸⁹ Catherine Coker, *American science fiction TV: Star Trek, Stargate, and beyond* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2005), p.77.

³⁹⁰ Chris Gregory, *Star Trek: Parallel Narratives* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000), p.2.

³⁹¹ Gerard Klein, D. Suvin and Leila Lecorps, 'Discontent in American Science Fiction', *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol.4, No.1 (1977), pp.3-13, p.12.

³⁹² Alan Asherman, *The Star Trek: Interview Book* (New York: Rocket Books, 1986), p.78.

needs of 'action and romance' from television networks.³⁹³

The tension between Roddenberry and the networks eased when they developed the second sequel of the *Star Trek* series: *The Next Generation* (1987-1994). In Roddenberry's *Star Trek: The Next Generation Writers/Directors Guide*, he wrote that 'we now have more freedom and story latitude, because our series bypasses the networks and is made directly for television stations'.³⁹⁴ During this period, Roddenberry's name became a brand for Paramount to market the *Star Trek* series, and Gregory believes this is an 'auteur-consciousness' that came from the cinema.³⁹⁵ Roddenberry's authorial voice has been vital for the development of the *Star Trek* franchise. He had the path, such as the making-of documentary, to elaborate his personal vision for *Star Trek* and defined the core spirit of the show to the audience.³⁹⁶ Fans of the show, who named themselves Trekkies or Trekkers, also expected that Roddenberry could personally participate in the production to make sure the show would keep its fidelity to 'Roddenberry's philosophy'.³⁹⁷

In an interview with David Alexander, Roddenberry claimed that on the one hand, this is a cooperative project, but on the other hand, this is a 'single creative artist's show' because he set the story and characters from the beginning.³⁹⁸ Feedback from fans has also agreed with this point.³⁹⁹ Meanwhile, in his *Writers/Directors Guide*, Roddenberry listed the main ideas that *The Next Generation* needed to keep:

As before, without neglecting entertainment values, we invite writers to consider premises involving the challenges facing humanity today (the 1980s and 90s), particularly those which interest the writer personally. The new *Star Trek* episodes will continue the tradition of vivid imagination,

³⁹³ Chris Gregory, p.27.

³⁹⁴ Gene Roddenberry, 'Star Trek: The Next Generation Writers/Directors Guide', 1987, in roddenberry.com <<https://www.roddenberry.com/media/vault/TNG-WritersDirectorsGuide.pdf>> [accessed 11 November 2020].

This sentence deleted in the second version of Writers/Directors Guide.

³⁹⁵ Chris Gregory, p.43.

³⁹⁶ Henry Jenkins, 'Infinite diversity in infinite combinations': Genre and authorship in Star Trek', in John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins, *Science fiction audiences: watching Doctor Who and Star Trek* (Taylor & Francis Group, 1995), pp.173-193, p.187.

³⁹⁷ Ibid, p.186.

³⁹⁸ David Alexander, 'Gene Roddenberry: Writer, Producer, Philosopher', *The Humanist*, Volume 51, no. 2 (1991), pp.5-30.

³⁹⁹ Henry Jenkins, 'Infinite diversity in infinite combinations', p.186.

intelligence and a sense of fun, while still assessing where we humans presently are, where we're going, and what our existence is really about.⁴⁰⁰

In the interview with Alexander, Roddenberry introduced his childhood experiences and his humanist self-identity when asked about his philosophy.⁴⁰¹ Roddenberry explained to Alexander his ideas around political philosophy, that he self-identified as a feminist, and his other humanistic idea, further claiming their similarity to the views presented in *Star Trek*.⁴⁰² Gregory argued that Roddenberry's *Star Trek* TV series always has 'ethical questions' underpinning the action and adventure stories.⁴⁰³ There are reports that Roddenberry significantly reduced his participation after the first season of *The Next Generation*.⁴⁰⁴ However, as long as the series continued Roddenberry's philosophy, whether he really took action in the creative process, is not necessarily important. This is because, from the viewers' perspective, Roddenberry is associated with the shows due to what they express. That is to say, if Roddenberry's 'tonality' has been inherited, the satisfaction of the audience can be guaranteed.

However, the strong dependence on Roddenberry's inference in the TV series did not extend Roddenberry's participation in its adapted films. There are many TV series from the 1950s and the 1960s that were adapted into films during the 1980s, and *Star Trek* is one of them.⁴⁰⁵ Gregory points out that the first *Star Trek* film, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (USA, dir. Robert Wise, 1979), maintained the 'Roddenberryesque' plotline, which mainly is the setting of a villain (often an alien) who is eventually understood as an alien with a moral standard.⁴⁰⁶ However, in the initial film series, from 1979 to 1991, the core spirit of the original series was abandoned, especially from the second film, *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* (USA,

⁴⁰⁰ Gene Roddenberry, 'Star Trek: The Next Generation Writers/Directors Guide 2', 1987, in [rodtenberry.com < https://www.rodtenberry.com/media/vault/TNG-WritersDirectorsGuide2.pdf>](https://www.rodtenberry.com/media/vault/TNG-WritersDirectorsGuide2.pdf) [accessed 11 November 2020].

⁴⁰¹ David Alexander, 'Gene Roddenberry: Writer, Producer, Philosopher'.

⁴⁰² Ibid.

⁴⁰³ Chris Gregory, p.40.

⁴⁰⁴ Henry Jenkins, 'Infinite diversity in infinite combinations', p.186.

⁴⁰⁵ David A. Black, 'Charactor; or, the strange case of Uma Peel', in Sara Gwenllian-Jones, Roberta E. Pearson (eds), *Cult Television* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp.99-114.

⁴⁰⁶ Chris Gregory, p.39.

dir. Nicholas Meyer, 1982), when Roddenberry was marginalised by the studio during a series of films' productions.⁴⁰⁷ When Roddenberry was not participating in the films' production, they gradually abandoned the discussion of moral and ethical issues. Concomitantly, Harve Bennett, who participated more in the *Star Trek* original film series' production as producer and writer, was criticised by fans for replacing Roddenberry rather than inheriting Roddenberry's tone. Additionally, during the production of *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country* (USA, dir. Nicholas Meyer, 1991), the last film of the *Star Trek* original film series, the director Nicholas Meyer clashed with Roddenberry when he went to consult him because Roddenberry claimed it went against his setting for the universe of *Star Trek*.⁴⁰⁸ Although he was appointed to be the adviser by the studio because of his reputation among *Star Trek* fans, Roddenberry had no real power on the film's production.⁴⁰⁹ Contrary to the themes in the original TV series that were influenced by Roddenberry, such as eliminating hatred bred by political dissent and many forms of discrimination, the *Star Trek* original film series tended to offer a targeted response to global political issues at that time.⁴¹⁰ This is a significant change, highlighting the identifiability of Roddenberry's authorial features on the one hand, and the possible conflict between the individual author and the franchise on the other. But even though his original authorial features have been adapted or changed, he remains one of the franchise authors of the franchise since there are still fans of the original TV series who constantly try to find his authorial identity from subsequent *Star Trek* works.

The notion of authorship and the identification of the author in the *Star Trek* franchise breaks the barriers between different media forms. The adaptation from a TV series to feature films is different from the adaptation from books to feature

⁴⁰⁷ Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, 'Cold War pop culture and the image of US foreign policy: The perspective of the original *Star Trek* series', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol.7, no. 4 (2005), pp.74-103.

⁴⁰⁸ TrekMovie, *Nick Meyer on His Gene Roddenberry Regret*, 2009<<https://youtu.be/-3Z87KlOuD4>> [accessed: 29 October 2020].

⁴⁰⁹ Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, 'Cold War pop culture and the image of US foreign policy', p.100.

⁴¹⁰ The other three films that belong to this series but are not mentioned in this thesis are: *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (dir. Leonard Nimoy, 1984), *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (dir. Leonard Nimoy, 1986), *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* (dir. William Shatner, 1989).

films. The literal narrative of a book cannot identically correspond to the visual narrative of the film, but a TV series shares similar visual characteristics with feature films. David A. Black suggested that the adaptation from TV to a film makes it easier to build connections with the original fans and transform them into the film's fans, but also makes it easier to arouse their dissatisfaction.⁴¹¹ In Jackson's case, his adaptation of Tolkien's book to his film can easily be analysed as a *film work* by Jackson that is based on Tolkien's novel. For *Star Trek*, the *Star Trek* original film series had ended by the time Roddenberry passed away. Since then, the *Star Trek* films have developed into *The Next Generation* film series and have introduced other filmmakers to the franchise, such as David Carson and Jonathan Frakes, who are not only directors for the film series but also directors for the *Star Trek* TV series.⁴¹² However, for Trekkers, the fact that Roddenberry participated in the film production has become a direct sign for them to identify those films that have Roddenberry's authorial voice. Many different individuals have participated in this franchise, but Roddenberry's role as the creator of *Star Trek* established him as a significant figure within the franchise. Even though he did not direct any of the films, his authorial voice and personal expression do not lose their association with the subsequent TV series and film because of his absence.

'Not Your Father's *Star Trek*'⁴¹³

For *Star Trek*, which has a huge, long established, long-standing fan base, it was important for the rebooted films to be recognised by the original fans. However, the reboot of *Star Trek* did not only follow this principle. As the first *Star Trek* reboot film, *Star Trek* (2009), started a new relationship with its fans and with the general audience. When planning the reboot of *Star Trek*, Paramount wanted 'a very specific kind of thinking'.⁴¹⁴ Subsequently, the studio asked for someone who loves this kind

⁴¹¹ David A. Black, 'Character; or, the strange case of Uma Peel', p.101.

⁴¹² The films included in this series are: *Star Trek Generations* (dir. David Carson, 1994), *Star Trek: First Contact* (dir. Jonathan Frakes, 1996), *Star Trek: Insurrection* (dir. Jonathan Frakes, 1998), *Star Trek: Nemesis* (dir. Stuart Baird, 2002).

⁴¹³ Salvor Seldon, *Star Trek - tv spot #5 Not your Father's ST HD*, 2009<<https://youtu.be/KMDAh-n12Wc>> [accessed: 29 October 2020].

⁴¹⁴ Dave Itzkoff, *New Team Retrofits the Old Starship*, 2009 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/26/movies/26itzk.html>> [accessed 20 May 2020].

of genre but who was still able to 'separate it from what 'Trek' had been, to make it feel fresh'.⁴¹⁵ According to Abrams, his aim was not to only meet the diehard *Star Trek* fans' demands but also to make a film 'for moviegoers who love an adventure, and movies that are funny and scary and exciting'.⁴¹⁶ Abrams described the film *Star Trek* (2009) as 'this isn't exactly your dad's *Star Trek*'.⁴¹⁷ A similar but in a more assertive slogan tone, 'This Is Not Your Father's *Star Trek*', was also used in one of *Star Trek*'s TV spots.⁴¹⁸ Such promotional discourse points out that this reboot film illustrated the determination to avoid being entirely loyal to the original series and only a simple remake.

Henry Jenkins analysed the authorial status of Roddenberry based on Michel Foucault's statement that 'the myth of the author serves three basic functions'.⁴¹⁹ When Abrams' reboots are also considered there are more features discussed by Foucault that can be applied to discuss this case than Jenkins selected, as it is complicated by the multi-author status of franchise films. The first feature from Foucault is considering the 'texts' as 'forms of property'.⁴²⁰ Foucault argues that the author is the one to take responsibility, mostly a legal responsibility, for the text.⁴²¹ In another respect, the owner of the property is also the one who controls the 'power' of the property. In the case of *Star Trek*, even though Roddenberry is the creator, he was not working directly as the author who has the control power under the rules of the system of authority but rather working for the networks, television stations, and studios. When Roddenberry called his lawyer to demand Paramount re-edit *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*, it did not happen as he wished.⁴²² Thus, his participation as the creator was under the studio's control. Furthermore, as mentioned above, the reboot film, to some extent, differed from the originals as it was based on the requirements of the studio, and Abrams was chosen based on

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ ArtisanNewsService, *Star Trek is Not Your Father's Enterprise, Explains JJ Abrams*, 2009<<https://youtu.be/UJomOLuqRho>> [accessed: 29 October 2020].

⁴¹⁸ Salvor Seldon, *Star Trek - tv spot #5 Not your Father's ST HD*.

⁴¹⁹ Henry Jenkins, 'Infinite diversity in infinite combinations', p.186.

⁴²⁰ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', *Screen* (London), Vol.20, no. 1 (1979), pp.13-33, p.20.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, 'Cold War pop culture and the image of US foreign policy', p.101.

this requirement. Compared to the first function of the author suggested by Foucault, in the *Star Trek* franchise, the owner of the property is not always the attributed author in marketing materials. The owner of the property, Paramount Pictures, would not have been an acceptable author figure that audiences would have believed. Instead, creator Roddenberry, and the rebooted films director Abrams are the typical person, who could be easily portrayed as authorial figures.

Foucault's second feature is that the 'meaning and value attributed to the text depended on' the author's name.⁴²³ Given this, Roddenberry's name was more important at the early stage of *Star Trek*. For example, his name became the marketing point for *The Next Generation* series. Gregory suggested in his book, which was published before Abrams' *Star Trek* was released, that 'its characters, locations, and familiar catchphrases ... are recognised across the globe'.⁴²⁴ As such, the value of *Star Trek* is already guaranteed by its brand and the name *Star Trek* is already enough for promotion purposes. However, *Star Trek* (2009) had two versions of the film poster for different territories. The official poster for western countries, like America and the UK, just had the film's name on it without specifically mentioning the director. However, the official poster for *Star Trek* in Asian countries, including China, South Korea, and Japan, had a note indicating that this film comes from the director of *Mission: Impossible III*. From this point, Abrams' name and reputation helped this franchise to reach more audiences in areas where the original series and films had less of a fan base.

Furthermore, among eight reviews of *Star Trek* (2009), only Mike Goodridge, the critic from *Screen International*, compared it with the original film series. He combed through the box-offices of the entire original film series, then moved to this reboot, and believed that Abrams was hired because he understands the interests of contemporary teenagers based on his successful previous works that contain not only sci-fi but also the romantic series *Felicity*.⁴²⁵ Although *Star Trek* is a popular

⁴²³ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p.21.

⁴²⁴ Chris Gregory, p.2.

⁴²⁵ Mike Goodridge [review], *Star Trek* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2009), *Screen International*, 20 April 2009. < <https://www.screendaily.com/star-trek/5000394.article> > [accessed 14 April 2020].

franchise, Abrams' name is still one of the marketing points for specific regions or specific age groups. In Hadas' case study of *Star Trek*, she believes that what Abrams has added to the *Star Trek* franchise is his name, which represents 'cool' and 'modern' to the audience, rather than a sense that he portrays his personality traits in the film text like a film author.⁴²⁶ From this point, Abrams' name is used to guarantee the quality of the film rather than offering a substantial contribution in terms of creativity. This fulfils one of the features of the author, but does not meet the traditional principle of the film auteur.

The third point suggested by Foucault is that the text can be explained according to the 'author's biography', 'social preferences', 'position within a class', or 'fundamental objectives', which echoes traditional auteur criticism.⁴²⁷ This depends on who is seen as the author. The interpretations for the rebooted films of *Star Trek* could be different, because Abrams' 'biography' differs from that of Rodenberry. Sterba suggested that Abrams 'had a fine line to walk' between the *Star Trek* diehard fans and the general audience, to keep meeting both their needs.⁴²⁸ On the review site Rotten Tomatoes, *Star Trek's* three rebooted films do not show much difference in their scores from critics and audiences. They are all marked as Certified Fresh status with the Tomatometer Score of 94% (*Star Trek*), 84% (*Into Darkness*), and 86% (*Beyond*), and received the Audience Score of 91%, 89%, and 80% respectively.⁴²⁹ However, *Into Darkness* was well received by the critics and audiences, according to the above data, but not recognised by Trekkers.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁶ Leora Hadas, 'A New Vision: J. J. Abrams, Star Trek, and Promotional Authorship', *Cinema Journal*, Volume 56, Number 2, Winter 2017, pp.46-66.

⁴²⁷ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p.22.

⁴²⁸ Wendy Sterba, *J. J. Abrams VS. Joss Whedon*, p.176.

⁴²⁹ The Tomatometer score based on the reviews of film critics. The Audience Score voted by the audiences with ticket verification. Certified Fresh status is a special certification, which has certain requirements on evaluation score and evaluation quantity. Rotten Tomatoes, *Star Trek*, 2009 < https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/star_trek_11> [accessed 4 August 2020].

Rotten Tomatoes, *Star Trek into Darkness*, 2013 < https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/star_trek_into_darkness> [accessed 4 August 2020].

Rotten Tomatoes, *Star Trek Beyond*, 2016 < https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/star_trek_beyond> [accessed 4 August 2020].

⁴³⁰ Ben Child, *Into Darkness voted worst Star Trek film by trekkies*, 2013 < <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2013/aug/14/star-trek-into-darkness-voted-worst>> [accessed 12 June 2020].

According to *The Guardian's* report, *Into Darkness* was voted the 'worst *Star Trek* film in the entire canon' by Trekkers at the Annual *Star Trek* Convention in Las Vegas.⁴³¹ One conference participant claimed that 'these reboots shouldn't even be considered for a list of *Star Trek* movies'.⁴³² These fans believed that Abrams' *Star Trek* films are more like 'space opera', which is far away from the original films' style of science fiction.⁴³³ Such reception from two extremes, Trekkers and other viewers, occurred because of the different interpretations of reboot films based on loyalty to different authorial voices. From the Trekkers' perspective, their recognition of the film was based on their understanding of Roddenberry's authorial voice', however, the general audience's principle was related to Abrams' authorial voice.

Star Trek (2009) rebooted the characters from the original series but set their story as a prequel that happened in an alternate timeline. The *Star Trek* plotline is based on time-travel and the alternate timeline. The story is about the USS Enterprise's Captain Pike (Bruce Greenwood) and his crew, including young James T. Kirk (Chris Pine) and young Spock (Zachary Quinto), who go to save the planet Vulcan and meet the villain Captain Nero (Eric Bana), who time-travelled from the future for revenge. With the help of old Spock (Leonard Nimoy), who also time-travelled from the future, Kirk and Spock finally defeat Nero together with other USS Enterprise crews and save Earth. After the mission, Kirk is promoted to the Captain of Enterprise, while Spock becomes the First Officer. In this film, characters such as Kirk, and McCoy (Karl Urban) share similar characteristics to the original characters. Diversity among the other characters is still preserved, but characters such as Spock, Scotty (Simon Pegg), Uhura (Zoe Saldana), Sulu (John Cho), and Chekov (Anton Yelchin) are not exactly the same as they were portrayed in the original series.

The reboot film re-portrayed these characters in a way that would fit into both contemporary society and Hollywood norms. In the original series, Spock was ashamed of his biracial identity (half-human half-Vulcan) and refused to tell his

⁴³¹ Ibid.

Annual *Star Trek* Convention in Las Vegas is a *Star Trek* fan convention produced by Creation Entertainment.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid.

mother he loved her because of his human origin, which reflects the inferiority of biracial Americans at the time.⁴³⁴ In *Star Trek* (2009), Spock was encouraged by old Spock from the future to accept the part of his ancestry from humans that brings him the ability to feel emotions. Compared to the original series, Abrams' film dealt with the biracial identity in a more moderate and tolerant way. Another changed character that triggered discussion was Uhura. She is a capable and talented communications officer, with multiple skills, in the crew of the USS Enterprise. Her professional abilities stand out in the *Star Trek* original series, but in the reboot films, she is caught in a spiral of love with Spock. Lorrie Palmer criticised Abrams for having portrayed several strong female characters in his previous TV works but that he did not portray Uhura in a similar way.⁴³⁵ To a certain degree, the character arc for Uhura is in line with some norms of Hollywood. Her role is to supplement the emotional themes of the film, which also helps to highlight Spock's emotional Earth-blood nature. Meanwhile, the Enterprise engineer Scotty in *Star Trek* (2009) is more like a comedic role, which is very different from the original Scotty (James Doohan). However, Pegg's Scotty is similar to his other role in *Mission: Impossible III*, as Benji Dunn, who is also a technician and represents the film's major comedic element.

Trekkers' rejection to the reboot came from their attachment to the original characters and the original social viewpoint created by Roddenberry. Similarly, for the film reviews, even though Roddenberry did not participate much in the original film series production, and had passed away before the next film series, he was still the consistent crucial author of the franchise. Consequently, the film reviews still analysed the reboot film by comparing it with the original series. However, the centre of their discussion was the reboot film directed by Abrams, so the comments' focus was on judging movies instead of guarding their original value based on Roddenberry, as the Trekkers did. For example, Manohla Dargis' review from *The*

⁴³⁴ Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., 'Hybrids: Interspecies Intercourse and Biracial Identity in Star Trek', in Nadine Farghaly, and Simon Bacon (eds), *To Boldly Go: Essays on Gender and Identity in the Star Trek Universe* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2017), pp.201-218, p.206.

⁴³⁵ Lorrie Palmer, 'Female Leadership, Sacrifice and Technological Mastery on Star Trek: Voyager', in Nadine Farghaly, and Simon Bacon (eds), *To Boldly Go: Essays on Gender and Identity in the Star Trek Universe* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Incorporated Publishers, 2017), pp.169-188, p.171.

New York Times suggests that Abrams did not see the original as a ‘sacred text’ but still showed his loyalty to this classic of popular culture.⁴³⁶ Todd McCarthy also commented that Abrams transferred the ‘Roddenberry DNA’ into a ‘trim new body that hums with youthful energy’, which built up a foundation for the ‘new generation of Trekkies’.⁴³⁷ Ray Bennett, in *The Hollywood Reporter*, believes that the success of Abrams’ reboot of *Star Trek* was as a result of the success of the original series.⁴³⁸

As mentioned above, the most significant difference in the reception, from Trekkers and other viewers, lies in reactions to Abrams’ second *Star Trek* film *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013). This second reboot film was a revision of *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, which was successful in the original film series.⁴³⁹ This film is a story about the crew of USS Enterprise discovering a terrorist attack led by Khan (Benedict Cumberbatch), who used to be a commander of the Federation, and trying to stop him. Thus, their new mission is to deal with Khan and save the Federation from several renegades. Ian Freer believed that Abrams respected Roddenberry’s dramatis personae in this film and the second *Star Trek* film, having learned lessons from the first one about the lack of political views, and he related its story to post 9/11 America.⁴⁴⁰ Kim Newman made a different comment on this, criticising that *Into Darkness* only relates its story to ‘terrorism’ and ‘warmongering’, which is actually different from Roddenberry’s approach.⁴⁴¹ Similarly, Robbie Collin believed the first film did not really reference the originals, and commented that ‘all ties with

⁴³⁶ Manohla Dargis [review], *Star Trek* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2009), *The New York Times*, 07 May 2009. <

<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/08/movies/08trek.html?ref=movies>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴³⁷ Todd McCarthy [review], *Star Trek* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2009), *Variety*, 22 April 2009. < <https://variety.com/2009/film/markets-festivals/star-trek-3-1200474457/>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴³⁸ Ray Bennett [review], *Star Trek* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2009), *The Hollywood Reporter*, 20 April 2009. < <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/star-trek-film-review-93063>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴³⁹ This film is a revision of *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, but the first time its character Khan shows up was in *Star Trek: The Original Series* Season 1 Episode 22.

⁴⁴⁰ Ian Freer [review], *Star Trek: Into Darkness* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2013), *Empire*, 8 May 2013. < <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/star-trek-darkness-review/>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴⁴¹ Kim Newman [review], *Star Trek: Into Darkness* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2013), *Sight & Sound*, July 2013, Vol. 23 Issue 7, p86-87.

the earlier films were severed' aside from those 'odd' references.⁴⁴² Although their opinions on whether Abrams was loyal to Roddenberry's original vision are different, these reviews all discussed the film with reference to Roddenberry, instead of seeing it solely as Abrams' work. This is contrary to the promotional strategy of the film. The focus of these reviews' discussion is whether Abrams brought Roddenberry's attitude back, which illustrates a tendency to analyse the film according to Roddenberry's author features, rather than showing their expectation for its director Abrams' personal attitude.

There were also reviews that focussed more on Abrams. Scott Foundas' review of *Into Darkness*, for example, relates Abram to Steven Spielberg, stating that Abrams' original film *Super 8*, as well as this second rebooted film, are all homages to Spielberg's films (*E.T.*, *Close Encounters*, and *Indiana Jones*).⁴⁴³ Foundas also compared Abrams to Nicholas Meyer, the director of *The Wrath of Khan*, arguing that Meyer's work mainly references 'Shakespeare, Dickens and Conan Doyle' while Abrams' references are 'Spielberg, John Hughes and Cameron Crow'.⁴⁴⁴ These comments are based on the premise that the reboot film was Abrams' film, rather than looking for traces of Roddenberry. This is unusual, as for the first two rebooted *Star Trek* films, most reviews only compared Abrams with Roddenberry, rather than others who have directed *Star Trek* films or other directors who are more associated with Abrams. In such reviews, the core of *Star Trek* was represented by its franchise author Roddenberry, and Abrams was interpreted as a director hired for these two films.

When combining those comments about the first two films, Roddenberry and Abrams are the two main options used to analyse or explain the films. Given this, both Roddenberry and Abrams function within the categories of the author, according to Foucault. However, Abrams' function as an author is less significant

⁴⁴² Robbie Collin [review], *Star Trek: Into Darkness* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2013), *The Telegraph*, 2 May 2013. < <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/10032429/Star-Trek-into-Darkness-review.html>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴⁴³ Scott Foundas [review], *Star Trek: Into Darkness* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2013), *Variety*, 2 May 2013. < https://variety.com/2013/film/reviews/star-trek-into-darkness-review-1200442461/#!1/startrek_benedict/> [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

than Roddenberry's. Although these reboots differ from the originals, the differences are not attributed to Abrams' personal style, but rather the marketing need for blockbuster films. The need to reboot *Star Trek* required Abrams, the 'pop-culture's golden child', to take full advantage of his personal strengths in making successful blockbusters, while continuing Roddenberry's authorial voice.⁴⁴⁵ This can also be seen in the reviews. Colin Kennedy comments that Abrams' *Star Trek* is 'sassy, young and hip in a way the franchise has not been since the 1960s'.⁴⁴⁶ Tim Robey, analogously, describes this version as having 'resplendence, charm, and gusto' because of its director.⁴⁴⁷ Ian Freer described Abrams' version of *Into Darkness* as having 'energy, vibrancy and spectacle' and this is 'the need of the many'.⁴⁴⁸ Such reviews' comments demonstrate that Abrams' authorial voice here is more like a safe-hand on making blockbuster films, which is more focused on the commercial value he can bring. As mentioned above, one of his functions is to communicate with audiences who are not familiar with the original series, so Abrams can also be considered as a franchise author of this franchise.

Even though the rebooted films are different from the originals, the views expressed continued to respond to the issue that has attracted much attention since the series' inception: political attitude. Stephen McVeigh referenced the interviews of Zachary Quinto and Abrams, in which they related the film's idealism with Obama's presidential campaign at that time.⁴⁴⁹ McVeigh, however, suggested that this was only a promotional strategy and the film's political background was more related to George W. Bush's government.⁴⁵⁰ The George W. Bush's government

⁴⁴⁵ Ian Nathan [review], *Mission: Impossible III* [film].

⁴⁴⁶ Colin Kennedy [review], *Star Trek* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2009), *Empire*, 07 May 2009. < <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/star-trek-review/> > [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴⁴⁷ Tim Robey [review], *Star Trek* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2009), *The Telegraph*, 07 May 2009. < <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/star-trek/5290539/Star-Trek-review.html> > [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴⁴⁸ Ian Freer [review], *Star Trek: Into Darkness* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Paramount Pictures, 2013), *Empire*, 8 May 2013. < <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/star-trek-darkness-review/> > [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴⁴⁹ Stephen McVeigh, 'The Kirk Doctrine: The Care and Repair of Archetypal Heroic Leadership in J.J. Abrams' *Star Trek*', in Matthew Wilhelm Kapell (ed.), *Star Trek as Myth: Essays on Symbol and Archetype at the Final Frontier* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2010), pp.197-212.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

during the post 9/11 period shared a similar political situation to the Cold War period, which is the background of the original series. In this way, the political concerns from Abrams' *Star Trek* overlap with the attitude from the original works. As such, the reboot of *Star Trek* offers a renewal of political views within contemporary society, but it can be easily questioned as an imitation of the original political views, or even, that the political views having been inserted was not the priority in the reboot's filmmaking. The discussion around idealism and contemporary politics is a tradition of *Star Trek* referenced by Roddenberry, such that the relation between the reboots and Roddenberry is once again reinforced.

Foucault suggests that the notion of the author is a way to 'reinforce the enigmatic link between an author and his works'.⁴⁵¹ Within the context of franchise filmmaking, the notion of the author can reinforce the link between an author and work that is not directly created by him/her. For the first two rebooted films, Roddenberry has been linked to the films he did not participate in, because of the similarities to his original works, accordingly, in this way, Abrams' link with his two *Star Trek* films is weakened. However, Abrams' third film changes his position within the *Star Trek* franchise. The third reboot film *Star Trek: Beyond* (2016) was directed by Justin Lin. Abrams only joined as the producer, with his company Bad Robot as one of the film's production companies. Unlike reviews of the first two films, Abrams' name was mentioned more than Roddenberry's in the *Beyond* film reviews sampled for this thesis, which again hints at the fact that Abrams has become one of the franchise authors in this franchise. Of all eight film reviews, Peter Bradshaw's film review of *Beyond* from *The Guardian* was the only one not to mention Abrams. Instead, Bradshaw declared himself satisfied with the reference to the 'visual language' of Roddenberry's original series.⁴⁵² The film reviews not only compared *Beyond* to Roddenberry's original, but also compared it to Abrams' two previous reboots. For example, in Gleiberman's review of *Beyond*, he claimed that Abrams' two *Star Trek* films have 'pushed and poked boundaries' and 'turned fans into

⁴⁵¹ Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author?', p.27.

⁴⁵² Peter Bradshaw [review], *Star Trek: Beyond* [film] dir. by. Justin Lin (Paramount Pictures, 2016), *The Guardian*, 15 July 2016. < <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/jul/15/star-trek-beyond-review-zachary-quinto-spock-anton-yelchin> > [accessed 14 April 2020].

lifelong cultists', which built up audiences for *Beyond*.⁴⁵³

Unlike *Into Darkness*, effectively a remake of one of the original films, *Beyond* is a completely new story. In this film, the USS Enterprise is dispatched on a rescue mission but is attacked by Krall (Idris Elba), a former commander of the USS Franklin, but he and his crew were abandoned by the Federation. Consequently, he is looking for an ancient weapon to destroy the Federation to take revenge. Meanwhile, some of the crews of the USS Enterprise are captured after the attack. Kirk, Spock, and the rest of the crew have to battle the alien race, rescue their crew, and stop Krall's revenge. In Newman's review of *Beyond*, he gave a detailed summary of the difference between Abrams' first two films and *Beyond*.⁴⁵⁴ He suggested that Abrams' films are more like remakes of the old series, while *Beyond* 'coins a Roddenberry-esque idea'.⁴⁵⁵ Newman pointed out one such plot of a militarist character who complained about the 'conflict-based way of life' having been replaced by the 'unity of the Federation'.⁴⁵⁶ He further explained that this is a positive response to the criticism of Roddenberry's military orientation in the creation of this utopia, which may lead to this new film franchise replacing the originals.⁴⁵⁷ Such comments put the three rebooted films together and judge their loyalty to Roddenberry's philosophy. These are like two different ways to inherit the tradition of a creator's authorial voice. What Lin did, according to the critics' feedback, was more related to the notion of authorship, whilst Abrams' way, relative to Lin's, was more superficial. However, when these discussions sought to reinforce the link between Roddenberry and the *Star Trek* reboot series, they also brought Abrams into the context, even though he was not this film's director. In doing so, Abrams' is afforded a link to the reboot series as well, meaning Lin's authorial voice was, therefore, relatively weakened.

