

BLOODY STUMPS, EXPLODING STARS

The Iconic Logic of Purified Bodies

In all societies, technology is the ritual replication of origin myths such as Nebuchadnezzar's Dream, but industrialism regards myth and ritual as primitive modes of thought that need to be replaced by bureaucracy, science, and machines. How does industrialism reconcile the social necessity of myth and ritual with its own technocratic agenda? It does this by operating on two distinct levels of symbolic structure simultaneously: an overt level of mechanism and rationality, which is openly acknowledged and taught in the schools as a true description of the world, and a covert level that is officially dismissed as mere "art and entertainment" but which in fact creates a mythic infrastructure supportive of the technocracy.¹ Thus, the symbolic body of industrialism has three distinct categories of symbolic content: the "primitive" aspects of nature and society that the system is trying to replace (equivalent to the feet of Nebuchadnezzar), the technological "advances" with which it hopes to replace them (equivalent to the head of Nebuchadnezzar), and the covert system of myth and ritual that defines Nebuchadnezzar's Dream itself. However, in the folk theory of industrialism, Nebuchadnezzar's Dream is equated with the primitive parts that the technocracy is trying to eliminate, so it cannot be openly acknowledged but manifests itself by what I call *covert symbolism*.

The overt content of industrialism is conveyed by a broad range of so-called educational institutions, including schools, museums, and documentary television. It is also taught and reinforced by the business and financial communities, both through their own media and by dissemination in the general press of statements by stockbrokers, investment strategists, and economists of all persuasions. The "primitive" parts of industrial society are obvious too, as commonplace as churches, religious schools, family gatherings, and company picnics. However, the covert

content of industrialism is a good deal harder to recognize because nowhere is there anything that says: "Covert mythology: read me!"; "Hidden agenda: do this!" In fact, the culture actively denies that there is any such thing, proclaiming in large letters: "No myths here!"

Nonetheless, industrial society has several categories of covert myth and ritual, each conveyed by a characteristic genre or medium. First, there is the ritual of the technocratic extravaganza, typified by the space shuttle launch and the lunar landing, through which ordinary citizens are incorporated into the activities of high-tech organizations. Like rituals, these carefully orchestrated events take place in real time with real characters, incorporating people from all walks of life into the enterprise as spectators. Yet these events are also art, for even when broadcast "live," they are narrated by newscasters, edited by control-room technicians, and interspersed with previously recorded footage. The space launch, by merging the imagery of the technocracy with that of the adventurer/hero, and by referencing the great American aviators and explorers of the past, such as Charles Lindbergh and Admiral Byrd, makes it possible for people without any technical knowledge to understand the purpose of the activity and to identify with its goals. Moreover, the ritual battle between "man and nature" has inherent drama, for as the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger* showed, there is always the chance that "nature" might win.

In addition to these national rituals of technocratic dramatization, there is also the covert mythology proper, which is primarily conveyed to citizens of industrial society by the genre of science fiction (sci-fi to its fans); and it can take the form of books, toys, television shows, video games, and motion pictures. With a few notable exceptions, the books are rarely read by anyone outside of the sci-fi community, but the movies and TV shows, which are directed to mass audiences, often attain the status of cultural icons: the *Star Trek* television series and the movies it inspired; Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*; and, of course, George Lucas's *Star Wars*, which was for a time the largest-grossing movie in Hollywood history. Although the genre is called *science* fiction, the content usually has very little to do with the scientific method, scientific theory, or scientists themselves.² In many stories, the heroes are not even scientists, and in others the social organization, far from reflecting the intricate division of labor of technocratic society, often appears to be lifted wholesale from medieval Europe, with knights and warriors, peasants and aristocrats, priests and magicians. The modes of transportation often mix radically different levels of technology, with some characters riding on

domesticated animals while others pass from one galaxy to another on warp-speed spaceships in a matter of minutes. If managers and bureaucrats appear at all, they are often portrayed as the tools of evil empires or as officious functionaries putting obstacles in the path of the hero. If commerce has any role in the plot, it tends to be an underground activity of pirates, bounty hunters, and unscrupulous cartels. The plots are more likely to involve physical challenges than intellectual ones, and many of the heroes scarcely differ from cowboys in terms of their physical stamina and combative proclivities. Yet, in the sci-fi genre, weapons are curiously primitive given the technological standards that prevail elsewhere in the plot, almost always being hand-held and optically guided, so that shots by bad guys rarely find their marks. Although scientific facts and theories are often incorporated into the story to make certain aspects of the plot more plausible, such as spaceships propelled by gravity waves, they are just as likely to be ignored, as when the hero travels faster than light or when objects are moved by telekinesis.

In *Star Wars*, for example, the villain is a vast bureaucratized empire staffed by Teutonic-looking generals and faceless storm troopers (the term storm trooper is in fact used in the spinoff books), represented by the emperor's most powerful warrior, the evil Darth Vader.³ The heroes are a ragtag band of insurrectionists consisting primarily of a blond, young male of noble lineage (Luke Skywalker), a princess (Leia), a personable smuggler with a noble heart (Captain Han Solo), his alien sidekick (the Wookiee named Chewbacca), and a pair of androids, R2-D2 and C-3PO. The Empire commands vast technological resources, including a man-made planet called the Death Star, but the storm troopers are armed with weapons that look very much like 20th-century automatic rifles, and both the arch hero and the arch villain prefer hand-to-hand combat with sabers—laser-like *lightsabers* to be sure—but weapons that nonetheless require the physical skill of fencing. The non-rationalist side of science fiction is also well represented in this story by an old man in a monk's cowl, Ben (Obi-Wan) Kenobi (the parentheses are part of the name), who teaches Luke Skywalker about the Force. The Force is the power of life itself, and it is said to be more powerful than the mere technology of the Empire. Before the arch villain Darth Vader kills Ben Kenobi in a duel with lightsabers, the old man prophesies that he will become even more powerful in death; and, sure enough, after Obi-Wan is killed, his body suddenly disappears, leaving behind his monk's habit in a rumpled pile on the floor. In both its technological imagery and surreal fantasy, *Star Wars* is a good

representative of the sci-fi genre, so one is naturally led to the question: Where is the science in science fiction?

Science fiction is *science* fiction because it encodes the symbolic content that is a necessary part of the social organization of the technology but which cannot be overtly acknowledged because it conflicts with the rationalist and mechanistic world view: the contradiction between scientists' perception of themselves as rugged individualists and the demands of the bureaucratic organizations which they invariably serve; the persistence of manual skills, which, if technocratic history were right, should long ago have been replaced by machines; the arbitrary and capricious use of political and economic power in what are supposedly ruled-governed, democratically organized institutions; the political competition between individuals in what is supposedly a meritocracy; the fact that technical superiority has more to do with old-fashioned martial virtues than with the dispassionate discovery of truths about nature; and, finally, that there is some poorly defined spiritual power, the Force if you will, that is stronger than machines.

The fact that the industrial system produces two distinct symbolic products, the overt and covert symbolism, science and science fiction, indicates that there are two classes of technocratic practitioners, what I call the *mechanists* and the *players*. The mechanists comprise the vast majority of people who subscribe to the technocratic world view, and they believe that the overt mythology is an accurate description of reality: that people are machines, that labor is a quantity, that the past is primitive, the future advanced, and that they and their colleagues are engaged in rational activity in a world that can be made even more so. It is the mechanists who develop the algorithms, design the machines, perform the experiments, perfect the standardized tests, compile the statistics, edit the journals, program the computers, write the plans, compose the press releases, and do the million other functionally defined jobs required by the bourgeois conquest of knowledge. If the mechanists read science fiction, they dutifully think of it as a form of entertainment. If they watch a space shuttle launch, it resonates to beliefs about American technological leadership, the conquest of the last frontier, and the vindication of individual initiative. In short, to the mechanist, there is no covert agenda in industrial civilization; and even if there were, it has long been purged of its incense, icons, and relics of saints—like a pure and triumphant Protestantism.

