

Creative Venture 2 - Evaluative Report

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In this report, I will be critically analysing the career paths and development of three filmmakers. The aim is to evaluate how their choices and opportunities culminated in all three becoming known names in their field. By looking at these three specialists, I hope to find patterns within their journeys by analysing distinctive moments in their careers, as well as evaluate how their route could influence my own as I move forward.

As I move beyond my life as a university student filmmaker, I find myself faced with many choices on how to further my career. The three filmmakers I shall be looking at have all played a part in my development as a filmmaker. The first, George Lucas, instigated my love of film. The second, Edgar Wright, made me want to make films. Finally, the third, James Gunn, has inspired me in my adult life. In analysing their path into the film world, I hope to identify patterns which I could emulate or learn from.

Of the three directors I'll be looking at, *George Lucas* is the one I credit for being my introduction to the film world. While some would consider him more of an entrepreneur or a businessman in more recent years, it is undeniable that Lucas has had an everlasting impact on the film industry. Lucas proved himself an emerging talent with *American Graffiti* (Lucas, *American Graffiti*, 1973) being a huge success at the box office. However, it was *Star Wars* (1977) (Lucas, *Star Wars*, 1977) that propelled Lucas into the forefront of the filmmaking industry. Lucas graduated from the University of Southern California in 1967, only to return shortly afterwards after failing to find work in the industry. Rather than give up on his dream, Lucas chose to persist, eventually finding success. This serves to show that failure after graduation is not the end – this is something I did not know about Lucas until researching this report, and it is comforting to know someone whom I admire so much has struggled in a way that I too may struggle.

Lucas chose to look towards his own personal experiences as inspiration for his film ideas. *American Graffiti* was inspired by his days of cruising in his hometown. "Cruising was gone, and I felt compelled to document the whole experience," (AMAUROITASP, 2015) Lucas said on *American Graffiti*. This is something I have already brought into my own films; personal experiences can help heighten the sense of realism and personal connection to a film's story. For example, an ambition of mine was to create a film centred around my home country of Gibraltar and its history, which is a goal I have achieved.

Lucas had hoped to adapt *Flash Gordon* (Stephani, 1936) to film, but instead created his own original sci-fi fantasy, *Star Wars*. While the film was a critical and financial success and has become a cultural phenomenon in the decades since, I have always been fascinated with the story of the film's troubled production, which was well documented on an extras DVD that I would watch as a child. While the word is arguably overused by today's hyperbolic standards, it is no understatement to call George Lucas a visionary director. For *Star Wars*, Lucas wanted to push the boundaries of what had been achieved previously with visual effects. He was unable to find a production company able to realise his vision, and so he created his own – Industrial Light & Magic (ILM). Through ILM, he was able to achieve his desired effects for *Star Wars*, and ILM has since gone on to work on over three hundred productions, including a branch of the production company breaking off into the world-renowned animation studio, Pixar. This is proof that pushing boundaries can result in success, and that being limited by a budget or compromising your vision isn't a necessity.

Through the creation of ILM and success of the first *Star Wars* alone, Lucas could've solidified himself as a leading director in the industry. However, he also realised the importance of allowing someone else to have creative control of his stories, and as such, *Star Wars's* sequel, *The Empire Strikes Back*, (Kershner, 1980) was directed by Irvin Kershner. Lucas remained on the production as a story writer, showing once more that while it is important to not compromise your vision, that the input of others can help benefit your own creations. This was also seen with *Star Wars*, where the entire film was reworked in post-production by a team of editors. This story is one that opened my eyes to how much of an impact editing can have on a film, as I have learned time and time again – a film can be crafted in the editing room.

Lucas was a great admirer of Joseph Campbell, using his writings to help create the overarching story of the *Star Wars* films. Campbell crafted the concept of the Hero's Journey in his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Campbell, 1949). This serves to show that while Lucas crafted his original ideas, his themes and motifs were inspired by someone he admired in similar ways Lucas himself is admired by filmmakers today. *Star Wars* is at times a dark story – however, it doesn't forget itself in its grandeur, with light-hearted humour used to break up tension in some scenes. Lucas himself has served as my earliest inspiration for wanting to be a filmmaker, and further researching his development from student to world-renowned filmmaker is something that has made me appreciate him even more.

Edgar Wright is who I credit for making me want to create films of my own. A decent portion of my adolescent life was spent trying to emulate his unique and quirky style in my own homemade films, something Wright himself was known for doing throughout his teenage years. Wright's own journey from an emerging talent into a leading director can best be surmised by a quote from his own website – “Edgar Wright has evolved from a young film geek wanting to prove himself to one of the most sought-after geeks working in film today.” (Wright, About Me, n.d.)

Similar to how Lucas began with his relatively low budget *THX 1138*, (Lucas, THX 1138, 1971) Wright began his feature film-making career with low budget films. He directed the independent film *A Fistful of Fingers*, (Wright, A Fistful of Fingers, 1995) leading to him landing several directorial roles on smaller BBC productions. This then led to him creating shows such as *Spaced*, (Wright, Spaced, 1999) which could be considered the beginning of Wright's unique comedic style.

