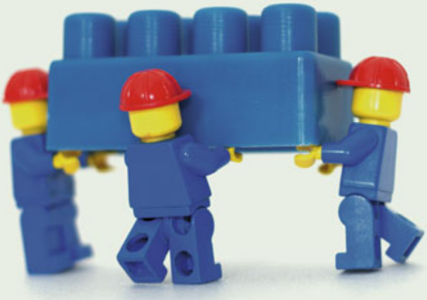
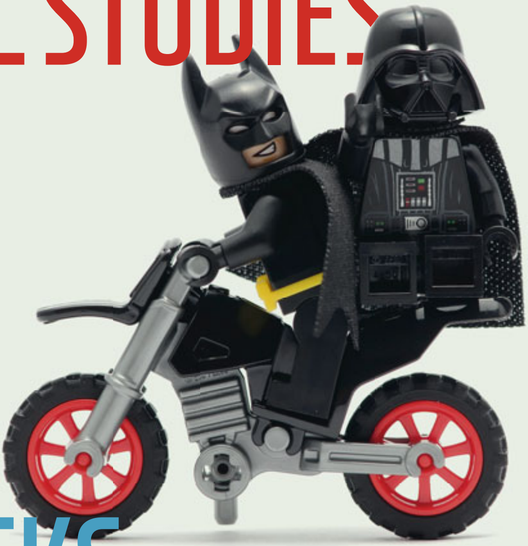


CULTURAL STUDIES OF LEGO



MORE THAN JUST BRICKS

Edited by
Rebecca C. Hains
Sharon R. Mazzarella

Cultural Studies of LEGO

Rebecca C. Hains · Sharon R. Mazzarella
Editors

Cultural Studies of LEGO

More Than Just Bricks

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For Theo, Alex and Xavier, who make everything awesome
—Rebecca C. Hains

For Jeff, who has taught me one is never too old to "play well"
—Sharon R. Mazzarella

Preface

As a children's media culture scholar, I observed with professional interest LEGO's transformation from a children's toy into a transnational, transmedia brand with immense cultural power. My research has always considered the cultural implications of major media phenomena, such as girl power's rise in the 1990s, and the Disney Princess brand's ascendency after the turn of the millennium. The latter subject built upon a wealth of previous scholarship, as scholars and other critics have been interrogating Disney for decades. But not so with LEGO: It only recently emerged as a transmedia brand that boasts, among other properties, blockbuster animated films. So, one day, not too long after the release of *The LEGO Batman Movie* in 2017, I asked Sharon: What if we were to give LEGO the Disney treatment? That question guided us as we developed this volume.

We created this book for scholars, students and readers from the general public alike. It will appeal to those with an interest in the LEGO brand, as well as in children's media culture more broadly. In this volume, essays examine LEGO from an array of critical/cultural studies approaches, with attention to its ideological power, influence and status as a major transnational media brand. While our contributors' work focuses on LEGO, their findings reflect broader trends in the children's media landscape. As such, these chapters have implications for those who are interested in cultural studies, media studies and the array of additional disciplines that our contributors represent, including literature, psychology, religious studies and sociology. We also value that our contributors bring to bear perspectives from a variety of nations, as they hail from Canada, Germany, England, Australia, The Netherlands, Norway and locations across the United States.

Sharon and I owe these amazing scholars a huge shout-out for being part of our team. This collection's high quality derives from their passion for the topic, their intellectual expertise and their understanding of the importance of subjecting popular cultural artifacts to in-depth critical/cultural analyses. Over the past year or so, it has been a genuine pleasure to work with them: We admire their good humor, willingness to stick with us as this collection evolved and overall commitment to our project. Finally, we appreciate the contributions of everyone involved in the editorial and production processes at Palgrave Macmillan: their commitment to providing a space for academic exploration and intellectual interrogation of popular culture artifacts made this project possible.