However, there is another type of technocrat, whom I call the player, who recognizes that mechanism by itself just dead-ends in the middle

class, and that the technocracy has both overt and covert symbolic content. The player understands, perhaps only on an intuitive level, that *Star Wars* is not just a movie but as essential a part of industrial technology as the space program itself. As Delany has pointed out, the distinguishing characteristic of science fiction as a genre is that it creates imaginary worlds that are to be taken as possible futures, in effect, a world without metaphor, in which even seemingly metaphorical statements, such as "His eyes popped out when she walked into the room," are always to be given physical interpretations. This literal-mindedness is a characteristic of the technocratic mentality, and it is reinforced by long exposure to its most characteristic machine, the computer, so when the player, who is as literal-minded as any other technocrat, and as lacking in social imagination, views *Star Wars*, he does not see it as most people do, as an adventure story, an allegory, or as a stunning display of special effects, for all these interpretations presume metaphor or indifference. Rather, the player's only possible interpretations are either skepticism or belief, so he must either dismiss the film entirely or see it as a literal description of someplace else or some other time, as actual events that have either happened in the past or will happen in the future. Even though science fiction is clearly labeled "fiction," not fact, and certainly not myth, the player nonetheless comes away with the conviction that the real technocratic agenda is not the machine but the Force: an essentially irrational and mythical domain of princesses, gurus, and Jedi knights.

The player's confidence is not misplaced because a movie like *Star Wars* is itself a high-technology product as sophisticated in its way as any computer system or spacecraft. In Alan Arnold's book, *Once Upon a Galaxy: A Journal of the Making of "The Empire Strikes Back,"* two of the principals involved in the making of the movie, the production designer and the co-supervisor of special effects, tell us that they keep abreast of the work at the United States government agency that manages the space program (NASA), and that this interest is reciprocated, for many NASA people are keenly interested in science fiction movies. Moreover, the production of the *Star Wars* sequel required state-of-the-art technology, including computerized image-processing that would not be out of place in the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, as well as the services of two special effects studios, one in London to work with the film crew, another in California, with a staff of forty-three technicians, to build the models. The sets for the movie also required an industrial level of technical organization. Han Solo's spaceship, the *Millennium Falcon*, was constructed by a firm of marine engineers at the Pembroke

Docks in Wales, where flying boats were built in the 1930's. This one prop, constructed of steel, was 65 feet in diameter and 16 feet high, with a weight of 23 tons. It was transported to the studio in London in sixteen separate sections, carried by a convoy of trucks. The other props included specially designed snowmobiles, built by a car manufacturer, and remote-controlled, working models of robots produced by a toy company. In addition to the sets and props, shooting the location scenes required a level of logistics appropriate to an airborne assault. For the rebel stronghold on the ice planet Hoth, Lucasfilms took over a glacier at Finse in Norway, where it erected two base camps, equipped with arctic survival tents and a full-time medical staff. Ten container loads of equipment went by sea from England to Oslo, then by train to Finse. Three others were airlifted in. To move the actors and crew between the two camps and the hotel, there were ten tracked snow vehicles, a snowplow, and a helicopter. Movies like *Star Wars* do not only portray technocratic values: they are themselves technocracies.

Because there is no hard-and-fast dividing line between industrial technology and the media representation of it, we can take the *Star Wars* trilogy as a projection of the repressed aspects of the technocratic culture that produced it. But as movies are themselves industrial products, sensitive to all the same taboos that operate elsewhere in the system, their symbolic content, especially that of large-budget extravaganzas, is never an unambiguous projection of the covert symbolism. Movies are subject to the rigorous censorship of the box office, and their symbolism must hint at the covert content without actually exposing it. For this reason, the covert content of industrialism and the surface projections of it are quite different, in no way identical, but they are nonetheless systematically related to each other through processes of symbolic transformation. In this sense, science-fiction movies are the dreamwork of the technocracy, the configuration of words and images, plot and characterization, that recreate the repressed world of ritual and myth in a form acceptable to the culturally dominant consciousness.

The anthropologist's task, like the clinician's, is to infer the underlying system of symbolism from its disguised manifestations on the screen. To do this, we first assume that the symbolic content is logical, systematic, and productive; and then we build a cognitive framework in which the events on the screen can be seen as coherently motivated and rational. The linguistic concepts of deep structure and surface structure are useful here. The surface structure is symbolic content that is directly observable, whereas deep structure is the inferred system of cultural rules

that produces it. For example, in English, the list *horses, dogs, cats...* is surface structure, whereas the rules for pluralizing these nouns are deep structure.⁴ Thus, in analyzing imagery and myth, the anthropologist develops what I call an *iconic deep structure*, or *IDS*: a system of imagery and rules of transformation that explains the observable features of the symbolism (Figure 3.2). Like any hypothesis, the iconic deep structure must, first, be consistent with the empirically observable content; and second, if the generalizations are correct, it should be possible to extend them beyond the original evidence to explain other works in the same tradition. Thus, *an IDS is a hypothetical system of thought that explains the collective dreamwork of a culture*—and I use this idea to explore the covert symbolism of industrial society.

As Sigmund Freud showed in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, information that is unacceptable to consciousness, because of cultural taboos or whatever reason, manifests itself in a distorted or disguised form, such as jokes, dreams, or "Freudian" slips, a process he called *repression*.⁵ Freud's original insight was based on his experience as a medical doctor. As medical practitioners are well aware, people who lose a limb by amputation frequently have the experience that the limb is still attached to the body, a well-documented phenomenon known as the phantom limb experience. In this syndrome, the body part is objectively missing, but the patient's body, on some fundamental experiential level, refuses to accommodate to the altered morphology of its physical form. Freud's concept of repression is the logical opposite of the phantom limb effect, for in the repressed patient the body part is objectively there, apparent for all to see, but its existence is experientially denied, so that the person acts as if the body part were not attached to himself. Implicit in Freud's original formulation of repression is the idea that there is a systematic relationship between traumatic acts directed towards the body on one hand and the fantasy or denial of bodily experience on the other. Repressed patients no longer experience physically attached parts of their body, just as amputees fantasize body parts that are no longer there. Freud saw the source of these phenomena as trauma, a medical term meaning a wound or injury to the body; and he generalized it to include purely symbolic acts—mental traumas that leave the physical body intact but seriously damage the internal perception of it.