Chris Hewitt argued that the third film's 'good, old-fashioned fun' style is the films' 'reaction' and attitude to the vote of *Into Darkness* as the worst *Star Trek*

⁴⁵³ Owen Gleiberman [review], *Star Trek: Beyond*.

⁴⁵⁴ Kim Newman[review], *Star Trek: Beyond* [film] dir. by. Justin Lin (Paramount Pictures, 2016), *Sight & Sound*, September 2016, Vol. 26 Issue 9, p87-88.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Kim Newman[review], *Star Trek: Beyond*.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

film.⁴⁵⁸ In Hewitt's opinion, although Lin is famous for the *Fast And Furious* franchise, he still handled *Beyond* in a way that shows his 'lovely reverence for the legacy of Trek'.⁴⁵⁹ Another critic, Tim Robey, also mentioned the Trekkers' vote in his review, and claimed that *Beyond* is 'really back to basics' with a story of the Enterprise crew's adventure.⁴⁶⁰ David Rooney showed a similar attitude, arguing that *Beyond* delivered a 'nostalgia without stiff veneration' through 'a welcome strain of humo[u]r' that was inherited from Roddenberry's creation, in contrast to *Star Trek Into Darkness*, directed by Abrams, which was more like 'a regimented blockbuster that felt hollow and heavy beneath all its noise and brawn'.⁴⁶¹ Scott also points out this loyalty to the original that was seen in *Beyond*, and he believes there is a good balance between 'stubborn consistency' and 'canny inventiveness' in the reboots.⁴⁶² Again, these comments discuss the film in relation to Roddenberry's original, thereby weakening Lin's subjectivity. Lin fulfilled the duty of inheriting Roddenberry's style, thus weakening the connection between himself and the film. Given this, Lin's authorial features have been reduced to even less than those attributed to Abrams in this franchise.

A few film reviews also analysed the film in terms of Lin's input, such as Owen Gleiberman, who compared Lin's *Fast and Furious* series to *Beyond*, arguing the similarity between these two film franchises is that several multicultural characters work together as a team.⁴⁶³ This is similar to when film reviewers of the former two films stated that Abrams' function was to extend this franchise's audience to

⁴⁵⁸ Chris Hewitt, [review], *Star Trek: Beyond* [film] dir. by. Justin Lin (Paramount Pictures, 2016), *Empire*, 15 July 2016. < <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/star-trek-beyond-review/> > [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁰ Tim Robey [review], *Star Trek: Beyond* [film] dir. by. Justin Lin (Paramount Pictures, 2016), *The Telegraph*, 22 July 2016. < <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/2016/07/15/star-trek-beyond-review/> > [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴⁶¹ David Rooney, [review], *Star Trek: Beyond* [film] dir. by. Justin Lin (Paramount Pictures, 2016), *The Hollywood Reporter*, 15 July 2016. < <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/star-trek-beyond-film-review-911141> > [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴⁶² A.O. Scott, [review], *Star Trek: Beyond* [film] dir. by. Justin Lin (Paramount Pictures, 2016), *The New York Times*, 20 July 2016. < <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/movies/review-star-trek-beyond.html> > [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴⁶³ Owen Gleiberman [review], *Star Trek: Beyond* [film] dir. by. Justin Lin (Paramount Pictures, 2016), *Variety*, 15 July 2016. < <https://variety.com/2016/film/reviews/star-trek-beyond-review-chris-pine-anton-yelchin-1201814942/> > [accessed 14 April 2020].

teenagers. Gleiberman criticised *Beyond* as an 'interplanetary action film' with a classic Hollywood blockbuster structure.⁴⁶⁴ Abrams' two *Star Trek* films also followed the classical three-act structure. This is a feature of the industry and cannot be related to the normal standards of the recognition of an author. Other than these two directors, the film's screenwriters also are mentioned in a few reviews. Rather than give all the credit to the director, Rooney praised the two scriptwriters, Simon Pegg and Doug Jung, for offering a 'utopian fantasy' with 'ideals of peace and intergalactic unity', which referenced the 1960s original series.⁴⁶⁵ Similarly, when John Hazelton's review of *Beyond* compared this film with its two predecessors from Abrams, instead of emphasising Abrams, Hazelton mentioned the two screenwriters of the previous reboot films, Alex Kurtzman and Roberto Orci, and argued that the 'theme of loyalty and unity', as well as the 'relationship between Kirk and Spock', are not depicted as 'convincingly' as before.⁴⁶⁶ Nevertheless, such comments compare the reboots with the original series, so that these new people's work is always understood in terms of whether it is faithful to the originals.

When the rebooted film series was promoted as 'Not Your Father's *Star Trek*', the aim was to extend their audience group beyond the Trekker group to bring in a blockbuster audience.⁴⁶⁷ To some extent, it achieved this goal of attracting a broader audience base. Meanwhile, from the perspective of the original *Star Trek* fans, the film critics, and viewers who experienced the original *Star Trek*, the marketing strategy introduced the creator Roddenberry to understand or explain the rebooted *Star Trek* films, thus giving Roddenberry attention in different levels. But it turned out only Trekkers thoroughly criticised the film based on their understanding of Roddenberry. For the other film audiences, both Roddenberry and Abrams could be their point of identification to explain the film. Based on the context of the franchise, the reboot series also brought Roddenberry back to the public and reinforced his connection to the franchise. Such authorial involvement is quite unusual if only one

⁴⁶⁴ Owen Gleiberman [review], *Star Trek: Beyond*.

⁴⁶⁵ David Rooney, [review], *Star Trek: Beyond*.

⁴⁶⁶ John Hazelton, [review], *Star Trek: Beyond* [film] dir. by. Justin Lin (Paramount Pictures, 2016), *Screen International*, 15 July 2016. < <https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/star-trek-beyond-review/5106791.article> > [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁴⁶⁷ Salvor Seldon, *Star Trek - tv spot #5 Not your Father's ST HD*.

film is considered. Roddenberry is not considered within such context as the original author of the film adaptation as Tolkien was, because it is not only the explaining and recreating the original texts in another media form. Although he has passed away, he is still continuously involved as a franchise author in this franchise. Meanwhile, even though Abrams did not refresh the films' spirit or philosophy in a straightforward way, there is still a clear link between his authorial status and the rebooted series based on his fame and other abilities, rather than the authorial voice defined by the traditional notion of film author. Therefore, Lin is the one who has been considered, by most critics, to have inherited the core spirit of the originals, although Abrams has been considered the one with more connection to the *Star Trek* franchise, according to the films' reception. The connection here has been understood as the participant from the franchise author; however, this has more in common with the star image as a promotion approach. Like Peter Jackson, Abrams' function as a franchise author closely relates to his commercial value. However, Abrams' commercial value is not as dependent on the *Star Trek* franchise as Jackson's reliance on the *Middle-earth* franchise.

George Lucas' *Star Wars*

Unlike Gene Roddenberry's limited importance that is predominantly recognised within *Star Trek* fans society, the industry, scholars, and critics have reached the consensus that George Lucas has an important place in film history. Not only did he create the *Star Wars* franchise that became a popular culture phenomenon, but Lucas is also recognised as an essential figure in the development of Hollywood cinema. He is one of the significant filmmakers, whose films initiated the era of Hollywood blockbusters and led to the popularity of event films. He also contributed filmmaking technologies via his company Lucasfilm as well as its subsidiaries. This reputation, together with his affinitive relationship with *Star Wars*, led to more pressure on Abrams to continue Lucas' legacy than was seen with *Star Trek*. Existing scholarship focusing on Lucas covers many different topics and even work that has focused on Lucas and authorship approaches the subject from diverse angles. Scholars, such as Tara Lomax, whose research focuses on Lucas, stated that

his creativity has functioned in so many different areas rather than only positioning him as a film author.⁴⁶⁸ Meanwhile, others, such as Elana Shefrin choose to focus on authorship. Shefrin used case studies of *The Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars* film franchises to discuss the new form of authorship under the context of media entertainment.⁴⁶⁹ She used authorship to analyse Lucas and his films, or used him as a case study, to understand authorship in a new way. She suggested that they are both 'producers of middle-brow art' that 'combine spectacle with originality and creative inspiration with cliché', but able to 'gain symbolic power' within the film industry.⁴⁷⁰ Also, some of the discourses that connect Lucas to film authorship are based on the general background of New Hollywood, because Lucas' personal experience and early career fits with the typical definition of New Hollywood's notable figures. All the research on Lucas provides a rich discourse that helps to build a strong association between him and his authorial status, which was then solidified with the *Star Wars* franchise.

The *Star Wars* film series is divided into three trilogies: original trilogy, prequel trilogy, and sequel trilogy. The original trilogy is centre around the character Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) and comprises the first film *A New Hope* (1977) directed by Lucas, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) directed by Irvin Kershner and *Return of the Jedi* (1983) directed by Richard Marquand. The prequel trilogy's three films are stories about Luke Skywalker's father, and were all directed by Lucas, namely *The Phantom Menace* (1999), *Attack of the Clones* (2002), and *Revenge of the Sith* (2005). The sequel trilogy started with Abrams' *The Force Awakens* (2015), then was continued with *The Last Jedi* (2017) directed by Rian Johnson, before returning to 'Abrams with *The Rise of Skywalker* (2019). Lucas wrote the story for the first two trilogies and directed four of them, but he did not participate in any of the further films after Disney purchased his company in 2012.

⁴⁶⁸ Tara Lomax, "'Thank the Maker!': George Lucas, Lucasfilm, and the Legends of Trans textual Authorship across the Star Wars Franchise', in Dan Hassler-Forest and Sean Guynes (eds), *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), pp.35-48.

⁴⁶⁹ Elana Shefrin, 'Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and participatory fandom: Mapping new congruencies between the internet and media entertainment culture', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, Vol.21, no.3 (2004), pp.261-281.

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid, p.265.

Henry Jenkins argues that the key point of a successful franchise is to have ‘a single creator or creative unit [that] maintains control’.⁴⁷¹ In the case of *Star Wars*, Lucas has been portrayed and recognised as that single creator who dominates the franchise. When Robert Iger told the story of how he represented Disney in their purchase of Lucasfilm, he provided details of the discussion between him and Lucas.⁴⁷² When Lucas claimed his company had the same value as Pixar, Iger pointed out that Pixar has a massive group of filmmaking talent, but Lucasfilm had only one valuable employee: George Lucas.⁴⁷³ From the perspective of film production, there is a common agreement that filmmaking is collaborative. Essentially, Lucasfilm was a company comprised of numerous creative employees, just like Pixar. However, Iger, as the Disney CEO, who mainly represented the studio’s commercial needs, held the attitude that the creative vision is still assigned to just one person who can be considered as a brand for commercial interests. Although this statement shows Iger’s appreciation for Lucas’ creative ability, what Iger emphasised was that Lucas was the only employee from Lucasfilm whose creative ability could transfer into commercial value, so that the authorial voice would be readily interpreted as the signature of his brand.

Thomas Schatz suggested that Lucas is one of the important figures who replaced ‘the director-as-author with a director-as-superstar ethos’.⁴⁷⁴ Directors like Lucas and Spielberg play an important role in connecting the notion of film author to the marketing elements for the talent agency. This is also one of the reasons why some scholars debate whether they are film authors. In Matt Hills’ study on blockbuster films, he pointed out the prevalent view from scholars and critics is that culture and economy are antagonistic, so that when blockbuster films like *Star Wars* have been recognised as a spectacle, the cultural value of these films would be

⁴⁷¹ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York; London: New York University Press, 2016), p.106.

⁴⁷² Robert Iger, *The Ride of a Lifetime: Lessons Learned from 15 Years as CEO of the Walt Disney Company* (New York: Penguin Random House USA, 2019), pp.195-196.

⁴⁷³ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁴ Thomas Schatz, ‘The New Hollywood’, in Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Collins (eds) *Film Theory Goes to the Movies: Cultural Analysis of Contemporary Film* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.8-36, p.20.

deprived.⁴⁷⁵ The tension between cultural value and economic value, seen in scholarly and critical accounts, translates into the internal contradiction during film production, between artistic expression and commercial need. *Star Wars*, as one of the successful blockbuster films, has challenged the culture/economy binary opposition.⁴⁷⁶ These studies affirm the artistic value of *Star Wars* attributed to Lucas. Given this general perception, it would have been difficult for Abrams to have brought in his own artistic aspiration to challenge Lucas' original tone.

Geoff King provided an approach to solve this tension between personal creative and commercial needs when he analysed the historical phase of New Hollywood, which requires the filmmakers to participate more in business affairs. He took Steven Spielberg as an example, noting that Spielberg had earned the opportunity of having a massive budget of \$25 million to make a black-and-white film, *Schindler's List* (USA, 1993), which is different from the everyday blockbuster filmmaking norm, because of his previous blockbusters' success.⁴⁷⁷ This offers one way for filmmakers to deal with the culture/economy binary opposition. As King suggested, Spielberg first gained business success, then was allowed the economic support to pursue his more personal filmmaking.⁴⁷⁸ This does not directly solve the tension within one film, nevertheless, in the long-term view, it provides an approach that allows the filmmaker to control the filmmaking, by meeting both commercial and creative needs. A more proactive approach is for filmmakers to set up their own studio to provide themselves creative freedom. From United Artists in 1918, to Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope Studios, then Lucas' Lucasfilm, this has been a strategy explored by filmmakers to fight against the major studios' control. However, unlike his predecessors, Lucas was passionate about technology, which is 'the heart of the economy of New Hollywood' and helped Lucas' company keep its position in the industry.⁴⁷⁹

When questioning Peter Jackson's authorial persona alongside *The Lord of the*

⁴⁷⁵ Matt Hills, 'Star Wars in fandom, film theory, and the museum: the cultural status of the cult blockbuster', in Julian Stringer (eds), *Movie Blockbusters* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp.178-189.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*, p.92.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid, p.102.

Rings films, Shefrin claimed that the film author must work in an isolated environment rather than be influenced by the audience or fans.⁴⁸⁰ From this perspective, she further claimed that Lucas's attitude to *Star Wars* fans is different from that of Jackson, who has a close relationship with Tolkien's fan group through the Internet.⁴⁸¹ Instead, Lucas drew a clear line between his work and fans' desires, which highlights his strong desire for personal control that can be considered a feature of the film author.⁴⁸² Furthermore, Jenkins described Lucasfilm as 'one of the most aggressive corporate groups in trying to halt fan cultural production'.⁴⁸³ Lucasfilm's solution for dealing with its intellectual property in the situation of substantial fan-made artworks has been to control fans' creations and claim all fan art belongs to the studio, arguing it is commercial and therefore enforcing a legal interpretation of the concept of authorship.⁴⁸⁴ Tara Lomax stated that this is 'doubling' 'Lucas' authorial identity'.⁴⁸⁵ Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray interpret this behaviour as a sign of the studio taking action to regain the control of 'creativity and innovation' 'when their interests are challenged'.⁴⁸⁶

The establishment of these arguments is beyond the scope of the original authorship theory, and Lucas is understood as a film author in terms of his own and his company's business decisions. At this point, authorship, as it was initially introduced by François Truffaut as an emphasis on creativity, is not understood in the same way. So, it is easy to challenge Lucas' authorial status based on this traditional standard of authorship. For Lucas, it is an inescapable fact that he did not direct many films. During his film directing career, only six feature films were

⁴⁸⁰ Elana Shefrin, 'Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and participatory fandom', p.268.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Ibid, p.271.

⁴⁸³ Henry Jenkins, 'Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars?: Digital cinema, media convergence and participatory culture', in Meenakshi Gigi Durham, and Douglas M. Kellner (eds), *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2005), pp.549-576, p.558.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ Tara Lomax, "'Thank the Maker!': George Lucas, Lucasfilm, and the Legends of Trans textual Authorship across the Star Wars Franchise', in Dan Hassler-Forest and Sean Guynes (eds), *Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), pp.35-48, p.39.

⁴⁸⁶ Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray, 'Introduction: The Problem of Media Authorship', in Jonathan Gray, and Derek Johnson (eds), *A Companion to Media Authorship* (Somerset: WILEY, 2013), pp.1-19, p4.

directed by him and four of those were from the *Star Wars* franchise.⁴⁸⁷ Apart from the first *Star Wars* film, the other three films (prequel trilogy) directed by Lucas were 'alternatively excoriated and praised' by critics and fans.⁴⁸⁸ Meanwhile, the other two films after Lucas' first *Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back* (USA, 1980) and *Episode VI – Return of the Jedi* (USA, 1983) were directed by Irvin Kershner and Richard Marquand respectively, with Lucas only taking credit for the stories. Both these films have received relatively good reviews, much like Lucas' original film. According to Sarris' author theory, the discussion of film authors focuses solely on directors, as such Kershner and Marquand would deserve to be mentioned. However, Lucas, as the creator and the person who contributed the story, has been recognised as the owner of *Star Wars* films. Once again, this is beyond the terms of traditional film authorship.

Furthermore, identifying Lucas as the significant figure of *Star Wars* films that were not directed by him is also not in accordance with the idea of collaborative authorship. Collaborative authorship's basic point of departure is that it is difficult to distinguish one author from many people who participate in the filmmaking process. For example, scholars, such as Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray, brought up the idea of collaborative authorship in the case of *Star Wars* and considered other people's contributions, such as the composer John Williams, sound designer Ben Burtt, and actress Carrie Fisher.⁴⁸⁹ However, Lucas is still the one who is distinguished from all others and represents the creative thoughts and ownership of *Star Wars*. Under the traditional understanding of authorship, this kind of working pattern is not enough to identify Lucas as an auteur, because this is no longer an analysis based on the film text. Whilst he is regarded as the author, nevertheless he is defined by an approach beyond the cognition of the notion of auteur.

Shefrin argued that one of Lucas' strategies to establish his persona as an author figure was to highlight his 'prestige and power' within the creation of the *Star*

⁴⁸⁷ Lucas's direct works are as follow in chronological order: *THX 1138* (USA, 1971), *American Graffiti* (USA, 1973), *Star Wars* (USA, 1977), *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace* (USA, 1999), *Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones* (USA, 2002), *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith* (USA, 2005)

⁴⁸⁸ Elana Shefrin, 'Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and participatory fandom', p.262.

⁴⁸⁹ Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray, p.2.

Wars franchise.⁴⁹⁰ Hills referenced Timothy Corrigan's concept of the 'commercial auteur', which was developed mainly from the perspective of commercial needs, and he identified Lucas as one of the commercial auteurs who has a celebrity status.⁴⁹¹ Based on this idea, the discussion of authorship, within the context of the film industry, moves beyond the film's textual analysis. Instead, the authorship idea has been used in promotional discourses. This not only marks a change from the author being associated with cultural value, to an association with economic value, but also provides a change of perspective from the viewer's analyses to the filmmaker's intention. In Johnson and Gray's study on media authorship, they claimed that there always has to be 'at least one author figure' during the marketing of 'any item of media'.⁴⁹² Under the condition of Lucas' intangible creative prestige in the *Star Wars* franchise, Abrams, as director, worked in a very different context to that of *Star Trek*, as with *Star Wars* he needed to negotiate and accept Lucas's creative prestige when rebooting the series. Thus, the studies based on authorship, at this point, are more about exploring how the authorship has been constructed purposefully around more than one author figure within a franchise.

The discussion of directors purposely establishing their own authorial status is not a new topic within Hollywood, for example, scholars like Kapsis and Leitch explored how Hitchcock and Kubrick use promotional strategies to emphasise their personas as artists so as to reinforce their authorial position.⁴⁹³ As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Lucas is regarded as an important figure with significant influence through film history, but not necessarily as a film author. Therefore, within the *Star Wars* franchise, other directors are easily overlooked because of Lucas, who is almost the only franchise author of it. This has become an obstacle for other directors involved in this franchise as they are unable to establish their own authorial voice. With Lucas' reputation and his identity as the creator of this franchise, *Star Wars* is more complicated than *Star Trek* in accepting the existence

⁴⁹⁰ Elana Shefrin, 'Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and participatory fandom', p.265.

⁴⁹¹ Matt Hills, p.185.

⁴⁹² Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray, p.2.

⁴⁹³ Robert E. Kapsis, *Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation*.

Thomas Leitch, *Film adaptation and its discontents from Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

of a new authorial figure. In fact, *Star Wars* may have given Abrams the same space as *Star Trek*, but because of the former's famous creator George Lucas, it may have been more difficult for Abrams to leave his own name on it.

Disney's *Star Wars*, Lucas' *Star Wars*

By studying Disney's purchase of Lucasfilm and the subsequent reboot films, Lomax argued that there is a new 'authorial structure'. This would lead to the new directors or other participants replacing Lucas' original 'singular auteur brand', but 'Lucas' authorial significance remains' during these transformations.⁴⁹⁴ Lucas' status as the person in control of *Star Wars* has gone beyond whether he is the director of the film or not. He still maintained his authorial status, even though he had sold his company and the rights of *Star Wars*. Lucas' dominance within the franchise was steadily consolidated through promotional discourses, though Hills argued that 'the use of promotional discourses to position *Star Wars* as a myth' moves beyond the idea of authorship.⁴⁹⁵ Furthermore, Hills' idea of authorship is the traditional understanding of film auteur, whereas this thesis posits that the authorial status has already been established by such promotional discourses, so the further study is to explore how this kind of authorial status can be understood.

In early December of 2015, before *The Force Awakens* was released, interviews were published in which Lucas described his relationship with the franchise as being like 'a divorce' after he sold Lucasfilm to Disney. He said Disney did not like the stories that he had outlined for the future *Star Wars* films.⁴⁹⁶ Disney quickly responded to these comments: the president of Lucasfilm, as well as the film's producer Kathleen Kennedy, told the media that Lucas had seen the film before the release and 'he really liked it'.⁴⁹⁷ Four years later, Disney CEO Iger claimed in his

⁴⁹⁴ Tara Lomax, *Thank the Maker*, p.46.

⁴⁹⁵ Matt Hills, p.186.

⁴⁹⁶ Hank Stuever, *George Lucas: To feel the true force of 'Star Wars,' he had to learn to let it go*, 2015 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/george-lucas-to-feel-the-true-force-of-star-wars-he-had-to-learn-to-let-it-go/2015/11/27/d752067a-8b1f-11e5-be8b-1ae2e4f50f76_story.html> [accessed 12 September 2020].

⁴⁹⁷ Austin Siegemund-Broka and Kim Masters, *George Lucas to Attend 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' Premiere: "He Really Liked It" (Exclusive)*, 2015

book, *The Ride of a Lifetime*, that Lucas was disappointed by the new film after watching it. Lucas' real comments were 'there is nothing new' and 'there were not enough visual or technical leaps forward'.⁴⁹⁸ Iger also discussed that Disney had convinced Lucas to attend the premiere of *The Force Awakens* when he had not wanted to attend. Furthermore, they asked Lucas to agree that he 'would not publicly criticise any of the *Star Wars* films' Disney made.⁴⁹⁹ All these media discourses convey that the public was still concerned about Lucas' attitude to the new *Star Wars* films and that the production company kept trying to use Lucas' association to maintain the franchise's success.

A few days after *The Force Awakens* was released, an interview with George Lucas was broadcast online, by the interviewer Charlie Rose, and caused a public sensation. In this interview, Lucas showed his emotional attachment to *Star Wars* and called the films his 'kids'.⁵⁰⁰ His next comment that he had 'sold them to the white slavers' was quickly caught by the media.⁵⁰¹ He later made a statement apologising for this claim and emphasising his respect for Disney.⁵⁰² His statement was picked up by several media outlets and reported but only clarified what he called Walt Disney Company 'white slavers' instead of his disappointment in the new film. Lucas claimed again in this interview that he did not want to be involved in the reboots, and that Disney also wanted to produce them on their own.⁵⁰³ He also revealed how he and Disney had different opinions about the franchise's future development.⁵⁰⁴ He stated they wanted to do a retro movie, 'I don't like that,' Lucas told Rose in the interview, 'I work very hard to make them different...to make it new'.⁵⁰⁵

<<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/george-lucas-attend-star-wars-845948>> [accessed 12 September 2020].

⁴⁹⁸ Robert Iger, *The Ride of a Lifetime*, pp.180.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid, p.181.

⁵⁰⁰ Charlie Rose, *George Lucas*, 2015 < <https://charlierose.com/videos/23471>> [accessed 12 September 2020].

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Ben Quinn, *George Lucas apologises for describing Disney as 'white slavers'*, 2016 <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/george-lucas-attend-star-wars-845948>> [accessed 12 September 2020].

⁵⁰³ Charlie Rose, *George Lucas*.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

After Disney purchased Lucasfilm, the *Star Wars* franchise challenged Jenkins' suggestion that a successful franchise is understood in relation to one, or a group of, sustained creators. Lucas' comments on the new film and the disclosed production process revealed that he was not involved in this film's production in any way. Lucas' criticism of the new film echoes his consistent position as creator of the *Star Wars* narrative world, as well as a filmmaker with a passion for filmmaking technology. Though *The Force Awakens* was the first *Star Wars* film that Lucas did not participate in, his name flooded the media coverage and publicity events before, during and after the film was released. For example, there are news articles with titles like 'Star Wars creator George Lucas gets chummy with director JJ Abrams at *The Force Awakens* premiere in Hollywood' from *The Daily Mail*, 'Star Wars 'coming home' says George Lucas at London premiere' from the *BBC*, and 'Why George Lucas Hasn't Seen *'Star Wars: The Force Awakens'* Trailer' from *ABC News*.⁵⁰⁶ The director and producer have changed, but the original creator's opinions and comments were still important to the franchise. For promotional discourses, Lucas is still portrayed as the author of the *Star Wars* franchise whose opinion is very important. This challenges the norm of the authorship criticism, which relies on connecting the director with the film they directed. Even in exploring ideas of collective authorship, the focus is on labourers who have been considered as participating in the filmmaking process.

Meanwhile, J.J. Abrams, the real director of the two reboots, showed his respect to Lucas in interviews and expressed his wish to be accepted by Lucas.⁵⁰⁷ For Lucas and other critics, *The Force Awakens* lacked originality, Abrams responded

⁵⁰⁶ Paul Chavez, *Star Wars creator George Lucas gets chummy with director JJ Abrams at The Force Awakens premiere in Hollywood*, 2015 <<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-3360330/Star-Wars-creator-George-Lucas-gets-chummy-director-JJ-Abrams-premiere-Force-Awakens-Hollywood.html>> [accessed 12 September 2020].

Tim Masters, *Star Wars 'coming home' says George Lucas at London premiere*, 2015 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-35111055>> [accessed 12 September 2020].

Michael Rothman, *Why George Lucas Hasn't Seen 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens' Trailer*, 2014 <<https://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/george-lucas-star-wars-force-awakens-trailer/story?id=27470883>> [accessed 12 September 2020].

⁵⁰⁷ Brian Hiatt, *The writer and director on the challenge of ending the saga, fan criticism, and respecting George Lucas' vision*, 2019 <<https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-news/star-wars-jj-abrams-secrets-of-skywalker-912362/>> [accessed 12 September 2020].

that this film was not a 'nostalgia play' but a story with a new character.⁵⁰⁸ However, he also stated that his philosophy for this film was 'Let's go back to a *Star Wars* that we know, so we can tell another story'.⁵⁰⁹ Before Lucasfilm became a subsidiary of Disney, Lucas owned the creative control of the company's production, of which *Star Wars* was a big part. Lucas outlined the stories for each film, even though some of them were not directed by him. Although *Star Wars* is seen as Lucas' project, the prequels he directed in full were poorly received. He might be seen as the creative force behind the franchise, but he is not held in much esteem as a director. According to Iger's recollection, Lucas also offered the stories for the three new *Star Wars* films when Disney negotiated its acquisition of his company.⁵¹⁰ However, with the support of the purchase agreement, the new *Star Wars* films did not follow Lucas's new stories, Abrams created his own.⁵¹¹ When Lucas discussed why Disney had not used his story in an interview, he said Disney 'want to make something for the fans', but from his viewpoint he 'wanted to do was tell the story of what happened'.⁵¹² This echoes what he has done to draw a line between him and *Star Wars* fans. Without Lucas' participation, this way of challenging the audience is undoubtedly a risk for Disney and Abrams. Therefore, Lucas himself is not inclined to meet the expectations of *Star Wars* fans, but the reboots from Disney and Abrams planned to do so. As Henry Jenkins argued, fans take seriously the world created within the franchise, and they would consider the narrative world a real place where the characters keep living.⁵¹³ The way the reboots tried to keep meeting their fans' expectations is to maintain the world created by Lucas, which may not have been what Lucas really wanted to do.

According to the films' critical reception, Abrams' aim of going 'back to a *Star*

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Robert Iger, *The Ride of a Lifetime*, p.199.

⁵¹¹ Ibid, p.202.

⁵¹² Jack Shepherd, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens: Why Disney scrapped George Lucas' episode 7 ideas*, 2015 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/star-wars-force-awakens-george-lucas-explains-why-disney-scrapped-his-ideas-episode-7-a6744091.html>> [accessed 12 September 2020].

⁵¹³ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).

Wars that we know' was achieved in *The Force Awakens*.⁵¹⁴ Tim Grierson from *Screen International*, Nick Pinkerton from *Sight & Sound*, Justin Chang from *Variety*, Peter Bradshaw from *The Guardian*, Todd McCarthy from *The Hollywood Reporter*, and Manohla Dargis from *The New York Times* all directly point out in their film reviews of *The Force Awakens* that this film successfully paid tribute to the original *Star Wars* film from 1977, and avoided the failures of its prequel trilogy.⁵¹⁵ In their reviews, Grierson described Lucas' prequel trilogy as containing 'drab performances and emotional inertness', while Pinkerton used the word 'execrable' in his comments.⁵¹⁶ Bradshaw celebrated that Abrams successfully 'banishes memories' of Lucas' prequel trilogy through *The Force Awakens*.⁵¹⁷ These polarised comments about Lucas' original film and the prequel trilogy challenge Lucas' authorial status from the traditional perspective of auteurism. Meanwhile, according to the information Abrams conveyed, his clear goal is to return to the style and success of Lucas' original film series. At this stage, authorship, which is used to analyse or summarise the characteristics of films based on their director, is now separating the director/directors from their films and being applied to films from the same

⁵¹⁴ Brian Hiatt, *The writer and director on the challenge of ending the saga, fan criticism, and respecting George Lucas' vision*.

⁵¹⁵ Tim Grierson[review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Lucasfilm Ltd./Bad Robot Productions, 2015), *Screen International*, 16 December 2015. < <https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/star-wars-the-force-awakens-review/5098043.article>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

Nick Pinkerton[review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Lucasfilm Ltd./Bad Robot Productions, 2015), *Sight & Sound*, February 2016, Vol. 26 Issue 2, p66-67.