Salem, USA Rebecca C. Hains

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1

"Let There Be LEGO!": An Introduction to *Cultural Studies of LEGO*

Sharon R. Mazzarella and Rebecca C. Hains

Upon entering the historic National Cathedral in Washington D.C. in May 2019, the second editor of this book was intrigued to see a large sign announcing "Let There Be LEGO!" The sign, featuring the image of a LEGO minifigure gargoyle, further read, "Help Washington National Cathedral become the world's largest LEGO cathedral." As part of a fundraising effort to repair significant damage from a 2011 earthquake, the cathedral had just launched a $19 million (US) campaign to sell $2.00 (US) LEGO bricks to build a LEGO replica of the cathedral, stationed in the cathedral's gift shop. In-person visitors could add their purchased bricks to the model—guided, of course, by designated

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volunteers using official blueprints. When the replica is completed in two to three years, it is expected to stand 8 feet high, 13 feet long, contain half a million LEGO bricks and weigh 1350 pounds (Washington National Cathedral 2019). In fact, a volunteer explained that once completed, the replica would be too large to move from that room, as it would no longer fit through the doorway. It would become an enduring part of the public's experience touring the cathedral.

We begin our introduction to this volume, *Cultural Studies of LEGO: More Than Just Bricks*, with this story to show the near-ubiquity of LEGO as a cultural artifact. The little plastic bricks and representations of them seem to be nearly everywhere.[1] Let there be LEGO, indeed!

LEGO is the world's largest toy manufacturer[2] and an international, multimedia conglomerate. Due to its popularity among consumers, its marketing budget and its profitability, *Brand Finance* (Kauflin 2017) declared LEGO the world's most powerful brand in 2017, with *Business Insider* (Rath 2017) noting that LEGO's popular film properties contributed significantly to its rise to the top. While LEGO did not maintain this position the following year, it is still notable that they so recently ranked ahead of global behemoths including Google and Amazon.

While many still think of LEGO as the colorful building block toys they grew up with, toy production company The LEGO Group has grown its brand into a multimedia/multi-experiential phenomenon that includes seven Legoland theme parks spanning the globe from Denmark to Dubai. Moreover, LEGO boasts over 100 Lego Store retail shops worldwide, as well as videogames, board games, movies, television shows, books, a magazine, and even LEGO Wear children's clothes. LEGO's bricks and robotics kits have given the brand significant credibility as a STEM-oriented educational toy that is inherently wholesome and good for children. Still, however, the company considers the brick to be their "most important product" (Mortensen 2017). According to The LEGO Group, "the foundation remains the traditional LEGO brick" (Mortensen 2017).

Given the brand's reach, popularity and ubiquity, LEGO is ripe for serious critical/cultural interrogation of the kind offered by the chapters in this book. In this chapter, we begin by introducing the reader to the history, evolution and expansion of the LEGO brand over the past 80+ years. We then briefly situate our project within the broader field of Cultural Studies before introducing each chapter.

History, Evolution and Expansion of the LEGO Brand

Named "'Toy of the Century' in 2000 by both *Fortune* magazine and the British Association of Toy Retailers" (LEGO, n.d.), LEGO has a long and storied history within the international cultural landscape. Attesting to its longevity and diversity as a cultural artifact, in 2018, The LEGO Group experienced three notable milestones: The plastic LEGO bricks as we know them today turned 60; the first LEGOLAND theme park (in Billund, Denmark, where The LEGO Group is headquartered) turned 50; and the LEGO minifigure turned 40. But LEGO's history has not been an entirely upward trajectory, and in this section, we cover some notable events and time periods in the LEGO brand's evolution. Individual chapters feature additional key dates and events, such as movie and product line release dates, when relevant to their topics.

Founded in Billund, Denmark in 1932 by Ole Kirk Kristensen, the same family still privately holds The LEGO Group, which boasts a long history of family leadership (Jensen 2015). The word LEGO is a contraction of the Danish "leg godt," meaning "play well," which, according to the LEGO Group Web site, is "our name and it's our ideal" (Mortensen 2017). Coincidentally, the company later realized that in Latin, the word *lego* appropriately means "I put together" (Lauwaert 2008).

As a toy company, LEGO began first by producing wooden toys (Konzack 2014; Lauwaert 2008), moving to "the now famous automatic Binding Bricks" in the late 1940s (Schultz and Hatch 2003, p. 7). The company launched "the revolutionary 'LEGO System of Play'" in 1955 (Mortensen 2017) which, according to the company,

> essentially means that [bricks] can easily be combined in innumerable ways—and just as easily be dismantled. The more LEGO bricks you have, the more fertile your creativity can become. The combination of a structured system, logic and unlimited creativity encourages the child to learn through play in a wholly unique LEGO fashion. (Jensen 2015)[3]

In addition, in that same year, the company began what it describes as "The first real export of LEGO" (in this case to Sweden) (Mortensen 2017). As of this year, LEGO products are available in over 140 countries (Mortensen 2017).