However, where Freud saw the process of repression as taking place primarily inside the head of the individual patient, I see it as a fundamentally social process that is defined in terms of the symbolic body of a culture.⁶ In the symbolic anthropological approach, *repression* occurs

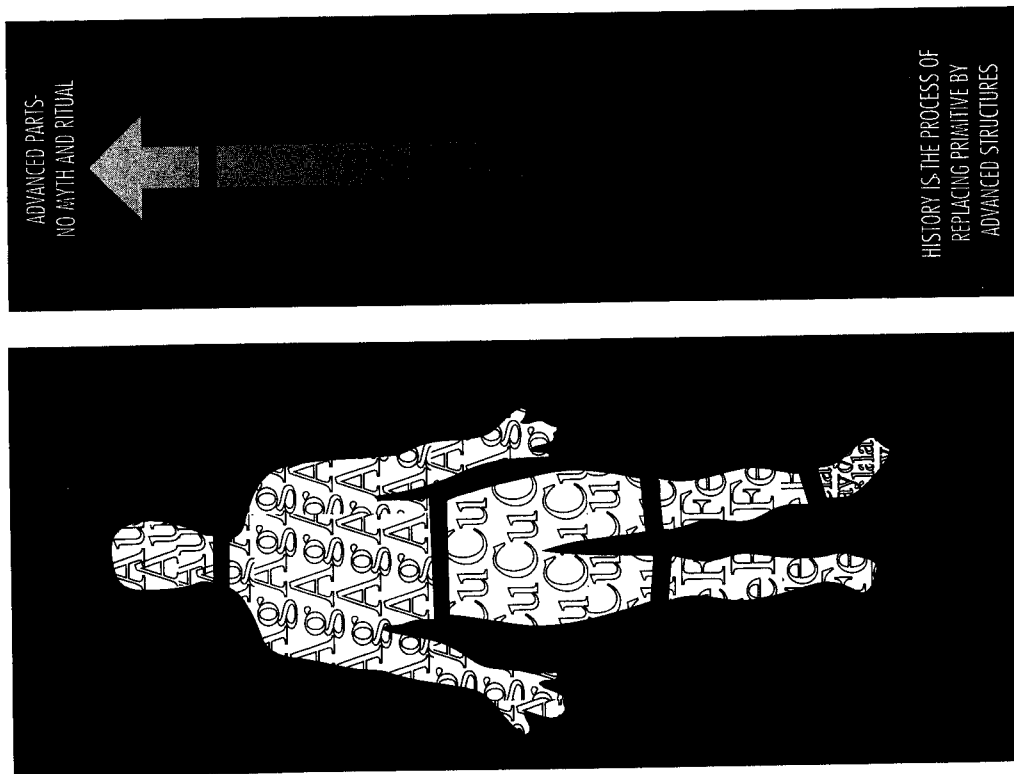


Figure 3.1 Folk theories of technological change are based on the covert imagery of the symbolic body.

when a culture collectively ignores or denies the relevance of parts of the human body and fails to represent them in its definition of the "human species." That is, in repressive situations, the culture establishes an idealized body image that differs in significant ways from the biological body, and it prescribes techniques, both physical and symbolic, for bringing the observable world into conformity with this ideal. Typically, the biological body itself is altered, by means of clothes, makeup, tattoos, deformations, and so on, to ensure that real human beings match the idealized image. In addition, in the realm of art and imagery, the taboo body parts are removed from the collective representation of the human species and relegated to an underworld of unconscious forms. Thus, repression is equivalent to an act of mutilation on the symbolic body that produces an amputated symbolic body part (called the *amputatum*) and a purified residue of the process (the *puritatum*). The purified residue becomes the overt part of the cultural representation—the official body image—whereas the amputata are relegated to the covert symbolic content.

The *Star Wars* trilogy is ideal for demonstrating this interaction of overt and covert symbolism. First, the movies were great commercial successes, indicating that they resonate to the values and beliefs of contemporary Americans. Second, they are representative of the genre, and Baird Searles says in his *Films of Science Fiction and Fantasy* that for many people *Star Wars* is the best science-fiction film ever made.⁷ Also, they consciously present themselves as "high-tech" movies, both in the technology portrayed and in their method of production. Moreover, they spawned a whole host of spinoff products, including adventure novels and children's books that elaborate on the symbolism, making it more accessible and transparent. In addition, the movies are available on videotape, so it is easy for anyone interested in analyzing them to view them at slow speed and to stop at particular frames. Finally, the name "Star Wars" is symbolic enough to have entered popular culture in another way: It was adopted by critics of the arms race as a derogatory label for the proposed nuclear defense shield of laser-toting satellites first introduced by President Reagan and known to its advocates as the Strategic Defense Initiative or SDI.⁸

The Mythology of *Star Wars*

Oddly enough, the first film in the trilogy, *Star Wars*, released by Twentieth Century-Fox in 1977, begins with the subtitle "Episode IV:

A New Hope." Why does the series, especially a series with three movies, begin with Episode IV? Although George Lucas is on record as saying that two trilogies were originally written, not one, this does not explain why he started with the second half of the story or why he did not simply renumber the episodes. Such discrepancies in the overt symbolism are usually indicators of repressed content on a deep structure level, and the task of the symbolic anthropologist is to postulate an IDS that explains the anomalies on the surface. One interpretation that is consistent with the symbolic content of the movies is that the Roman numerals are to be taken as letters. In this case, the number IV is really a pair of letters, "I" and "V," which together form a commonly used abbreviation for "intravenous," a phrase known to anyone who has been in an American hospital. Venous blood is deoxygenated blood, dark red in color, that is returning to the heart, and *intravenous* means "inserted into the veins," as with a syringe or an IV catheter. It is consistent with this interpretation that at the very beginning of *Star Wars*, when Princess Leia is captured by the troops of the Evil Empire, she is injected with some sort of drug by a hovering, hypodermic robot shaped like a black sphere.

In addition to the image of foreign substances injected into the blood, the name of the arch villain, the black-robed and helmeted Darth Vader, is in my view a symbolic transformation of the phrase "dark invader," conceptualized as an intruder into the collective body. Significantly, in the spinoff books, he is denoted Lord of the Sith, where Sith is obviously an anagram of shit, so the reference to bodily functions is not far off. Freud showed in *The Interpretation of Dreams* that symbolic content is often disguised by anagrams that rearrange the letters of words, by puns that substitute one meaning for another, by the deletion of speech sounds or letters, and by the combination of separate words into new condensed images. As shown in Figure 3.2, all of these processes are at work in the transformation of the phrase Dark Invader into the name Darth Vader. In English, the phrase "Bite your tongue!" is used when someone says something that they ought not to have said, and this gesture is also a speech sound in the language, ordinarily written "th," and articulated by placing the tip of the tongue between the teeth, as in the last phonemes of *tooth* and *teeth*, and the first phonemes of *thick* and *thin*. Linguists call this speech sound theta, written θ , and if you apply the cultural injunction "Bite your tongue!" to the word *dark* as you pronounce it, the final consonant is transformed from k to θ —from *dark* to *darth*. In addition, the dreamwork removes incongruous elements from

dark invader. For example, if the phrase *dark invader* is run together as a single word (*darkinvader*), then the word *kin* is seen to be embedded in the middle of it. But as consciousness recognizes that this element is inappropriate to the larger meaning of the phrase, indeed conflicts with it, the dreamwork says "No kin of mine!"—and out goes *kin*, transforming *darkinvader* to *darvader*. Indeed, Darth Vader's audio anxiety is even audible in the movie as the heavy-breathing track that follows him around like an obscene caller. These two transformation processes together produce the name Darth Vader from the prototype *dark invader*:

darkinvader + No kin of mine! → *darvader*

and

darvader + Bite your tongue! → *darthvader*.

In confirmation of this interpretation, Darth Vader's name before he became the evil servant of the Emperor was Anakin. This name not only incorporates the *kin* element extracted with the first transformation, but *ana* itself is a prefix with several meanings, one of which is "similar to," as in the word *analog*. So Anakin translates to Darth Vader in his kin-like aspect: that is, Darth Vader as Luke Skywalker's father, a genealogical fact that is revealed in *Return of the Jedi*.

