

Film Studies in Focus
Return of the Blockbuster

STAR

RETURN OF THE BLOCKBUSTER

WARS

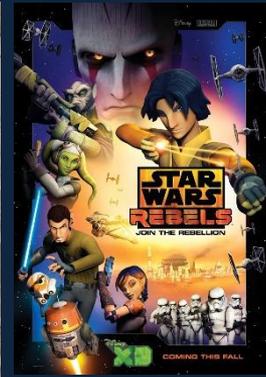
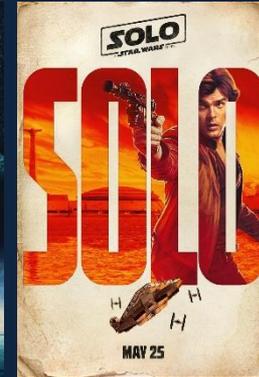
Context: *The Star Wars Saga* in 1977 - 2005

- The first film *Star Wars* released in 1977, followed by sequels *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *The Return of the Jedi* (1983)
- *Star Wars* re-released in 1981 as *Star Wars Episode IV – A New Hope*
- Alongside *Jaws* (Dir. Steven Spielberg, 1975) seen to instigate a new era of **blockbuster** cinema in Hollywood
- Followed by a prequel trilogy, beginning with *The Phantom Menace* (1999), *Attack of the Clones* (2002), and *The Revenge of the Sith* (2005)



Context: *The Star Wars Saga* from 2012 onwards

- Acquired by Disney in 2012, leading to the production of a sequel trilogy comprised of *The Force Awakens* (2015), *The Last Jedi* (2017), and *Episode IX* (2019)
- The main saga films now supported by a *Star Wars Stories* series of films as well as TV shows, following the Cinematic Universe model pioneered by Marvel



Context: The Blockbuster

- Focus on **spectacle** rather than **plot**
- Increased budgets, increased use of special effects
- Films compared to the experience of riding a rollercoaster
- Unprecedented focus on merchandising



Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom
(Dir. Stephen Spielberg, 1984)

Blockbuster Cinema & New Hollywood

- The late 60s to mid 70s considered by critics to be a time of significant change in Hollywood, both industrially and artistically
- **Classical Hollywood:** film industry dominated by major studios; Classical Hollywood Style; universal family audience
- **The Hollywood Renaissance:** major studios lose dominance, low budget productions inspired by European Art Cinema aimed at young adults
- **New Hollywood:** Rise of conglomerates, higher budgets, increased focus on action and spectacle, aimed at younger audiences

A New New Hollywood?

The Rise of the Cinematic “Universe”



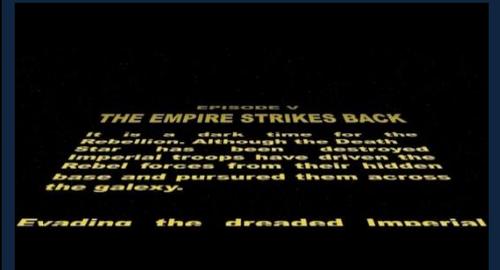
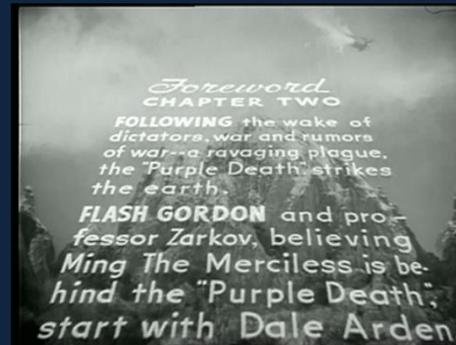
- Relations between films in a series no longer simply linear, but a network
- A shift to **transmedia** story-telling – story continues across films, television, comic books etc
- Requires a greater investment from spectators
- Has been criticised for diminishing the variety of cinema, and the idea of **franchise fatigue**

Blockbusters and Nostalgia

- The blockbusters of the 1980s were often criticised for being nostalgic – they just recreated favourite childhood films
- Much the same is said of the blockbuster today – especially in relation to reboots and remakes
- These films aren't just nostalgic, they're nostalgic for nostalgia!



Every Major Stranger Things Movie Reference Explained By the Duffer Brothers | WIRED



The Blockbuster as Rollercoaster

- Blockbusters allegedly favour spectacle over plot
- Critics argue that the telling of the story is paused so that a spectacular action piece can happen, then restarts afterwards.
- Critics also claim that the blockbuster has less dialogue, and has less well developed characters

Blockbuster as Advert:
Jurassic Park
(Dir. Stephen Spielberg, 1993)



The “Classical” Hollywood Epic: Scale as Spectacle



- Are blockbusters just rollercoaster rides with little plot, dialogue, or character development? Or do they just tell stories in a different way?