It wasn't until 1958 that "the brick in its present form was launched" (Mortensen 2017) and "the familiar stud-and-tube interlocking system was patented" (Schultz and Hatch 2003, p. 7). Indeed, in her technological history of LEGO, Maaike Lauwaert (2008) itemizes "three major instances in the history of the LEGO company" (p. 221)—the first being this transition from wood to plastics. Contrary to popular lore, however, some historians assert that LEGO did not invent the plastic brick toy (Lauwaert 2008). Rather, they "were inspired" by self-locking bricks called Kiddicraft that a man named Hillary Page had designed earlier in England, and in 1981, LEGO paid an out-of-court settlement for "residual rights" to the new owners of Mr. Page's company (Lauwaert 2008, p. 223). Interestingly, as Lauwaert notes, this latter part of the evolution of LEGO bricks typically is omitted from the many published histories of the product.

While the company thrived for decades, Schultz and Hatch (2003) identify four broader social, cultural and technological changes that affected the LEGO brick's viability and popularity by the end of the twentieth century:

1. the pace of child development sped up such that kids aged out of playing with such toys at younger ages;
2. competition from new digital technology including video games and digital toys took kids' attention from simpler toys;
3. overall trends in the toy industry resulted in toys going out of fashion more quickly;
4. and toy companies began partnering with "global mega-brands" such as film franchises.

Moreover, the last of LEGO's patents expired in 1998, resulting in the market being flooded with a range of copycat products (Einwächter and Simon 2017). As a result, according to Lauwaert (2008), the second notable phase in LEGO's historical evolution, what she calls "a rather unfortunate episode" (p. 221), occurred in the period from the late 1990s through the early 2000s. In an attempt to compete and stay viable in this new environment, LEGO shifted emphasis from its bread-and-butter construction toys to a more varied yet less creative product line focused on role playing (often tied in with other media products, which required LEGO to pay hefty licensing fees) (Lauwaert 2008).

These dramatic shifts resulted in a "huge deficit" (Mortensen 2017) in the early 2000s that "made clear that brand extension through product differentiation had not been successfully executed" (Lauwaert 2008, p. 227). In 2004, LEGO announced a 7-year strategy to revitalize the company, including the reintroduction of the classic construction toys as a core product line. The plan was so successful that, according to the company's Web site in 2013, "In less than 10 years, the company has quadrupled its revenue" (Mortensen 2017).

By 2017, LEGO had surpassed Mattel as the "world's largest toy manufacturer" (Van Looveren 2017), with the company attributing a large part of that success to its licensing deals with such transmedial juggernauts as Star Wars and Harry Potter. According to Sophie Einwächter and Felix Simon (2017), LEGO's deal with Lucasfilm for the licensing rights to Star Wars "equipped Lego (sic) with a powerful weapon in the competition for market share" (n.p.). Indeed, in his cultural history of LEGO, Lars Konzack (2014) identifies several epochs in the development of the brand, with the latest one being what he calls "transmedial," or spanning multiple media platforms using an array of technologies. Mark J. P. Wolf (2014, p. xxiii) sees LEGO as both transmedial and transfranchisal, or bridging multiple franchises (ranging from Disney films to Star Wars to DC Comics to Harry Potter to the Simpsons), while Sondra Bacharach and Roy T. Cook (2017) describe LEGO bricks as "the building blocks of a transgenerational multimedia empire" (p. 1), appealing a wide range of ages and abilities, including children of all ages and adults alike.

In the process of becoming a transmedia and transfranchisal phenomenon, LEGO came to reflect both "toyetics" and "toyesis" as phenomena. When considering greenlighting media texts, producers and other gatekeepers have long evaluated them for whether they are "toyetic": "suitable to be merchandised across a range of licensed tie-ins: including toys, games and novelties" (Bainbridge 2017, p. 24), as well as other cultural artifacts with playful qualities, such as foods and apparel (p. 24). Building upon the concept of "toyetics," Jason Bainbridge (2017) has suggested that "toyesis" is a kind of "reverse toyetics": a free-flow of ideas between licensed toys and media texts (like films and television shows) that enriches toys and media texts alike. As such, the original media text may be considered "erased," enabling more free flow across media platforms (p. 26). As Bainbridge has explained: "Whereas toyetic implies a one-way adaptation from screen/literary text to a physical paratext (through merchandising), toyesis implies movement both ways across platforms to point the that the distinction between different texts becomes obscured and therefore less important" (p. 26)— which in many ways characterizes the LEGO brand.