Justin Chang[review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Lucasfilm Ltd./Bad Robot Productions, 2015), *Variety*, 14 December 2015. < <https://variety.com/2015/film/reviews/star-wars-review-the-force-awakens-1201661978/>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

Peter Bradshaw [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Lucasfilm Ltd./Bad Robot Productions, 2015), *The Guardian*, 16 December 2015. < <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/dec/16/star-wars-the-force-awakens-review-a-spectacular-homecoming>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

Todd McCarthy [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Lucasfilm Ltd./Bad Robot Productions, 2015), *The Hollywood Reporter*, 16 December 2015. < <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/star-wars-force-awakens-review-848963>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

Manohla Dargis [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Lucasfilm Ltd./Bad Robot Productions, 2015), *The New York Times*, 16 December 2015. < <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/18/movies/star-wars-the-force-awakens-review.html?>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁵¹⁶ Tim Grierson [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film].

Nick Pinkerton [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film], p.66.

⁵¹⁷ Peter Bradshaw [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film].

franchise instead of the films from one film auteur.

Abrams' *Star Wars*, Lucas' *Star Wars*

Abrams claimed that he was 'excited' and 'hungry' to continue developing the world, based on the existing worlds of *Star Wars*, for new characters when he wrote *The Force Awakens*.⁵¹⁸ Therefore, the reboot of *Star Wars* introduced a group of new characters created by Abrams. In *The Force Awakens*, Abrams created a new age for *Star Wars* with several younger protagonists led by Rey (Daisy Ridley), Finn (John Boyega), Poe Dameron (Oscar Isaac), and Kylo Ren (Adam Driver). However, even with new characters and an updated narrative world, *The Force Awakens* still follows the original path of the storyline and the main character arcs, so it was considered a retro film by Lucas.⁵¹⁹ As Andrew Scahill suggested, the reboots often use repetitions of semiotic features or reiterations of narrative events to 'provide the pleasure of recognition'.⁵²⁰ Critics and fans were keen to compare this new film to *A New Hope*, searching for the similarities between the two. As Abrams maintained the characters from the original trilogy like Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill), Han Solo (Harrison Ford), and Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher), the continuity of the roles also enforced the associative connection between this reboot and the original trilogy. Seven out of eight film reviews of *The Force Awakens* referred to George Lucas. Additionally, the only review that did not directly refer to Lucas's name, did instead refer to the original characters throughout. However, unlike the previous *Star Wars* films, this was the first time that Lucas had not directly participated in this franchise's creation.

Lucas' original film, *A New Hope*, revolves around Luke, who accidentally finds the message left by Princess Leia and decides to help Obi-Wan Kenobi (Alec Guinness). After a series of thrilling and witty confrontations, Luke teams up with Han Solo, and two robots, R2-D2 and C-3PO, they finally rescue Princess Leia, but Obi-Wan sacrifices himself. Finally, Luke helps the Rebel Alliance destroy the Death

⁵¹⁸ Nicole Laporte and KC Ifeanyi.

⁵¹⁹ Charlie Rose, *GEORGE LUCAS*.

⁵²⁰ Andrew Scahill, 'Serialized Killers: Prebooting Horror in Bates Motel and Hannibal', in Amanda Ann Klein and R. Barton Palmer (eds), *Cycles, Sequels, Spin-Offs, Remakes, and Reboots* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021), pp.316-334, p.322.

Star guided by Obi-Wan's spirit. Thirty-eight years after Lucas' first *Star Wars* film, the protagonist in Abrams' film, *The Force Awakens*, is Rey, who stumbles upon the message left by Poe, then decides to help Finn. However, even though they have help from Han Solo and the Resistance, Rey is kidnapped and taken to the Starkiller Base, which has the power to destroy several planets at the same time. Then, after a series of thrilling and witty confrontations, Rey is finally rescued by her companions, but Han Solo sacrifices himself. Finally, Poe makes a vital move to destroy the Starkiller Base, and Rey returns to the Resistance's base.

The Force Awakens and *A New Hope* have similar narratives that are based on the three-act structure. This type of story, revolving around heroic characters, can be traced back to studies of Joseph Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces* as well as Vladimir Propp's *Mythology of Russian Folktales*, heroic characters experience trouble, then improve their abilities under the guidance of their mentors and eventually win in battle. Therefore, there can be arguments about whether Abrams imitated the structure of *A New Hope*, or just followed traditional narrative patterns. However, both critical fans' receptions focused on the similarities between *The Force Awakens* and *A New Hope*, rather than any compliance with narrative traditions. Still, *The Force Awakens* essentially finds it difficult to break away from those classic narrative formulae. Once again, this means Abrams does not fit easily within the criteria initially attributed to the auteur, such as, Sarris' initially standardised but controversial approach of three premises of the auteur theory. What Abrams has done with *The Force Awakens* makes it is hard to prove he has a distinguishable personal style, which is Sarris' second premise of the auteur theory.⁵²¹

The 'mystery' style, which has been mentioned many times to describe Abrams, is also difficult to identify in this film. One of Abrams' strengths that has been a concern of scholars, such as Sterba, is his complete character portrayals, but this potential is not realised in *Star Wars*.⁵²² Abrams' *The Force Awakens* did not have many mysteries to discover. Instead it is like *A New Hope*, which is a heroic story

⁵²¹ Andrew Sarris, 'notes on the auteur theory in 1962'.

⁵²² Wendy Sterba, *J. J. Abrams VS. Joss Whedon*, p.204.

without complicated moral ambiguity since the characters are natural rebels with straightforward characterisation. Even though he created new characters for *Star Wars*, which separates this from the *Star Trek* reboots, those protagonists are substitutes for the original characters, but with contemporary characteristics. There are female characters and black characters to meet the need for diversity in contemporary society, in the new *Star Wars* film. In a similar vein, even though the reboot of *Star Trek* brought back the original characters, it already had characters of different genders, races and sexual orientations that fit into contemporary culture's needs. Sterba praised Abrams for having 'sensitivity to diversity', which won him much praise.⁵²³ However, it is difficult to say Abrams' motivation for having this diverse setting originates from his personal political views, since it could be challenged that his purpose was only to meet the needs of popular social values.

Abrams' commitment to diversity can also be questioned by analysing the details of the characters in his movies. Abrams' heroine Rey does not take on as many heroic plot scenes as Luke did in the original'. Different from Luke's rejection at the beginning of *A New Hope*, Rey refused Luke's lightsabre because she is frightened by the illusion that follows. Rey feels the Force when she is kidnapped and uses it to save herself, but Luke uses the Force to blow up the Death Star and finally wins the battle for the Rebels. Luke's final heroic action in *A New Hope* also transfers to the pilot Poe, instead of Rey, in *The Force Awakens*. Compared to Luke, Rey's heroic actions are more passive and need to be triggered by other events. Whilst it could be contested that *The Force Awakens* is trying to avoid the classic heroic story, Abrams set up similar plots to *A New Hope* in *The Force Awakens*, but spreads them out among several roles, such as Poe and Finn. As a result, compared to Luke's character arc, Rey's character has less confidence and less heroic spirit. Apart from this film, Abrams' so-called sensitivity, especially to female characters, gradually weakened in the next two *Star Wars* films.

The Force Awakens also contains intuitive imitation of *A New Hope*, with key narrative elements, famous scenes, *mise-en-scène* and the fighting plot. For example, in *A New Hope*, Leia hides the plans in BB-8 before she is captured, and pilot Poe

⁵²³ Ibid, p.203.

gives the map of Luke's location to R2-D2 in *The Force Awakens* when he was chased by the enemy. Then, after a series of interrogations, Leia and Rey are saved by Luke and Finn respectively, both of whom are dressed as a stormtrooper. In addition to these noteworthy imitations, *The Force Awakens* uses the original film's industrial technology. During the pre-production period, Abrams made an announcement, in a series of press interviews, that he would use 'anachronistic celluloid film' rather than digital film and use 'practical special effects' instead of CGI.⁵²⁴ David H. Fleming and Adam Knee pointed out that using this kind of technology was a deliberate way of showing Abrams' faith in Lucas, as a way to promote the film.⁵²⁵ Both the promotion of the behind-the-scenes decisions and the directly imitated film content pays homage to the original, and therefore reflect Abrams' ambition in offering the original *Star Wars* style in this reboot. To achieve this goal, Abrams needed to remodel the film based on Lucas' visual and narrative traits in *A New Hope*. This goes against the main idea advocated by auteur theory. As a critical approach, auteurism claims to identify the director through the film, but *The Force Awakens* is more like a formulaic film that follows the consensus of Hollywood blockbusters and Lucas' version in *A New Hope* and therefore Abrams' personality is distinctly lacking.

Both Truffaut and Sarris' accounts of authorship try to sum up the characteristics of a film author that can continually be seen in a director's films. For Abrams, the clear goal, when taking over the *Star Wars* films, was for him to return to the original films by Lucas to repeat their success. Although Abrams refused Lucas' initial new stories provided for Disney's reboot, and Lucas was already disappointed with Abrams' creation, *The Force Awakens* can still be considered an inheritance of Lucas' original film and story world. This leads to the situation that the film reviews interpret the film as a continuation of the Lucas style, even though it does not correspond to what the popular understands to be Lucas' expressed personal aspirations. From this point, the notion of authorship, which is used to analyse or summarise the characteristics of films based on their director, separates the directors from their films. The analysis of the authorial features within the franchise

⁵²⁴ David H. Fleming and Adam Knee, 'The analogue strikes back: Star Wars, star authenticity, and cinematic anachronism', *Celebrity Studies*, 2019, pp.1-16, p.2, p.8.

⁵²⁵ Ibid.

becomes one based on one franchise instead of one director. What comes with it are the tensions that arise when the authorial voice is shared between filmmakers introducing a different type of collective authorship to that seen when numerous people work together on one film.

Collective authorship is a popular notion among scholars, as a study of authorship, which challenges the notion of the director as sole film author. However, it is rarely the concern of film critics and is not considered in their analysis. *The Force Awakens* had three writers: Lawrence Kasdan, J.J. Abrams, and Michael Arndt, but they received different levels of attention from the critics. Five out of eight film reviews mentioned all the writers when discussing the characters and the film's storytelling, but most of these reviewers only paid brief attention to the writers or others who participated in the film's production. For example, Manohla Dargis gave the writers' names in her film review of *The Force Awakens* as 'Mr. Abrams, with Michael Arndt and the *Star Wars* veteran Lawrence Kasdan'.⁵²⁶ Robbie Collin from *The Telegraph*, praised 'Abrams, Kasdan and Arndt' for their 'deep ingenuity' in creating characters, such as Kylo Ren, but in both cases they quickly return to a discussion of how Abrams handled the movie's plot rather than any further analysis based on these three writers.⁵²⁷ Compared to Arndt, Kasdan is at least mentioned separately by the critics, because he was also the writer of *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. Peter Bradshaw even ignored the other writer Arndt in his review and only mentioned Kasdan and Abrams.⁵²⁸ Both Bradshaw and Dargis use the word 'veteran' to describe Kasdan, contributing to discourses that focus on the established context of the *Star Wars* franchise, rather than considering *The Force Awakens* as an individual film.⁵²⁹ From this point of view, Kasdan can be considered one of the collaborative authors within the development of the *Star Wars* franchise.

However, this kind of collaborative authorship that includes writers or other

⁵²⁶ Manohla Dargis [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film].

⁵²⁷ Robbie Collin [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Lucasfilm Ltd./Bad Robot Productions, 2015), *The Telegraph*, 14 December 2015. <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/0/star-wars-force-awakens-review-magic-back/>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁵²⁸ Peter Bradshaw [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film].

⁵²⁹ Peter Bradshaw [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film].
Manohla Dargis [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film].

participants is still not the primary analytical perspective held by critical reviews of *The Force Awakens*. Among the eight film reviews of *The Force Awakens*, only McCarthy offered his opinion on Kasdan's participation in his film review for *The Hollywood Reporter*.⁵³⁰ Instead of leading a discussion about collective authorship, he criticised how even though *The Force Awakens* had experienced writer Kasdan on board, it still lost the 'magical elements that Lucas slipped into the first three films'.⁵³¹ In contrast to exploring the collective authorship, McCarthy's emphasis on Lucas' non-participation reaffirms critics' views of Lucas' position as creator, rather than recognising Kasdan's participation throughout the franchise's production. In this context, film reviews' content has denied the possibility of collaborative authors in the traditional sense within *Star Wars*. Accordingly, people involved in the production are also considered in some of the film reviews but in a limited manner. Similar to McCarthy, most other reviews only referred to members of the production team in order to prove or to enhance Lucas as the franchise author. For example, McCarthy and Chang's film reviews celebrated the return of people who used to work for the originals, such as Kasdan and John Williams, but only to explain Abrams' smart way of continuing the 'previous features of the franchise'.⁵³² McCarthy introduced Williams as 'the key contributor to the series' success' and commented the director is a 'very capable student' who knows to engage the 'experts in the field'.⁵³³ This approach not only ignores the contributions of others, but also enlarges the importance of directors, and this idea of taking directors as the creative centre is clearly influenced by auteur theory. Therefore, film reviews still centre their discussion on the role of director. For *The Force Awakens*, reviews focused on two directors: Lucas and Abrams. More specifically, the eight reviews in this study focused on two perspectives of the director. One is how Abrams kept the tone of the originals, and the other is how Abrams dealt with this film compared to his other

⁵³⁰ Todd McCarthy [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Lucasfilm Ltd./Bad Robot Productions, 2015), *The Hollywood Reporter*, 16 December 2015. < <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/star-wars-force-awakens-review-848963> > [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁵³¹ Ibid.

⁵³² Todd McCarthy [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film].

Justin Chang [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film].

⁵³³ Todd McCarthy [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film].

films, such as *Star Trek*. Under the notion of authorship, the latter follows the director's authorial voice as a way of analysing the film, while the former attempts to involve the shared authorial voice between two directors.

Abrams did not earn as much praise based on his own filmmaking style or skills in film reviews as Jackson did in his Middle-earth films. Indeed, there were few comments only focused on Abrams' authorial voice. In Collin's review, he indicated that Abrams used the same approach as he had in his reboot of *Star Trek*, in which there were several clichéd 'action scenes and plot manoeuvres' from the original series as well as from films such as *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones*.⁵³⁴ Another critic, Grierson, mentioned more of Abrams' work in a review and deemed that *The Force Awakens* has the same problem as some of Abrams' other films (the two *Star Trek* reboots and *Mission: Impossible III*) which is that it contains a 'slightly cheeky tone' with 'warmly nostalgic humour'.⁵³⁵ These comments were not focused on Abrams' authorial voice. Instead, just as Dargis recognised as she described that Abrams is not 'a god or an empire builder like George Lucas', but a 'superfan and pop culture savant', what the franchise needed from Abrams was not his own authorial voice but his understanding of *Star Wars* from the fans' viewpoint.⁵³⁶

***Star Wars* without Lucas**

The second film in the new *Star Wars* trilogy, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017), was written and directed by Rian Johnson, who also wrote and directed the films *The Brothers Bloom* (2008) and *Looper* (2012). Unlike Abrams, who worked with several screenwriters, Johnson was the first director since George Lucas to write and direct a *Star Wars* film by himself. After Johnson's *The Last Jedi*, Abrams came back to direct the third film, *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* (2019), co-written with Chris Terrio. According to Rotten Tomatoes, the *Star Wars* sequel trilogy received three different ratings from critics (Tomatometer) and audience.⁵³⁷ *The Force Awakens*

⁵³⁴ Robbie Collin [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film].

⁵³⁵ Tim Grierson [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film].

⁵³⁶ Manohla Dargis [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* [film].

⁵³⁷ The Tomatometer score based on the reviews of film critics. The Audience Score voted by the audiences with ticket verification.

earned the highest score from both sides with the Tomatometer Score of 94% and the Audience Score of 86%.⁵³⁸ *The Last Jedi* received a similar score from critics with the Tomatometer Score of 90% but had the lowest Audience Score at 43%.⁵³⁹ In contrast, *The Rise of Skywalker* performed well on the Audience Score with 86%, but did not find favour with the critics, having a 51% Tomatometer Score.⁵⁴⁰ When compared to *The Force Awakens*, the latter two films did not receive balanced feedback.

The Last Jedi did not have a good response from the audience, but critics' film reviews praised Johnson's work in this *Star Wars* film. Newman described Johnson as the 'best director to sign up for the franchise' in his review of *The Last Jedi*.⁵⁴¹ His compliment was that Johnson's film had high political 'seriousness' and 'fan-service tear-jerking with enough charm and humour', which was different from Abrams.⁵⁴² Bradshaw described Johnson's *Star Wars* film as his displaying 'determination' to 'put his own mark on the project' and 'wrest the lightsaber away from' Abrams.⁵⁴³ These comments draw on auteurist approaches by trying to distinguish Johnson's personal style through a comparison with the previous *Star Wars* films. Different from how Abrams was treated in reviews, critics actively explored the breakthroughs Johnson made in his film. Meanwhile, Johnson's participation as director and writer also highlights him as a potential creative filmmaker. Manohla Dargis directly suggested that Johnson was 'putting his fingerprints on a franchise that deliberately resists individual authorship'.⁵⁴⁴ As for Johnson's personal traits shown in this *Star*

⁵³⁸ Rotten Tomatoes, *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens*, 2015 < https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/star_wars_episode_vii_the_force_awakens> [accessed 4 August 2020].

⁵³⁹ Rotten Tomatoes, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*, 2017 < https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/star_wars_the_last_jedi> [accessed 4 August 2020].

⁵⁴⁰ Rotten Tomatoes, *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*, 2019 < https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/star_wars_the_rise_of_skywalker> [accessed 4 August 2020].

⁵⁴¹ Kim Newman [review], *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* [film] dir. by. Rian Johnson (Lucasfilm Ltd., 2017), *Sight & Sound*, February 2018, Vol. 28 Issue 2, p74-74.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ Peter Bradshaw [review], *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* [film] dir. by. Rian Johnson (Lucasfilm Ltd., 2017), *The Guardian*, 13 December 2017. < <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/dec/12/star-wars-the-last-jedi-review-episode-viii-rian-johnson>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁵⁴⁴ Manohla Dargis [review], *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* [film] dir. by. Rian Johnson (Lucasfilm Ltd., 2017), *The New York Times*, 12 December 2017. < <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/12/movies/star-wars-the-last-jedi-review.html>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

Wars film, Peter Debruge praised Johnson's authorial voice by discussing how individual directors were 'supporting a unified corporate aesthetic' in 'Disney-owned property'.⁵⁴⁵ Comparing Johnson to Abrams, Johnson achieved more recognition in terms of his authorial voice according to these critics' comments. Abrams, however, is more considered as the safe pair of hands of dealing with franchise films or blockbuster films, rather than stand out for his own authorial features.

As for the negative feedback from the audience, Kailash Koushik and Abigail Reed referenced several pieces of news in their research. They argued this low audience score was the result of the female characters rising to prominence in this film and there is a group of audiences, mostly alternative right-wing groups, who believe that 'women are best left out of meaningful roles in the franchise'.⁵⁴⁶ Radical comments like this even affected the daily life of actresses from *Star Wars* films. The Asian actress Kelly Marie Tran, who played one of the leading roles Rose Tico in *The Last Jedi*, deleted her social media because of online harassment.⁵⁴⁷ The controversy was not only about female roles, but also about race. Morten Bay argued that the online disputes generated by *The Last Jedi* were due to the 'deliberate and organised social media influence tactics' from domestic and foreign operators with political motives.⁵⁴⁸ In particular, during the Presidency of Donald Trump, a social media user with a right-wing agenda, discussions on social media magnified the political used of the film.

Although there are arguments about how the left-leaning values in *The Last Jedi* caused resentment from a particular group of audience via the Internet, it is not

⁵⁴⁵ Peter Debruge [review], *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* [film] dir. by. Rian Johnson (Lucasfilm Ltd., 2017), *Variety*, 12 December 2017. <<https://variety.com/2017/film/reviews/star-wars-the-last-jedi-review-rian-johnson-1202635597/>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁵⁴⁶ Kailash Koushik and Abigail Reed, 'Star Wars: The Last Jedi, Beauty and the Beast, and Disney's commodification of feminism: A political economic analysis', *Social sciences (Basel)*, Vol.7, no.11 (2018), pp.237-258, p.243.

⁵⁴⁷ Kelly Marie Tran, *I won't be marginalized by online harassment*, 2018 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/21/movies/kelly-marie-tran.html>> [accessed 12 November 2020].

⁵⁴⁸ Morten Bay, 'Weaponizing the haters: The Last Jedi and the strategic politicization of pop culture through social media manipulation', *First Monday*, Vol.23, no.11 (2018), <<https://journals.uic.edu/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/9388>> [accessed 12 November 2020].

just this franchise that expresses such values.⁵⁴⁹ Firstly, the criticism of the female lead in the *Star Wars* films did not start from this film but had existed since *The Force Awakens* introduced Rey into this franchise. Secondly, when interviewed about another *Star Wars* anthology film, *Rogue One* (dir. Gareth Edwards, 2016), and questioned about the lead female characters in the recent *Star Wars* films, the president of Lucasfilm Kathleen Kennedy claimed that she had no responsibility to keep *Star Wars* films as only for men and had no need to apologise for having a female lead in *Star Wars*.⁵⁵⁰ Yet despite outside criticism and stern responses from the studio, the scores for *Rogue One* are very similar across the audience and critics on Rotten Tomatoes, at 86% and 84%, respectively.⁵⁵¹ Thirdly, there are also critics who offer uncomfortable comments regarding female leads. As a female lead character, Rey's similar character arc to Luke did not receive similar comments. For example, in Tim Grierson's review of *The Rise of Skywalker*, he compared Luke and Rey then argued that Luke's arc in the original trilogy was a 'classic hero's journey', while Rey's arc in this sequel trilogy was 'more of a soap opera'; despite similar character arcs, the female protagonist is received differently.⁵⁵² This sudden drop in positive audience responses to *The Last Jedi*, compared with the previous film, *The Force Awakens*, was therefore not entirely due to its female lead character or the political context of that time.

Abrams also had his own comments on this second film. In his interview with Brian Hiatt for *Rolling Stone*, Abrams said he 'laughed' when he read Johnson's script draft, and he further explained by saying 'I appreciated the choices he made as a filmmaker that would probably be very different from the choices that I would have

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Dave Itzkoff, *From 'Rogue One': A Rising Star in a Galaxy Far, Far Away*, 2016 < https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/29/movies/felicity-jones-rogue-one-a-star-wars-story.html?smid=tw-nytimesarts&smtyp=cur&_r=0 > [accessed 27 November 2020].

⁵⁵¹ Rotten Tomatoes, *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story*, 2016 < https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/rogue_one_a_star_wars_story > [accessed 28 November 2020].

⁵⁵² Tim Grierson [review], *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Lucasfilm Ltd./Bad Robot Productions, 2019), *Screen International*, 18 December 2019. < <https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/star-wars-the-rise-of-skywalker-review/5145724.article> > [accessed 14 April 2020].

made'.⁵⁵³ Abrams claimed that he was surprised that Johnson's film came from the death of Snoke, who was the supreme leader of the First Order, and the dark side of Luke.⁵⁵⁴ One of Abrams' frequent collaborators, Mary Jo Markey, also the editor of *The Force Awakens*, offered a more critical take in her interview with *Light the Fuse* podcast.⁵⁵⁵ She claimed that *The Last Jedi* 'und[id] the storytelling of the first one'.⁵⁵⁶ Johnson subverted a series of expectations in *The Last Jedi*, on the one hand, this is what Johnson usually does in his films, such as *The Brothers Bloom* and *Looper*. On the other hand, *The Last Jedi* is a film that belongs to the *Star Wars* franchise, therefore, although this series of reversals on the surface enhances the interest of *The Last Jedi* as an individual film, at the same time, it may have caused dissatisfaction among fans and audiences because it was different from the established cinematic world of *Star Wars*.

When Hiatt asked about whether Johnson's film would influence Abrams' third *Star Wars* film, Abrams answered that 'nothing sort of obviated a sense of inevitability where I thought the story could go'.⁵⁵⁷ *The Rise of Skywalker* was well received by the audience according to the score on Rotten Tomatoes, even though Rey, as the female lead, had her mission in this film maximised. *The Force Awakens* assigned the heroic actions to several characters, but Rey in *The Last Jedi* is more like a leader in the Resistance who fulfilled all the typical heroic actions. This sense of saviour-like destiny is also upgraded again in the third film, *The Rise of Skywalker*, which follows both references of reversal the infamous line of *The Empire Strikes Back* 'I am your father' and the reversal of Rey to be the granddaughter of Emperor Palpatine. The reappearance of Emperor Palpatine' at the end of the film almost completely negates the previous story of Darth Vader, who redeemed himself by killing the Emperor in *Return of the Jedi*. As a film in such a massive franchise, it does

⁵⁵³ Brian Hiatt, *The writer and director on the challenge of ending the saga, fan criticism, and respecting George Lucas' vision*, 2019 < <https://www.rollingstone.com/movies/movie-news/star-wars-jj-abrams-secrets-of-skywalker-912362/> > [accessed 20 May 2020].

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ Zack Sharf, J.J. Abrams' Editor Still Feels Very Strongly About 'Last Jedi' Consciously Undoing 'Star Wars', 2020 < <https://www.indiewire.com/2020/04/force-awakens-editor-last-jedi-ruined-star-wars-1202223866/> > [accessed 20 November 2020].

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁷ Brian Hiatt, *The writer and director on the challenge of ending the saga, fan criticism, and respecting George Lucas' vision*.

not maintain the integrity of this famous narrative world. In the process of building its own new story, *The Rise of Skywalker* destroys the integrity that was formed through Lucas' *Star Wars* films.

Maryann Brandon, the editor of Abrams' two *Star Wars* films, described the sequel trilogy as a 'novel' and complained that after others finished the middle part, Abrams needed to think about how to end it.⁵⁵⁸ Unlike the praise from the audience, this film was not well received by the film critics. Grierson noted that compared to *The Last Jedi*'s ambition of breaking through 'some of the franchises' mythos', this third film by Abrams was 'uninspired' and did not show its 'personality'.⁵⁵⁹ Grierson further criticised Abrams' film as a generic blockbuster that just referenced the lines and plots from the original films instead of inheriting the 'DNA' of Lucas' *Star Wars*.⁵⁶⁰ *The Rise of Skywalker*, at 142-minutes long, is full of plot details that enrich the storylines of Rey and other characters, but this happens within the narrative that affects emotional empathy. Within this context, those superficial tribute scenes, such as Rey walking in Tatooine with two suns in front of her, is not enough to satisfy the film critics. Even though Abrams claimed *The Last Jedi* would not affect the direction of the third film, in reality, *The Rise of Skywalker* appeared to cover up or ignore the previous film, thus destroying the continuity within its trilogy.

Critical reviews have analysed *The Rise of Skywalker* based on authorship criticism, but, at the same time, have also considered the directors beyond Abrams. The reviews of Abrams' third film mentioned Johnson and Lucas, in order to contextualise the film as well as the franchise. Among the eight film reviews of *The Rise of Skywalker*, only one did not mention Lucas's name, and Johnson's name was mentioned in four, being used in comparison to Abrams. The fact that Johnson and Lucas are mentioned in critical reviews, as well as the way and number of times they are mentioned, proved that the critical reviews of a film belonging to a franchise

⁵⁵⁸ Zack Sharf, J.J. Abrams' Editor Still Feels Very Strongly About 'Last Jedi' Consciously Undoing 'Star Wars'.

⁵⁵⁹ Tim Grierson [review], *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* [film] dir. by. J.J. Abrams (Lucasfilm Ltd./Bad Robot Productions, 2019), *Screen International*, 18 December 2019. <<https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/star-wars-the-rise-of-skywalker-review/5145724.article>> [accessed 14 April 2020].

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

also notice the people who are absent from this film's production. The framework of this kind of film review considers other directors who are important to the whole franchise's picture or who have played a 'perfect' role in the films that come from the same franchise. When mentioning their names, these film reviews empirically maintain the approach of authorship criticism by linking their names to the film content and comparing their authorial features within the franchise. On the surface, it constitutes a form of collective authorship or multiple authorship, however, within the context of the franchise, the relationship among these filmmakers is not a precise collective relationship. Most of them chronologically contribute to the franchise. The latecomers can make changes to their predecessors' work whether these new participants will receive criticism or praise. More importantly, they cannot reach a unified standard. The franchise has the collective intention, which follows the idea from collective authorship and, most importantly, it could contain different individual intentions by different directors.

The unstable reception of the last two *Star Wars* films was not only because of each film itself, but also because they did not fit into the trilogy or the franchise very well. When Jenkins argued that a successful franchise needs a single creator or a stable group of creators to take control, his idea could also correspond to the individual author or collective authors within a franchise.⁵⁶¹ After Disney and Abrams refused Lucas' stories for the new trilogy, then different writers and directors were employed for each film, the coherence in this sequel trilogy declined. The original trilogy's main storyline is how the Resistance overthrows the Galactic Empire step-by-step. Its core characters always are Luke, Princess Leia, and Han Solo. Similarly, the prequel trilogy's main storyline is focused on how the Galactic Republic step-by-step transformed into the Galactic Empire. Moreover, its three films keep focusing on Anakin's life. However, when it comes to the sequel trilogy, the main storyline is not as stable as its predecessors. The central villain, Kylo Ren from the first film, suddenly became a good guy in the third film, after experiencing a profound explanation of his backstory in *The Last Jedi*. As for the new characters, *The Force Awakens* initially appeared to have a group of three characters, like the

⁵⁶¹ Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*.

three main characters in the original trilogy, but it failed to set up continuity character arcs for Finn and Poe, who were supposed to be the essential roles like Leia and Han in the originals. Finn has three different relationships with three female characters in the three films. Poe does not have many scenes in *The Force Awakens*, but he is still a strong character. In *The Last Jedi*, he became a reckless man who did not follow orders at the beginning of the second film and experienced the process of growing into a leader in *The Rise of Skywalker*. This storyline of Poe ignored the previous film's narrative. Also, in the last film, Poe's important role as a leading pilot is replaced by Lando (Billy Dee Williams), who is not a new character for the *Star Wars* franchise but was absent in the former two films.