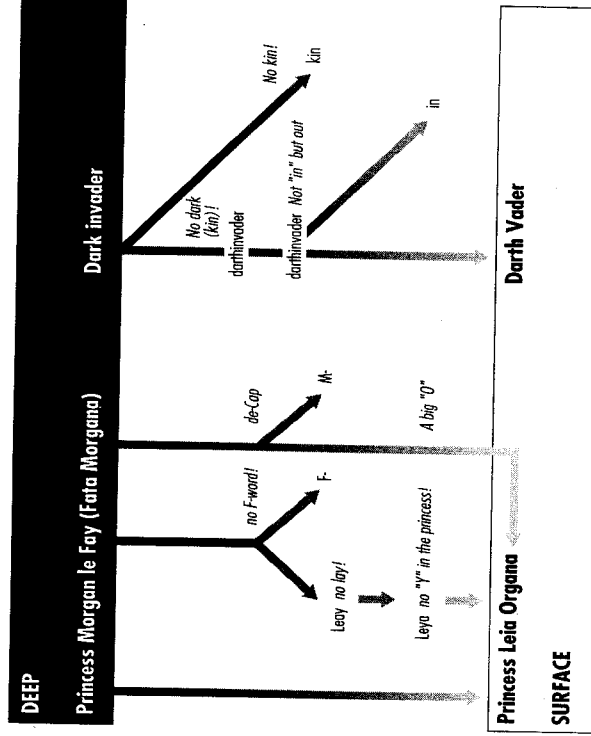


Figure 3.2 The names of characters in *Star Wars* are transformations of covert imagery.

But if *kin* combines with *ana* to become *anakin*, then where does *ana* itself come from? The title Lord of the Sith suggests *anal* as a possibility, but interpretations that explain multiple elements in the story are preferable to those that explain but a few. For this reason, I suggest that the first half of *Anakin* is primarily derived from *Fata Morgana*, the elusive mirage seen in the Strait of Messina and attributed to King Arthur's wicked half sister Morgan le Fay. This too is not surprising, for there is already a princess in the story, and princesses imply kings. Also, the term *morgan* has strong genealogical associations that go well with *kin*, encoding both a blood relation of the mythical King Arthur, and a form of marriage, namely *morganatic*, which is a union between a noble person and one of inferior rank in which neither the lower-ranked person nor the children born of the marriage are eligible to inherit the noble's title or property. The hypothesis that Morgan le Fay is the source of both Anakin and Princess Leia is confirmed by the credits of the movie which give Princess Leia's full name as Leia Organa. As shown in Figure 3.2, the prototype phrase "Princess Morgan le Fay (Fata Morgana)" is transformed by a series of symbolic operations that repress the objectionable idea, namely that the heroine, far from being the innocent maiden that she is portrayed to be on the screen, is in reality a temptress and a sorceress. In English, when a woman is regarded as only a sexual object, she is said to be a *fuck* or a *lay*, who is *taken to bed*, and the word *fuck* itself in polite society is sometimes called the "F-word." Thus, the name Morgan le Fay is a perfect crystallization of these ideas because there is an F "embedded" in a *lay*, namely *Le(F)ay*. If the F element is removed, the remainder is still *lay*, which retains the original idea, so the content is further disguised by rearranging the letters and substituting *i* for *y*: *Leay* → *Leya* → *Leia*. As for Morgana, the capital letter is removed, or, more precisely, the word itself is de-"capitated," giving the transformation *Morgana* → *M* + *organa*. Also, the *organa* element is then capitalized, making it the new capital or surrogate name. Finally, the desexualized woman (Leia) is merged with the decapitated product of her own sorcery (Organa) to give us the insipid image of the Princess herself, dressed in a white smock like a resurrected virgin, with her hair done up in the style of a Hopi Indian maiden.

In the *Star Wars* trilogy, each intermediate stage of derivation in the deep structure generates its own surface structure imagery. This process is shown in Figure 3.3, in which the *lay* of Morgan le Fay is combined with the *fata* left over from Fata Morgana to become the Jabba the Hutt scene in *Return of the Jedi*. Described in one of the spinoff

books as a wicked, repulsive blob of fat, Jabba the Hutt is shown sucking on a hooka pipe, like the caterpillar in *Alice in Wonderland*.⁹ Visually, Jabba has a broad, toad-like mouth that dominates his entire face, and this orality is reflected in his name, which is composed of a pair of "fleshy" bilabial stop consonants (b...b) and a pair of primary t...t's. This is no coincidence, for Jabba's henchman, Boba Fett, has a name that exemplifies the same principles (bb...tt), as does his lieutenant Bib Fortuna (bb). Significantly, this is the only scene in the trilogy in which we see Leia's body: she is chained to Jabba's throne wearing a bikini,¹⁰ each breast accentuated by a coiled snake of wrought gold. Her hair is braided into two intertwined strands that hang between her breasts. Moreover, Leia shares the frame with Jabba's prominent hooka pipe, a pair of hemispheric vessels as large as she is. Leia's bare skin is enhanced by Jabba's throne, which is itself a pile of animal skins, and by the scalps hanging from the bounty hunter's belt. Thus, the Jabba the Hutt scene is a pastiche of the elements that have been removed from the female prototype to create Leia the white-robed princess: the body fat, the nurturing breasts, the snake-like tresses, the hairy patches of skin, and the viper-like lures of her sexuality. With this constellation of imagery, can the vagina dentata be far behind? As if on cue, Jabba decrees that the male heroes are to be thrown into a pit inhabited by a monster, the Sarlacc of Carakoon, which is a huge slimy mouth surrounded by teeth.

In *Star Wars*, not only in this example, but throughout the entire trilogy, there is a schism between the surface structure commentary on events and the imagery of the events themselves. These movies operate on two distinct planes: on one level, they are adventure stories about good versus evil and freedom versus tyranny, but at the same time they reference traditional mythological elements in such a way that a native speaker of English will subconsciously make a very different interpretation of the images on the screen. Leia Organa, who is visually portrayed as a lily-white maiden of exemplary virtue, has a name that is derived from Morgan le Fay, and in the Jabba the Hutt scene, the seductive aspects of her body and its consequences for manly virtue are unequivocally displayed. The negative connotations of Leia's character rationalize the actions that are done to her, transforming her in the audience's eyes from innocent victim to deserving recipient. In the first film alone, Leia is stunned by a laser gun, shot with a hypodermic syringe, forcibly shown the power of the Death Star (which vaporizes the planet Alderon), and confined to a prison cell. When she is finally rescued by

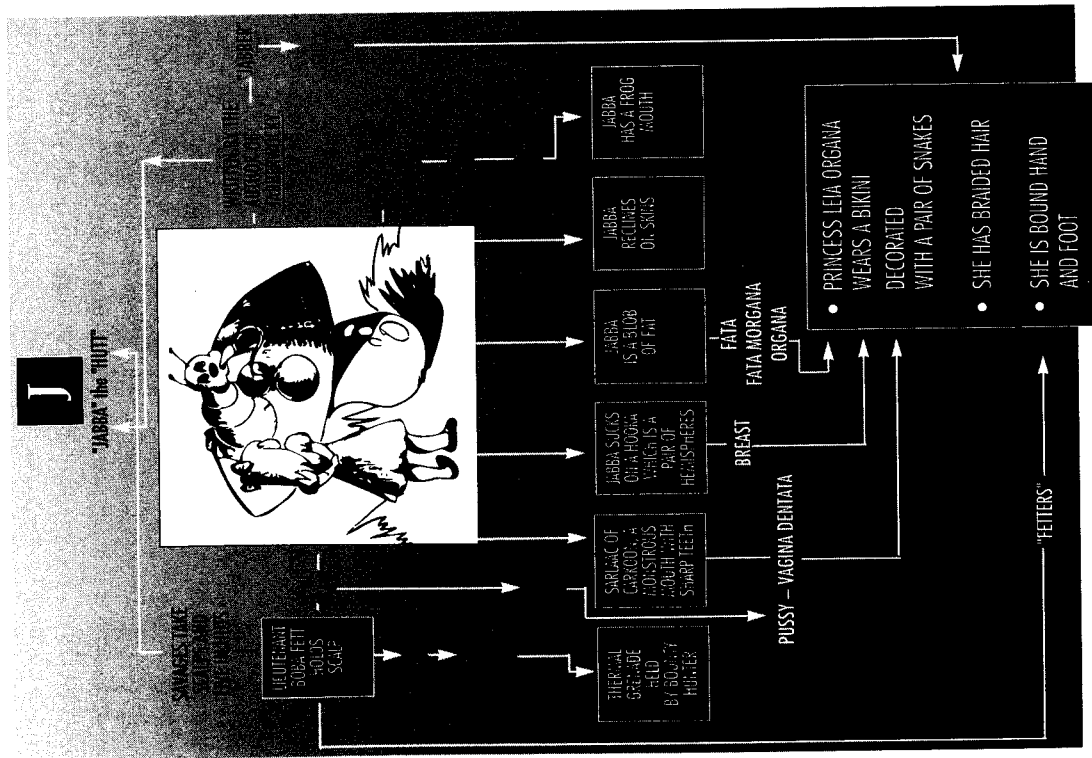


Figure 3.3 *Star Wars*' Jabba the Hutt is a transformation of the caterpillar scene in *Alice in Wonderland*.