The “Classical” Hollywood Epic: Scale as Spectacle

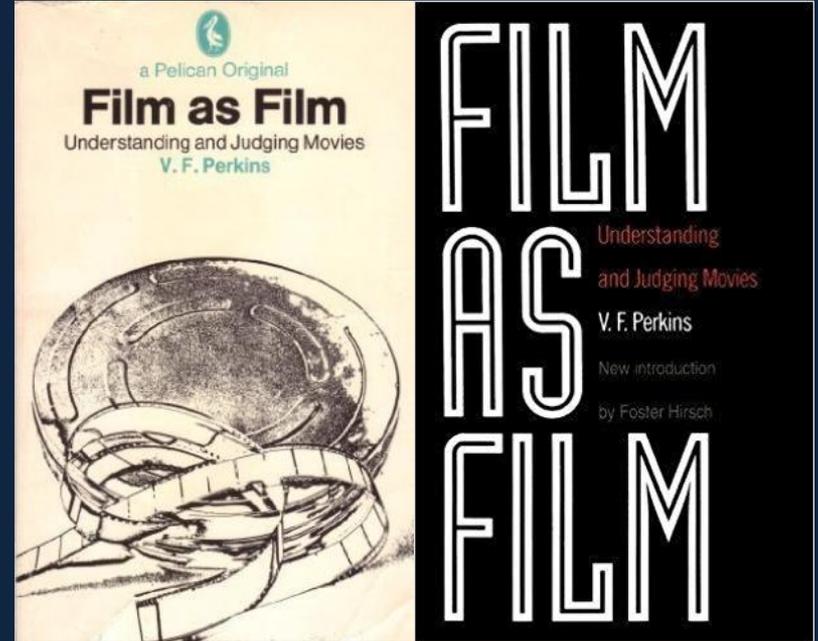


PRESENTS

Studying Film as Film

“A useful theory [of film as art] will have to redirect attention to the movie as it is *seen*, by shifting the emphasis **back from the creation to perception.**”

– Perkins, *Film as Film*, p.27



Form & Content or How is What

- “[Hitchcock] does not let us know whether he is finding the style to suit his subject or has found the subject which allows him best exercise of his style.”
- “Synthesis [...] where **there is no distinction between how and what, content and form**, is what interests us if we are interested in film as film. It is that unity to which we respond, where film as makes us sensitive to film as film.”

- V.F. Perkins, *Film as Film*, p.133

Close Textual Analysis

“Looking closely at the details of films and parts of films is sometimes suggested to be the preserve of a particular branch of scholars who ‘do textual analysis’. However, **whether it is to illustrate a wider aesthetic, conceptual or historical point [...] a concentration on the film moment is in fact central to many different traditions of investigation in to film.**”

Tom Brown and James Walters, ‘Preface’ to *Film Moments*

Star Wars: The Force Awakens
(Dir. J.J. Abrams, 2016)