In the case of the *Star Wars* sequel trilogy, Abrams was not the single creator, but neither was there a stable group of creators working throughout the whole trilogy. Two directors, Abrams and Johnson, also worked on different paths even though they all maintained a level of loyalty to Lucas. In aiming at the consideration of loyalty to Lucas, the evaluation of the two directors by film critics is divided in two directions. Johnson's loyalty to Lucas lay in his understanding of Lucas' *Star Wars* theme, whilst extending it in his own way. Abrams, compared to Johnson, preferred to reproduce Lucas' *Star Wars*, especially the parts that were popular with the audience. Rather than inheriting Lucas' authorial voice, it is better to say that Abrams strictly inherited or repeated Lucas's contribution. Therefore, Abrams' film was still recognised by the audience. As such, for the film critics and some of the audiences, the franchise's fans and cinephiles, their judgements were influenced by several features. One was whether the new directors showed their personal characteristics, and the other was whether the new directors were loyal to the whole franchise's big picture. Notably, a level of personal characteristics is welcomed but they should also be in keeping with the franchise. Different viewers have different evaluation criteria regarding this balance of personal style versus franchise' tradition, and that results in the scores from critics and audiences, given above, being different. Combined with the film reviews from the eight sources analysed in this study, as well as the Tomatometer Scores and Audience Scores of *The Last Jedi* and *The Rise of Skywalker* from Rotten Tomatoes, it can be inferred

that the critics paid more attention to the film's director, while audiences still assessed the new films from the *Star Wars* franchise based on their understanding of Lucas' original *Star War* films. Thus, authorship criticism is still a popular approach to understanding franchise films, but it has evolved in two different directions. The film's director is constructed and analysed as the author, while the creator of the franchise also is considered as another central figure when understanding the film. These different responses to the franchise lead to different responses to the film. Correspondingly, each approach represents a different demand on the film and the sequel trilogy led by Abrams did not find a suitable way to meet these demands uniformly.

The inheritance of authorial voice

It is commendable that a director can bring new elements to enrich a franchise's narrative world. Meanwhile, any damage done to the narrative world of the franchise would be criticised. Between the two, being faithful to the original becomes a safe strategy when contributing to a popular franchise. Rather than replacing a franchise's existing tone with a subsequent director's personal authorial voice, some film franchises' production has been expected to continue the famous/original authorial voice in their production. *Star Trek* and *The Force Awakens* are the first films Abrams directed within these two franchises, and they started in different ways. *Star Trek* had the same characters as the original but offered new storylines, while the story of *The Force Awakens* introduced a new generation of leading characters with cameos from original characters. However, *Star Trek* was not afraid to promote its differences, while *The Force Awakens* kept paying tribute to the original work to emphasise that it was not separated from the type of *Star Wars* films that were hugely successful with audiences. Instead of expanding the world of *Star Wars*, the new trilogy, especially Abrams' two films, essentially retold the original story with new heroes and new settings. This approach was similar to Newman's criticism that Abrams had simply remade the old *Star Trek* series, while

Lin's *Beyond* offered a new take on Roddenberry's authorial voice.⁵⁶²

With *Star Wars*, Abrams inherited features from Lucas' original films, implying an inheritance of the authorial voice from Lucas. Compared with Johnson's *The Last Jedi*, Abrams' two reboot films are more like a reference to the originals rather than a development of them. This approach was successful with the first reboot *The Force Awakens* but failed to gain critical success when repeated at the end of the trilogy. With *Star Trek*, Abrams inherited the authorial voice from Roddenberry in the same way as happened with *Star Wars*, keeping the original roles and trying to explore the philosophical topic of human nature, or contemporary politics, as Roddenberry had done. However, this was just a surface-level inheritance as Abrams did not offer a more in-depth exploration on the theme that underpinned Roddenberry's original series. Abrams' approach to the *Star Trek* reboot was more aggressive than for *Star Wars*, and this was reflected in the film's marketing strategy rather than the creativity within the film. Trying to prove that this is a brand-new film may be an effective marketing strategy, but fans of the original version resisted it. Most importantly, it did not showcase Abrams' personal style either.

Abrams was dubbed 'a love child of Mr. Lucas and Mr. Spielberg, born to the blockbuster world they helped make' by critic Dargis.⁵⁶³ He is different from Jackson or other directors who started their careers as independent directors. In fact, most of Abrams' films are franchise films. For scholars like Sterba, 'Abrams has not quite found his personal voice'.⁵⁶⁴ With *Star Trek*, the studio wanted Abrams to join and modernise this franchise in order to extend its audience scope. Abrams achieved this and made the reboot *Star Trek* films successful blockbusters, praised by audiences and critics. After positive audience reception of the rebooted films, *Star Trek* launched a series of TV dramas to enrich its franchise, such as *Star Trek: Discovery* (CBS, 2017 – present), *Star Trek: Short Treks* (CBS, 2018–present), and *Star Trek: Picard* (CBS, 2020 – present). Abrams' function within this franchise has been to help extend its audience.

⁵⁶² Kim Newman [review], *Star Trek: Beyond*.

⁵⁶³ Manohla Dargis [review], *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*.

⁵⁶⁴ Wendy Sterba, *J. J. Abrams VS. Joss Whedon*, p.207.

In contrast to *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* is a franchise developed around films, so, its demands are much more complicated. Disney's demand was the guarantee of box office takings to ensure that its acquisition of Lucasfilm did not lead to a financial loss and on the premise of those new films' success Disney could continue to seek commercial success in its other *Star Wars* spin-off.⁵⁶⁵ Therefore, *Star Wars* needs a stable development of its narrative universe, based on its original and successful retention of its features that have been celebrated by the audience for decades. Despite box office success, the poor reception of the sequel trilogy is because it failed to build up such a strong base for the franchise's future development. In the same period as Abrams' reboots, other anthology films were released, such as *Rogue One* (USA, dir. Gareth Edwards, 2016) and *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (USA, dir. Ron Howard, 2018). There are also other TV dramas being developed, such as *The Mandalorian* (Disney+, 2019 – present), but none of these works is an extension of his films. Abrams did not achieve the status of the original creator for the two franchises, instead, his responsibility was to work under the demands of the studio, fans, or new audiences of the franchise: he could not change the tone of the franchises. As a result, viewers also would not attribute all the franchise films that Abrams had directed to Abrams himself, only seeing them as Lucas' creation. Abrams is not the only director who has suffered this fate. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Matthew Vaughn also faced this demand when he directed *X-Men: First Class*. This eventually led him to refuse to return to the *X-Men* franchise and instead he developed another franchise's film, *Kingsman*, to escape this limitation. Compared with Vaughn, Abrams is more like a trustworthy pair of hands for the reboot franchise. However, the fact that audience dissatisfaction often comes from a comparison between reboots and the original, also highlights the difficulty for Abrams in establishing his own authorial voice within the two franchises. From the perspective of franchises' needs, Abrams was required to inherit the authorial voice instead of expressing his own. Also, when the casting of directors continues as the franchise develops, the new directors are being compared with the original directors rather than Abrams. It is difficult for Abrams to become another

⁵⁶⁵ Robert Iger, *The Ride of a Lifetime*.

authority of the franchise like Peter Jackson. Even though Jackson had' star-director status throughout the Middle-earth franchise, he still had to build a one-to-one relationship with the franchise as the only director. Thus, Jackson still meets the requirement of identifying the director's authorial voice via the connection between him and the films he directed. Abrams had no such conditions to establish his connection to the two franchises from the beginning, as other directors had always participated.

The case study of Abrams breaks another general understanding of authorship, that the specific artistic identity is tied one-to-one to the author to whom it belongs. Through the case study of Abrams, authorship was developed into a way to explore the connection among films from the same franchise but directed by different directors. Abrams was not the key figure who defined the authorial voice within the two franchises. Instead, he became a carrier, responsible for keeping the original authorial voice within the franchise. By studying his directing experience as well as how the audience and critics reacted to his reboots, this case study has argued that the authorial voice can be intentionally preserved through the franchise films, even without the participation of the owner of those authorial features. Nevertheless, this can be a challenge to those who participate afterwards because contradictions or tensions often arise when they have to deal with the demand from the franchise to maintain the authorial features of others. It could be argued that the concept of authorship can become meaningless in such an atmosphere of either contradiction or cooperation among different authorial voices.

However, introducing the idea of collective authorship has given a new direction for exploring this kind of conflict or cooperation. The idea of collective authorship promotes the collaboration between different authors, emphasising collaborative intention in filmmaking. Therefore, the collective authorship encouraged the discussion about other people's participation, not only focusing on the director. It is normally a theoretical concept that attempts to acknowledge the artistic contribution of all those involved in the production of the film. Sellors pointed out that during filmmaking, the conceiving processes and the filmic utterance delivery are two different 'tasks' theoretically, but 'may be hopelessly

inseparable in practice'.⁵⁶⁶ So, in Sellors' definition, the idea of collective authorship is hardly used to identify individuals who could be qualified as author(s) of a film but to emphasise the 'collective will of the group', which suggests the 'intention is no longer located in any individual'.⁵⁶⁷ Then, there are possibilities that the individual opinion 'held by any of the members of the collective' is different from the collective will.⁵⁶⁸ The nature of Sellors' arguments mainly encourages abandoning the 'mythical and romanticised' understanding of authorship.⁵⁶⁹ However, Sellors also pointed out the fact that the distributors still follow such romantic views of authorship and market the film under the directors' names.⁵⁷⁰ As this situation cannot be eliminated, this chapter discusses Sellors' argument by situating it in the context of the current state of the film market through the case study of Abrams in order to present some new ideas for understanding collective authorship within franchise cinema. In order to apply this idea in a more practical way, this case study analysed broad characteristics among the films from two franchises separately, as well as analysed how these characteristics have been created and especially who is thought to have made it. Then, the discussion around these specific people and some of the specific collective wills demonstrates the mobility of the authorial voice in the context of franchise cinema.

As discussed above, both the two creators of the two franchises, Roddenberry and Lucas, expressed their own views that proved to be different from those of the later films in the franchises. However, even though Roddenberry had died by the time of the *Star Trek* reboot and Lucas had publicly stated that his wishes did not correspond to what the rebooted *Star Wars* film presents, their names were still used in the marketing of those rebooted films. Also, other than their names for marketing use, their authorial voices also kept in the further production of each franchise. The authorial voices that are inherited in every franchise film become the film franchise's collective will. Similarly, the authorial voices here also cannot be attributed to any individual but are more related to the franchise. Those who join

⁵⁶⁶ C. Paul. Sellors, *Film authorship*, p.124.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid, p.125.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid, p.124.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid, p.125.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

the franchise become part of the group that shares the franchise's collective will and the authorial voice. As Sellors emphasises that the 'collaborative agreement takes priority over individual preferences', in the case of *Star Wars*, both Abrams and Johnson prioritised the collaborative agreement, which is based on the franchise's demand, over their individual preferences, only in different ways.⁵⁷¹ This collaborative agreement based on the *Star Wars* franchise's demand mainly comes from the authority of Lucas. Furthermore, it is important to notice that his recognisable authoritative features are also not his own opinion, which again, takes the collaborative agreement as the priority. The case of *Star Trek* also demonstrates a similar situation.

When Sellors argues, 'within the production collective is an authorial collective', this is for the production of one film, which is a collective production.⁵⁷² There are cases such as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy that can fit this idea of collective production even though it contains three films, but they are produced together. However, there are also film franchises with a long-time scale, such as *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, which contain films that were produced separately and could have different production teams during different periods. Therefore, when Sellors suggests considering how each of the 'authored' participants' 'contributions relate to one another' in one film, this case extended it into one franchise so that some different arguments from his suggestion arise.⁵⁷³ The understanding of authorial collective is separated from the production collective and becomes a broader concept within franchise cinema. In a film franchise, the situation in which one film inherits the authorial voice of the previous film can also be considered a special form of the authorial collective in franchise cinema.

Back to Sellors' original advocacy, which was to discuss the authorial collective without discussing individuals and to abandon romantic views of authorship, a similar way of understanding could be developed in franchise cinema. The authorial collective of a franchise is a collection of several films. Different from one film, the

⁵⁷¹ C. Paul. Sellors, *Film authorship*, p.125.

⁵⁷² Ibid., p.124.

⁵⁷³ C. Paul Sellors, 'Collective Authorship in Film', p.270.

authorial collective of a franchise is established step by step rely on every film. The marketing and reception of the film become part of the consideration for the next film's production, given the gap between each film's release. Therefore, in the study of collective authorship within franchise cinema, the romantic views of authorship cannot be completely abandoned, just as the marketing and reception of one film in a franchise cannot be ignored as an influence to produce the later films. Lucas has been recognized as the authorial figure of *Star Wars*, and Abrams' name also has been used for marketing the rebooted films. However, the difference between Lucas and Abrams is that Lucas' position is more like the traditional romantic view of the author, but Abrams is not. Instead, Abrams is an individual, but he is a symbol of the authorial collective within the franchise production. Abrams inherited the authorial voice from Lucas, or what has been believed from Lucas, rather than his individual opinion. In contrast to *Star Wars*, the marketing strategy of *Star Trek* rebooted films relies more on Abrams' name, such as claim of 'not your father's *Star Trek*' during the marketing.⁵⁷⁴ Still, he is not the only name that be marketed as the authorial figure of those *Star Trek* reboots. The creator's name, Roddenberry, is not completely ignored, and is even more noticed by fans of the original.

Indeed, even if Abrams' individual will could overlap with the collective will, what is being highlighted in franchise cinema is in fact the collective will. This could superficially be interpreted as a collaborative approach to seek common ground, while reserving differences within the long-term production of a series of films of one franchise. However, because of the franchise's strong demand for commercial success, it is often the case that how much emphasis is placed on the part of the process that seeks similarity is determined by the importance of the original authorial figure of the franchise, rather than the director of the film. For example, with Abrams, the expectation for him to keep Lucas's original *Star Wars* film style was stronger than the expectation for him to maintain the original *Star Trek* style. In other words, seeking the original authorial voice of the iconic figures of the franchise, most of whom are the creators, becomes one of the key approaches when criticising a film within a long-running franchise. Abrams became the safe hand of such

⁵⁷⁴ Salvor Seldon, *Star Trek - tv spot #5 Not your Father's ST HD*.

franchise rebooted films because of his ability to integrate into the collective as well as a reputation that could be used for marketing. The inheritance of authorial voice is a new aspect of understanding collective authorship within the context of franchise cinema, so this thesis proposes the idea of the collective authorial voice within the film franchise. Abrams, as the safe hand of franchise reboots and key figure who gave his priority to the collective authorial voice, became one of the franchise authors alongside the creators of the franchises.

The case study of Abrams combines the idea of the authorial voice with the concept of collective authorship, further improving the framework for studying authorship in the context of franchise cinema. Instead of being limited to the condition of focusing on the director and his films, the case of Abrams provides the possibility to identify the authorial voice within the franchise, but beyond the usual limit of only relating the authorial voice to one individual auteur. Therefore, the authorial voice of a franchise can become a mobile feature that can be linked to whoever it needs with the franchise. This understanding of the concept of authorial voice from franchise cinema further offers a basis for discussion in the last case study, Marvel Studios and the MCU franchise.

Chapter Three: Case study of the MCU franchise

This chapter focuses on Marvel Studios, currently a subsidiary company of Disney. Since 2008, Marvel Studios has produced several films, TV series, short films (One-Shots) based on the Marvel comics' characters, and they all share continuity of the narrative universe with each other, as part of what has become known as the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). Although the previous chapter recognised the importance of the studio's position with the example of *Star Wars* and Lucasfilm, the MCU case study in this chapter will analyse in detail how a studio's authorial position functions within the development of a coherent franchise. Every section of this chapter is focused on the key idea of exploring how the studio's control underpins the guise of collective authorship that is necessary to a large-scale film franchise. The MCU franchise has similarities to each of the previous case studies as well as its own unique features. Like Jackson's *LOTR* trilogy or *The Hobbit* trilogy, the MCU franchise also has an overall plan for the franchise, in fact it is even more meticulously planned. Two years before the first MCU film, *Iron Man* (2008), was released, at the 2006 San Diego Comic-Con (SDCC), Kevin Feige, who represents Marvel Studios as their spokesman, claimed that 'I think if you listen to the characters I'm working on currently and put them all together, there's no coincidence that they may someday equal the Avengers'.⁵⁷⁵ In contrast to Jackson's Middle-earth film franchise, the MCU relies on different directors' participation. It also differs from the film franchises that Abrams has participated in, which depend on the integration of one director into an existing film franchise. By studying the unique features of the MCU franchise and Marvel Studios, this chapter further uncovers a new direction for the study of authorship, as well as authorship's function, within franchise cinema.

⁵⁷⁵ *Marvel Studios Assembling a Universe* [TV Movie] (USA, ABC, 2014).

Given the high frequency of Marvel film releases, this case study sets the research scope as the first twenty-two Marvel films from 2008 to 2019.⁵⁷⁶ Unlike the previous case studies, this chapter turns its perspective beyond the directors to focus on the studio's participation in order to give the concept of the franchise author a broader scope to understand. The studios mentioned in previous chapters, like New Line Cinema that produced the Middle-earth film franchise, are different from Marvel Studios, which only has this one film franchise – the MCU – that encompasses all their films and related products; therefore, Marvel Studios *is* the MCU franchise. This relationship leads to a new direction for the study of authorship, which focuses on the studio's participation and studies its role as an authorial figure, especially in its early era before Marvel Studios became a dominant commercial brand. On this premise, the study of the directors will also be different from the previous cases. This chapter will not analyse all the directors one by one (eighteen directors across the twenty-two films in this case study), instead, the directors will be selected and grouped for analysis as follows: directors who have directed more than one MCU film; directors who have directed one MCU film; directors left the project before a film's release. This is done so this case study can closely focus on the relationship between individuals and the studio.

This chapter will first offer an overview of Marvel Comics and the MCU franchise, by introducing discussions around the 'Marvel style' from the comic era. Then the focus will turn to explore the authorial control of Marvel Studios from three different perspectives. To understand the traits and uniqueness of Marvel Studios' authorial voice, the first perspective explores the authorial voice associated with

⁵⁷⁶ The 22 Marvel films are: *Iron Man* (USA, dir. Jon Favreau, 2008), *The Incredible Hulk* (USA, dir. Louis Leterrier, 2008), *Iron Man 2* (USA, dir. Jon Favreau, 2010), *Thor* (USA, dir. Kenneth Branagh, 2011), *Captain America: The First Avenger* (USA, dir. Joe Johnston, 2011), *The Avengers* (USA, dir. Joss Whedon, 2012), *Iron Man 3* (USA, dir. Shane Black, 2012), *Thor: The Dark World* (USA, dir. Alan Taylor, 2013), *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (USA, dir. Anthony and Joe Russo, 2014), *Guardians of the Galaxy* (USA, dir. James Gunn, 2014), *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (USA, dir. Joss Whedon, 2015), *Ant-Man* (USA, dir. Peyton Reed, 2015), *Captain America: Civil War* (USA, dir. Anthony and Joe Russo, 2016), *Doctor Strange* (USA, dir. Scott Derrickson, 2016), *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (USA, dir. James Gunn, 2017), *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (USA, dir. Jon Watts, 2017), *Thor: Ragnarok* (USA, dir. Taika Waititi, 2017), *Black Panther* (USA, dir. Ryan Coogler, 2018), *Avengers: Infinity War* (USA, dir. Anthony and Joe Russo, 2018), *Ant-Man and the Wasp* (USA, dir. Peyton Reed, 2018), *Captain Marvel* (USA, dir. Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, 2019), and *Avengers: Endgame* (USA, dir. Anthony and Joe Russo, 2019).

Marvel Studios and how critical reviews have played a part in this. This authorial voice will then be further discussed by applying the notion of collective authorship to draw out an argument about the authorial control of Marvel Studios. The next section will study Marvel's authorial control through the president of Marvel Studios, Kevin Feige, as well as how Feige's authorial voice functions within the MCU franchise. This chapter's final section will study the directors from MCU films. The two obvious groups to discuss are a group of directors who have already established a long-term relationship with the franchise, having worked on at least two MCU films, and another group of directors who had intended to direct MCU films, but who left their projects. There are directors in each group who will be analysed in detail, such as Joss Whedon, the Russo Brothers and Taika Waititi, who have worked with Marvel more than once, as well as Patty Jenkins, Edgar Wright, and Ava DuVernay, who left during the production of MCU films. Other than these two groups, directors who were only involved with single productions, such as Shane Black and Kenneth Branagh, will also be discussed in order to add a relatively comprehensive analysis.

The Marvel way

Terms like the 'Marvel way' or the 'Marvel style', which are used to emphasise the uniqueness of Marvel comic books, existed before the MCU. Although the term 'Marvel' is now likely to refer to Marvel Studios and the MCU, this section will explain that the phrase, the 'Marvel way' cannot fully encompass all Marvel properties, especially the MCU. Also, the Marvel way covers a broader range than MCU, meaning the phrase does not highlight the uniqueness of MCU either. This is because the MCU franchise does not contain all the Marvel-related intellectual properties. Before the MCU, there existed another Marvel Universe (MU), within the Marvel comic books, and the MCU has been adapted from the MU. Films adapted from Marvel comic books, other than the MCU films, were produced by other studios that had purchased the rights to the characters, such as *Spider-Man* and *X-Men*. Because of the copyright ownership, the characters and stories that were sold to other studios (e.g., the *Fantastic Four* series directed by Tim Story, *Spider-Man*

series directed by Sam Raimi and *X-Men* series owned by Twentieth Century Fox) are not part of the MCU franchise.

The instructional book *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*, by Stan Lee and John Buscema, published in 1978, used the phrase 'the Marvel Way' in the book's title to highlight that their comic books have a unique style that is different from their competitors. This approach of giving the name of Marvel to emphasise its special traits is also applied to the content of the book. For example, it explains how to draw a heroic-looking character in the 'Marvel manner' and describes their way of drawing action as 'a Marvel speciality' and 'a Marvel Trademark'.⁵⁷⁷ The Marvel way referred to in the title further highlights that the Marvel style was initially associated with its comic books. In the book's preface, Lee wrote, 'there's been no book available to tell a budding young Buscema, or Kirby, Colan or Kane how to draw comic book superheroes, and -- most importantly -- how to do it in the mildly magnificent Marvel style'.⁵⁷⁸ Such wording makes the Marvel style a special presence, although the four key names Lee mentioned also used to work for other comic companies, such as DC Comics. Meanwhile, another contributing factor that helped market this notion of the Marvel way is how Marvel Comics promoted their artists at that time. As Deron Overpeck explained, 'in the late 1960s and 1970s', Stan Lee 'cultivated a sense of celebrity' when he gave a number of speeches and interviews to promote Marvel Comics.⁵⁷⁹ Lee's celebrity status bonded with the Marvel way has continued and expanded through guest-starring roles in many of the films adapted from Marvel comic books.⁵⁸⁰

Thus, as the Marvel style has existed since the comics, some studies provide analyses of Marvel films. Not only the MCU films but other films adapted from Marvel Comics have focused on the visibility of the visual style that was associated with the comic books. Liam Burke's book *The Comic Book Film Adaptation* offers an

⁵⁷⁷ Stan Lee and John Buscema, *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), p.59, p.87.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid, p.1.

John Buscema, Jack Kirby, Gene Colan, and Gil Kane are all famous for superhero comics and have all worked for Marvel Comics.

⁵⁷⁹ Deron Overpeck, 'Breaking Brand', in Matt Yockey (ed), *Make Ours Marvel: Media Convergence and a Comics Universe* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), pp.164-186, p.171.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid.

in-depth discussion of comic aesthetics through a study of comic book film adaptations. When Burke suggested that the comic book style can be identified as a film genre, he mainly analysed how to apply comic aesthetics in the framing and *mise-en-scène* of the film, not just Marvel-related films.⁵⁸¹ Burke argues that Marvel Comics have become one of the sources for filmmakers to 'seek inspiration' and the visual styles of the Marvel way, introduced by Lee, have been applied concretely within a wide range of comic book movies.⁵⁸² Burke listed the specific style of framing and composition such as 'asymmetrical compositions' or putting characters in 'different planes of perspective' and demonstrated how this was evident in the second *X-Men* film *X2* (USA, dir. Bryan Singer, 2003).⁵⁸³ The performance, especially the leading role of the hero or superhero, also retains the 'human form and the language of its bodily movements' from comic books'.⁵⁸⁴ Additionally, Burke argues that the acting in comic book films is 'more expressionisti[c]' than other genres, such as crime films.⁵⁸⁵ Furthermore, Burke argues that these aesthetic features borrowed from Marvel Comics are not only applied to films adapted from comic books, but have also been widely used in other similar films nowadays, such as *The Matrix* (USA, dir. The Wachowskis, 1999).⁵⁸⁶ Or, the method of representing hero characters in comic books has been used to portray muscled heroic action stars like Arnold Schwarzenegger.⁵⁸⁷ In addition, Burke believes that some of the filming techniques, such as the Dutch angle, borrow from the visual style of comic books.⁵⁸⁸ He gives the example of *Citizen Kane* (USA, dir. Orson Welles, 1941) and suggests that the comic book style influenced Welles' film visual style.⁵⁸⁹ These arguments result in Burke further defining comic book films as a specific film genre based on comic aesthetics, which goes beyond the restriction that it has to be a film adapted from a comic

⁵⁸¹ Liam Burke, *The Comic Book Film Adaptation: Exploring Modern Hollywood's Leading Genre*.

⁵⁸² *Ibid*, p.231.

⁵⁸³ *Ibid*, p.234.

X2 is the sequel film of *X-Men* (USA, dir. Bryan Singer, 2000), so it also known as *X-Men 2*, and the film rights were bought by Twentieth Century Fox.

⁵⁸⁴ Will Eisner, quoted in Liam Burke, *The Comic Book Film Adaptation*, p.100.

⁵⁸⁵ Liam Burke, *The Comic Book Film Adaptation*, p.262.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid*, pp.178-272.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.240.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p.230.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p.231.

book.⁵⁹⁰ As Burke analysed, these films all fit the Marvel style to some extent, through character portrayal and *mise-en-scène*.⁵⁹¹

The Marvel way has, then, come to refer to something beyond just the MCU – and even films based on Marvel properties. This has also created a complex background for MCU films. What has been recognised as the Marvel way is a broad artistic style that has extended from the adaptation of the comic books to the film genre, so it is rarely promoted as a label exclusive to the MCU. As a result, it is difficult to analyse or distinguish the authorial traits of an MCU film by its aesthetic traits. Although there may be a visual style associated with the MCU, the MCU authorial voice has been understood differently in promotion materials and criticism, such as the working pattern within the MCU. These different ways of understanding the MCU authorial voice are one focus of this chapter's research.

In addition to the difficulty of analysing or distinguishing the authorial traits of MCU films through aesthetic features based on the Marvel way, discussion of the superhero film genre also seems, to some extent, to limit the possibilities for the MCU in terms of developing its authorial traits. Scott Bukatman, writing in 2011, claims that superhero movies are still a new genre within contemporary Hollywood and have not developed into various changeable styles yet.⁵⁹² Bukatman suggested that the superhero movie is 'an exuberant, performative, embodied genre' with 'gargantuan budgets', that have 'the transforming body' as the 'central fascination'.⁵⁹³ Richard Reynolds concludes that there exist several common traits of superhero characters and a fixed mode of narrative style, so these films are mainstream entertainment without artistic value.⁵⁹⁴ Additionally, Scorsese's comments that the MCU films are more like products based on market research and

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid, pp.230-236.

⁵⁹² Scott Bukatman, 'Why I Hate Superhero Movies', *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Spring 2011), pp. 118-122.

⁵⁹³ Ibid, p.119 & p.121.

⁵⁹⁴ Richard Reynolds, 'Masked Heroes', in Charles Hatfield, et al. (eds), *The Superhero Reader* (University Press of Mississippi, 2013) pp.99-115.

audience-tests also highlight the stereotype that superhero films lack creativity or individuality.⁵⁹⁵

In response to such criticism, Marvel Studios' usual attitude is that they have been trying to get out of that bind since the beginning. Feige claims that he and Marvel Studios 'don't believe that the superhero film is a genre unto itself', and their approach is 'taking sub-genres and putting them together and then adding the superhero elements into other genres of film'.⁵⁹⁶ He classified *Guardians of the Galaxy* (USA, dir. James Gunn, 2014) as an 'action-adventure science-fiction film'; *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (USA, dir. Anthony Russo and Joe Russo, 2014) as a 'political thriller'; and the *Iron Man* films as 'techno-thriller[s]'.⁵⁹⁷ Feige also faced the media in response to the criticism from Scorsese with a similar explanation, with Feige claiming that the studio was taking numerous risks to achieve such breakthroughs in the stereotype of a superhero genre.⁵⁹⁸ These claims try to convince audiences that MCU films are different from other superhero films, and they are at the frontiers, breaking through the limitations of typical superhero conventions. Marvel Studios' desire to highlight its own uniqueness as a form of distinction becomes the starting point for studying how the MCU established its authorial traits under such complex circumstances. The following sections of this chapter will rely on several research themes based on authorship – collective authorship promoted by the studio, the authorial control from the studio, the tension and collaboration between the studio and individual filmmakers – to focus on how the MCU franchise, led by Marvel Studios, actively set up its own brand of Marvel.

Marvel Studio as the authorial control figure

Although the MCU is adapted from a comic book universe, Deron Overpeck noticed that some scholars, like Derek Johnson, already use the term Marvel to refer

⁵⁹⁵ Martin Scorsese, *Martin Scorsese: I Said Marvel Movies Aren't Cinema. Let Me Explain*.

⁵⁹⁶ *Marvel Studios: Assembling a Universe*.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Arron Couch, *Marvel's Kevin Feige Breaks Silence on Scorsese Attack: "It's Unfortunate"* (Exclusive), 2019 < <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/marvels-kevin-feige-breaks-silence-martin-scorsese-attack-1253710/> > [accessed 31 May 2021].

to the Marvel studios rather than Marvel Entertainment or Marvel Comics.⁵⁹⁹ Bart Beaty noted that ‘the sales of superhero comic books are reaching their historic nadir’ while superhero films dominate the Hollywood film industry.⁶⁰⁰ This attention from the entertainment industry market environment has led to the MCU being considered representative of Marvel. This case study focuses on exploring how the MCU itself develops its own brand, based on the idea of authorship. As discussed above, it is difficult to analyse or distinguish the authorial voice of an MCU film by its aesthetic traits alone. As such, this case study continues to follow Corrigan’s argument on the commerce of the auteur to study Marvel Studios. Corrigan suggests that the film author can be considered as ‘a commercial strategy for organising audience reception’, as well as ‘a critical concept bound to distribution and marketing as that identify and address the potential cult status of the auteur’.⁶⁰¹ By introducing Sellors’ idea of collective authorship and further combining it with Corrigan’s concept of commercial auteurism, this section argues that Marvel Studios has brought another definition to the Marvel style, one that is different from the Marvel way associated with the comics. Put another way, for distinction, this Marvel style defined by MCU can be recognised as the Marvel ‘tonality’, a word that Kevin Feige often uses.⁶⁰²

Sellors’ concept of collective authorship needs to be further clarified to discuss the tonality of the MCU and how it leads to additional authorial control in the franchise context. Collective authorship emerges from the recognition that there are several participants from the filmmaking process who should be considered as authors of the film, instead of only placing emphasis on directors. As introduced in Chapter One, Sellors’ idea of collective authorship could be traced back to the discussion of ‘intentional action’ when he defined the filmic author. When Sellors explains the relationship between collective intentions and individual intentions in a film, he offers the idea that if the collective intentions align with a participant’s

⁵⁹⁹ Deron Overpeck, ‘Breaking Brand’, in Matt Yockey (ed), *Make Ours Marvel: Media Convergence and a Comics Universe* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), pp.164-186.

⁶⁰⁰ Bart Beaty, ‘Superhero fan service’, p.318.

⁶⁰¹ Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls*, p.103.