the heroes, she expresses her thanks by giving them orders in a haughty tone of voice, insults Han Solo's sidekick, and then leads them all into a foul-smelling garbage chute, which drops them into a cesspool inhabited by a slimy monster. So much for female gratitude and leadership.

In the *Star Wars* series, there is a profound discrepancy between what the movie says it is doing and what the images actually convey. It says it is portraying women as leaders by making Princess Leia head of state and the matronly Mon Mothma (who?) commander of the rebel forces when in fact the real heroes are Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker, and Han Solo. By filling the screen with alien creatures bustling about, the movie says that the galaxy is a polyglot, multicultural society, but in fact all the nonhumans in the films, with the exception of Yoda, are either subordinate to humans or only nominally in charge. The characters say that the Force is a spiritual power, but in fact it always manifests itself as military superiority. The titles say that the Empire is evil and the rebels good, but there is little difference between them in their behavior or concerns, which invariably involve weapons development and plans of attack. In short, the *Star Wars* movies exemplify an Orwellian use of language and imagery, in which Sexism is Equality, War is Freedom, Planets are Targets, and all moral distinctions are collapsed into the martial and mechanistic vision of the space-race technology itself—just like the society that produced it.

Dark Invader

Nowhere is the discrepancy between deep structure and surface structure more apparent than in the dramatic weight of the "hero" relative to that of the "villain." The ostensible hero of the series, Luke Skywalker, is a boring nonentity, but Darth Vader is a memorable creation of the film maker's art. Who is this masked man? In our deep structure model, the anagrammar of Anakin, D.V. is doubtlessly V.D., venereal disease; and the history of V.D. in the past decade is largely the history of AIDS.¹¹ I realize, of course, that AIDS was not yet "discovered" in 1977 when the first movie was released, but, like moviegoers, let us suspend our disbelief and follow these characters through to the end. Let us assume that the dark invader is the immune deficiency syndrome, or AIDS, nowadays known as the HIV virus or AIDS. In support of this interpretation, the term HIV contains *ids* as does the title *Episode IV*, and, second, the word AIDS contains *ids*, which alludes to Freud, the doctor of sexual repression, so it is highly appropriate symbolically. Also,

one gets AIDS by exchanging body fluids, particularly by sexual intercourse, but also from IVs, injections, and contaminated blood; and we have already noted the black robotic sphere that inoculates Princess Leia. What does the HIV virus look like? Well, the published photomicrographs show it as a sphere covered with short appendages, like a thistle with blunt thorns—not exactly a carbon copy of Darth Vader's automated syringe but nonetheless a sphere with inoculative powers. Did George Lucas know about AIDS as early as 1977, even earlier when production time is taken into account? Probably not, but he did know about the values of the technocracy, its images, and aspirations; and he understood on a symbolic level that if there were no AIDS it would be necessary to invent it.

AIDS is not just a disease; it is also a symbol—retribution for illicit sex and drug use, and this complex of ideas has a long history in American culture. The anthropologist Emily Martin, who has studied the symbolic content of modern medical literature, concludes that Americans see the human body as a culturally constructed barrier between themselves and outside invaders.¹² This barrier is also thought of as a machine that wages war on alien microbes, which must be recognized, neutralized, and ultimately exterminated. The medical expression of this symbolic complex is the immune system, a cluster of physiological responses, including white blood cells, antibodies, and cellular memory, which is specialized for recognizing and eliminating intruders into the body. Since the physiological immune system is the culture's first line of defense against alien invaders, a disease like AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome), which is a permanent breach in the biological barrier, is particularly terrifying, for it leaves the body exposed to all other sources of infection. Moreover, the way in which AIDS is transmitted potentiates these fears, for it feeds into the puritanical distrust of the body as a source of sin, seems to confirm the idea of physical retribution for immoral acts, underscores the subversive role of homosexuals and drug addicts, and highlights the danger of pollution from such bodily fluids as blood and semen.¹³

In conformity with the imagery that underlies AIDS, the *Star Wars* trilogy presents an endless succession of barriers being breached. The first film begins with Darth Vader's Imperial storm troopers bursting through the defenses of Princess Leia's ship and taking her prisoner. Then the bad guys destroy Luke Skywalker's home and kill his foster parents. When the heroes' ship is pulled into the Death Star by a tractor beam, the heroes, disguised as storm troopers, break through the Death Star's

defenses, rescuing the princess from her cell. In the rebel counterattack, the somatic imagery is made even more explicit, as the heroes fly their ships up "the thermal exhaust port, right below the main exhaust," which is the "only vulnerable target" on the Death Star. In *Return of the Jedi*, the plot hinges on destroying the power source of the Death Star's invisible deflector shield, which makes it otherwise "impenetrable."

Thus, *Star Wars* shares with AIDS the symbolic concept of the body as a machine that protects against alien invaders that penetrate it during acts of sexual intimacy or through contact with contaminated blood, but the movie focuses on the overt body of defense and counterattack, while the underlying motivation of contaminated body fluids is barely hinted at in the surface structure. Nonetheless, it is the imagery of infection through sexual contact that ties together the sorceress Morgan le Fay, the desexualized Princess Leia, the scene with Jabba the Hutt, and the references to V.D., IV, and dark invaders. In fact, the very concept of the hero in *Star Wars* is almost coextensive with *fluid-free bodies* constructed of mechanically generated parts. Lightsabers are the weapons of choice for Jedi knights because they cut clean, presumably cauterizing the wounds they make. When Darth Vader chops off Luke Skywalker's right hand with a lightsaber, not a drop of blood is visible on the screen, and no body fluids of any kind appear in any of the *Star Wars* movies, even though the heroes shoot their way through throngs of Imperial storm troopers.

In *Stars Wars*, flesh and blood are conceptualized as primitive, whereas heroes are made of radiant energy. Princess Leia, Luke Skywalker, and Ben (Obi-Wan) Kenobi make appearances as lifelike holograms, which in the case of Leia and Luke are projected from the head of R2-D2. In other words, these characters are unequivocally good because their biological bodies have been encoded in mechanical brains and regenerated as waves of light. In the same vein, Jedi warriors fight with laser-like beams of light portrayed as hand-held sabers; and in the case of the Emperor, who is even more closely connected to the Force, albeit to its Dark Side, crackling, blue, light waves of energy emanate directly from his hands. The equation of spirituality with light and baseness with fluids is also conveyed in the scenes with Yoda, the alien trainer of Jedi knights. In this sequence, Luke and the faithful R2-D2 crash-land in a marsh on Dagobah, which is entangled with vines and inhabited by ominous aquatic creatures. There Luke meets Yoda, who begins to train him in levitation, psychokinesis, and other "spiritual" skills. These so-called spiritual strengths are themselves

emblems of disembodied action, and the diminutive Yoda demonstrates the Force by lifting Luke's spaceship out of the primal marsh by the power of mental concentration alone. Significantly, a few scenes later, Han Solo mentions matter-of-factly that the Imperial fleet always dumps its garbage before going to light speed.