Einwächter and Simon (2017) discuss how LEGO's realization of the importance of "transmedial stories" (n.p.) for its toy sales informed the highly successful (and highly toyetic) *The LEGO Movie*, the main concept of which is "transmedia world-building" (n.p.). As the highest-grossing animated film of 2014, *The LEGO Movie* (Einwächter and Simon 2017) paved the way for a range of additional LEGO-related movies, many of which are discussed later in this volume.

LEGO's fan outreach has been another component, its resurrection (Einwächter and Simon 2017; Lauwaert 2008). Whether soliciting fan involvement in product development such as the programmable robotic kits Mindstorms 2.0 and Mindstorms NXT (Lauwaert 2008), building community through such programs as the LEGO Ambassador Program (Lauwaert 2008), or supporting adult fans of LEGO (AFOLs) in other ways (Einwächter and Simon 2017), one of LEGO's most important changes in recent years has been "the strategy of bringing fans into the company, for tapping into the user-driven innovative fan culture" (Lauwaert 2008, p. 232). (See Nancy Jennings' chapter in this volume for an in-depth discussion of AFOLs.)

Jason Mittell (2014) has pronounced LEGO to be "an unusual company" in that it was "globalized prior to the era of globalization, connected to a web of other cultural industries but structurally independent from them, and innovating trends like transmedia convergence long before such terms were coined" (p. 270). Indeed, for these reasons, LEGO is worthy of critical/cultural academic inquiry. While in this book we do not seek to establish or contribute to a sustained, formalized field of LEGO Studies—something Mittell argues against—we do acknowledge the LEGO brand's global reach, influence, and importance. As such, through this book, we seek to interrogate critically many of LEGO's interrelated cultural artifacts.

This Collection

Cultural Studies

Over the past several decades, LEGO has emerged as one of the most studied cultural artifacts in history. The lions' share of this scholarship, however, is experimental in nature, as scholars have sought to measure and document the effects of a range of LEGO artifacts on young people. Evidencing the wealth of scientific examination of LEGO's effects, recent studies range from how LEGO products affect the gendering of children's play (Fulcher and Hayes 2018), to the effectiveness of LEGO Therapy for youth with autism (e.g., Lindsay et al. 2017), to the role of LEGO building toys in improving children's problem-solving skills and overall STEM learning (e.g., Li et al. 2016; Moreau and Engeset 2016), to the integration of LEGO robotics (Mindstorms) in the classroom (e.g., Afari and Khine 2017).

As LEGO has grown to enjoy unprecedented commercial success, however, a growing body of critical scholarship—grounded in more humanistic inquiry—has begun interrogating LEGO as a seemingly ubiquitous cultural artifact. Much of this scholarship, including the chapters in this book, is situated in the interdisciplinary field known as Cultural Studies.

Before discussing Cultural Studies as a field, it is imperative first to address what we mean when we talk about "culture," and specifically about LEGO as a cultural artifact. As eloquently described by Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas H. Kellner (2012), culture "constitutes a set of discourses, stories, images, spectacles, and varying cultural forms and practices that generate meanings, identities, and political effects" (p. 4). One cannot separate culture from the broader system of ideologies at play—specifically its link to a dominant ideology or hegemony (Durham and Kellner 2012; Kellner 2015). Large, powerful, multinational corporations like LEGO and Disney, for example, can perpetuate their worldview across the range of cultural artifact they produce by telling the stories they want audiences to hear. They are likely to prioritize stories whose worldviews promote the corporations' self-interests (such as financial success), with the cultural needs of their audience members (such as inclusivity and the breaking-down of harmful stereotypes) playing a secondary role. The chapters in this collection therefore offer diverse critical/cultural studies perspectives on what we see as the "storytelling" of the LEGO franchise.