⁶⁰² Rotten Tomatoes, *MCU Phase One: Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige Recalls the Beginnings* / *Rotten Tomatoes*, 2018 <<https://youtu.be/7aXBcMlaxX0>> [accessed 15 May 2018].

individual intentions, this participant could be considered one of the authors.⁶⁰³ Sellors gives an example that if there is an actor who participates in the film, they may have the intention of making the film, but may also have another intention to promote their career.⁶⁰⁴ Then the intention about their career would not be considered part of the collective intentions, but the intention of making the film could be. However, those ideas are developed in a purely theoretical context rather than a practical context.

This case study of the MCU franchise attempts to apply Sellors' theory of collective authorship to the series and to explore some possible practical approaches for discussing Marvel Studios' authorial image. First, it could be assumed that if the collective intentions of a film franchise might be part of the single film's intentions, then the single film's author has met the franchise's demand because of the collective relationship. The establishment of this viewpoint becomes the prerequisite for discussing the feasibility of collective authorship in the context of franchise cinema. Secondly, the intentions that Sellors discusses emphasise actions that derive from the will of the participants themselves, which is an extension of the traditional theory of authorship. Additionally, there are scholars, like Jerome Christensen, who consider analysing a studio's authorship in terms of the ideological commonalities expressed in all that studio's films.⁶⁰⁵ However, the discussion in this thesis focuses on the analysis of the authorial images presented by participants in the filmmaking process to the films' audiences. This becomes a premise on which Sellors' theory can be put into practice in this case study. Therefore, by extending Sellors' ideas and using them to study reception rather than intentions, the approach to this case can be derived. In this case study, within the MCU franchise, especially the MCU films, whoever is considered the key figure of the MCU creation can be identified as the author figure of the MCU franchise.

⁶⁰³ C. Paul Sellors, 'Collective Authorship in Film', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Summer, 2007), pp.263-271.

⁶⁰⁴ C. Paul Sellors, *Film authorship: history and theory*, pp.124-126.

⁶⁰⁵ Jerome Christensen, *America's Corporate Art: The Studio Authorship of Hollywood Motion Pictures*

The analysis of promotional material and film reviews in the previous two chapters confirmed that those publications outside of academic discussion become another important element for establishing an authorial status. This idea has been demonstrated by Erin Hill-Parks' case study of Christopher Nolan, in which she argues that the critical reviews from mass media help to establish and emphasise a director's auteur persona.⁶⁰⁶ These case studies illustrate how the study of general media coverage can contribute to the understanding of how authorship functions in contemporary franchise cinema – through its promotion and reception. However, the starting point and concern of all these arguments and analyses are the studies of authorship focused on the director, either as a part of a collective or an individual director. Meanwhile, Johnson suggested that 'Marvel's ability to manage the creative enterprise of filmmaking was framed as a necessity for commercial and critical success'.⁶⁰⁷ This section aims to apply the above arguments and the corresponding practical approaches to discuss Marvel Studio's authorial voice within the MCU franchise. I would describe this authorial voice as a form of authorial control hidden beneath the surface of collective authorial voices.

This chapter continues the analyses of promotional material and film reviews from the previous two chapters, but the focus of the study is more on film reviews. With reference to Hill-Parks' approach of using film reviews to study the auteur persona of Nolan, this section collected film reviews of twenty-two Marvel films from *Iron Man* to *Avengers: Endgame* (2019) to study the possible ways that the author is established within a film franchise. A total of 176 film reviews come from the same eight sources as the previous two case studies in this thesis. In addition to studying how these film reviews present the director's authorial voice, the reference to, and discussion of, MCU and Marvel Studios are also considered in this study. To enable a more detailed comparative study of these reviews, this case study will set up two similar sets of criteria for analysing the studio and the directors, respectively, each with three factors of progressively increasing relevance to establish who is considered to have authorial authority. The basic factor is whether their names,

⁶⁰⁶ C. Paul Sellors, *Film authorship: history and theory*.

⁶⁰⁷ Derek Johnson, 'Cinematic Destiny: Marvel Studios and the Trade Stories of Industrial Convergence', *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 52, No. 1, Fall 2012, pp.1-24, p.17.

either of the directors or Marvel Studios, were mentioned.⁶⁰⁸ Shyon Baumann suggests that 'serious art forms require recognition of the artists by name, and in the case of film, this means the director'.⁶⁰⁹ This view is clearly still confined to a perspective of considering the director as the film author. Based on Baumann's view, Hill-Parks believes that the frequency with which a director's name is mentioned in film reviews 'helps recognition of Nolan as an auteur in the public sphere'.⁶¹⁰ Based upon the idea that film reviews can create an authorial authority for the director, by linking the director to the film, this thesis further demonstrates that the studio can similarly build its own authorial authority, through film reviews.

Compared to the base factor explained above, the second factor is more detailed. This is whether the film reviews mentioned their works (both an individual director's and Marvel Studios), *other than* the reviewed film. According to Hill-Parks, mentioning a director's other films helps to imply that director is building their own identity.⁶¹¹ For Marvel Studios, this factor means other films from the MCU franchise have been mentioned in the film reviews. This kind of discourse emphasises the connections within the franchise instead of only categorising the film by its director. This kind of reference to directors and the studio helps to set up a prominent image within a collaborative project, and it leads to the final factor for analysis. This factor focuses on how the film review mentions the director or/and the studio's contribution to the film and the detailed discussion of the stylistic and thematic traits. This is the core factor in this case study and the most intuitive factor to analyse if the film review is helping to establish an authorial image. At this stage, the comments on how Marvel's style or MCU's common traits appear in the film have a similar function to the analysis of how the director's style appears in the film. This is the most direct way of reaching the public and sending them the message of recognising an authorial figure, even though these film reviews do not mention the

⁶⁰⁸ The list of credits that appear before or after the film review text is not included here.

⁶⁰⁹ Shyon Baumann, *Hollywood Highbrow: From Entertainment to Art*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), p.124.

⁶¹⁰ Erin Hill-Parks, 'Developing an Auteur Through Reviews: The Critical Surround of Christopher Nolan', p. 20.

⁶¹¹ Ibid, pp.22-26.

concept of authorship directly. Therefore, according to the above instructions, the six factors can be listed as follows:

Factor 1-1: Does the term Marvel appear in the reviews?⁶¹²

Factor 1-2: Are other MCU films or the MCU long-term-plan related information mentioned in the review?

Factor 1-3: Does the film review mention Marvel films' common traits? For example, some reviews use phrases like 'The Marvel Movie Method' or emphasise Marvel's involvement in the creative process.⁶¹³

Factor 2-1: Is the director's name given in the reviews?

Factor 2-2: Is the director's other work(s) or/and personal life experience mentioned in the review (their other MCU films are not included).

Factor 2-3: Does the review analyse the director's stylistic or thematic traits? One intuitive standard is whether the director's name has been used in association with the process of analysing the film.

This study compares each of the 176 film reviews with the six factors above to derive the number of film reviews that met the relevant factor. The details of the tables for data collection and notes on special cases in specific film reviews can be found in Appendix A. In general, of the 176 film reviews 166 mentioned Marvel, and 162 film reviews named the director. Furthermore, 136 film reviews referenced the MCU franchise or other films from MCU, while 79 referred to the director's other films. For the detailed analysis, 41 film reviews attributed the style or certain characteristics of the film to the director, whilst 61 film reviews implied the idea of the Marvel style and analysed the film according to it, which follows Hill-Parks' idea about crediting specific traits to authors.⁶¹⁴ When a film review puts the film's traits together with the studio, or considers one single film as part of the franchise, they

⁶¹² Just as Overpeck pointed out that some scholars turn to use Marvel to represents Marvel Studios, this factor considers Marvel as the keyword rather than Marvel Studios. Also, the tables in Appendix A mark out which paragraph it appears first.

⁶¹³ Kim Newman [review], *Ant-Man* [film] dir. by. Peyton Reed (Marvel Studios, 2015), *Empire*, 17 July 2015. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/ant-man/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶¹⁴ Erin Hill-Parks, 'Developing an Auteur Through Reviews'.

are helping to build the bridge between the artwork and the studio. This section mainly analyses the authorial image of Marvel Studios based on the data from Appendix A and the specific contents of the film reviews. Apart from film reviews, different forms of promotional materials from the studio also will be analysed in this section, including interviews from the cast and crew and the behind-the-scenes video or filmmaking diary.

This analysis of Marvel Studios' authorial identity is divided into three steps, starting with a description of the studio's authorial identity, such as the Marvel styles described in film reviews. Then it explores the status of this authorial identity by analysing how Marvel's style was established. Finally, it returns to the key question of this case study, examining the authorial control under the surface of the authorial status. First, through the analysis of film reviews, this case study suggests that Marvel Studios can be considered as one of the authorial figures in the MCU franchise. The portrayal of Marvel Studios' authorial image comes from two main aspects of the film reviews. One is the detailed analysis of the film text, by making comparisons with its previous MCU films, and the other is the particular use of phrases like the 'Marvel style' to reinforce this impression. *The Hollywood Reporters'* critic Todd McCarthy posed a question to his readers – 'Does this sound like your everyday Marvel film so far?' – when he reviewed the MCU's eighteenth film *Black Panther*.⁶¹⁵ Whatever the answer, the question itself represents a certain meaning that a sense of recognition of the franchise has been established, based on the name of Marvel. Some film authors would be attached to labels that describe their personal styles, such as Alfred Hitchcock's title as the 'master of suspense', and Tim Burton being closely related to 'German Expressionism' or 'Gothic'.⁶¹⁶ These labels also tend to recognise an intuitive feeling or expectation of their films. In reviews of MCU films, this kind of label can also be associated with the studio. Even though every film review is supposed focus on one film, the reviews of MCU films still

⁶¹⁵ Todd McCarthy [review], *Black Panther* [film] dir. by. Ryan Coogler (Marvel Studios, 2018), *The Hollywood Reporters*, 6 February 2018. <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/black-panther-review-1080811>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶¹⁶ Christine Etherington-Wright, and Ruth Doughty, *Understanding Film Theory: theoretical and critical perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.12, p.5.

consider the franchise as a whole project in order to discuss common characteristics within the franchise.

According to the eight sources in this study, film reviews that have discussed the MCU franchise's style mostly mention two key factors: humour and spectacle. These two features are not uncommon in films of the same genre but still, they appear almost continuously in each film's review, highlighting the relationship between the MCU film and these two features. *Variety* notes this in the review of *Thor: The Dark World* with the comment that the 'pure essence of Marvel' is the 'tongue-in-cheek humor' and 'destructive mayhem'.⁶¹⁷ *Empire* made similar arguments four years later in their review of *Thor: Ragnarok* in a conclusion that MCU's sixteen previous films were 'action movie[s] leavened with humour'.⁶¹⁸ The review then commented that the seventeenth film (*Thor: Ragnarok*) is a 'full-bore comedy' with 'blockbuster spectacle as a backdrop'.⁶¹⁹ Similarly, the review of *Captain America: Civil War* from *The Guardian* concludes this humour is part of 'the best Marvel tradition' along with being 'engaging' and 'surreal'.⁶²⁰ *The Guardian's* review of *Avengers: Infinity War* emphasises the importance of humour to the franchise stating 'this Marvel movie shows its brand identity in the adroit management of tone' then points out that the brand identity is their sense of humour.⁶²¹ Usually, humour is not a particularly specific trait that can identify films, because it can appear in any film genre including action films, science fiction films, or even horror films. The idea of spectacle could also be used to describe most fiction

⁶¹⁷ Justin Chang [review], *Thor: The Dark World* [film] dir. by. Alan Taylor (Marvel Studios, 2013), *Variety*, 22 October 2013. <<https://variety.com/2013/film/reviews/thor-the-dark-world-review-1200751252/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶¹⁸ James Dyer [review], *Thor: Ragnarok* [film] dir. by. Taika Waititi (Marvel Studios, 2017), *Empire*, 27 October 2017. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/thor-ragnarok/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶¹⁹ James Dyer [review], *Thor: Ragnarok* [film] dir. by. Taika Waititi (Marvel Studios, 2017), *Empire*, 27 October 2017. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/thor-ragnarok/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶²⁰ Peter Bradshaw [review], *Captain America: Civil War* [film] dir. by. Anthony Russo, Joe Russo (Marvel Studios, 2016), *The Guardian*, 20 April 2016. <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/apr/20/captain-america-civil-war-review-an-aspartame-rush>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶²¹ Peter Bradshaw [review], *Avengers: Infinity War* [film] dir. by. Anthony Russo, Joe Russo (Marvel Studios, 2018), *The Guardian*, 25 April 2018. <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/apr/24/avengers-infinity-war-review-supremely-entertaining-showdown-in-the-grand-marvel-tradition>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

films or superhero films. However, MCU has made a strong connection with these two common traits through the comments, which believe humour and spectacle are two elements that have been deliberately arranged to appear in MCU films. For example, *Sight & Sound*'s review of *Avengers: Infinity War* explains in detail how the 'Marvel humour' remains in such a genocidal story.⁶²² *Empire* criticises that the humour in *Guardians of the Galaxy* (USA, Dir. James Gunn, 2014) is 'too formulaic' and part of a 'Marvel formula', and the same publication noted that in *Black Panther* the humour actually caused an awkward atmosphere, but Marvel still chooses to maintain this trait as part of the franchise.⁶²³ Such comments render humour an integral part of the MCU franchise and build up a close relation between this style and its studio rather than its directors.

However, although humour is integral to the MCU style, the reviews are rather vague in how they describe this humour. The Marvel-style humour is a label for the MCU films, but it has not been defined clearly. Rather than trying to define Marvel-style-humour, this case study is more interested in the reason it cannot be defined. When examining the technique of humour expression in more detail, it varies between films, for example through the editing, performance and dialogue, so that it would be difficult to identify as a united film style. Even within one sub-series of one character, it can differ depending on directors. Jon Favreau, the director of the first two *Iron Man* films, used editing or camera movement to connect two completely opposite states when creating humour. For example, at the beginning of *Iron Man*, the first scene is Obadiah Stane (Jeff Bridges) announcing that 'he's [Tony is] always working', and then cuts to another setting where Tony is playing in a casino.⁶²⁴ This same trick also happens several times in the film. For example, there is a shot of Colonel Rhodes (Terrence Howard) refusing to drink, then quickly cuts to

⁶²² Kim Newman [review], *Avengers: Infinity War* [film] dir. by. Anthony Russo, Joe Russo (Marvel Studios, 2018), *Sight & Sound*, Jul2018, Vol. 28 Issue 7, p59-60.

⁶²³ Dan Jolin [review], *Guardians of the Galaxy* [film] dir. by. James Gunn (Marvel Studios, 2014), *Empire*, 31 July 2014. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/guardians-galaxy/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

Jimi Famurewa [review], *Black Panther* [film] dir. by. Ryan Coogler (Marvel Studios, 2018), *Empire*, 16 February 2018. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/black-panther/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶²⁴ *Iron Man* [film], dir. Jon Favreau (USA, Marvel Studios/ Fairview Entertainment, 2008).

the next shot when Rhodes is drinking, or the first scene where Rhodes is on the phone with Stark firmly saying that he could never explain to the press that the destroyed jet was just a training exercise, yet in the next scene that is exactly what he is doing.⁶²⁵ In contrast to Favreau, the director of *Iron Man 3*, Black, is more likely to use unexpected lines, coincidence, or plot reversal to create his humorous effect.

Film reviews' attention to humour within MCU films has built up a specific label to identify the authorial voice of the MCU. The detailed approach to presenting the humour in each MCU film can only be related to the directors. Compared to the association between humour and director, Marvel, highlighted by a large body of film reviews consisting of many MCU films, became the major source of association with the keyword humour. Additionally, the studio also emphasised the association between humour and the MCU during its promotion and promoting Marvel Studios films reiterates that the MCU films share a consistent tone. Feige often uses the word 'tonality' to identify the MCU films. During his interviews, such as one with Rotten Tomatoes, he notes that humour is one of the keys to this tonality.⁶²⁶ Furthermore, Feige stressed, in a Reddit Q&A with fans, that the MCU films have humour 'in the DNA' of them so that 'there will be no giant dark turns in the MCU'.⁶²⁷ In another interview with *The Hollywood Reporter* in 2017, Feige claimed that humour and action are 'the top two things that are listed in those movies' during their production.⁶²⁸ With the emphasis on both film reviews and promotional content, the Marvel-style humour becomes a specific trait for the MCU franchise, although it has different forms of expression and presentation, as well as the proportions in which it is presented, depending on different directors. Thus, it would appear that the undefinable vague Marvel-style humour can always be attributed to the authorial voice of Marvel Studios taking responsibility for all the MCU films.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ Rotten Tomatoes, *MCU Phase One: Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige Recalls the Beginnings*.

⁶²⁷ Ben Kendrick, *Kevin Feige: Marvel Cinematic Universe Will Never Be 'Dark'*, 2015 <
<https://screenrant.com/marvel-vs-dc-movies-dark-tone-humor/>> [accessed 31 May 2021].

⁶²⁸ Borys Kit and Aaron Couch, *Marvel's Kevin Feige on Why the Studio Won't Make R-Rated Movies, 'Guardians 2' and Joss Whedon's DC Move*, 2017 <
<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/marvels-kevin-feige-why-studio-wont-make-r-movies-guardians-2-joss-whedons-dc-move-99507-995076/>> [accessed 31 May 2021].

Another trait that critics frequently discuss is the analysis of theme and narrative across the franchise, which normally only happens to a single film being reviewed. For example, some of the MCU solo-character film series (*Iron Man* trilogy, *Captain America* trilogy and *Thor* trilogy) function like sub-franchisees, and some film reviews have taken this as an entry point to analyse the narrative and theme within the franchise. *Empire's* review of *Thor: Ragnarok* claims that every third film of an MCU's single superhero is 'always the charm' with different stories emerging, while the first ones are always 'a carefully pitched origin story' and the second full of risky adventures to 'jack up the stakes'.⁶²⁹ Another *Thor: Ragnarok* review from *Variety* claimed that some of the narrative devices in this third *Thor* film are a self-imitation that draw comparisons to *Iron Man 3*, which has a similar narrative device of destroying what is important to the characters in the storyline (e.g. killing their friends/family or demolishing their home).⁶³⁰ Meanwhile, the franchise's self-promotion goes along with these reviews' comments. Feige said, in an interview with *Rotten Tomatoes*, that 'I had always vowed if I was ever lucky enough to work on a film that had gotten to a part three, that I would use that as an opportunity to do something unique'.⁶³¹ It is hard to deny the contribution made by director Waititi to *Thor: Ragnarok*, and the film reviews also recognized his importance to the film. However, the promotional content and the film reviews of MCU films always have an additional focus on the involvement from Marvel Studios. The approach to promoting the theme and narrative traits of the MCU is similar to how humour became one of the keywords for the MCU, even though it is not a specific trait created, developed, or contributed by the MCU. *Sight & Sound* directly uses the phrase 'corporation as auteur' in its review of *Captain America: Civil War* to emphasise how the studio participates in the development of their characters

⁶²⁹ James Dyer [review], *Thor: Ragnarok* [film] dir. by. Taika Waititi (Marvel Studios, 2017), *Empire*, 27 October 2017. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/thor-ragnarok/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶³⁰ Peter Debruge [review], *Thor: Ragnarok* [film] dir. by. Taika Waititi (Marvel Studios, 2017), *Variety*, 19 October 2017. <<https://variety.com/2017/film/reviews/thor-ragnarok-review-cate-blanchett-1202594143/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶³¹ Rotten Tomatoes, *MCU Phase Two: Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige Recalls the Beginnings* / *Rotten Tomatoes*, 2018 <<https://youtu.be/dycRPcNrGYE>> [accessed 15 May 2018].

through the whole franchise, even though they originally derive from the comics.⁶³² Newman makes a comparison between Marvel and DC, arguing that although DC has the advantage that their superheroes such as Batman and Superman were introduced to the 'mass popular culture in the 1940s', Marvel's characters still 'carry more screen weight than those DC icons' through several films focussing on each key Marvel superhero.⁶³³ Another example is the father-son narratives within the MCU films. Such narratives have been integral to Hollywood storytelling, therefore, father-son narratives are clearly not specific to these directors or this franchise. Nevertheless, the reviews frame it as an aspect that is part of the MCU. For example, *Sight and Sound's* review of *Black Panther* comments that Ryan Coogler's previous 'films have been concerned with the legacy of fathers', and then notes that MCU films also portray this father-son theme in other characters such as Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.), Thor (Chris Hemsworth) and Peter Quill (Chris Pratt).⁶³⁴ There is the tendency for film reviews continue try to find commonalities in the context of the MCU franchise when analysing those films, and this reiterates a need to create an authorial voice or style associated with the franchise.

Just as the Dolly zoom is also known as the 'Hitchcock Zoom', some film reviews choose to make up phrases such as 'Marvel formula', 'Marvel mindset', 'Marvel Movie Method', 'Marvel tradition', and 'Marvel Standards' to emphasise the creative ability of Marvel Studios.⁶³⁵ These phrases help the public to build up their

⁶³² Kim Newman [review], *Captain America: Civil War* [film] dir. by. Anthony Russo, Joe Russo (Marvel Studios, 2016), *Sight & Sound*, July 2016, Vol.26 (7), pp.71-72, p.71.

⁶³³ Ibid.

⁶³⁴ Kelli Weston [review], *Black Panther* [film] dir. by. Ryan Coogler (Marvel Studios, 2018), *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 28 Issue 4 (2018), pp.50-51.

⁶³⁵ Christine Etherington-Wright, and Ruth Doughty, *Understanding Film Theory: theoretical and critical perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p.13.

Nick De Semlyen [review], *Iron Man 2* [film] dir. by. Jon Favreau (Marvel Studios/Fairview Entertainment, 2010), *Empire*, 30 April 2010. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/iron-man-2/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

Kim Newman [review], *Ant-Man* [film] dir. by. Peyton Reed (Marvel Studios, 2015), *Empire*, 17 July 2015. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/ant-man/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

Kim Newman [review], *Avengers: Age of Ultron* [film] dir. by. Joss Whedon (Marvel Studios, 2015), *Sight & Sound*, July 2015, Vol. 25 Issue 7, p69-70, p.70.

Newman's phrase has been used twice in two different journals but from the same author.

Peter Bradshaw [review], *Captain America: Civil War* [film] dir. by. Anthony Russo, Joe Russo (Marvel Studios, 2016), *The Guardian*, 20 April 2016.

<<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/apr/20/captain-america-civil-war-review-an-aspartame-rush>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

belief that the studio is extremely engaged in the production of the film franchise. Most of them refer to the common film style of the MCU franchise, such as the use of humour discussed above. In *Sight & Sound's* review of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, Newman use the phrase 'Marvel Movie Method' and claims that the advantage of 'Marvel Movie Method' is to help the franchise to continue even when some of the single films are weak.⁶³⁶ Although the review gives a name to this method, which focuses on the continuity among the films, as the Marvel Movie Method, it is, in fact, an approach that has its roots in comics. In Bart Beaty's study of MCU's cinematic universe, he briefly outlined the development of the superhero film and stated that superhero film franchises or film series, before the MCU franchise, can all be understood as 'loosely connected sequels' with 'low continuity', recognising that even other, non-MCU adaptations of Marvel films have similar traits.⁶³⁷ Marvel Studios' approach to creating the MCU franchise is based on 'many of the innovations introduced into comic book storytelling by Marvel Comics in the early and mid-1960s'.⁶³⁸ As such, the MCU's creation referenced the innovations of Marvel Comic books and established its shared narrative universe to enhance the continuity among MCU films.

Although the MCU films are based on characters from Marvel comic books, the MCU has developed its own narrative universe around its films, including TV shows, comic books and other spin-offs. Furthermore, as the MCU continued to grow and become popular, it also branched out into its own comic books, as well as related works in other forms of media, such as television series and short films. Therefore, to establish and emphasise its own brand, the MCU franchise has separated itself from the other Marvel Comics adaptations by making a new narrative universe. Felix Brinker praised the MCU as it 'constitutes an unprecedented attempt to transfer

Dan Jolin [review], *Guardians of the Galaxy*.

Todd McCarthy [review], *Ant-Man and the Wasp* [film] dir. by. Peyton Reed (Marvel Studios, 2018), *The Hollywood Reporters*, 27 June 2018. <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/ant-man-wasp-review-1123413>> [accessed 30 April 2021].

⁶³⁶ Kim Newman [review], *Avengers: Age of Ultron* [film] dir. by. Joss Whedon (Marvel Studios, 2015), *Sight & Sound*, July 2015, Vol. 25 Issue 7, p69-70, p.70.

⁶³⁷ Bart Beaty, 'Superhero fan service: Audience strategies in the contemporary interlinked Hollywood blockbuster', *The Information Society*, 32, no. 5 (2016), pp. 318-325, p.321.

⁶³⁸ Ibid, p.321.

logics of serial storytelling, in this case, established in the medium of superhero comics, to film and beyond'.⁶³⁹ This move by MCU can be seen as an extension of the approach taken by the Marvel comics' multiverse. Marvel Comics published a series of comic books named *What If* to present what could happen if the story did not work out as originally planned in the main Marvel Universe of Earth-616. The MCU used to be marked as Earth-199999, which is one of the universes different from the comic's main universe, but still part of the Marvel Comics multiverse. Other adapted films also do not belong to this universe. However, it is worth mentioning that Marvel Studios has released its TV series *Loki* (Disney+, 2021-present) and *What If...?* (Disney+, 2021-present) to explore what could happen in the MCU universe if some of the key moments were different from the original MCU setting. It can be inferred that the MCU will develop its own multiverse other than setting itself as part of the multiverse of Marvel Comics. The way the MCU has established its cinematic universe is inherited from the creation of Marvel Comics but has become MCU's uniqueness within the franchise cinema.

Those common features derived by comparing the films have been attributed to Marvel Studios by reviewers and critics, thus also attributing authorial control to the MCU franchise. In so doing what is implied is a collective working pattern. To study this collective working pattern promoted by the studio, it is necessary to return to the idea of collective authorship to further the discussion of the relationship between Marvel Studios and individual directors. Within the case of MCU/Marvel Studios, the appearance of a collective authorial action is created under Marvel Studios' leadership. In the documentary *Marvel Studios Assembling a Universe* (USA, ABC, 2014), the President of Marvel Entertainment, the parent company of Marvel Studios, Alan Fine, claimed that the studio's attitude to the production of the MCU franchise, from their first independent film onwards, was that they wanted to take control and 'decide when, how, and which ways we [Marvel Studios] would bring them [superhero characters] to film entertainment'.⁶⁴⁰ This announcement from the studio claimed that they have the right to participate

⁶³⁹ Felix Brinker, 'Transmedia storytelling in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the logics of convergence-era popular seriality'.

⁶⁴⁰ *Marvel Studios Assembling a Universe*.

in the creative process of the MCU and have the power to make the decisions. The idea of taking control laid the foundation for the studio to participate more in the decision of what they term the tone of the films. In Feige's explanation, the studio wants filmmakers 'to bring a tonality' to their films, such as their first filmmaker Jon Favreau, who 'brings a unique tonality' that he is 'able to maintain'.⁶⁴¹ When making this explanation, Feige emphasises the involvement of the studio in the production of the film.

More than just finding a director whose ideology fits the needs of the franchise, Marvel Studios has made demands on films in terms of story development, characterisation, even visual aesthetics, and these are used as standards to find the right director to work with. A significant example of letting the directors bring their specialities is *Captain America: The First Avenger*. Most of the reviews (five out of eight) refer to another of Joe Johnston's films, *The Rocketeer* (USA, 1991), for comparison and suggest that these two films have the similar aesthetic style of a retro tone which uses pop culture from the past.⁶⁴² As *Variety's* review emphasises, Johnston's contribution is that he 'sticks to the lustrous, tactile look of earlier chapters of the MCU, despite the added challenge of "Captain America's" period setting'.⁶⁴³ Although the superhero films are supposed to be more futuristic, to highlight their science fiction features, Johnston's nostalgia and Captain America's origin story echo each other and help to introduce this classic World War II superhero into the MCU. This is a perfect example for MCU to show how they cooperate with their directors, letting them play to their strengths, whilst still ensuring the franchise's demand is met. Even though not every director's talent can fit into the franchise's need, in this instance the studio could find a way to keep that balance. As Feige explained in the interview with Rotten Tomatoes, the studio's primary demand for the director is to focus on the tonality and the characters:

Early on, we realized that the role of the filmmaker of our films is to bring a tonality. Jon Favreau, amazing job, bring a unique tonality and be able to maintain and ride that tone, to bring the characters to life, to make

⁶⁴¹ Rotten Tomatoes, *MCU Phase One: Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige Recalls the Beginnings* / *Rotten Tomatoes*, 2018 <<https://youtu.be/7aXBcMlaxX0>> [accessed 15 May 2018].

⁶⁴² These five reviews are from *Empire*, *New York Times*, *Variety*, *Screen International*, and *Sight & Sound*.

⁶⁴³ Peter Debruge [review], *Captain America: The First Avenger*.

them realistic, grounded. We have amazing artists and technicians. They can help with the scale... but what the filmmakers need to do is to sort of, not get lost in all that and focus on the great characters work.⁶⁴⁴

On behalf of Marvel Studios, Feige regularly restates the standards by which they choose their co-directors for MCU films. Feige claimed that he wants 'Unique voices, with unique things to say' in response to questions about why Chloé Zhao was chosen as director of *The Eternals* (2021).⁶⁴⁵ He further explained:

When you get people with unique points of views, regardless of the size of film they've done in the past and empower them and surround them with the great artists and technicians that can bring spectacle, that can bring the visuals that a Marvel movie requires, they can take you to places you've never gone before. And I think you've seen that with all of the filmmakers that we've worked with, and particularly the filmmakers who have done smaller, more personal things before agreeing to come on board the MCU.⁶⁴⁶

Thus far, the film reviews and the studio's own words express a view that the studio works alongside the directors. This view can help to reinforce the idea of a collective relationship within MCU. Tracing back to Marvel Comics, they created many 'characters and stylistic innovations' because the company allowed 'creative individuals to create'.⁶⁴⁷ In respect of filmmaking, Marvel Studios maintains this strategy for their MCU franchise productions. According to the studio's own stated, and consistently marketed, creative attitude, individual directors are welcomed by the studio to share their specialities and personal styles to enrich the franchise. Alternatively, in Feige's words, 'When we're looking for a partner in a director, writer or actor, it's to come into our sandbox and share in the temporary stewardship in whatever we're making'.⁶⁴⁸ Meanwhile, just as Marvel Comics can still keep its 'signature achievement' through shaping 'the interconnected Marvel Universe', Marvel Studios also has its own authorial image within the MCU franchise.⁶⁴⁹ In

⁶⁴⁴ Rotten Tomatoes, *MCU Phase One: Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige Recalls the Beginnings*.

⁶⁴⁵ Kate Aurthur, *Kevin Feige on Chloé Zhao's 'Spectacular' Approach to 'Eternals' and Who the Film's 'Lead' Character Is (EXCLUSIVE)*, 2021 < <https://variety.com/2021/film/news/kevin-feige-chloe-zhao-eternals-1234962496/> > [accessed 31 May 2021].

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷ Martin Flanagan, Andrew Livingstone, and Mike McKenny, *The Marvel Studios phenomenon: inside a transmedia universe*, p.75.