The Y-forked Organ

The contrast between contaminating fluids, associated with biological processes, and a spiritual power, manifested as mental control of radiant energy, creates a corresponding bifurcation of the human body into those parts that are associated with pollution and those associated with intellect and the perception of light. In the technocratic world view, where heads are considered "advanced" structures, the hind parts are necessarily "primitive" and often threatening. The *Star Wars* movies exemplify these assumptions in a variety of ways. First of all, evil characters typically are masked, so that their human facial features are disguised. The Imperial storm troopers wear face protectors and full body armor; the bounty hunters wear ominous helmets; and Darth Vader himself is both helmeted and masked. At the court of Jabba the Hutt, almost everyone is masked except the heroes and the alien species. The good guys, in contrast, never wear armor except as a disguise, and even when they don aviator helmets to go into battle, their faces are left exposed. Almost the only exceptions to this rule are the Emperor, who wears a monk-like cowl, and his officers and crew, who wear uniforms like those of the German army. Alien species, of course, are exempt from this rule because it is their odd or deformed heads that mark them as alien in the first place: Jabba, Yoda, Akbar, and so on.

But if the Emperor and his crew are evil, why are they portrayed with human heads? The Emperor is said to embody the Dark Side of the Force, the same Force that throbs in Luke Skywalker, and we are told that even Jedi knights can be captured by the Dark Side, as was Luke's own father Darth Vader. So the evil Empire and its rebels are really kinfolk after all, as closely related as father and son, so it is hardly surprising that both have human forms. Notice, however, that this kinship system is rigorously patrilineal, for both Luke and Leia admit to having no recollection of their mother, and nowhere does she appear in the plot. Although Leia is said to be Luke's twin sister, the closest thing there is to motherhood in the entire trilogy is a stern, white-robed woman, the putative commander of the rebel alliance: Mon Mothma,

a series of nasalized bilabials (m...m...m) in a war room full of men. In the technocracy, heroes are born of light and not of woman.

This suggests that the head is not only the most advanced part of the human body but the most *male* part as well. In Nebuchadnezzar's Dream, for example, it is no accident that the golden head of the statue is that of a king, not a queen, and that the most fragile and ignoble element, namely clay, is the material which partly forms the feet. Moreover, these anatomical metaphors are endemic in the English language. In American English, for example, it is common to refer to people by the body parts that exemplify their social roles, such that sex objects can be denoted as *tail* or *ass*, obnoxious persons as *assholes*, and ethnic groups by idealized skin color, such as *Whites* and *Negroes*. Also, as the anthropologist Edmund Leach points out, the equation

deity = human phallus = totemic animal = human head = nose

probably occurs in all known human mythologies. Moreover, the totem animal itself is often a species with prominent headgear, such as beards and dewlaps, plumes and horns, antlers and cockscombs, and this principle is exemplified in English by the word *stag*. English speakers who have never even seen one of these animals in their lives and who may even think it a distinct species know very well that it means "lone male" or "men only," as in *to go stag* and *stag party*. Linguistic techniques show that the word *stag* is vintage English, traceable through Middle English and Anglo-Saxon right back to Proto-Indo-European, the ancestral language from which most European tongues diverged. The Proto-Indo-European root of *stag* means "to sting" or "to prick." *Prick?* This loanword from German has become American slang for "penis," so even in ordinary English we can see the symbolic equivalence of the totem animal, the phallus, and the human head as pointed out by Edmund Leach. Moreover, in imagery the world over, the head of the body is associated with the dominant power relations in a community, as with *heads of families* and *heads of state*.

But do not women have heads too? Anatomically perhaps, but in the androcentric mythology of the technocracy, females have only *one* head whereas men have *two*, connected to each other by a wooden trunk to form a Y-shaped architecture. The *upper fork* is the male head in social and intellectual aspect, the *lower fork* the energetic, phallic aspect. In the war-room scene of *The Return of the Jedi*, where the rebels plan their attack on the second Death Star, all three kinds of human heads are on display together: desexualized female heads in the form of Leia

and Mon Mothma; powerful male heads in the form of Luke, Han Solo, and the soldiers; and a third head, the phallic head, in the form of nameless, funny-looking creatures with enormous hairless heads covered with shiny skin and punctuated by a pair of thick, fleshy eyestalks, like the eyes of snails and slugs. In this androcentric system, where the organ of procreation is the head, the phallus itself is accorded cephalic properties, such as eyes, brain, and the power of independent action; and this idea, while seemingly idiosyncratic, is in fact one of the most venerable concepts in the human mythological repertory. The Y-forked concept of the human head, combining both the phallus and the animal head into a single composite image, is one of the first ideas ever to be represented in symbolic media by the human species. From the Upper Paleolithic in France, the period with the oldest artistic works known to archaeology, excavators in the last century found a Y-forked piece of reindeer antler in which the prongs are carved into both a human phallus and the head of a snake, which dates from about 30,000 years ago.¹⁴ Also, in the mural art of that era, there are animal heads topping human figures with erect phalluses; and the male head, divorced from the rest of the body, occurs as a design motif, as at the rock shelter at La Marche, where dozens of examples have been found. Thus, the iconic deep structure of the technocracy, with its disembodied male heads and Y-forked phallic/cephalic structures, is perfectly consistent with both the comparative study of human mythology and the archaeological history of imagery.

The imagery of the Y-shaped male organ is almost as important to technocratic mythology as Nebuchadnezzar's Dream, for it encodes the masculine properties associated with the golden head of the king, namely, phallic and intellectual power. In science, the life force in male aspect is represented by the Y chromosome, but in *Star Wars* it is conveyed by the scenes with Yoda, a shriveled 900-year-old alien guru on the swamp planet Dagobah, a world with "massive life-form readings." In Lucas's films, the hot spots of the technocratic mythology are realized by visually powerful images, such as Darth Vader, that strongly contrast to the stunning two-dimensionality of a Leia or a Luke; and Yoda is an appealing character, whose look and set was closely supervised by Lucas himself. In fact, the director of *The Empire Strikes Back*, Irvin Kershner, says that the Yoda sequence is "the heart of the picture."¹⁵ Significantly, this little, misshapen creature who embodies the Force is almost all Y-shaped head, with enormous fleshy ears pointing out to the sides, and even his name begins with a "Y." Timelessness is

conveyed not only by Yoda's great age but also by his name, an anagram of *today*, and by his large, pointed ears, for *Y + ears = Years*. Also, as if to emphasize that this particular character inverts the symbolic order of the two male heads, giving primacy to phallic instead of intellectual power, Yoda speaks in portentous subject/predicate inversions, such as "Fear you will know soon." Appropriate too is that Yoda's voice is played by an impersonator with the name of Frank Oz—reminiscent of the disembodied head of the wizard.

In *Star Wars*, the shaft of the "Y" is also a literal character. In the androcentric mythology, the shaft that connects the two forks in the man's body is not made out of flesh and blood but *heartwood*, a bloodless, generative substance that contrasts to the bleeding hearts of wimpy males; and this image is embodied in the Wookiee Chewbacca. This alien creature, covered with long, shaggy hair, is Han Solo's ever-present sidekick, and he seems to violate all of the rules of gender-appropriate behavior. He is a nonhuman creature, not a machine, yet he is perennially associated with the real heroes of the story, accompanying them on their adventures. Even though he is covered with hair, he is both a fierce fighter and a skilled pilot, and in no way effeminate. Although intelligent enough to play three-dimensional chess and to reassemble the disarticulated C-3PO, he is nonetheless completely inarticulate, communicating only in emotional screeches. Also, he not only appears bigger than the other characters; he is in fact played by an actor who is over seven feet tall. And what are we to make of his odd name?