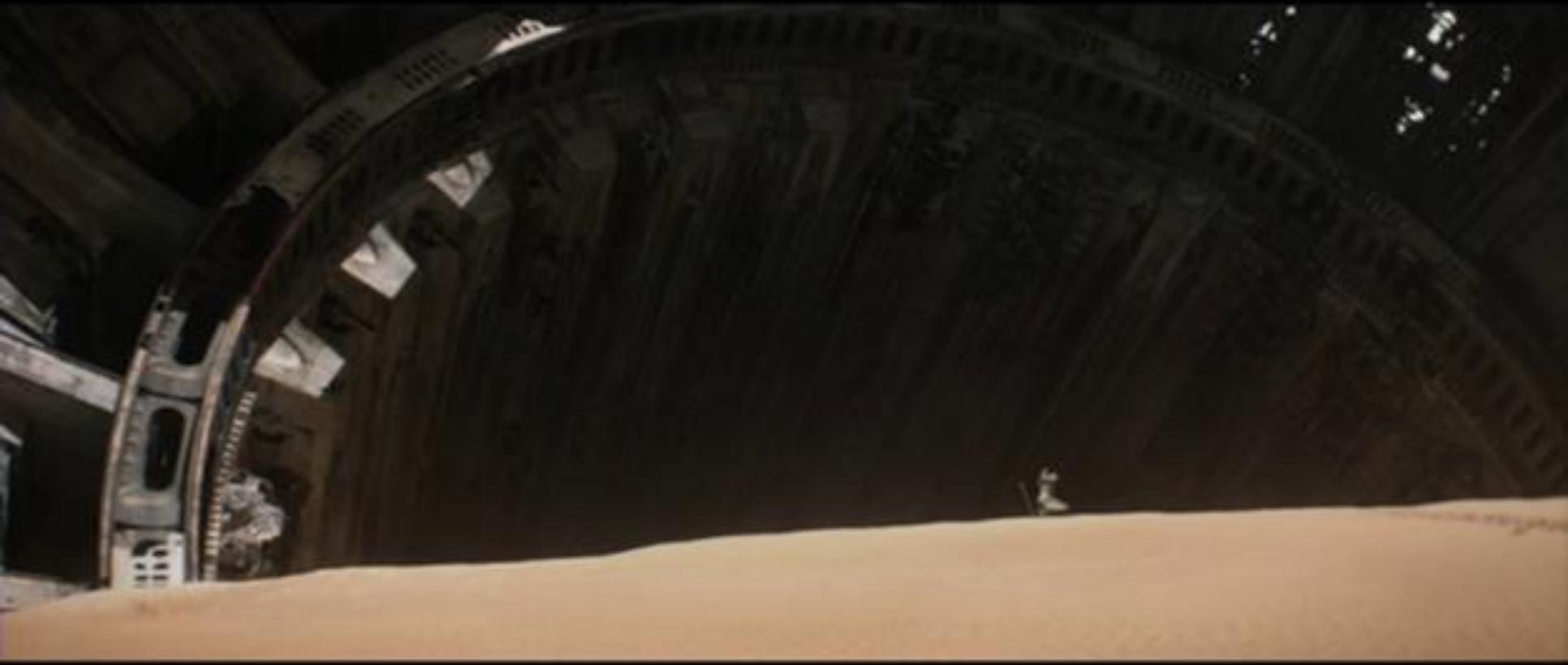




Reflection

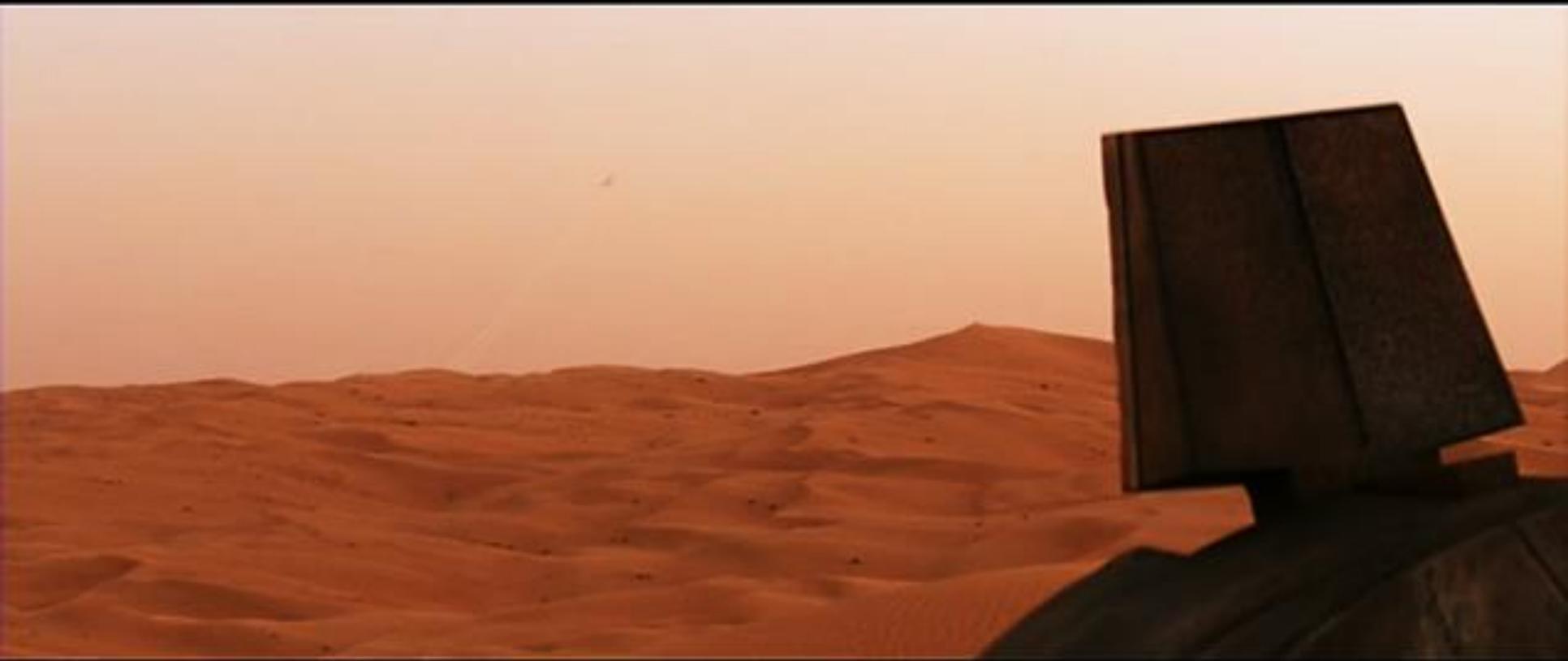
- Watch the clip and/or examine the stills provided. How is meaning conveyed through non-verbal means in this sequence? What do we learn about Rey, and how do we learn this?
- What sort of heroic qualities does Rey exhibit? Which moments from the clip support your claim?