⁶⁴⁸ Marc Graser, 'How Marvel Guards Its Properties But Isn't Afraid to Take Chances With Its 'Galaxy'', *Variety*, 23 July 2014, < <https://variety.com/2014/film/news/marvel-studios-guardians-of-the-galaxy-risk-1201266165/> > [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

Martin Flanagan's opinion, the studio is able to 'protect itself creatively' because this strategy from Marvel Comics can result in a 'well-planned' structure of a sustainable film franchise.⁶⁵⁰

Although Marvel presents itself as a warm and collaborative community through promotional materials such as the interviews and making-of documentaries, it does so while still exerting control over its products. This studio is cautious about managing its relationship with the franchise. They frequently highlight the relationship between the studio and the MCU films and avoid their films being titled with other names except for Marvel Studios, such as the names of directors. This caution also shows in their posters because these are a way to communicate to audiences. For example, at the top of the poster for *Thor*, the line is: 'FROM THE STUDIO THAT BROUGHT YOU IRON MAN'. Although this sort of marketing line is not unusual, the emphasis here is on the studio rather than a director, producer or creator. There is similar wording to emphasise the studio's participation on posters of other MCU films, even in the early period of MCU, such as *Captain America: The First Avenger*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, and *Ant-Man*. Marvel Studios is constantly reinforcing the notion that they are in charge of the creation of the entire franchise and that the directors of each film are acting on the power given to them by the studio. This conveys the message that Marvel Studios is involved in the creation of the films and has supreme creative authority within the MCU. Therefore, it can be summed up as, on the one hand, it is the studio that offers the MCU participants such rights; on the other hand, when these participants obtain the rights, it automatically creates an equal collective authorial relationship with the studio. This leads to the final argument of this section.

This work posits that that the collective authorial form created or marketed by Marvel Studios only exists on the surface, and what lies beneath is a studio that takes full control. MCU's controlling position emerges through analysing the film reviews. Of the 176 film reviews in this work, 14 did not mention the directors' names at all, while almost half of the other film reviews (83 out of 162) only mentioned the name

⁶⁵⁰ Martin Flanagan, Andrew Livingstone, and Mike McKenny, *The Marvel Studios phenomenon: inside a transmedia universe*, p.72.

without further analysis or elaboration. For some specific films, there are reviews that would question the role of the director. For example, the *New York Times* believes *Ant-Man* is a 'drone work' and the main function of this film is as a transitional film that keeps in touch with other MCU films from an overall perspective.⁶⁵¹ *Empire's* review suggests this situation is because of the studio's production strategy, the 'Marvel Movie Method', which means that the studio would not choose 'auteurs like Ang Lee or Sam Raimi' to direct their films.⁶⁵² *Empire's* comment conveys the idea that Marvel Studios would like to make their own films instead of films marked as being from or by individuals, and this reflects the tension between the studio and individual directors who have their own authorial status. Similar comments are also evident in reviews of *Thor: The Dark World*. For example, *The Telegraph* comments that the film is made in a 'house style' that follows other MCU films without showcasing any of the director's personal traits.⁶⁵³ *The Hollywood Reporter* also comments that it is 'hard to tell how much director Alan Taylor should be credited or blamed for the finished result' 'with a project so firmly supervised by its studio'.⁶⁵⁴

In discussing how to identify an auteur, King suggests that one feature of the auteur is 'distinctive thematic concerns have to be identified across a director's body of work', and another is 'particular issues or attitudes are detected'.⁶⁵⁵ Within the MCU franchise, it can be argued that the studio is deliberately avoiding their directors' unique thematic concerns or particular attitudes, in case these ruin the coherence of the franchise as a whole. This is also reflected in the critical trends in the content of film reviews since some film reviews attribute the films' themes to the MCU franchise's overall arrangement, rather than to the individual directors. For

⁶⁵¹ A. O. Scott [review], *Ant-Man* [film] dir. by. Peyton Reed (Marvel Studios, 2015), *New York Times*, 15 July 2015. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/17/movies/review-ant-man-with-paul-rudd-adds-to-a-superhero-infestation.html>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶⁵² Newman, Kim [review], *Ant-Man* [film] dir. by. Peyton Reed (Marvel Studios, 2015), *Empire*, 17 July 2015. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/ant-man/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶⁵³ Chris Hewitt [review], *Thor: The Dark World* [film] dir. by. Alan Taylor (Marvel Studios, 2013), *Empire*, 22 October 2013. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/thor-dark-world/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶⁵⁴ Leslie Felperin [review], *Thor: The Dark World* [film] dir. by. Alan Taylor (Marvel Studios, 2013), *The Hollywood Reporters*, 22 October 2013. <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/thor-dark-world-film-review-649886>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶⁵⁵ Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*, p.87.

example, a film review of *Ant-Man and the Wasp* from *Sight & Sound* claimed that 'the Marvel movies have found a way to thematise their relatively marginal position within the galaxy-conquering home brand'.⁶⁵⁶ *The Telegraph* directly point out in a review of *Avengers: Endgame* that 'everything is franchise', criticising the film for being too focused on the franchise as a whole, rather than working as a stand-alone film, recognising features such as the repetition of some classic shots from the previous *Avengers* films.⁶⁵⁷ The questions about the directors' personality that emerge from the film reviews, meanwhile reflect the authorial control of Marvel Studios. For example, *New York Times* offers the opinion, when reviewing *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, that it is hard to determine who 'the biggest creative force is in a corporate entity' and how much the individual directors 'contributed to its look, vibe and feel'.⁶⁵⁸

From the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, who paid attention to analysing 'the sophisticated visual language' in Hitchcock's films, to King's analysis of Spielberg, which argues that his films are 'filled with very smooth transitions and slick visual matches', most analyses of auteurs emphasise the aesthetic style of their films and consider it an artistic signature.⁶⁵⁹ The same also happens with MCU. The review of *Captain America: The First Avenger* (the fifth MCU film) from *Variety* pointed out that 'the films all seem to coexist within the same universe, aesthetically speaking'.⁶⁶⁰ *Variety* gives Kevin Feige credit for this in its review of *Doctor Strange* (USA, dir. Scott Derrickson, 2016), claiming that the producer brings a master plan for MCU, which is commendable, and notes that Feige is exerting control by

⁶⁵⁶ Adam Nayman [review], *Ant-Man and the Wasp* [film] dir. by. Peyton Reed (Marvel Studios, 2018), *Sight & Sound*, Vol. 28 Issue 4 (2018), pp.50-51.

⁶⁵⁷ Robbie Collin [review], *Avengers: Endgame* [film] dir. by. Anthony Russo and Joseph Russo (Marvel Studios, 2019), *The Telegraph*, 26 April 2019. <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/films/0/avengers-endgame-review-spoilers-end-credits-ending-explained/>> [accessed 30 April 2021].

⁶⁵⁸ Manohla Dargis [review], *Spider-Man: Homecoming* [film] dir. by. Jon Watts (Marvel Studios, 2017), *New York Times*, 29 June 2017. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/29/movies/spider-man-homecoming-review.html>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶⁵⁹ Nicholas Haefner, 'Authorship and Reputation', in Haefner, Nicholas, *Alfred Hitchcock* (Harlow: Longman, 2005), pp.29-43, p.25.

Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*, p.105.

⁶⁶⁰ Peter Debruge [review], *Captain America: The First Avenger* [film] dir. by. Joe Johnston (Marvel Studios, 2011), *Variety*, 20, July, 2011 <<https://variety.com/2011/film/reviews/captain-america-the-first-avenger-1117945677/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

‘recruiting A-list talent on both sides of the camera and holding them to aesthetic standards that unify the various projects’.⁶⁶¹ Following this argument, the retro tone in Johnston’s *Captain America: The First Avenger* is due to the wise choices made by the studio. This attribution to Feige is not an isolated case. Therefore, before exploring the tension and collaboration between the studio and individual filmmakers, Feige, as an important individual for MCU, needs to be discussed in terms of the role he then plays within the franchise.

Kevin Feige, on behalf of the studio

One of the functions of auteurism is that it identifies a single figure to whom creative control is attributed. People want an authority figure to give credit or fault to. Generally, the director fills that role because they are habitually treated as the authorial figure of a film. Within the MCU franchise, such a complex relationship of collective authorship, formed under the authorial control of Marvel Studios, makes it difficult to identify such a figure. Given this, the MCU franchise is in need of an actual figure (a real person) for audiences to discuss in a more realistic dimension, in addition to Marvel Studios. Furthermore, this figure can undertake the responsibility of active communication, that is, marketing, according to the modern understanding of the author’s function led by Corrigan.⁶⁶² In contrast, according to the film critics, public attention, and press coverage, Feige’s function within the MCU is similar to the auteur’s commercial value but does not offer the auteur’s artistic contribution. In Flanagan et al’s words, Feige ‘is a strong, charismatic figurehead, whose image and patter lends itself to publicity’.⁶⁶³ In addition to being the President of Marvel Studios, in 2019 Feige was named Chief Creative Officer of Marvel Entertainment, meaning that his responsibility has extended to the ‘overall creative direction of Marvel’s storytelling and content creation platforms’.⁶⁶⁴ Noting

⁶⁶¹ Peter Debruge [review], Doctor Strange [film] dir. by. Scott Derrickson (Marvel Studios, 2016), Variety, 23 October 2016. <<https://variety.com/2016/film/reviews/doctor-strange-review-marvel-studios-1201895862/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶⁶² Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls*.

⁶⁶³ Martin Flanagan, Andrew Livingstone, and Mike McKenny, *The Marvel Studios phenomenon: inside a transmedia universe*, p.72.

⁶⁶⁴ Mike Fleming Jr, *Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige Adds Marvel Chief Creative Officer Title; He’ll Oversee All Creative & Story Initiatives*, 2019< <https://deadline.com/2019/10/kevin-feige->

that Feige has been considered or publicised as the authorial producer, this section argues that his authorial status was established in a de-personalisation process, defeating the original purpose of authorship.

Tracing back to the origin of Marvel Entertainment, Feige's position within the MCU franchise has been similar to Stan Lee's role within Marvel Comics. Matt Yockey suggested that one of the strategies that led to Marvel Comics' success was Lee becoming 'the face and voice of Marvel', so he could create 'a familiar and familial rapport with readers' and 'fostered an empathetic connection with readers by projecting an affective authenticity'.⁶⁶⁵ Similarly, Feige, as the voice of the MCU, can also build a rapport with audiences. Some scholars, such as Flanagan, Livingstone, and McKenny, believe that Feige, 'like Lee', has the marketable image 'with a primary stated focus of channelling the creative abilities of others; yet is associated with elements of a creative – or at least creatively sympathetic – force'.⁶⁶⁶ Based on such arguments, Feige is seen as being able to contribute directly to the creation of the film in a similar way to the traditional view of the author. Meanwhile, as the producer of each film rather than the director, it is a challenge for him to be taken for granted as the author of the film in terms of the traditional understanding of film author. Considering the attention Feige has received and the accolades for his involvement in the MCU, this work now turns to how Feige gained his authorial status, as the franchise author of MCU, through promotional strategies.

Since Feige and Lee share a similar function of representing the company, studying Feige's authorial status should start with reference to some of the analyses of Lee's approach to becoming the voice of Marvel Comics. Deron Overpeck noted that 'the popular belief' that Stan Lee is the primary creator of most of Marvel's popular comics, such as *Spider-Man*, and the *X-Men*, was because of his 'sense of celebrity', established through his speeches and interviews during the late 1960s

marvel-studios-president-adds-chief-creative-officer-marvel-title-oversees-all-creative-1202760382/> [accessed 23 May 2021].

⁶⁶⁵ Matt Yockey, 'Introduction: Excelsior! Or, everything that rises must converge', in Matt Yockey (ed), *Make Ours Marvel: Media Convergence and a Comics Universe* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), pp.1-38, p.24.

⁶⁶⁶ Martin Flanagan, Andrew Livingstone, and Mike McKenny, *The Marvel Studios phenomenon: inside a transmedia universe*, p.72.

and 1970s.⁶⁶⁷ When combing through the history of the comic, Ian Gordon also noted that Lee ‘sold comic books on the back of his own personality’.⁶⁶⁸ Furthermore, Yockey gave the example of Lee choosing to offer the ‘standard address’ for fans to write letters directly to him, or Jack Kirby, and even called himself ‘Stan “The Man” Lee’, in order to make it appear to the reader that Marvel Comics is a personal company.⁶⁶⁹ From the early 1970s, Lee gradually stepped back from a creative role so that he finally became more of a ‘figurehead’ instead of an actual creator of Marvel Comics.⁶⁷⁰

Similar to Lee, Feige also established his sense of celebrity through the promotion of MCU films. Within the context of cinema, Feige occupies a role that means it is difficult to become a celebrity recognised by the public, either as the producer of the films or the president of the studio. He cannot be as actively visible to audiences or the public as a film actor can be on a regular basis. Also, he does not have the shortcut as a film director who can claim that a film is his own personal work simply by following the normal understanding of film authorship. However, as a producer or a spokesman of Marvel Studios, Feige stands in front of the camera nearly every time there are important marketing events, such as press conferences, panels with fans and the making-of documentaries from DVD/ Blu-ray extras, to speak for the studio and their franchise. Even though he has never done cameos in any MCU films, like Lee used to do, he been in several making-of documentaries for MCU films, as well as the movie documentary of Marvel Studios, *Marvel Studios: Assembling a Universe*.⁶⁷¹ His role in the making-of documentaries is to introduce the characters and stories to the audience and explain the process by which they are

⁶⁶⁷ Deron Overpeck, ‘Breaking Brand’, in Matt Yockey (ed), *Make Ours Marvel: Media Convergence and a Comics Universe* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), pp.164-186, p.171.

⁶⁶⁸ Ian Gordon, ‘Comics, Creators, and Copyright: On the Ownership of Serial Narratives by Multiple Authors’, in Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson (eds), *A Companion to Media Authorship* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 221-236, p.221.

⁶⁶⁹ Matt Yockey, ‘Introduction: Excelsior! Or, everything that rises must converge’, p.14.

⁶⁷⁰ Deron Overpeck, ‘Breaking Brand’, p.171.

⁶⁷¹ The making-of documentaries from Marvel Studios are not only for the MCU films but also for the MCU TV series. For example, *Marvel Studios: Assembled*, a seven episodes TV documentary introduced the TV series *Hawkeye* (Disney+, 2021-present), *What If...?* (Disney+, 2021-present), *The Falcon and the Winter Soldier* (Disney+, 2021-present), and *WandaVision* (2021-present), as well as three MCU films *Eternals* (dir. Chloé Zhao, 2021), *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* (dir. Destin Daniel Cretton, 2021), and *Black Widow* (dir. Cate Shortland, 2021).

adapted and filmed, taking on a similar role to the one Jackson played in his own making-of videos. Feige has been on the stage at press conferences for every MCU film and has participated in interviews alongside the actors and director. Additionally, he gave presentations about the long-term plans of the MCU at the Marvel Studios panel and Disney Investor Day event.⁶⁷² During the premiere of *Avengers: Endgame*, an *Entertainment Weekly* roundtable interview with the six original cast members (Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, Chris Hemsworth, Mark Ruffalo, Scarlett Johansson, Jeremy Renner) had Feige as the only guest who was neither a star nor director of the films.⁶⁷³



Figure 2. The class photo featuring 79 actors and filmmakers from across the Marvel Cinematic Universe for the 10th-anniversary celebration.



Figure 3. Zoom in on the four central figures from Figure 2.

⁶⁷² The announcements of each phase of the MCU are normally presented by Feige through the SDCC Marvel panel or the Disney Investor Day.

⁶⁷³ Entertainment Weekly, 'Avengers: Endgame' Cast Full Roundtable Interview On Stan Lee & More, Entertainment Weekly, 2019 < <https://youtu.be/ECdQ6OV-rkU> > [accessed 23 November 2021].

Some reports directly point out it is ‘unusual’ for someone like Feige to be ‘so in demand as an interview subject every time’ the MCU releases a film.⁶⁷⁴ This demand reflects his importance for the studio’s marketing strategy. To celebrate the 10th anniversary, in 2018, Marvel Studios released a short behind-the-scenes video as well as the official photo of the ‘class’ that included 79 cast and crew members from MCU films (Figure 2).⁶⁷⁵ The celebrities at the front and centre of the class photo are Robert Downey Jr. and Kevin Feige, then behind them are Chris Evans and Stan Lee (Figure 3).⁶⁷⁶ These four key MCU figures are surrounded by several other actors and filmmakers of the MCU films.⁶⁷⁷ Having such a significant position within the frame conveys the idea that Feige is as important as the other two leading stars as well as Lee, The Man of Marvel. However, this is not a sign that Feige is the only important figure behind the scenes at the studio. The photo also has other filmmakers scattered around the edges of the crowd or in inconspicuous positions, such as Co-President Louis D’Esposito, Casting Director Sarah Finn, Head of Visual Development Ryan Meinerding, as well as a group of executive producers like Trinh Tran, Nate Moore, Stephen Broussard and Jeremy Latcham.⁶⁷⁸ This arrangement also clearly conveys the idea that the studio is a collection of talented people working behind the scenes and in so-doing echoes the strategy from Marvel Comics that concentrated on emphasising Lee’s vision and style but also praises Marvel’s coterie of artists.⁶⁷⁹ Correspondingly, the comments Feige received also echo such a strategy. His presence is certainly not ignored by film critics, as demonstrated when *The Hollywood Reporter’s* used the words ‘hands-on’ to describe Feige’s

⁶⁷⁴ Mike Ryan, *Kevin Feige On ‘Thor: Ragnarok,’ The Hulk Trilogy, And What’s The Deal With Thanos*, 2017 < <https://uproxx.com/movies/kevin-feige-thor-ragnarok-thanos-hulk/> > [accessed 23 May 2021].

⁶⁷⁵ Marvel Entertainment, *Marvel Studios 10th Anniversary Announcement – Class Photo Video*, 2018 < <https://youtu.be/GjwjzIFcX7U> > [accessed 23 May 2021].

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁸ Louis D’Esposito is the executive producer of all MCU films. He also directed some of the shot films as well as one episode of the TV series *Agent Carter* (2005-2006). Sarah Finn and Ryan Meinerding also participated in the production of MCU films from *Iron Man*.

⁶⁷⁹ Matt Yockey, ‘Introduction: Excelsior! Or, everything that rises must converge’, p.17.

participation in its review of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*.⁶⁸⁰ *Empire* notes that regarding the production of the MCU, Feige's primary responsibility is to focus on the franchise's perspective to avoid the MCU 'mak[ing] the same film twice'.⁶⁸¹ Furthermore, *The Hollywood Reporter* directly called Feige the 'maestro' of the MCU in the review of *Avengers: Infinity War*.⁶⁸² Similarly, *Variety* called him the 'honcho' of the MCU to highlight his importance to the franchise, which has 'managed to attract a diverse mix of' directors.⁶⁸³ Usually, film reviews' auteurist critique focuses on one director with their work(s) and analyses this director as an author. Sellors claims that the author is the one who takes responsibility for their expressions both 'morally and semantically'.⁶⁸⁴ When it extends to the broader context of the film franchise, this kind of responsibility not only comes from each individual director, but also comes from the people who take charge of the whole project. Just as a director is often acknowledged as the one who takes charge of a film's production, Feige has become another main figure to take responsibility for the long-term franchise and this is bolstered by the film reviews.

At the beginning of Marvel Studios' Panel at SDCC in 2019, Kevin Feige took to the stage with enthusiastic cheers from the audience to introduce the Phase Four productions of MCU, that would continue the franchise beyond its 23 released films.⁶⁸⁵ He took the opportunity to introduce his colleagues, a group of producers and executives from Marvel Studios, who also have worked for a long time on The

⁶⁸⁰ Todd McCarthy [review], *Avengers: Age of Ultron* [film] dir. by. Joss Whedon (Marvel Studios, 2015), *The Hollywood Reporters*, 21 April 2015. <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/avengers-age-ultron-film-review-790246>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶⁸¹ Chris Hewitt [review], *Thor: The Dark World* [film] dir. by. Alan Taylor (Marvel Studios, 2013), *Empire*, 22 October 2013. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/thor-dark-world/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶⁸² Todd McCarthy [review], *Avengers: Infinity War* [film] dir. by. Anthony Russo, Joe Russo (Marvel Studios, 2018), *The Hollywood Reporter*, 24 April 2018. <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/avengers-infinity-war-review-1105484>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶⁸³ Peter Debruge [review], *Captain America: The First Avenger* [film] dir. by. Joe Johnston (Marvel Studios, 2011), *Variety*, 20 July 2011. <<https://variety.com/2011/film/reviews/captain-america-the-first-avenger-1117945677/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁶⁸⁴ C. Paul Sellors, 'Collective Authorship in Film', p.264.

⁶⁸⁵ Big Gold Belt Media, *FULL Marvel Studios Panel from Hall H | San Diego Comic-Con 2019*, 2019 <https://youtu.be/_C-aHSauS-Q> [accessed 23 May 2021].

Infinity Saga, but who are not as familiar to the audience.⁶⁸⁶ Compared to his colleagues, Feige's opportunities to directly communicate with the audience and fans are more widespread, and this has contributed to him becoming a figure who can represent the MCU as well as Marvel Studios. Although this is no longer the era of receiving fan letters and writing Stan's Soapbox for Marvel Comics books, Feige can still communicate with the fans and audiences through other popular ways that are suitable for film marketing.⁶⁸⁷ For example, James N. Gilmore suggested that the special edition DVD is more like a filmic version of Lee's Soapbox because of its additional materials like making-of documentaries and audio commentaries.⁶⁸⁸ In other words, within the context of franchise cinema, Feige can be considered as the only actual person who acts on behalf of Marvel Studios, therefore he has authorial control. Feige is recognised by the media as the important figure who represents the MCU, or, in Alex Galbraith's words, 'the president of one of the most expansive entertainment empires ever carries a ton of weight'.⁶⁸⁹

In addition to the rhetoric of film reviews, the studio's own marketing strategy has helped to promote Feige's position of authority within the MCU franchise. The key difference between Feige and Lee is that Marvel Comic readers had faith that Lee was the primary creator of Marvel Comics, but it would be incorrect to think of Feige as the actual creator of the MCU. Thus, instead of being the creator of the

⁶⁸⁶ Tucker Chet Markus, *The Best Moments from Marvel Studios' Hall H Panel at SDCC 2019*, 2019< <https://www.marvel.com/articles/live-events/the-best-moments-from-marvel-studios-hall-h-panel-at-sdcc-2019>> [accessed 23 May 2021].

The Infinity Saga a saga of films including Phase One, Phase Two and Phase Three. It has 23 MCU films that began with *Iron Man* and concluded with *Spider-Man: Far from Home*. This is based on the development of the stories. However, in this thesis research, the last film of The Infinity Saga, *Spider-Man: Far from Home* (USA, dir. Jon Watts, 2019), is not included, because the 22nd film *Avengers: The Endgame* was a significant key point for the franchise's development from the marketing perspective. This case study is focusing on studying authorship from the marketing and reception perspectives rather than narrative continuity.

⁶⁸⁷ Stan's Soapbox is a special column written by Stan Lee, published in the Bullpen Bulletins section in monthly comic books of Marvel Comics. In this column, Lee can communicate with readers by explaining the comic book-related topics and showing some exclusive ideas their artists have during the creation meeting.

⁶⁸⁸ James N. Gilmore, 'Spinning Webs: Constructing authors, genre, and Fans in the Spider-Man Film Franchise', in Matt Yockey (ed), *Make Ours Marvel: Media Convergence and a Comics Universe* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017), pp.248-267.

⁶⁸⁹ Alex Galbraith, *Kevin Feige Confirms Marvel Sees 'Deadpool' as MCU's Only R-Rated Property*, 2021< <https://www.complex.com/pop-culture/kevin-feige-marvel-sees-deadpool-mcu-only-r-rated-property>> [accessed 23 May 2021].

MCU, acknowledged as such by audiences, Feige becomes a trustable companion for audiences, especially for fans of the comic books. Feige has two key functions in his public persona. One is as a communicator to the audience, similar to Lee, and the other is as a spokesman for Marvel Studios. This is distinctly different from being the creator of the work or a creative decision-maker, as might be associated with the auteur. It is particularly important to mention that Feige, representing Marvel Studios, still has the power or the right of creative intervention, even though he is not really a member of the creative team. This unique feature is an important reason for introducing authorship to the discussion.

Feige's persona has been cultivated through more than just his role as communicator. When appearing in front of the camera, there is almost always a set rule to Feige's dress code: he wears a baseball cap with the logo for the latest MCU film in production, and his passion for the cap caught fans' attention. At a fan Q&A for *Avengers: Endgame* through the Twitter account of The Avengers, a fan asked the question, 'How many hats does Kevin Feige own?' It was selected and answered by Feige ('I honestly don't know. Dozens.').⁶⁹⁰ Feige's decision to wear a cap that always features one of MCU film's logos is a habit worth discussing further.⁶⁹¹ When Dyer suggested that 'the general image of stardom can be seen as a version of the American dream, organised around the themes of consumption, success and ordinariness', he offered several examples such as female stars' fashion and luxurious outfits, male stars' masculinity reinforced through a series of sporting images, or 'the idols expressing in ideological form the economic imperatives of society'.⁶⁹² Different from those star images that aim to be close to the common consumption of the society, Feige's image leans very specifically towards a specific social group: the comic book fan. Henry Jenkins pointed out that the common

⁶⁹⁰ The Avengers, 3 August 2019

<<https://twitter.com/Avengers/status/1157466322768293888?s=20>> [accessed 27 May 2021].

⁶⁹¹ According to Feige's interview with *Variety*, he has had the habit of wearing hats since a very early age that can dating back to his junior high school days, and it was because he 'used to have a lot of hair that was unwieldy'.

Brent Lang, *How Kevin Feige Super-Charged Marvel Studios Into Hollywood's Biggest Hit Machine*, 2019 < <https://variety.com/2019/film/features/kevin-feige-avengers-endgame-marvel-studios-1203188721/>> [accessed 31 May 2021].

⁶⁹² Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, Bloomsbury, 1998), P.39-45.

stereotype of comic fans is a group of men who have ‘unrewarding lives...few social ties, unsuccessful or threatening romantic relationships, and hectic or demeaning jobs, often at the periphery of show business’.⁶⁹³ As a producer, as well as the president of Marvel Studios, it is easy for Feige to keep up the image of being a successful businessman, a figure associated with the American Dream. However, this kind of image is far away from the stereotype of comic fans as Jenkins described. Rather than maintaining the image of a successful businessman in a high-class suit, there are numerous red-carpet photos of Feige at film premieres in jeans, trainers and most importantly, always a cap with the MCU film logo (Figure 4). This not-too-serious attire portrays him as a casual personality, which, combined with his claims to have grown up as a comic book fan, makes him more likely to be believed as a Marvel fan. Most importantly, the caps he wears are a constant reminder of his close association with the MCU.



Figure 4. The cap and casual attire contribute to Feige's person (The photos from left to right: *Avengers: Infinity War* world premiere on 23rd April 2018 in Los Angeles, Disney's D23 EXPO 2017 in Anaheim, *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* world premiere on 19th April 2017 in Los Angeles, and *Thor: Ragnarok* world premiere on 10th October 2017 in Los Angeles.)

Richard DeCordova suggested that the ‘private life of the star was not to be in contradiction with his/her film image’ when he studied the star system in early twentieth-century Hollywood.⁶⁹⁴ Dyer argues that stars ‘relate to the social types of a society’, such as the heroes, rebels, and independent women.⁶⁹⁵ The MCU has no

⁶⁹³ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p.14-15.

⁶⁹⁴ Richard DeCordova, ‘The emergence of the star system in America’, in Sean Redmond and Su Holmes, *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader* (LA, London, New Delhi: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2007), pp.132-140, p.138.

⁶⁹⁵ Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: BFI, Bloomsbury, 1998), p.53.

shortage of stars, with many actors and actresses who were already famous before joining the MCU and those who became stars afterwards, such as Samuel L. Jackson, Anthony Hopkins, Josh Brolin, Robert Downey Jr., Scarlett Johansson, Chris Evans, Chris Hemsworth. Different from them, Feige's public image is limited to a much smaller scope, associated solely with Marvel. His dress code allows him to be both casual and de-personalised. No matter how much of it is really of his own volition or personality, this style of dressing fits him into a persona being more of a comic fan. When discussing the star system in Hollywood, John Ellis suggested that 'the star image is an incoherent image', which is both 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary'.⁶⁹⁶ Feige's image portrays him as an ordinary person but more specifically, which conveys the idea to audiences that Feige is familiar with comics, and the comic fan group, so that as the producer of the MCU films (and TV series), Feige knows how to maintain their tonality for the fans. Meanwhile, the cap with MCU films' logo reiterates that Feige's function is to represent the MCU, or Marvel Studios.

Feige's almost unchanging dress style enhances his identity, and the primary role of his identity is to represent Marvel Studios rather than himself. Ellis argued that for performing stars, their personality could become 'a means of describing or specifying a particular film'.⁶⁹⁷ Although Feige is not a performing star, he could also become part of the narrative image to describe the MCU film. Also, in Jo Littler's study of celebrity CEOs, she suggested that one of the features of celebrity CEOs is that they offer 'a means for a corporation to gain maximum exposure for little cost'.⁶⁹⁸ The case of Feige and Marvel Studios is more complex than Littler's case studies. Feige's image is constructed in such a way that it highlights the Marvel brand, and particularly its film franchise. Thus, the overlap between Feige's personality and the characteristics Marvel Studios wants to portray are amplified by the media coverage to convince the viewers. *Variety* directly complimented Feige, noting that his personality helped set up and highlight 'Marvel's signature style — a blend of

⁶⁹⁶ John Ellis, *Visible fictions: cinema, television, video* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.93.

⁶⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p.92.

⁶⁹⁸ Jo Littler, 'Celebrity CEOs and the cultural economy of tabloid intimacy', in Sean Redmond and Su Holmes, *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader* (LA, London, New Delhi: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2007), pp.230-243, p.238.

humor, optimism, and spectacle that has attracted legions of fans around the world'.⁶⁹⁹

The other feature of a celebrity CEO, suggested by Littler, is that it can 'encourage customer intimacy, increase promotion and offset the charge of CEO greed'.⁷⁰⁰ Feige can adapt to this feature, but his approach is different from the CEO-centric way of promoting the relevant material described in Littler's case study. Feige's persona is that of a down to earth figure and an actual person who speaks for Marvel Studios; his words should be understood as representing the studio's decisions rather than his personal views. Therefore, Feige does not discuss too much of his own personal experiences, unless he is putting himself in the role of a comic book fan or film fan in order to shape a communication that audiences and fans can relate to the MCU franchise. For example, *Variety* posted an interview with Feige in 2019 with several photos of him and his office.⁷⁰¹ The header photo is a close-up of Feige, wearing black clothes against a black background with the Captain Marvel logo on top of a black baseball cap. There are also photos of Thanos' Infinity Gauntlet, the character of Groot from *The Guardians of the Galaxy* in different corners of Feige's office. This is a set of photographs of Feige's office that does not include any office supplies, or usual workplace paraphernalia within the frame, but only shows the collections of objects relating to the MCU (Figure 5). These distinctive office photos undermine Feige's status as a businessman or company president and instead draw him closer to the MCU audience with a series of MCU collections that emphasise his fan persona.