Although chewing tobacco is the most masculine of cuds, the vegetative associations of the Wookiee have far deeper roots than this. We first meet Chewbacca in a bar, which is a place that sells fermented beverages; and historically in European culture, fermentation is associated with the wine god Bacchus, from *baccate*, which means "bearing berries." There is also a homonymous word, *baccalaureate*, which is cognate with *baculum* or staff, such as what a shepherd carries, and it is semantically associated with the "sheepskin," which corresponds to the Wookiee's hairy pelt. Princess Leia even calls Chewbacca a "walking carpet." In addition, there are strong chess associations. Wookiee sounds like *rook*, which is a chess piece, one of a pair of crenelated towers, also known as castles, that typically protect the king in the end game. That the Wookiee is a chess piece as well as a berry is shown by the fact that he plays chess and sometimes wears a bandolier of alternating black and white squares. Also, Han Solo merges the two images when he says that when Wookiees lose at chess they like to tear

the arms off their opponents—the image of a trunk without limbs. Thus, it is hinted at in the surface structure that Wookiees make trees, as do nuts and berries. Also, chewing tobacco, the surface etymology, is also a kind of leaf, reinforcing these vegetative associations. Moreover, in preindustrial European mythology, the equation of hair with leaves and blood with sap is commonplace. Thus, Chewbacca is the vertical shaft of the letter “Y,” as solid as an oak and as germinative as an acorn.

When the phallic tine of the male fork is contrasted with the cephalic tine, the latter outranks the former, creating the bifurcation into higher and lower forks; but when the entire male body is contrasted with that of females, both male heads radiate with a captivating light. The pair of male heads in radiant aspect corresponds to the pair of male twins hatched from the same egg, the Gemini of the Romans and the Dioscuri of the Greeks. In the English language, the equation between male heads and radiant celestial bodies is further reinforced by the pun of *son* and *sun*, which Shakespeare used to good effect in the opening speech of *Richard III* (“Now is the winter of our discontent Made glorious summer by this sun of York.”). Indeed, when we first meet Luke Skywalker, he lives on a planet with a pair of suns visible in the sky, one bright, the other clouded over. In *Star Wars*, the mythological twins (who are never completely symmetrical because one is left and one is right) are Luke Skywalker and Captain Han Solo, who often fight as partners against the Evil Empire, but who also go their separate ways when Luke is dealing with the Force. Han Solo is the less spiritual of the two, with the attributes of an ancient sun god (*Solo* as in *Of Sol*): like the Egyptian Ra he flies in a ship called the *Falcon*, keeps Luke from freezing to death on Hoth (Thoth, the Egyptian moon in male aspect), is tortured by “clouds” (that is, by the ruler of the Cloud City of Bespin), can be frozen by carbonite (that is, “black night”), moves in concert with the moon (that is, with Leia on the Moon of Endor), and is consistently associated with Chewbacca, the male vegetative force. Where Han is a good right han(d) man, Luke’s right hand was cut off by Darth Vader in Episode V and replaced by a robotic device, suggesting that his nature is further to the left, more spiritual and cerebral—which in the technocracy is equivalent to cephalic control of radiant energy.

Luke’s spiritual mission is reflected in the name *Luke*, which is probably short for *Lucifer*, “the light-bearer,” and an eponym of Lucas himself. As George Lucas tells Alan Arnold, “I wanted a concept of religion based on the premise that there is a God and that there is good and evil.

I began to distill the essence of all religions into what I thought was the basic idea common to all religions and common to primitive thinking.”¹⁶ Clearly, the name *skywalker* is not what it seems to be, for “one who walks in the sky” is still too down-to-earth for anyone who can distill the essence of all religions into three adventure films. If Princess Organa is any indication, then the last name of the character is closer to the deep structure derivation than the first name, and this suggests that the prototype of *skywalker* is not the obvious surface structure “sky” at all but the Proto-Indo-European root **skeh-*, “to cut” and “to split”—the origin of the word *science* itself, the real religion in the series. The root **skeh-* is the ancestor not only of the Latin *scientia* but Celtic “knife,” Greek *schism*, and English *shit*. Thus **skeh-* is the process that separates the pure from the polluted, the orthodox from the heterodox, the enlightened from the ignorant. Luke Skeh-walker is **skeh-* in the aspect of science, whereas the evil Anakin Skeh-walker (Darth Vader) is **skeh-* in the aspect of male shit (Lord of the Sith). These two aspects of **skeh-* are “split” even before Luke is born by the affinity of Anakin for the Dark Side of the Force, which even the enlightened Ben Kenobi is powerless to prevent. In the same way, the mother of the celestial twins, Luke and Leia, disappears at birth, split off, apparently forever, from her offspring. Next, the male and female pair, Luke and Leia, are themselves parted at birth by Ben Kenobi in order to protect them from the Empire, that is, from the Dark Side. Finally, the attributes of the temptress and sorceress Morgan le Fay are split from the white-robed Princess Leia, where they pool in the throne room of Jabba the Hutt. *To cut, to chop, to split, to separate*: This is indeed the essence of the technocratic religion.

Splitting the body into mirror images helps to sustain the one-two punch. First, by defining one part of the body as alien nature polluting to the purified remainder, it necessitates a process of ritual purification that cuts off, symbolically or literally, the offending organ; and, second, it creates a new, dark force, cut off from the body, that threatens to re-enter and pollute it. Thus, purity and pollution form a single, self-sustaining cycle, which is why Luke Skywalker and his companions must penetrate the Death Star and remove the purified female element (Leia) before they can destroy the Death Star. The incorporation of purity and pollution into a single loop also explains why Sky(**skeh-*, “to cut”) is paired with Walker, an apparent contradiction because a walker is in contact with the ground. But in the movie, the contradiction is resolved by the imagery of what are called “Imperial

walkers"—huge, quadrupedal machines that attack the rebels on the ice planet Hoth. The name *walker* (pronounced in English with a silent "L") is cognate with the Proto-Indo-European **wak-* or "cow," and with Spanish *vaca* ("cow") and *vaquero* ("cowboy"). The cow is historically the source of the first vaccine, the smallpox vaccine; and the root of *vaca* is the linguistic source of the English word *vaccine*. Thus, the name Skywalker is a condensed image of the technological process, encoding both nature as a source of pollution (**skei-*, "to split off," "shit") and as a source of power if purified (**wak-*, "cow," "vaccine"). The full name, *Luke Skywalker, Son of Anakin*, encodes the entire technological mythology: namely, "the light-bearer who parts the cow shit (of nature)—in order to distill the pure inoculate that protects against pollution." In science as in Nebuchadnezzar's Dream, feet are soiled but heads are golden.

The Logic of Pure and Polluted

The *Star Wars* trilogy encodes the man-making process that produces the Y-forked organ and the golden head of Nebuchadnezzar. This process requires that radiant energy, epitomized by celestial light, be separated from fluids, especially blood. That is, women are born, but men are made by splitting themselves off from women and nature through ritual acts that either "shed blood" (their own) or show them to be literally "brilliant." These ritual acts of blood and fire, by separating the male and the female elements, leave behind bloody stumps and pools of body fluids that are by definition female and polluting.