On the development of his style, Wright said “you'd see BBC producers saying, ‘It's not about the camera work, it's all about the performers... Just concentrate on the performers....’ And I was thinking, ‘Well what if you do both? Of course the performance is important, the writing is really important. But what if you could have the perfect marriage of making it look really slick as well?’ I think that's kind of what I tried to develop as a style, and *Spaced* was the first TV show I did where all the elements came together.” (Phipps, 2007) Wright was able to slowly work out his own unique style through the medium of television, eventually bringing it to the big screen with *Shaun of the Dead*. (Wright, *Shaun of the Dead*, 2004) With its release, Wright presented himself as an emerging talent, providing his unique heartfelt romantic comedy in a horror setting. Similar to how Lucas reinvented the sci-fi genre, Wright brought new light to both the genres of romantic-comedy and zombie horror, with *Shaun of the Dead* being affectionately referred to as a “zom-rom-com.” (Godfrey, 2013)

The success of *Shaun of the Dead* led to the creation of *Hot Fuzz*, (Wright, *Hot Fuzz*, 2007) which had double the budget of *Shaun*, at \$12 million. However, this paled in comparison to the \$85 million budgeted *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* - (Wright, *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*, 2010) Wright's first true big budget tentpole film. In my adolescent years I admired Wright for his progression from

independent filmmaker, to TV director, to big-budgeted filmmaker. His style inspired me enough to where I, admittedly poorly, attempted to emulate it. Arguably he has helped to define the humour of a generation through a handful of films, leaving him a huge legacy as a director.

The final of the three directors is James Gunn, whom I attribute for inspiring myself as a filmmaker throughout university. In a similar way to Lucas, Gunn did not begin his career as a director. He started as a screenwriter before transitioning into the role of director. He worked for independent film companies, such as Troma Entertainment, before moving forward into working on Hollywood screenplays, starting with a live-action adaptation of *Scooby-Doo* (Gosnell, *Scooby-Doo*, 2002). While the film is intended for a younger audience, I would consider it to be a great balance of horror, humour, and heartfelt moments, surrounded by the silly exterior of a film featuring a talking dog.

Gunn found further success as a screenwriter in Hollywood with *Dawn of the Dead* (Snyder, 2004) - a remake of the film that inspired the title of Wright's *Shaun of the Dead*. He also worked on *Scooby-Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed*, (Gosnell, *Scooby-Doo 2: Monsters Unleashed*, 2004). Both of these films were box office hits, leading to him directing his first feature film, *Slither* (Gunn, *Slither*, 2006). While not a success at the box office, the film marked a turning point for Gunn, as he began directing his own screenplays rather than having them directed by other people.

Guardians of the Galaxy (Gunn, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, 2014) and *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (Gunn, *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*, 2017) are the two films that elevated Gunn to a leading director, and one that I admire professionally. Gunn's entry into Marvel's 'cinematic universe' featured a unique cast of misfit characters going through emotionally heavy situations. Despite this, the film never feels weighed down due to Gunn's mastery of balancing heart-warming or heart-breaking scenes with comedy sprinkled throughout. Both films were immense financial successes, taking relatively unknown comic-book characters and propelling them to the forefront of cinema. In turn, this helped solidify Gunn's legacy – even if he never worked again, it's undeniable that Gunn left his mark on both Marvel's 'cinematic universe' and cinema. Personally, both films meant a lot to me – Gunn manages to make each of the five members of the main cast feel human and relatable, even though all but one of them are aliens. *Guardians of the Galaxy* rejuvenated the trend in cinema of films featuring a 'rag-tag' group of misfits, as seen with *The Magnificent Seven* (Fuqua, 2016) and DC's *Suicide Squad* (Ayer, 2016) – the latter of which is having its sequel directed by Gunn himself.

The three directors I have analysed share one common element – the ability to create a narrative driven by heart, humour, and poignant moments that would often feel out of place in a relatively light-hearted film. While Lucas may not have pioneered this style, both Wright and Gunn have both expressed admiration towards him. Wright said he “always liked movies like *American Graffiti*” (Godfrey, 2013), while Gunn was awe-struck when meeting Lucas, saying “he changed my life by creating *Star Wars*” (Outlaw, 2018). The three may have had different beginnings and taken different paths, but they have each become some of the most successful and renowned directors in the industry.

While Lucas may have become more of a businessman than a filmmaker, his influence and legacy as a storyteller is undeniable. Both Wright and Gunn were in some way influenced by him – and I, in turn, have been influenced by all three. Their journeys as filmmakers have inspired me both as a child and recently at university. Their films have not only inspired stories of my own, but aspects of my life. As I move onwards into the industry and away from the comforts of university, I look towards their personal stories for guidance and influence.

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