⁶⁹⁹ Brent Lang, *Marvel's Kevin Feige on 'Spider-Man's' Future and Why Brie Larson Was Perfect for 'Captain Marvel'*, 2016 < <https://variety.com/2016/film/news/marvel-kevin-feige-interview-spider-man-captain-marvel-diversity-1201923851/> > [accessed 31 May 2021].

⁷⁰⁰ Jo Littler, 'Celebrity CEOs and the cultural economy of tabloid intimacy', p.239.

⁷⁰¹ Brent Lang, *How Kevin Feige Super-Charged Marvel Studios Into Hollywood's Biggest Hit Machine*.



Figure 5. The photos of Feige's office present in the article from *Variety*.



Figure 6. Kevin Feige in his office.

The other photo of Feige shows him sitting in his office with his hands on his baseball cap, which has *The Avengers* logo (Figure 6). Hanging on the white wall behind him is the shield used by Captain America from the film *Captain America: The First Avenger*, which takes up almost half the frame. The most prominent objects in the cabinets, on either side, are toys of Marvel characters and an elaborate Iron Man helmet. Feige is dressed in a casual outfit, the colour of which is almost identical to

the black of the cabinets on either side of him. His head is slightly bowed and his hands grip the cap brim, so that only his nose and below are visible in the photo; his eyes do not appear in the photo, but they do seem to underline the cap he wears, especially the red Avengers logo. Although this is a photo of Feige, all the Marvel elements in the picture are more prominent than Feige himself, who only shows half of his face. This conveys a message that Feige, as the producer of all the MCU films and the president of Marvel Studios, has a deep connection with the Marvel culture. This is an approach similar to how Peter Jackson established, and communicated, his persona as a Tolkien fan during the production of Middle-earth films. Feige's Marvel fan persona convinces the audience to believe that Marvel Studios has the ability to make the right decision, or faithful adaptations, with their MCU productions. Rather than portraying himself as a decision-maker, as Jackson did, the publicity around Feige continues to highlight the role of Marvel Studios. The message that comes across through Feige's image is that the audience is one of a cohesion between Feige and Marvel Studios, therefore, in contrast to the usual way authorial status is established, by looking for examples of the individual's persona, Feige's authorial figure is built up through a de-personalisation process because his function is to represent the studio and its franchise.

The difference between Feige and other individual filmmakers of MCU films is that he can fully represent the studio's interests. The successful box-office performance of the MCU franchise also earned Feige a position of power in the Hollywood film industry and has helped him to become one of the most economically successful film producers of all time. Feige was awarded the David O. Selznick Achievement Award in Theatrical Motion Pictures by the Producers Guild of America in 2019.⁷⁰² Later that year, it was reported that he was going to be involved in producing a *Star Wars* film for Disney.⁷⁰³ There were even rumours that 'he might assume more control of Lucasfilm'. However, a report in 2021 from *Variety*

⁷⁰² Gregg Kilday, *Kevin Feige to Be Honored by Producers Guild of America*, 2018 < <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/kevin-feige-2019-pga-david-o-selznick-achievement-award-recipient-1138439/> > [accessed 27 May 2021].

⁷⁰³ Kim Masters, *'Star Wars' Shocker: Marvel's Kevin Feige Developing New Movie for Disney (Exclusive)*, 2019 < <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/marvel-s-kevin-feige-developing-star-wars-movie-disney-1243481/> > [accessed 27 May 2021].

referenced an insider's comment that Feige is 'fully committed with his Marvel duties and has no ambition to lead Lucasfilm or take more of a role'.⁷⁰⁴ Rumours of being involved in another film franchise is a sign that this working pattern of Feige and Marvel Studios has earned enough success to be noticed by the industry. Meanwhile, comments that he has 'no ambition' for other projects reinforce that Feige is committed to Marvel. His close bond with Marvel Studios portrays him as a loyal figure who can fully represent Marvel and communicate with the audience on their behalf. Therefore, Feige and Lee are similar in terms of star or celebrity image-making, yet instead of reprising Lee's role as creator, Feige's role is closer to an organiser who can make creative interventions. The right of creative intervention in the production of MCU films transformed Feige from a simple celebrity CEO or star to something closer to an authorial figure. The tonality that Feige always brings up represents the creative intention from Marvel Studios, and this intention takes precedence over the creative intention from each film's participants. The creative intentions from Marvel Studio required Feige's convincing communication to convey their intentions to the audience. Feige has, therefore, functioned as a figure with an authorial voice during this process. However, this authorial voice effectively belongs to the studio with Feige's humour and personality echoing the humour of the MCU film style. His comic fan persona makes it easier for him to gain the trust of audiences for the MCU films. Therefore, Feige is effectively depersonalised through this process.

Although Feige is clearly the figurehead, his friendly relationship with directors and other participants in the MCU franchise reiterate a type of collective authorship. The form of collective authorship that exists within the MCU franchise can be understood as a collective one that exists on the surface, but that is established under Marvel Studios' authorial control. The creative intervention from Feige, along with the authorial voices from other individual directors, come together to form what seems to be a collaboration that appears in line with the concept of collective authorship. With Feige's involvement, this authorial control has been disguised into

⁷⁰⁴ Brent Lang and Matt Donnelly, *Disney's New World Order Leads to Confusion and Bruised Egos*, 2021 < <https://variety.com/2021/film/news/disney-bob-chapek-bob-iger-reorganization-1234971562/> > [accessed 27 May 2021].

a more acceptable authorial voice from an individual, rather than the corporate control of a studio. This authorial control of Marvel Studios could be seen as a way to keep the balance between individuals' expression and the franchise's long-term demands. However, from individuals' viewpoints, it could cause a limitation to their filmmaking and creative expression. Thus, it follows that the kind of directors who can fit, cannot fit, or to some extent can fit into this relationship should be the next topic to be discussed.

MCU directors – collaboration or control?

In the story of the film *Captain America: Civil War*, the Avengers disband because of the introduction of the Sokovia Accords. These are a series of legal files that aim to restrain superheroes' activities and bring all their actions under the United Nations' supervision, meaning a UN panel must be established to oversee and control the superhero team. What eventually divides this superhero team is their differing views on the Sokovia Accords. Some, such as Captain America, insist their own judgment is more reliable than the government, so they refuse to operate under government control. Others, like Iron Man, support the supervision from the government, so they are able to operate legally under the government's authority. Within the MCU franchise, a similar situation occurs behind the scenes of these superhero stories. Some directors are willing to direct MCU films under the studio's control and are therefore invited back to contribute to the MCU franchise one or more times. Meanwhile, some directors wanted to maintain their own creative opinions and subsequently lost their opportunity to direct a MCU film. This, to some extent, contradicts the model of collective authorship, described above, that seems to be promoted by Marvel Studios. The purpose of this study is not necessarily to criticise this contradiction, but rather, this section will discuss the way different directors have responded to this contradiction and thereby gain further insight into the balance between the studio's authorial control and the collective authorial relationship.

According to the summaries of reliable press reports, such as the news from *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety*, directors Patty Jenkins, Edgar Wright, and Ava

DuVernay were once considered or involved in pre-production but eventually left the MCU franchise.⁷⁰⁵ Meanwhile, there is a group of directors who maintain, or did maintain, long-term cooperation with MCU, namely Jon Favreau (two MCU films), Joss Whedon (two MCU films), Anthony and Joe Russo (four MCU films), James Gunn (two MCU films), Peyton Reed (two MCU films), Jon Watts (two MCU films), Taika Waititi (two MCU films), and Ryan Coogler (two MCU films).⁷⁰⁶ Other than these two groups of directors, another group of filmmakers have only participated once as the director. They are Louis Leterrier (*The Incredible Hulk*), Kenneth Branagh (*Thor*), Joe Johnston (*Captain America: The First Avenger*), Shane Black (*Iron Man 3*), Alan Taylor (*Thor: The Dark World*), Scott Derrickson (*Doctor Strange*), as well as Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck (*Captain Marvel*). Bradley Schauer notes that 'the franchise blockbuster is a big-budget genre epic with a narrative that elaborately ties into multimedia ancillaries such as books, video games and television'.⁷⁰⁷ This commercial demand creates a series of requirements that place limitations on an individual director's creativity and judgement on filmmaking. As can be seen from the above classification, the extent that directors can adapt to this way of working differs.

⁷⁰⁵ THR Staff, *Patty Jenkins on 'Thor 2' Exit and When a Project Could Be a "Disservice to Women"*, 2017 < <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/heat-vision/patty-jenkins-thor-2-exit-a-project-could-be-a-disservice-women-1008776> > [accessed 28 December 2018].

Marc Graser, 'Edgar Wright Exits Marvel's 'Ant-Man' as Director', *Variety*, May 2014, <<https://variety.com/2014/film/news/edgar-wright-exits-marvels-ant-man-as-director-1201190458/>> [accessed 28 December 2018].

Sarah Begley, 'Ava DuVernay Explains Why She Said No to Black Panther', *Time*, July 2015, <<http://time.com/3965845/ava-duvernay-black-panther/>> [accessed 28 December 2018].

⁷⁰⁶ Within the scope of the films discussed in this chapter, which is the first 22 MCU films, Jon Watts, Taika Waititi, and Ryan Coogler are not among the directors who have been involved more than twice. However, they have all begun production of their second MCU film at the time of writing, so their names have been added to this list. James Gunn is currently working on his third MCU film.

These films are: Jon Favreau's films are *Iron Man* (2008) and *Iron Man 2* (2010); Joss Whedon's films are *The Avengers* (2012) and *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015); Anthony and Joe Russo's films are *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014), *Captain America: Civil War* (2016), *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), and *Avengers: Endgame* (2019); James Gunn's films are *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014), *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (2017), and *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3* (2023); Peyton Reed's films are *Ant-Man* (2015) and *Ant-Man and the Wasp* (2018); Jon Watts' films are *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017) and *Spider-Man: No Way Home* (2021); Taika Waititi's films are *Thor: Ragnarok* (2017) and *Thor: Love and Thunder* (2022); Ryan Coogler's films are *Black Panther* (2018) and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022).

⁷⁰⁷ Bradley Schauer, 'Critics, clones and narrative in the franchise blockbuster', *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 5, no. 2 (2007), pp.191-210, p.193.

Those directors who participated in the pre-production of MCU films, but ultimately failed to direct one warrant attention. MCU almost welcomed their first female director in 2012, with Patty Jenkins scheduled to direct *Thor: The Dark World*. However, Alan Taylor eventually filled the vacancy, after Jenkins's exit.⁷⁰⁸ Kim Newman commented, in his review of *Doctor Strange*, that Marvel's directors are 'essentially a safe pair of hands with enough creativity to deliver a solid entertainment but not so much that he'll break the mould'.⁷⁰⁹ This is a common understanding of Marvel. Due to this demand of 'safe entertainment' from Marvel Studios, Jenkins was not the only one to leave during the production process. The reason for Jenkins' exit was cited as 'creative differences', at least this is the reason the media reported, as well as the official statement both sides agreed.⁷¹⁰ Furthermore, the same reason was given for Edgar Wright leaving *Ant-Man* in 2014, and for Ava DuVernay's refusal of the offer to direct *Black Panther* in 2015, because 'it really wasn't going to be an Ava DuVernay film'.⁷¹¹ After meeting with the writers and Chadwick Boseman (*Black Panther*), DuVernay believed there were 'creative differences' around 'story and perspective'.⁷¹² All these examples seem to contradict Feige's previous claim that Marvel Studios welcomes a 'unique point of view in a unique angle on the world'.⁷¹³

The departure of these directors demonstrates the authorial control from the studio takes precedence over the so-called collective authorship, even though emphasis is placed on the equal relationship during the MCU creative process. Of these three directors, Wright's departure from *Ant-Man* in 2014 caused many people to be 'disappointed', not only MCU fans but also filmmakers and actors such

⁷⁰⁸ 'Patty Jenkins on 'Thor 2' Exit and When a Project Could Be a "Disservice to Women"'.
⁷⁰⁹ Kim Newman [review], *Doctor Strange* [film] dir. by. Scott Derrickson (Marvel Studios, 2016), *Sight & Sound*, December 2016, Vol. 26 Issue 12, p60-61.
⁷¹⁰ 'Patty Jenkins on 'Thor 2' Exit and When a Project Could Be a "Disservice to Women"'.
⁷¹¹ Marc Graser, *Edgar Wright Exits Marvel's 'Ant-Man' as Director*, 2014, <<https://variety.com/2014/film/news/edgar-wright-exits-marvels-ant-man-as-director-1201190458/>> [accessed 28 December 2018].
Sarah Begley, *Ava DuVernay Explains Why She Said No to Black Panther*, 2015, <<http://time.com/3965845/ava-duvernay-black-panther/>> [accessed 28 December 2018].
⁷¹² Yolanda Sangweni, *EXCLUSIVE: Ava DuVernay Won't Be Directing 'Black Panther' Movie*, 2015, <<https://www.essence.com/entertainment/exclusive-ava-duvernay-not-directing-black-panther-movie/>> [accessed 28 December 2018].
⁷¹³ Rotten Tomatoes, *MCU Phase Two: Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige Recalls the Beginnings* / *Rotten Tomatoes*, 2018 <<https://youtu.be/dycRPcNrGYE>> [accessed 15 May 2018].

as his friend and collaborator Simon Pegg, in addition to Michael Douglas, who played Hank Pym in the film, and other influential MCU directors, such as Joss Whedon and James Gunn.⁷¹⁴ Wright was initially approached to work on *Ant-Man* in 2006, after which he wrote the script for the MCU and was named as director.⁷¹⁵ He was once so highly regarded by the MCU that Marvel Studios even rescheduled the production of *Ant-Man* to accommodate his other commitments, and when asked in an interview why, even though Marvel always planned out several projects in advance, they still delayed *Ant-Man* for him, Wright replied that it was ‘because they really love the script’.⁷¹⁶ His departure in 2014 received backlash from fans and celebrities and because of early reports that ‘Wright’s script’ drafts were excellent, Feige was forced to comment on his departure, promising fans that the film would still ‘retain the DNA of Edgar Wright’s vision’ and confirming that they had a very good writer to redraft it.⁷¹⁷

Wright was clearly unhappy about his departure from the production and noted that it was ‘due to differences in their vision of the film’. This official statement has led to criticism of Marvel Studios, in the popular press, as a ‘big evil studio’ that is ‘too scared [of] the outside-the-box creative vision’.⁷¹⁸ To respond to such

⁷¹⁴ Ben Child, *Simon Pegg says Edgar Wright’s Ant-Man departure is a ‘terrible shame’*, 2014, <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jun/17/simon-pegg-on-edgar-wright-ant-man-departure>> [accessed 10 June 2021].

Ben Child, *Michael Douglas: Edgar Wright Ant-Man departure ‘very disappointing’*, 2014, <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jun/09/michael-douglas-ant-man-edgar-wright>> [accessed 10 June 2021].

Ben Child, *Joss one cornetto: Whedon shows solidarity with Edgar Wright over Ant-Man departure*, 2014, <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/may/27/edgar-wright-marvel-cornetto-selfie-joss-whedon-ant-man>> [accessed 10 June 2021].

⁷¹⁵ Edward Douglas, *Exclusive: Edgar Wright Talks Ant-Man*, 2006, <<https://www.superherohype.com/features/91587-exclusive-edgar-wright-talks-ant-man>> [accessed 10 November 2021].

⁷¹⁶ Drew Taylor, *Interview: Edgar Wright Talks ‘The World’s End,’ Completing The Cornetto Trilogy, ‘Ant-Man’ & Much More*, 2013, <<https://www.indiewire.com/2013/08/interview-edgar-wright-talks-the-worlds-end-completing-the-cornetto-trilogy-ant-man-much-more-94578/>> [accessed 10 November 2021].

⁷¹⁷ Ben Child, *Marvel: Ant-Man to retain core Edgar Wright ‘DNA’*, 2014, <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jun/24/ant-man-to-retain-core-edgar-wright-dna-marvel>> [accessed 10 June 2021].

⁷¹⁸ Ben Child, *Ant-Man: Kevin Feige rejects Marvel criticism over Edgar Wright exit*, 2014, <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/jul/16/ant-man-kevin-feige-rejects-marvel-criticism-over-edgar-wright-exit>> [accessed 10 June 2021].

negative responses, Feige described the situation in detail in his interview with *The Guardian* during an event for *The Guardians of the Galaxy*'s release.⁷¹⁹ Feige described his meeting with Wright and recalled that he had also questioned that the public would only think of this 'creative differences' statement as an excuse, with Wright having said 'but in this case it's true'.⁷²⁰ Feige further explained that 'Marvel movies are very collaborative, and I think they are more collaborative than what he had been used to'.⁷²¹ In a 2017 interview with *Variety*, Wright again mentioned his departure, stating, 'I was the writer-director on it and then they wanted to do a draft without me, and having written all my other movies, that's a tough thing to move forward'.⁷²² It is very hard to really know what happened, but the interviews and reports available concerning Wright's departure from *Ant-Man* suggest it was not an amicable departure. The excuse of 'creative differences' in this instance implies creative control was being exerted by the studio, even though Feige attempted to explain that this was because the MCU had always sought a collaborative working model for which directors like Wright were not suitable. Regardless of the tensions behind this, Feige's attitude to the press has always been one of trying to emphasise collective intention in the production of this MCU film.

This incident, which on the surface appears to be a PR crisis, seemingly hides a tension between the differing authorial voices. Collective authorship can allow for collective creativity, it also has the potential to cause friction when creative intentions do not fit together. Even in 2017, what Wright still emphasised, when asked about *Ant-Man*, is that the control and interference of the studio made it difficult for him to maintain his own film style. He said, 'The most diplomatic answer is I wanted to make a Marvel movie, but I don't think they really wanted to make an

Marc Graser, Edgar Wright Exits Marvel's 'Ant-Man' as Director, 2014, <<https://variety.com/2014/film/news/edgar-wright-exits-marvels-ant-man-as-director-1201190458/>> [accessed 10 June 2021].

⁷¹⁹ Ben Child, *Ant-Man: Kevin Feige rejects Marvel criticism over Edgar Wright exit*.

⁷²⁰ Ibid.

⁷²¹ Ibid.

⁷²² Kristopher Tapley, Playback: Edgar Wright on 'Baby Driver,' Music and Walking Away From 'Ant-Man', 2017, <<https://variety.com/2017/film/news/playback-podcast-edgar-wright-baby-driver-1202467275/>> [accessed 10 June 2021].

Edgar Wright movie'.⁷²³ His words straightforwardly point out that the priority of MCU filmmaking is to meet the studio's intention rather than the individuals', thereby highlighting that authorial control exists for the studio, behind the facade of collaboration. Compared to Wright, the other two directors discussed in this study, Jenkins and DuVernay, did not receive as much attention or support as Wright. Their reaction to the departures was also very understated and polite. As for the departure, or not-signing as directors, both Jenkins and DuVernay made a similar statement to Wright, that they left because of 'creative differences'. When asked about her departure, Jenkins said, 'I did not believe that I could make a good movie out of the script that they were planning on doing'.⁷²⁴ Similarly, when talking about the reason DuVernay did not sign to direct *Black Panther* during an interview at the ESSENCE Festival in 2015, she explained that was because 'it comes down to story and perspective'.⁷²⁵ Despite their differences, both filmmakers expressed that they were grateful for having been given the opportunity by Marvel. In a podcast interview in 2020, Jenkins said it was commendable that Marvel hired her on a superhero film 'that didn't require a woman at all'.⁷²⁶ As for DuVernay, her statement also expresses respect for Marvel. In her interview, she said, 'Marvel has a certain way of doing things and I think they're fantastic' and 'I loved that they reached out to me'.⁷²⁷ Specifically for *Black Panther*, she said, 'I loved meeting Chadwick and writers and all the Marvel execs'.⁷²⁸ Unlike Wright, who worked for six years on *Ant-Man*, DuVernay and Jenkins did not spend as much time on MCU films. DuVernay departed from *Black Panther* in its early stages, noting that it is

⁷²³ Kristopher Tapley, *Playback: Edgar Wright on 'Baby Driver,' Music and Walking Away From 'Ant-Man'*, 2017, <<https://variety.com/2017/film/news/playback-podcast-edgar-wright-baby-driver-1202467275/>> [accessed 28 May 2021].

⁷²⁴ Anthony Breznican, *Wonder Woman 1984 Director Patty Jenkins on Knowing When to Fight*, 2020, <<https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2020/03/wonder-woman-1984-director-patty-jenkins-on-knowing-when-to-fight>> [accessed 28 May 2021].

⁷²⁵ Yolanda Sangweni, *EXCLUSIVE: Ava DuVernay Won't Be Directing 'Black Panther' Movie*, 2015, <<https://www.essence.com/entertainment/exclusive-ava-duvernay-not-directing-black-panther-movie/>> [accessed 28 May 2021].

⁷²⁶ Marc Maron, 'Episode 1187 - Patty Jenkins', *WTF with Marc Maron Podcast*, 2020 <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2UeTSZpaiDnEZZ2N4vMJYC?si=ohSYieT7SLSh4beflKm-lg&dl_branch=1> [accessed 11 June 2021].

⁷²⁷ Yolanda Sangweni, *EXCLUSIVE: Ava DuVernay Won't Be Directing 'Black Panther' Movie*.

⁷²⁸ Ibid.

‘better for me to realise that now than cite creative differences later’.⁷²⁹ Jenkins explained how stressful it is for a woman director if a film fails as this could lead to comments like ‘Oh my God, this woman directed it, and she missed all these things’.⁷³⁰ Furthermore, she mentioned on several occasions that ‘given the double standards of the industry’, ‘she had to navigate the world of blockbuster filmmaking almost perfectly to achieve and maintain a level of success’.⁷³¹ This supports Claire Jenkins’ argument that women directors remain on the side-lines of mainstream cinema, since the industry is dominated by ‘the action-fantasy genre and franchise filmmaking’.⁷³² Within this industrial context, Ava DuVernay and Patty Jenkins, as two women directors, could not have made the same strong statements as Wright. Meanwhile, tracing back to the idea of authorship, Claire Jenkins summarises Shelley Cobb and Christina Lane’s views in her article to state that auteurism is a term based on the idea of patriarchy that excludes women directors by its very nature.⁷³³ Based on this view, this thesis suggests that the authorial voice from women directors is already ideologically under the authorial control of the studio.

Combined with the experiences of this group of directors and the feedback received regarding their departures, tensions between the individual directors and the studio are emerging. The tension between them can be attributed to the failure to form a collective intention of filmmaking between individuals and the studio. Three of them all mentioned the story provided by Marvel could not meet their personal interests. Especially in Wright’s interview, he pointed out straight away that he was unable to accept the situation in which ‘they wanted to do a draft without me’ when he was the writer and director of the film, because he could not accept the feeling of ‘becoming a director for hire on it’.⁷³⁴ Even though the MCU has always boasted that it values the skills of talented directors, the limitation

⁷²⁹ Yolanda Sangweni, *EXCLUSIVE: Ava DuVernay Won’t Be Directing ‘Black Panther’ Movie*.

⁷³⁰ Anthony Breznican, *Wonder Woman 1984 Director Patty Jenkins on Knowing When to Fight*.

⁷³¹ Christian Blauvelt, *Patty Jenkins Knew She’d Be Held to a Different Standard if ‘Thor 2’ Failed — and That It Would*, 2020, <<https://www.indiewire.com/2020/12/patty-jenkins-knew-shed-be-blamed-for-thor-2-failure-1234607252/>> [accessed 28 May 2021].

⁷³² Claire Jenkins, “‘Counter cinema’ in the mainstream”, *Feminist Media Studies* (2021), DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2021.1877767, p.4.

⁷³³ Ibid, pp.4-5.

⁷³⁴ Kristopher Tapley, *Playback: Edgar Wright on ‘Baby Driver,’ Music and Walking Away From ‘Ant-Man’*.

caused for its directors is more than other cases mentioned in the previous two chapters. Abrams and Jackson have directed films under their authorial control while dealing with requirements from the franchisee perspective. The specific approaches they associated with the original creator were out of their own intention. The difference in the case of the MCU is that those individual directors' intentions are constrained by the studio. However, there are also directors successfully working under such authorial control within the MCU franchise who can be analysed to further explore the relationship within.

Similar to Wright, DuVernay and Jenkins, who brought out the issue of the script, when Black tells *The Hollywood File* about the production experience around *Iron Man 3*, he noted that Marvel Studios 'never use a writer/director' for their film, so they found him another writer, Drew Pearce, something he was initially resistant to.⁷³⁵ According to Black's account there are many people (Robert Downey Jr. and others from the studio) who became involved during the creation of the film, so *Iron Man 3* was a collaborative project rather than his own creative work.⁷³⁶ Under this circumstance, it could be said that Black had to make 'sacrifices' to meet the demands of others, who represent the franchise. Furthermore, when Shane Black was interviewed during the promotion of his film *The Nice Guys* (USA, 2016), he mentioned how Marvel Studios had not allowed him to create a female villain in *Iron Man 3*.⁷³⁷ Black said that had to be changed because the associated toy would not 'sell as well if it's a female'.⁷³⁸ This reiterates a tension between the director, whose focus is on the film they are currently directing, and the studio that needs to think about the wider market and what suits the whole franchise. Therefore, disagreements over filmmaking can emerge due to different demands.

⁷³⁵ Drew Pearce is also the writer/director of Marvel's short film *Marvel One-Shot: All Hail the King* (2014), which is after *Iron Man 3*.

The Hollywood File, Interview with Director Shane Black / Iron Man 3 Movie, 2014 <<https://youtu.be/upesCOLunFQ>> [accessed 18 March 2019].

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

⁷³⁷ Mike Ryan, 'Shane Black on 'The Nice Guys,' Mel Gibson, And Why A Female 'Iron Man 3' Villain's Gender Changed', May 2016, <<https://uproxx.com/movies/shane-black-the-nice-guys-iron-man-3/>> [accessed 20 December 2018].

⁷³⁸ Ibid.

In one of Black's interviews at the 2015 Austin Film Festival, he was highly interested in the anti-hero character's violence in film noir.⁷³⁹ He concluded that the film noir's story is basically 'the gunslinger whose day has passed but who has to summon up once again that sense of what he once was or can be again'.⁷⁴⁰ This personal interest clearly influenced his work for the MCU. Whereas the narratives of the first two *Iron Man* films occur during the protagonist's heydays, when it comes to *Iron Man 3*, Black places the protagonist in a slump, as seen in his other films *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (USA, 2005) and *The Nice Guys* (USA, 2016). Based on *Iron Man 3*, it is noticeable that Black changed his usual methods of presenting violent and bloody footage, in order to cater to the MCU's basic demand of a family-friendly production. In an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter* in 2017, Feige claimed that they would not give up on family films and go for R-rated movies, even with some successful examples adapted from Marvel Comics like *Deadpool* (USA, dir. Tim Miller, 2016).⁷⁴¹ Indeed, he has expressed this view many times, most recently in 2021 when he said 'we target everything we're doing for kids and adults'.⁷⁴² Therefore, from this particular perspective, Black's usual style had to be compromised to stay in keeping with the requirements of the studio. According to the story of *Iron Man 3*, Black has maintained his interest in anti-hero films, and the anti-hero theme is also developed in other MCU films (*Captain America: Civil War* and *Thor: Ragnarok*). From this point, it can be suggested that one of Black's personal interests caters to the need of the character development within the MCU franchise, because as a long-term franchise with multiple films, monotonous stories of heroes versus villains are not enough to keep their superhero alive. Black brought this idea into the MCU franchise resulting in what can be understood as a successful example of collaboration between individual filmmakers and the studio.

⁷³⁹ Austin Film Festival, On Story: 412 Neo Noir: The Modern Day Film Noir, 2015 < https://youtu.be/fd_LLw8uiXU > [accessed 18 March 2019].

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁴¹ Borys Kit and Aaron Couch, *Marvel's Kevin Feige on Why the Studio Won't Make R-Rated Movies, 'Guardians 2' and Joss Whedon's DC Move*, 2017 < <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/marvels-kevin-feige-why-studio-wont-make-r-movies-guardians-2-joss-whedons-dc-move-99507-995076/> > [accessed 31 May 2021].

⁷⁴² Anthony D'Alessandro, *Marvel Boss Kevin Feige Provides Update On 'Deadpool' Sequel At Today's TCA*, 2021 < <https://deadline.com/2021/02/deadpool-3-marvel-kevin-feige-tca-1234700125/> > [accessed 31 May 2021].

The critical reviews of *Iron Man 3* mostly ignored any compromises made by Black and instead emphasised how his personal style is evident in the film. For example, *Empire's* review of *Iron Man 3* claims that the studio would give 'carte blanche' to their directors to do what they want.⁷⁴³ *The Telegraph* claims that *Iron Man 3* is a 'younger, blingier cousin' of other films written by Black, such as *Lethal Weapon* (USA, dir. Richard Donner, 1987) and *The Last Boy Scout* (USA, dir. Tony Scott, 1991), even though Black was not the sole screenwriter of *Iron Man 3*.⁷⁴⁴ Similarly, Kenneth Branagh's passion for Shakespeare is also seen in the MCU film *Thor*, a topic that reviews tend to discuss. *Variety* comments that Branagh 'brings a fan's enthusiasm and his skill as an actor's director' to the film since he is a fan of the comics.⁷⁴⁵ Nearly every review of *Thor* mentioned Branagh's experiences as a Shakespearean actor and director in order to discuss how he develops the characters. Furthermore, none of Marvel's villainous characters is as interesting to critics as Loki has been. *Empire's* review states that the villains in the *Iron Man* trilogy have 'always been an issue' because of their simple intention and weak characteristics.⁷⁴⁶ *Sight & Sound* even compared the role of Loki to Branagh's 'career highlight' role as Iago in *Othello* (UK and USA, Dir. Oliver Parker, 1995).⁷⁴⁷ Another review for *Captain America: Civil War* from *Sight & Sound* claims that 'the lack of first rank villains' is MCU's 'persistent' problem.⁷⁴⁸ These reviews tend to link the successful portrayal of Loki to Branagh's personal knowledge and experience working with Shakespearean texts. As such, this becomes yet another example illustrating that Marvel Studios successfully utilised the director's own talents and

⁷⁴³ Nick De Semlyen [review], *Iron Man 3* [film] dir. by. Shane Black (Marvel Studios, 2013), *Empire*, 24 April 2013. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/iron-man-3/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁷⁴⁴ Robbie Collin [review], *Iron Man 3* [film] dir. by. Shane Black (Marvel Studios, 2013), *The Telegraph*, 19 April 2013. <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/filmreviews/10005267/Iron-Man-3-review.html>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁷⁴⁵ Richard Kuipers [review], *Thor* [film] dir. by. Kenneth Branagh (Marvel Studios, 2011), *Variety*, 17 April 2011. <<https://variety.com/2011/film/reviews/thor-1117945029/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁷⁴⁶ Nick De Semlyen [review], *Iron Man 3* [film] dir. by. Shane Black (Marvel Studios, 2013), *Empire*, 24 April 2013. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/iron-man-3/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁷⁴⁷ Kim Newman [review], *Thor* [film] dir. by. Kenneth Branagh (Marvel Studios, 2011), *Sight & Sound*, July 2011, Vol. 21 Issue 7, p80-80.