It is imperative, then, that scholars have the necessary tools to interrogate the relationship between culture and (dominant) ideology, and Cultural Studies, as an umbrella, provides us with those tools (Kellner 2015). While it is beyond this introduction's scope to provide a historical and epistemological overview of Cultural Studies, interested readers could follow up with Simon During's *The Cultural Studies Reader (3rd ed.)* (2007) for a comprehensive historical evolution of the field and/or Durham and Kellner's *Media and Cultural Studies: Keyworks (2nd ed.)* (2012) for an equally detailed introduction to key theoretical perspectives and approaches within the field. For our purposes, Cultural Studies, according to Douglas Kellner (2015), is characterized by a focus on the connections between ideology and representation, specifically the examination of the relationships between popular culture artifacts and the dominant ideologies of a particular time and place. Moreover, Kellner (2015) asserts:

> Cultural studies insists that culture must be studied within the social relations and systems through which culture is produced and consumed

> and that the study of culture is thus intimately bound up with the study of society, politics and economics. (p. 8)

In a nutshell, Cultural Studies' concern is with how meaning is made and transmitted, even through something as seemingly innocuous as a LEGO brick. Scholars working within this tradition therefore engage in "more differentiated political, rather than aesthetic valuations of cultural artifacts" (p. 8).

While, as During (2007) notes, Cultural Studies "possesses neither a well-defined methodology nor clearly demarcated fields for investigation" (p. 1), Kellner (2015) identifies three components that link Cultural Studies: (1) political economy (going behind the scenes, so to speak, to examine cultural artifacts within their broader systems of production); (2) textual analysis (deconstructing the "ideological positions," "narrative strategies" and "image construction" within cultural texts, broadly defined) (p. 12); and (3) audience reception (how audiences, including fans, negotiate their relationship with cultural artifacts). The various chapters in this collection represent these three traditions, although the chapter authors' use of theories and lenses to engage with these traditions varies.

In recent years, critical/cultural studies scholars have made the discourses and representations within children's culture a significant area of study. We situate this volume within this broader critical/cultural interrogation of children's culture including American Girl dolls (Zaslow 2017); Disney (Cheu 2013); Nickelodeon (Banet-Weiser 2007; Hendershot 2004); princess culture (Forman-Brunell and Hains 2013); video games (Cassell and Jenkins 2000); and more.

Chapters

This book is divided into three parts. The first, "LEGO as Media Text" focuses on LEGO films and various other mediated representations of the LEGO brand. Part II examines "Creativity in the LEGO Universe" by covering the phenomenon of creativity with and within LEGO cultural artifacts, as well as how LEGO fans and writers create with LEGO. Finally, Part III, "The Politics of Representation in the LEGO

Franchise," addresses the representation of diversity (or lack thereof) in LEGO artifacts.

LEGO as Media Text. In this book's first part, our authors engage with various LEGO "texts," such as assorted LEGO playsets, books and videogames; films like *The LEGO Movie*, *The LEGO Movie 2*, *The LEGO Batman Movie*, and *The LEGO Ninjago Movie*; and LEGO's DC Super Heroes media properties. In their chapters, the authors draw upon an array of critical/cultural studies perspectives to unpack various ideologies embedded into these texts, shedding light on the worldviews conveyed by the LEGO brand and their possible cultural significance.

The first two chapters focus on LEGO Batman—significant for its focus on a transfranchise title character that has been a toyetic and transmedia success for decades—within a political economy context. In their chapters, Lincoln Geraghty (Chapter 2) and Matthew McAllister and Jared LaGroue (Chapter 3) argue that LEGO Batman serves as a crossover, cross-promotional character that, in the marketplace, greatly benefits both the LEGO and the DC Comics brand.

In Chapter 2, called "In a 'Justice' League of their Own: Transmedia Storytelling and Paratextual Reinvention in LEGO's DC Super Heroes," Geraghty explores LEGO's collaborative working relationship with licensing partner DC Comics, which owns the Batman franchise. Examining a range of LEGO artifacts and paratexts (including playsets, minifigures, films, videogames and books) primarily related to the LEGO Batman character, he documents how the connections between corporate initiatives and content creation result in the construction of "transmedia worlds." These transmedia worlds catalyze new stories and franchise marketing opportunities for LEGO and also function to direct LEGO fans to engage further with DC's Batman, which has a lengthy and extensive transmedia history. Geraghty concludes that the collaboration between DC and LEGO strategically diversifies the brands' potential markets and "transforms Batman into a transmedia franchise character"—an insight that is helpful in understanding wider shifts in the toy and entertainment industries.