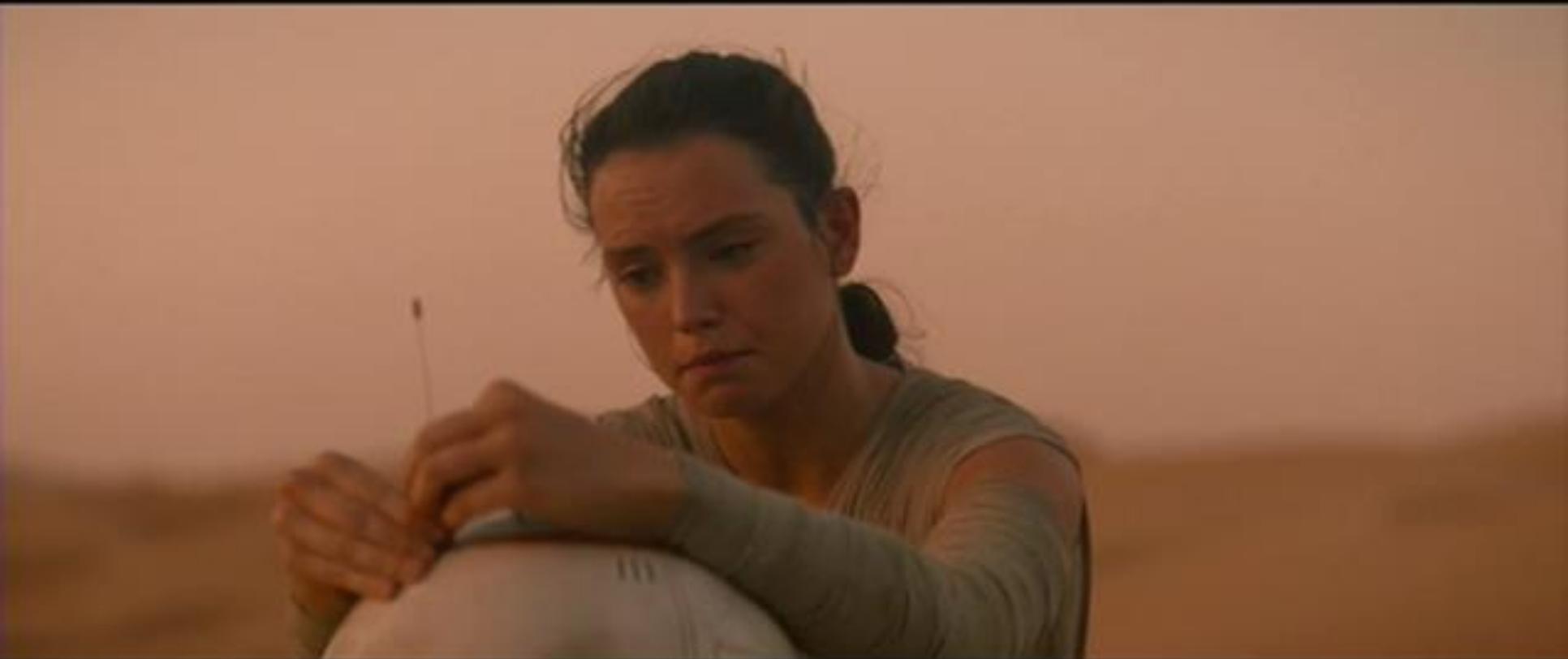














Reflection

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