FILM FORM

HOW TO APPROACH A FILM

- A film director = an engineer

- A film = a machine designed to produce a product

- The product = your experience of the film

- That experience —> your willingness (or unwillingness to accept the film's message)

THE KEY QUESTIONS

Ask these questions of every film:

- 1. What is the film about? What seems to be its central idea?

- 2. What is its attitude toward what it is about? Pro? Con? Contradictory? Ambiguous?

- 3. What narrative and cinematic strategies does it use to persuade us to accept its view?

- 4. What kind of experience do these techniques create?

VIEWING EXPERIENCE

- What sorts of pleasures does the film provide?

- Which narrative structures provide pleasure?

- Which cinematic strategies support those narrative structures?

- Who seems to be its ideal viewer?

- **ENTERTAINMENT IS ONLY THE SUGAR SHELL, NEVER THE ANSWER TO THESE KEY QUESTIONS.**

EXPECTATIONS

- **Plot:** Clear organization (cause/effect logic, clear goals/motivated obstacles, closure).

  Characters: Likeable (not "relatable") with clear motivation

  Genre: convention versus innovation

  Star: good fit between role and **persona**

  Director: good fit between film and "brand identity"
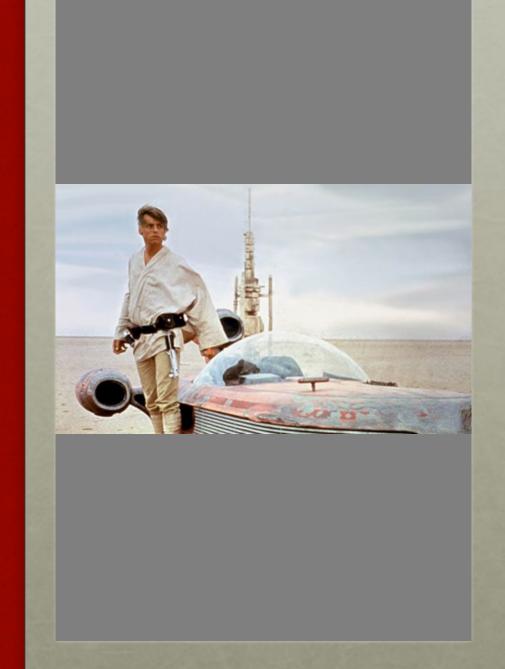
  Values: Mainstream Hollywood films tend to confirm majority values ("You were right all along.")
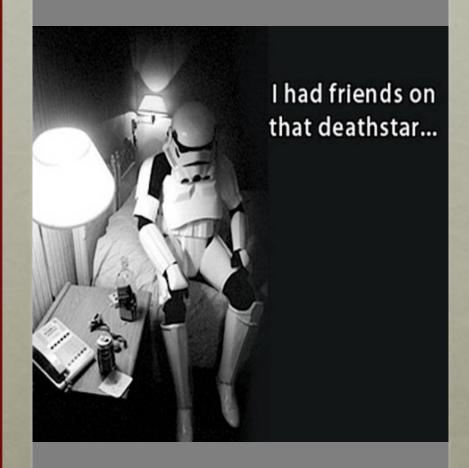
FOCALIZATION

attachment to protagonist

viewing the film through that character's eyes

appreciation for that character's desires and goals

FOCALIZATION

I had friends on that deathstar...

EXPECTATIONS

- How closely a film adheres to these expectations = the film's "degree of difficulty," how challenging it is for the viewer

- Films that fit our expectations are often rated more highly than those that don't.

- **Brechtian distanciation:** devices that exaggerate conventional moments and thus foreground their fictionality

REPRESENTATION

Signs, Encoding, Decoding

KEY CONCEPTS IN REPRESENTATION

- **Signs**
  - characters as **encoded constructions** that we are to **decode**
  - meaningful objects, also **encoded**

- **Subtexts** (denotation versus connotation)

POLYVALENCE

- *Polyvalence* = signs have no inherent meaning

- Meaning depends on *context*

- E.g.,

CONTEXT & MEANING

- *Context =*
  - the whole film: cinematic techniques and narrative
  - the whole genre
  - every film that you have ever seen
  - everything that you have ever learned and experienced

REPRESENTATION

REPRESENTATION

REPRESENTATION: ENCODING & DECODING