⁷⁴⁸ Kim Newman [review], *Captain America: Civil War* [film] dir. by. Anthony Russo, Joe Russo (Marvel Studios, 2016), *Sight & Sound*, July 2016, Vol.26 (7), pp.71-72.

achieved a successful collaboration. In a 2020 interview, Branagh explained that during the filmmaking of *Thor*, Feige and other producers ‘collaborated’ with him and they were able to be ‘critically aware’ about the details of what he ‘could be useful with’.⁷⁴⁹ However, Branagh also mentioned that the production process was very stressful under such a ‘collaborative’ working pattern.⁷⁵⁰ Directors like Black and Branagh are positive examples who highlight the collaborative working pattern within the MCU. According to reviews and interviews, these directors work in a pattern consistent with the idea of collective authorship, as defined by Sellors. The study of collective authorship by Sellors focuses on the existence of collective intentions within one film. However, within the MCU, the collective intentions happen under the authorial control of Marvel Studios. Thus, there is no longer an equal relationship in MCU filmmaking between the authorial voice of individual directors and the authorial voice of the MCU franchise as well as the studio. The authorial voice, or in other terms, the requirements of Marvel Studios are always prioritised, demonstrating their overarching control.

The last group of directors to be considered in this case study are those who have made more than one MCU film. In terms of the frequency they work with Marvel Studios, this is the group that is seemingly most adept at collaborating with the studio or, in the context of the idea of authorship, arguably the most adept at dealing with the studio’s authorial control. However, some reports still highlight the tension within this system. For example, one report from *Vulture* titled their coverage of the interview with Whedon as ‘How *Avengers: Age of Ultron* Nearly Killed Joss Whedon’.⁷⁵¹ In this interview, Whedon talks about the difficulties in the making of the film and he was ‘unhappy about’ the final cut.⁷⁵² Although the film was hugely successful at the box-office, Whedon describes it as: ‘flaw, flaw, flaw, compromise, laziness, mistake’.⁷⁵³ In a 2015 interview, Whedon angrily stated that

⁷⁴⁹ Collider Extras, *Sir Kenneth Branagh on Artemis Fowl, Tenet, and Casting Chris Hemsworth as Thor - Collider Connected*, 2020<<https://youtu.be/1fYMhGd4zWw>> [accessed 8 June 2018].

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁵¹ Kyle Buchanan, *How Avengers: Age of Ultron Nearly Killed Joss Whedon*, 2015, <<https://www.vulture.com/2015/04/how-age-of-ultron-nearly-broke-joss-whedon.html>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

⁷⁵² Ibid.

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

following the second *Avengers* film he has ‘no spine or self-identity or anything, and it’s horrifying’.⁷⁵⁴

Whedon announced he was leaving the MCU after *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, and according to him, it was not because he had ‘a falling out’ with the studio but only he ‘can’t’.⁷⁵⁵ Other than Whedon, other directors who have directed more than one MCU film still maintain their working relationship with the studio until now, except for Jon Favreau, although he reportedly did not continue as a director because he wanted to be paid more.⁷⁵⁶ Wheeler Winston Dixon and Gwendolyn Audrey Foster suggest that Favreau could be classified as an ‘industry-friendly director’.⁷⁵⁷ They believe that fledgling directors with experience in independent filmmaking before entering mainstream production can maintain an independent working style within the system.⁷⁵⁸ This thesis considers this kind of director as the potential star-director in the post-auteur age. These directors, to some extent, fit well with Marvel Studios’ criteria for choosing a director. If analysed in terms of Christensen’s argument of considering the studio as the auteur, the term industry-friendly director can be identified as those directors who have a personal style but who can still fit their film into the studio’s ideological guidance. From this understanding, the directors Marvel Studios has worked with or have almost worked with, such as Coogler, Watts, Wright, DuVernay and Jenkins, all fit this definition. However, in the case of the MCU franchise, the MCU-friendly directors are required to make forming a collaborative work pattern with the studio the priority, which means the primary requirement for them is that they also need to be willing to work under the studio’s authorial control.

Based on the established image of a studio that is willing to collaborate with a talented director and the development demands, the studio seeks individuals with their own perspective who could fit into the franchise to enrich the franchise’s

⁷⁵⁴ Oxford Union, *Joss Whedon | Full Q&A | Oxford Union*, 2015 <<https://youtu.be/wPnqzENRT0A>> [accessed 8 June 2021].

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁶ Raven Brunner, *Jon Favreau Should Direct Marvel’s ‘Armor Wars’ For Disney Plus*, 2021, <<https://gamerant.com/jon-favreau-direct-armor-wars/>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

Rebekah Barton, *Is Favreau Finally Set For a Triumphant Return to Marvel?*, 2021, <<https://insidethemagic.net/2021/01/jon-favreau-marvel-return-rwb1/>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

⁷⁵⁷ Wheeler Winston Dixon, and Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, *21st-Century Hollywood: Movies in the Era of Transformation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2011), p.132.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

perspective but still consolidate the bridge for the studio. From the viewers' perspective, they are willing to consider the individuals' personal style as part of the franchise as well. For example, the review of *Guardians of the Galaxy* from *Empire* even transfers the traits, which is 'keep things breezy and snappy', from directors and writers to Marvel Studio and claims this kind of 'snark over dark' thematic strategy is 'the Marvel way now'.⁷⁵⁹ *The Hollywood Reporters'* review of *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (USA, Dir. James Gunn, 2017) points out that even though Marvel has its own style of humour, the studio still offers James Gunn enough space to develop his own 'unexpected irreverence and mangy' humour under 'the highly controlled realm of Marvel'.⁷⁶⁰ Following this little breakthrough by Gunn (from 2014), the studio then cooperated with Taika Waititi to make Thor's third film *Thor: Ragnarok*, which further explored more possibilities of humour. After the success of *Thor: Ragnarok*, Waititi returned to direct another *Thor* film.⁷⁶¹ James Gunn also returned to the third *Guardians of the Galaxy* film after being fired by Disney because of his offensive tweets.⁷⁶²

As mentioned earlier, the director's name almost always appears in film reviews as a way to introduce or analyse the film. This is a common approach that is an extension of auteurism. In the case of MCU films, alongside the director's name, names that represent the studio (Marvel Studios, Marvel, or Feige) also appear in abundance. This helps to emphasise the name of Marvel instead of the directors. Therefore, following the usual perceived way of describing and analysing the author, Marvel, in the context of the MCU franchise, threatens the establishment of, and attention to the director's own authorial voice. For example, press coverage of *The*

⁷⁵⁹ Jolin, Dan [review], *Guardians of the Galaxy* [film] dir. by. James Gunn (Marvel Studios, 2014), *Empire*, 31 July 2014. <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/guardians-galaxy/review/>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁷⁶⁰ Todd McCarthy [review], *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* [film] dir. by. James Gunn (Marvel Studios, 2017), *The Hollywood Reporters*, 24 April 2017. <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/guardians-galaxy-vol-2-review-996282>> [accessed 24 June 2018].

⁷⁶¹ Dave McNary, *Taika Waititi to Direct Marvel's 'Thor 4'*, 2019, <<https://variety.com/2019/film/news/taika-waititi-thor-4-marvel-chris-hemsworth-1203268964/>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

⁷⁶² Matt Donnelly, *James Gunn Returns to Direct 'Guardians of the Galaxy 3'*, 2019, <<https://variety.com/2019/film/news/disney-reverses-course-on-james-gunn-director-to-return-for-guardians-of-the-galaxy-3-1203164489/>> [accessed 7 June 2021].

Eternals (USA, 2021) described this as ‘the Marvel Studios film’ rather than focusing on its Oscar-winning director Chloe Zhao.⁷⁶³ The relationship between the individual and the studio can be concluded as the individual’s authorial voice has to take place under the authorial control of the studio. The analysis of film author normally points out one figure to represent the film. This is because the necessity of how authorship works, within the marketing or to be understood by audiences, is that there exists a requirement for someone to be seen as the author, or authorial figure. However, the concept of collective authorship can break this kind of clear association between the audience and the film. In the case of the MCU franchise, this case study offers the suggestion that the authorial voice has been portrayed via Marvel Studios instead of one particular director in a specific way.

This last case study of the Marvel Franchise has taken a step beyond the previous two case studies. The Abrams’ case study asked questions about the conflict between individuals and the studio when meeting the demands of the franchise. The relationship between an individual’s personal intention and the studio’s demands has long been seen as a contradiction or a tension largely built around a tension between art and commerce. When scholars such as King and Lewis discussed directors like Spielberg, they noted how he balanced the commercial needs and the artistic intention; it is undeniable that both demands are met by Spielberg himself.⁷⁶⁴ Thus, in cases like Spielberg or Lucas, the way to ease this tension is for them to come on board as more than just a director.⁷⁶⁵ However, this approach depends on the individual’s ability or ambition in filmmaking. For example, they first directed blockbusters for the big studios, then earned their trust to obtain more freedom on future productions, or simply set up their own company to be more involved in the industry. In this context although authorship is both commercial and artistic, the role of the director is still central. All the discussions come from how the director has

⁷⁶³ Ryan Parker, ‘*Eternals*’ Drops First Captivating Trailer, 2021, <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/eternals-marvel-trailer-1234957737/>> [accessed 15 June 2021].

⁷⁶⁴ Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*.

Jon Lewis, ‘The Perfect Money Machine(s): George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and Auteurism in the New Hollywood’.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid.

participated in the film production, as well as its pre-production and post-production, whether it is related to the artistic contribution or commercial activities. However, this approach is difficult to implement in the context of franchise cinema since the films of a franchise are always only one of the components of a series of commercial enterprises. In particular, some directors, like Abrams, are mostly approached by studios to work with them because they are well suited or safe choices to direct, which ignores their individuality. Furthermore, when the scope of the films from a franchise is bigger than the six Middle-earth films directed by Jackson, the tension within franchise cinema is difficult for the individual to ease. As the franchise grows and produces more films, the model of engagement like Jackson's is not stable for the franchise's long-term profitability, and the model of reboot films, maintaining the original authorial voice, like Abrams', is also difficult to sustain. Therefore, in the final case study, the MCU franchise is an example of how collective authorship works in a particular way within the context of franchise cinema.

This particular way does not aim to indicate who the original owner of the authorial traits is. Instead, there is no such absolute core creator or director like Tolkien and Lucas within the MCU franchise. Marvel Studios has not designated any director as the author or the master, with the ability and right to have their own protégé within the MCU franchise. Instead, Marvel Studios *is* the authorial figure identified by the audience through the connection built up by an actual figure - Feige. As such, Feige has become the core figure within the MCU franchise. A point that cannot be ignored in this is that neither Marvel Studios nor Kevin Feige can be directly associated with the authorial traits from the franchise. In the case of the MCU franchise, the application of collective authorship does not emphasise the equality created by the contribution of multiple participants to the production of the film. On the contrary, it highlights the control of the studio in the whole process. What has been highlighted by Feige, through his public engagement, is the idea of collective authorship within the MCU franchise. However, the contradiction between the studio and the directors demonstrates the authorial control of Marvel Studios remains under the surface of the collective authorship. Within the context of film franchises like MCU, collective authorship, on a practical level, is not a truly

equal relationship of sharing creativities. Given the priority of authorial control, collective authorship has become a tool that the studio has used to collect individual talents and bring their personal strength together to transform into the franchise's unique identity.

Conclusion: The author will always find a way to live, since it always is needed

To conclude this thesis, it seems necessary to return to the suggestion from Corrigan, outlined in the introduction, that auteurism has 'historical adaptability'.⁷⁶⁶ This thesis has demonstrated the adaptability of authorship in contemporary Hollywood by considering how the idea of authorship has been applied within franchise cinema. Contemporary Hollywood franchise cinema dominates the global box office and the way in which these films are promoted, discussed and reviewed demonstrates that notions of authorship remain tied to popular and academic studies of the cinema. The idea of authorship cannot be divorced from cinema studies but needs to move beyond studies of the auteur to recognise that authorship has changed. As this thesis has demonstrated, we have entered what could be termed a post-auteur age. The case studies in this thesis suggest that in general, the understanding of authorship needs to be reconstructed so that it can fit into different contexts. The notion of authorship has been applied in different ways within the context of franchise cinema throughout this thesis, which has led to the notions like collective authorship, or even the auteur, being challenged. Therefore, this study offers a new understanding of the author, introducing the franchise author in the post-auteur age, an important figure in popular discourse who is distinctly different from the auteur but whose presence is needed to bring coherence to the franchise and its films. This franchise author can exist in different shapes and forms. For example, the creator of the franchise, the individuals who have built up their authority within the franchise, or the studio that produced the franchise. The common feature of these franchise authors is that they are all served for the development of the franchise, while the difference is some of them have the chance to establish their own reputation through this process.

As I have argued throughout the thesis, the film franchise offers a way of understanding authorship that separates the authorial voice from artistic value, and therefore, this kind of authorial status or authorial voice is different from the general understanding of the film auteur. Authorial figures within franchise cinema offer points of identification for both critics and the audience and they are established in

⁷⁶⁶ Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam*, p.101.

order to serve the demands of the franchise. However, this type of authorship can be easily challenged from the perspective of artistic value, as we saw with the case of Jackson, who has been considered as one of the authorities of the Middle-earth franchise but cannot be recognized as a film auteur. What clearly emerged throughout this thesis is that there are two demands of franchise cinema that have led to the emergence of a specific type of author. The first demand is for continuity within the franchise no matter how many individuals are involved and how they are involved. The concept of authorship was introduced in the development and promotion of this continuity, with one of the most significant examples being the case study of the MCU franchise.

The second demand is that the franchise requires an overall figure of control for the whole franchise. Compared to an auteur who has control over their own films in order to make them all similar, if the franchise also tries to seek similarity in its films, it needs a representative who has control over its films. As discussed through the case studies, this representative is not necessarily a single director. Except for Jackson as the single director who gradually established his authority within the Middle-earth franchise, it could also be the creator of the intellectual property, such as Gene Roddenberry, George Lucas, and Stan Lee, or a producer like Kevin Feige, who represents the studio. The control exerted by a studio has been a subject of discussion and analysis since the days of classic Hollywood, and Jerome Christensen has made the point that the studio would want its films to express the studio's identity and values.⁷⁶⁷ The focus of this thesis, however, is on a more detailed control of the film text. Thus, the authorial voice, which is emphasized as controlling, becomes the authorial control present in the franchise, for example, Feige represents Marvel Studios in order to supervise the development of their MCU films. Feige became the executor who maintained the MCU franchise to meet its demands of narrative continuity and therefore even though he did not direct any of the MCU films, he has been positioned by Marvel Studios as the authority or the figure with authorial control.

⁷⁶⁷ Jerome Christensen, *America's Corporate Art: The Studio Authorship of Hollywood Motion Pictures*.

These two demands from the franchise expose the central features of franchise authorship. One is the similarities and continuities needed in a group of films that belongs to one franchise. The other is the power of control represented by the notion of film auteur. However, because the authorial status established can be isolated from the recognizable artistic value or, rather, an identifiable artistic value is not the focus of popular analysis, the franchise author is an unstable figure. For example, the first chapter of this thesis used the idea of an unstable authorial status several times to describe Jackson. His image was built up around his status as a loyal Tolkien fan and a likeable 'nerd' director who is interested in special effects and filmmaking technology. This image of him covers several factors that the franchise needs, or in other words, the fans of Tolkien and the audience would believe that a director with such traits would be ideal for the adaptations. Therefore, Jackson's authorial status was established based on the requirement of the franchise's fans and audiences. Nevertheless, this authorial status established by Jackson is unstable because it is more dependent on the franchise and its fanbase rather than independently belong to him. A straightforward challenge from the audience could break down the strength of his authorial status, as happened following poor responses to *The Hobbit* trilogy.

With Jackson being the only director of all six Middle-earth films, the study of the authorial status within this franchise could easily become the study of Jackson as a director. However, this study of authorship within franchise cinema breaks the general understanding of authorship that the specific artistic identity, or the specific authorial features, are tied to the author to whom it belongs. For franchises that have more than one director, as analysed in chapters two and three of this thesis, the instability of authorial status within the franchise emerged from another perspective. When considering multiple directors involved in one franchise, what emerges is a mobility of the authorial voice. Scholars, such as Lewis and Hadas, attempted to link the films produced by Lucas or Spielberg's company that they did not direct themselves with the directors, highlighting a relationship between the

author (or the master) with their protégés.⁷⁶⁸ This kind of study can be understood as a basic idea of the inherited authorial voice passing from one director to another. Based on this idea, the case study of Abrams in Chapter Two outlined the process of inheriting authorial features within the context of franchise cinema. Abrams is not the key figure who defines the authorial voice within the two franchises, instead, he becomes a carrier responsible for keeping the original authorial voice within the franchise. The MCU films also find a way to keep the so-called Marvel-style recognized by some critics, even though many directors have been involved in it. In more general terms, the way in which Jackson establishes his authorial status also relies on his emphasis of loyalty to the original work by Tolkien. This could be seen as another way of inheriting the author's features. Thus, the authorial voice can be intentionally preserved through franchise films even without the participation of the owner of those authorial features.

As a franchise grows and produces more films, the model of engagement like Jackson's is not stable for the franchise's long-term profitability. Furthermore, the model of rebooted films maintaining the original authorial voice, as in the case of Abrams', is also difficult to sustain. Therefore, other than the mobility of the authorship voice within one franchise, the tension between the individual participants and the franchise has also emerged. This tension essentially comes from the contention for authorial control between the franchise as a whole and the individual director of one film. On the surface, it is also a tension between the needs of personal expression and the demand for the franchise's integrity. The case study of the MCU franchise provided an analysis of this tension in several different situations, such as the concessions made by Shane Black during the creative process of *Iron Man 3*, and the example of Edgar Wright who left the project midway through. Franchise cinema provides a very specific context in which the power of control, implied by the idea of auteur, can be shown in a very tangible way. When the establishment of authorial status is separated from the recognition of artistic value,

⁷⁶⁸ Leora Hadas, 'A New Vision: J. J. Abrams, Star Trek, and Promotional Authorship'. Jon Lewis, 'The Perfect Money Machine(s): George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, and Auteurism in the New Hollywood'.

the instability of authorial status within one franchise offers the conditions for contending such power. It is through this process that collaboration and tensions arise. Therefore, the authorial status within franchise cinema offers an approach that can combine the idea of pointing out an individual as the author and the idea of collective authorship.

The notion of collective authorship has previously been used in two ways. One is used as theoretical support to analyse that besides the director, writers and producers, can also be analysed in the role of the film auteur. Another use is outlining that all participants in the filmmaking process can be seen as offering input thus challenging the idea of the sole auteur. Comparing auteurism to the idea of collective authorship, the former emphasises the individual with powers while the latter emphasises the contribution of each participant, rather than focusing on who is in control. However, as the thesis has demonstrated, within the context of franchise cinema, the idea of collective authorship is no longer in opposition to the identification of individual film authors. The discussion of collective authorship ran through all three case studies in this thesis. In terms of highlighting the purpose served by the notion of collective authorship, the case of Jackson is essentially in line with the general interpretation of collective authorship. Other people's contribution to Middle-earth films are also demonstrated and highlighted through the making-of documentaries. However, the establishment of Jackson's authorial status has little relation to his artistic contribution but instead relies on how he promotes his personality. Given this, the involvement of others in terms of artistic contribution, does not affect the establishment of his authorial status. Without the standard of artistic value, Jackson has transformed the collective working pattern into a notion of authorship focused on his personal working style that emphasises his humble personality. Even Jackson's attitude and control over the contributions of others rather highlights his authorial status. This collaboration is reflected in his harmonious relationship with other members of the cast and crew, as well as in his loyalty to the original text of Tolkien. Jackson's search for collaboration with the original texts from Tolkien is what makes him part of the authority of the Middle-earth franchise.

The case studies of Abrams and the MCU franchise, however, present ways of understanding the idea of collective authorship from a new perspective within the context of franchise cinema. Here the discussion on collective authorship has to consider the big picture of the whole franchise which contains more than one film. Thus, when the scope of collective authorship extends to the entire franchise, the collective authorial features of all the films comprise the collective authorial features of the franchise. Extracting and retaining the authorial voice from the franchise, during the film production, is highlighted in the chapter of Abrams. This has been done by analysing how the original features from the creators of *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* have been applied in the reboots. Based on this suggestion, the case study of MCU further provides an idea of keeping collective authorship working under authorial control. Feige takes on the role of maintaining the association between the films from the MCU franchise and the audiences – particularly in press coverage and in Marvel’s marketing materials. The collective way of working is not the real working pattern within the franchise: Marvel is in control – but Feige becomes the figurehead who fulfils both requirements of a single author but also needs of Marvel to promote collective authorship – he is the visible head of the collective. Additionally, the experiences of individual directors also demonstrate both the collective way in which Marvel works and ultimately the fact that Marvel Studios, as well as Feige, are in control and it is their product and their vision. The authorial status of the director that is used for marketing purposes normally focuses on the director. However, in the MCU franchise, even though the promotional materials, such as the interviews of Feige, still cover the director’s contribution, the purpose of this kind of marketing, as already analysed in the case study, is to highlight the collective working pattern that is defined by Marvel Studios and the MCU franchise. Therefore, the application of collective authorship here only seeks to emphasise the power of control of the appointed author.

As Hollywood franchise cinema continues to develop and dominate the global film industry, more work will be required to determine and study the post-auteur age we are now in. The visibility of these franchise authors helps to build popularity for franchises. Meanwhile, the popularity of the franchise also provides the

opportunity for the franchise authors to build-up and maintain their reputations. By studying franchise authors through film reviews, together with ancillary materials such as making-of documentaries and interviews, this thesis has demonstrated that in the post-auteur age, the franchise author can be analysed beyond the common approach of textual analysis of film texts. This thesis has shown that contemporary authorship studies should have a close relationship to production and reception studies. Whilst the recurring filmic features provided by a franchise create the environment to discuss the possibility of authorial features, both the way the film is promoted and reviews of the films have habitually followed the idea of authorship. These two factors reiterate that the discussion of authorship in the context of franchise cinema should not exist solely for the purpose of responding to claims about lack of artistry. The reality of authorship within franchise cinema is much more complex and offers a challenge to long-established notions of the auteur. Although auteur studies may be dated and problematic when applied to franchise cinema, as this study has identified, franchise cinema relies on its franchise author, whether consciously or not.

Appendix A

This appendix presents the table of analysing film reviews of the MCU films according to the six factors introduced in Chapter Three.

Factors check table for *Empire*.⁷⁶⁹

Factor Number	1-1	1-2	1-3	2-1	2-2	2-3
<i>Iron Man</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>The Incredible Hulk</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Iron Man 2</i>	✓ (6 th)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Thor</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		✓
<i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>The Avengers</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓		✓
<i>Iron Man 3</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>Thor: The Dark World</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i>	✓ (3 rd)	✓		✓		✓
<i>Ant-Man</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Captain America: Civil War</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Doctor Strange</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓			
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		✓
<i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i>	✓ (2 nd)			✓	✓	✓
<i>Thor: Ragnarok</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Black Panther</i>	✓ (4 th)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i>	✓ (1 st)		✓	✓		
<i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓				
<i>Captain Marvel</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Avengers: Endgame</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓		✓		

⁷⁶⁹ The ordinal number in Factor 1-1 represent the paragraph that 'Marvel' first appeared.

Factors check table for *The Guardian*.

Factor Number	1-1	1-2	1-3	2-1	2-2	2-3
<i>Iron Man</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓		✓		
<i>The Incredible Hulk</i>						
<i>Iron Man 2</i>						
<i>Thor</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓	✓	✓ ⁷⁷⁰
<i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i>		✓		✓		
<i>The Avengers</i>				✓		
<i>Iron Man 3</i>				✓	✓	
<i>Thor: The Dark World</i>	✓ (1 st)					
<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i>	✓ (1 st)					
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i>	✓ (1 st)					
<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i>		✓ ⁷⁷¹		✓		
<i>Ant-Man</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓		
<i>Captain America: Civil War</i>	✓ (1 st)		✓			
<i>Doctor Strange</i>	✓ (1 st)					
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2</i>	✓ (1 st)					
<i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Thor: Ragnarok</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Black Panther</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓		
<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i>	✓ (1 st)		✓	✓		
<i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓			
<i>Captain Marvel</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓		
<i>Avengers: Endgame</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓		✓		

⁷⁷⁰ The factor 2-1 and 2-2 are all about Branagh and Shakespeare.

⁷⁷¹ MCU franchise films list with other superhero films here.

Factors check table for *The Telegraph*.

Factor Number	1-1	1-2	1-3	2-1	2-2	2-3
<i>Iron Man</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓		
<i>The Incredible Hulk</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		✓ ⁷⁷²
<i>Iron Man 2</i>				✓		
<i>Thor</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i>	✓ (2 nd)			✓		
<i>The Avengers</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>Iron Man 3</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Thor: The Dark World</i>	✓ (1 st)		✓	✓ ⁷⁷³		
<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i>	✓ (1 st)		✓	✓		
<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>Ant-Man</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Captain America: Civil War</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓ ⁷⁷⁴	✓		
<i>Doctor Strange</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓		
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓		✓
<i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i>	✓ (5 th)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Thor: Ragnarok</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Black Panther</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		✓
<i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Captain Marvel</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Avengers: Endgame</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		

⁷⁷² This film review believes that Leterrier's style in this film is owe to Paul Greengrass' style.

⁷⁷³ This film review claims that this film does not have any personality of director in it.

⁷⁷⁴ This film reviews points out that this film has learn from *Iron Man 3*.

Factors check table for *The New York Times*.

Factor Number	1-1	1-2	1-3	2-1	2-2	2-3
<i>Iron Man</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓	✓	✓
<i>The Incredible Hulk</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓	✓	
<i>Iron Man 2</i>				✓		
<i>Thor</i>	✓ (3 rd)			✓		✓
<i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>The Avengers</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓	✓	
<i>Iron Man 3</i>	✓ (7 th)			✓		
<i>Thor: The Dark World</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓		
<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>Ant-Man</i>	✓ (3 rd)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Captain America: Civil War</i>	✓ (3 rd)			✓	✓	
<i>Doctor Strange</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		✓
<i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i>	✓ (3 rd)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Thor: Ragnarok</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>Black Panther</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓		✓		
<i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Captain Marvel</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Avengers: Endgame</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		

Factors check table for *Variety*.

Factor Number	1-1	1-2	1-3	2-1	2-2	2-3
<i>Iron Man</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓ ⁷⁷⁵		
<i>The Incredible Hulk</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Iron Man 2</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓		
<i>Thor</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>The Avengers</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Iron Man 3</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>Thor: The Dark World</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Ant-Man</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Captain America: Civil War</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Doctor Strange</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓		
<i>Thor: Ragnarok</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Black Panther</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>Captain Marvel</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Avengers: Endgame</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		

⁷⁷⁵ Jon Favreau has been mentioned here only as actor.

Factors check table for *The Hollywood Reporters*.

Factor Number	1-1	1-2	1-3	2-1	2-2	2-3
<i>Iron Man</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>The Incredible Hulk</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Iron Man 2</i>		✓ ⁷⁷⁶				
<i>Thor</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		✓
<i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓		
<i>The Avengers</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Iron Man 3</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Thor: The Dark World</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓		
<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Ant-Man</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Captain America: Civil War</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Doctor Strange</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		✓
<i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Thor: Ragnarok</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>Black Panther</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Captain Marvel</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Avengers: Endgame</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		

⁷⁷⁶ It mentioned the *Iron Man* series as a normal film series but not the MCU franchise.

Factors check table for *Screen International*.

Factor Number	1-1	1-2	1-3	2-1	2-2	2-3
<i>Iron Man</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>The Incredible Hulk</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Iron Man 2</i>				✓		
<i>Thor</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i>	✓ (1 st)			✓	✓	✓
<i>The Avengers</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Iron Man 3</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Thor: The Dark World</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓		✓		
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i>	✓ (3 rd)	✓		✓		
<i>Ant-Man</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Captain America: Civil War</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Doctor Strange</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓ ⁷⁷⁷	✓		
<i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Thor: Ragnarok</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Black Panther</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Captain Marvel</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<i>Avengers: Endgame</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		

⁷⁷⁷ This review analysed the common traits of the *Guardians of the Galaxy* series within the MCU films by saying how James Gunn keep continuing the style in the sequel. Because it did not mention Gunn's other work, this content has been classified analysis of the franchise instead of the director.

Factors check table for *Sight & Sound*.

Factor Number	1-1	1-2	1-3	2-1	2-2	2-3
<i>Iron Man</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>The Incredible Hulk</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Iron Man 2</i>	✓ (2 nd)	✓		778	✓	
<i>Thor</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Captain America: The First Avenger</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>The Avengers</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Iron Man 3</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Thor: The Dark World</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Captain America: The Winter Soldier</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	
<i>Avengers: Age of Ultron</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Ant-Man</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓				
<i>Captain America: Civil War</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Doctor Strange</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓		
<i>Spider-Man: Homecoming</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>Thor: Ragnarok</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Black Panther</i>	✓ (6 th)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Avengers: Infinity War</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Ant-Man and the Wasp</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓	✓	✓		
<i>Captain Marvel</i>	✓ (1 st)	✓		✓	✓	✓
<i>Avengers: Endgame</i>	✓ (4 th)	✓		✓		

⁷⁷⁸ The director Jon Favreau's name only mentioned for his character in this film.

According to the eight tables above, there could have a table with key data below.

Summary of data from eight sources.

Factor Number	1-1	1-2	1-3	2-1	2-2	2-3
<i>Empire</i>	22	19	10	20	10	9
<i>The Guardian</i>	16	7	5	13	3	2
<i>The Telegraph</i>	21	15	8	22	8	6
<i>New York Times</i>	21	14	3	22	13	6
<i>Variety</i>	22	19	8	22	11	5
<i>The Hollywood Reporters</i>	21	20	7	21	11	3
<i>Screen International</i>	21	20	11	22	12	5
<i>Sight & Sound</i>	22	22	9	20	11	5
SUM	166	136	61	162	79	41

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The Lord of the Rings [film] (USA/UK, dir. Ralph Bakshi, 1978)

The Lord of The Rings: The Fellowship of The Ring [film] (NZ/USA, dir. Peter Jackson, 2001)

The Lord of The Rings: The Return of The King [film] (NZ/USA, dir. Peter Jackson, 2003)

The Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers [film] (NZ/USA, dir. Peter Jackson, 2002)

The Mandalorian [television programme] (USA, Disney+, 2019 – present)

The Matrix [film] (USA, dir. The Wachowskis, 1999)

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The Phantom Menace [film] (USA, dir. George Lucas, 1999)

Thor [film] (USA, dir. Kenneth Branagh, 2011)

Thor: Ragnarok [film] (USA, dir. Taika Waititi, 2017)

Thor: The Dark World [film] (USA, dir. Alan Taylor, 2013)

Transformers [film] (USA, dir. Michael Bay, 2007)

Transformers [film] (USA, dir. Michael Bay, 2007)

Westworld [television programme] (USA, HBO, 2016-present)

X2 [film] (USA, dir. Bryan Singer, 2003).

X-Men: The Last Stand [film] (USA, dir. Brett Ratner, 2006)

Young Mr. Lincoln [film] (USA, Dir. John Ford, 1939)