In Chapter 3, called "'Hey, Kids. Who Wants a Shot from the Merch Gun?!': LEGO Batman as a Gateway Commodity Intertext," McAllister and LaGroue build upon the idea that from a strategic corporate standpoint, LEGO Batman’s various appearances in LEGO films and other LEGO media functioned to extend both the LEGO and Batman brands. McAllister and LaGroue consider the marketing of LEGO Batman products, such as toys and books, and note that these cross-media products targeted children as young as three years of age. Taking a holistic view of LEGO Batman in the marketplace, and the array of strategic cross-promotion opportunities LEGO has created, McAllister and LaGroue conclude that a primary goal of LEGO Batman’s marketing is the socialization of young viewers into consumer culture, to the benefit of its own brand and those of its franchise partners.

Then, in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, our authors offer textual analyses that read LEGO media for other ideological positions: neoliberalism, religion, and gender and race, respectively. In Chapter 4, titled “Everything is Awesome When You’re Part of a List: The Flattening of Distinction in Post-Ironic LEGO Media,” Ari Mattes examines LEGO films and videogames for their use of lists and irony. Through his analysis, Mattes reveals that an apolitical, uncritical perspective is embedded throughout LEGO media at the narrative level. This, Mattes argues, reflects a neoliberal dream of an apolitical world in which individual choice and self-celebration are paramount, rather than structural matters. By reducing social and political conflict to matters of individual choices and morality, LEGO media suggest that it is entirely possible for every member of society to win: “that everything *is* awesome, if you’ve got the right attitude.” Mattes sees LEGO’s characteristic list-based, ironic humor as “attempting to evacuate and negate the political through the annihilation of a critical position.”

In Chapter 5, “Made Up Prophecies: Metamodern Play with Religion, Spirituality and Monomyth in the LEGO Universe,” Sissel Undheim considers *The LEGO Movie* and *The LEGO Movie 2: The Second Part* from a religious studies perspective. Although she notes that some may find the idea of LEGO mixing religion and popular culture blasphemous, she is interested in interrogating how LEGO’s diverse media and platforms approach religion. As LEGO primarily targets child audiences, Undheim notes that LEGO has received less attention from scholars in her field than have other, similarly influential transnational media phenomenon that target adult audiences. In her analysis, she finds that while most of the themes sold on the LEGO Shop Web site seem secular, LEGO products and media are filled with new-age spiritualities that are vague and nearly unnoticeable. Undheim concludes that LEGO celebrates rule-breaking opposing dogmatism, with a "kind of 'spiritual secularity' [that] emerges through tongue-in-cheek puns, play, and chaotic pop-cultural mash-ups."

The final chapter in the "LEGO as Media Text" part of this volume, written by Matthias Zick Varul (Chapter 6), is called "The Accursed Second Part: Small-Scale Discourses of Gender and Race in *The LEGO Movie 2*." Varul argues that while at first glance, *The LEGO Movie 2: The Accursed Second Part* seems to offer a scathing critique of toxic masculinity, it does not subvert the cultural dominance of the patriarchy or present a meaningful challenge to White, male privilege. Instead, Varul explains, the film positions the character Emmet as a "White savior" when Duplo aliens—led by a queen that the film presents as both gendered and racialized—invade Bricksburg. Problematizing these representations, Varul argues that the film supports a patriarchal, middle-class ideology by perpetuating the stereotypical idea that masculinity, Whiteness and order are dichotomously opposed to femininity, Blackness and disorder—making the former a necessary corrective for the threat presented by the latter.

"**Creativity in the LEGO Universe**." Part II of this volume considers the phenomenon of creativity with and within LEGO artifacts. While the first chapter (Chapter 7) examines the LEGO brand's own representation of LEGO as a creative medium, the other chapters consider the creative works of individuals—some of whom (as in Chapters 8 and 10) receive forms of compensation or reward from LEGO, but some of whom (as seen in Chapter 9) would receive no patronage from the company, as they create works that are entirely contrary to LEGO's brand image.

The part begins with "Master Building and Creative Vision in *The LEGO Movie*" (Chapter 7), which bridges the focus on LEGO as a media text and LEGO creativity. In this chapter, author Jonathan Rey Lee examines LEGO's representation of Master Builders in *The LEGO Movie*, specifically as this intersects with LEGO toy play. Organized using Csikszentmihalyi's five stages of creativity as adopted by

The LEGO Foundation—preparation, incubation, insight, evaluation and elaboration—Lee deconstructs how LEGO works to construct a particularly LEGO version of creative vision. His chapter begins by analyzing two reports commissioned by The LEGO Foundation which, taken together, articulate a theory of creativity that links to the need for development by activity such as building with LEGO. Moreover, he examines how this vision of creativity is played out in *The LEGO Movie* and its playsets, demonstrating that the film's messages about play, creativity and work are in discourse with central, crucial aspects of the LEGO brand's identity and philosophy. Lee concludes that LEGO has constructed a vision of creativity that fits into a commercial imperative, problematically advancing a consumerist ethic.

In Chapter 8, "Toyetics and Novelizations: Bringing *The LEGO Movie* to the Page," Joyce Goggin examines one of the least-studied and least-respected forms of popular culture: novelizations, or novels based on previously released films. She critically interrogates novelizations of *The LEGO Movie* and *The LEGO Batman Movie* by examining their content; interviewing women who write LEGO media novelizations; and bringing a political economy perspective to a range of intersecting issues related to the novelizations' production. These include the gendering of novelizations (as they are mostly written by women); cultural capital; pedagogy; and appeal to readers. While novelizations often receive criticism for their perceived role as unimaginative marketing vehicles for the films upon which they are based, Goggin argues that novelizations are linked historically to other cultural artifacts typically written by women, such as Harlequin Romances, and likewise devalued in part due to their reputation as a feminized form of labor. In her analysis, Goggin demonstrates that LEGO novelizations have links to "affective labor," women's perceived roles as caretakers, a focus on the "cuteness" of LEGO characters, and a pedagogy that is at times grounded in neoliberalism.

Chapter 9 turns to a type of creative work not conducted under the aegis of LEGO: "brickfilming" (Brownlee 2016; Einwächter and Simon 2017), or amateur stop motion films made primarily by LEGO fans. Noting that there is a long history of this LEGO fan creative practice, Shannon Brownlee's chapter narrows the study of such productions specifically to LEGO pornography. In "LEGO Porn: Phallic Pleasure and Knowledge," Brownlee offers a textual analysis of numerous videos posted primarily on YouTube. She reveals LEGO pornography to be both "phallic and phallocentric," in part as informed by the design of LEGO minifigures and the bricks themselves. This design, she argues, along with the use of metaphors and insinuations by LEGO porn creators, results in a genre grounded in the exploration of an overriding theme of penetration.

In Chapter 10, informed primarily by ethnographic research and situated within the seemingly unrelated academic fields of fan studies, labor relations and public relations, author Nancy Jennings takes the reader into the multifaceted relationship between Adult Fans of LEGO (AFOLs) and the company itself. Her chapter, called "'It's All About the Brick': Mobilizing Adult Fans of LEGO," is more than just an investigation into AFOLs: She also explores of how LEGO "mobilizes" those fans—specifically, the roles that LEGO invites AFOLs to play in the company's marketing and public brand management initiatives. Jennings demonstrates how, through their engagement with LEGO as artists, collectors, designers, and user community members, these fans also serve as free labor for the LEGO brand. For the AFOL, however, "it's all about the brick."

The Politics of Representation in the LEGO Franchise. The chapters in our third part focus upon the LEGO franchise's inclusivity and diversity (or lack thereof), examining matters of race and gender. In Chapter 11, titled "'I Just Don't Really, Like, Connect To It': How Girls Negotiate LEGO's Gender-Marketed Toys," Rebecca Hains and Jennifer Shewmaker begin by reviewing how LEGO began creating and marketing products in differing, gender-stereotypical ways to boys and girls in the 1980s, and have continued doing so ever since. Hains and Shewmaker then turn to their qualitative research with twenty girls, ages six to eleven, whom the authors individually interviewed and invited to engage in free play with the materials from several LEGO playsets. The authors found that their participants could readily tell them which products LEGO meant "for girls" or "for boys," and that some—but not all—participants expressed personal preferences for LEGO sets along such gender stereotypes (finding