The only relatively non-polluting body fluids in this system are *white* fluids, namely semen and mother's milk; but even these are gender-sensitive, for the color white is good in the case of females, as with the white-robed Princess Leia, but bad in the case of males, as with the white-armored storm troopers. Semen is a biological substance produced by the lower parts of the body in proximity to the organs of elimination, a fact which no amount of mystification can completely obliterate. For this reason, semen, although an unequivocally *male* fluid, homologized to stardust, is still a polluting substance; and the penis, although defined as a head, is conceptualized as the *lower* fork of the Y, inferior to the head of radiant light. Mothers' milk, the other white bodily fluid, is not high status either. In fact, in the United States it is generally considered bad even for mothers and infants, for the latter typically are fed store-bought formulas from sterilized bottles.¹⁷

In *Star Wars* this difference between head and phallus is expressed by the split between relatively *terrestrial* males such as Han Solo, who has a history of the illicit crossing of boundaries (both smuggling and smuggling—he kisses Princess Leia), and full-fledged *celestial* males, such as Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, the Emperor, and Obi-Wan Kenobi, who live in monastic isolation from women; wear black, monk-like cowls; and have apparently completely transcended a biological level of function. In this so-called "spiritual" realm, even semen is polluting; and Jabba the Hutt is portrayed as the embodiment of evil because he *likes* to suck fluids, presumably tit (the double-hemisphere hookah).

In the man-making process, the splitting of males from females occurs at birth, when the male baby is forever separated from his mother (female babies linger a little longer, which explains why Leia remembers her mother's smile but Luke remembers nothing at all). Moreover, the twin male and female in *Star Wars* suggests an androgynous infant that has been split into male and female "halves" by an act of purification, such as circumcision of the infant shortly after birth. In the United States, until recently, almost all male infants were circumcised, irrespective of the religion of their parents, which is very different from Europe, where this practice is typically restricted to Jews.¹⁸ In American popular culture, circumcision is defended in terms of cleanliness and reduced likelihood of infection, a rationale that attests to its connection with the logic of purity and pollution. Although the practice does have a biblical charter, the New Testament declares it irrelevant to Gentiles, but for Jews it is still a sign of the covenant between God and his chosen people. In *Star Wars*, there are no direct references to circumcision, but in *The Return of the Jedi*, the skin-headed alien in the war-room scene, which in my interpretation represents the phallus, is named Admiral Ackbar, an Arabic word meaning "great" and an appellation of Allah. This character is probably a veiled allusion to the custom of circumcision, which is associated with Jews and Moslems in American culture, and appears as a covert theme in *Star Wars*. Luke's benefactor, Ben (Obi-Wan) Kenobi, has a first name that is Hebrew for "son of"; and it is Ben who separates Luke and Leia at birth. Thus, the spirituality of males is further indicated by the act of circumcision, which literally "cuts off" (a piece of) the male organ from the rest of the body and marks the boy as one of the chosen people of God. Unlike Islam or Judaism, however, American culture views the act of circumcision as a routine medical procedure, done while the infant is still in the maternity ward, and there are no rituals surrounding either the act itself or

the disposal of the prepuce, so it does not in itself "make men." That comes in adolescence, when the young man is cut off from his home and incorporated into rituals of blood and fire, of which there are two distinct types, the military and the scientific.

Both of these man-making processes—the military and the scientific—are combined in the character of Luke Skywalker. At the beginning of the series, the adolescent Luke is split off from his home when his foster parents are literally killed by the soldiers of the Evil Empire, catapulting him into a world of blood (not shown) and fire (abundant) which he is powerless to fight. At this point, the retired trainer, Ben (Obi-Wan) Kenobi, takes Luke's career in hand and helps him to become a Jedi knight, an ancient class of warriors who defended the republic against the Empire and whose strength is based on the mental control of the Force. Thus, the plot of the *Star Wars* series is essentially the transformation of boys into men, which is to say, the differentiation of "male" at the expense of "female" parts of the body. Like all paranoid fantasies, the purity and pollution cult of industrial civilization is an exquisitely logical process that can, so to speak, be flow-charted (Figure 3.4).

Although, as *Star Wars* confirms, both science and war have the same ultimate goal of transforming boys into men, and they can be embodied in the same person, the two institutions are nonetheless distinguished by their very different strategies for dealing with female pollution. In the military strategy (or in its civilian analog, gang violence), the young man is trained to "shed blood"—namely that portion of his *own* blood that has been contaminated by women. This contaminated blood is symbolically equated with the dark, deoxygenated blood returning to the heart, which is also known as venous (that is, "Venus") blood because of its female associations. Male blood, however, is bright red blood, equated with arterial circulation, which is the sign of a strong, healthy heart, the seat of courage. This imagery is chartered in the mythology of industrialism, for who does not know that the first act of modern scientific medicine was Harvey's discovery of the circulation of blood?

When the imagery of male blood is assimilated to the logic of purity and pollution, warrior males can shed venous blood by shedding the blood of other males. Shedding female blood, or one's own blood in isolation, is useless in this respect, for it only contaminates one further. Thus, it is not blood *per se* but the social relations of male solidarity and male conflict that are the real purifying agents; and for this reason, in *Star Wars* male "blood shed" is depicted as a social activity, either

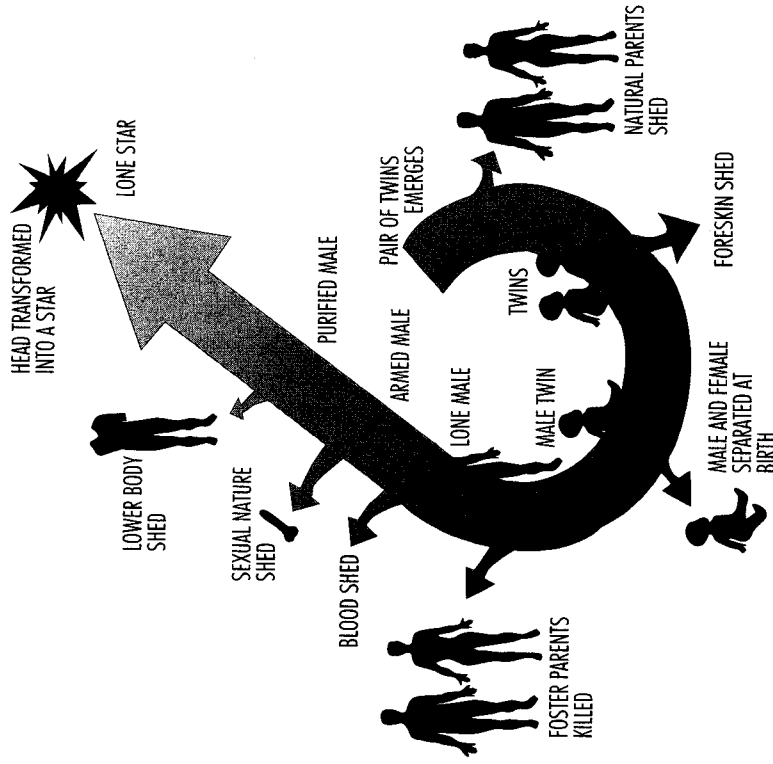


Figure 3.4 To purify the human body, first shed one's blood, then transform the remnant by fire.

the confrontation between armies, as in the concerted attacks on the Death Stars, or as one-on-one confrontations between warriors, as in the fencing scenes between Luke and Darth Vader.

In *Star Wars*, however, "blood shed" is conceptual, not biological, for men are made of light, not fluid; and attack is most effectively implemented by phallic- or cephalic-shaped objects that symbolize the male organ and simulate its association with celestial fire, such as guns, bombs, rockets, and other spherical or cylindrical devices that create explosions of light from a point source. The lightsaber, the weapon of choice for Jedi knights, also combines both the phallic shape and the imagery of celestial fire—but unlike the weapons of the purely military

heroes in the movie, it appears to be bloodless in its effects, killing without spilling. This weapon is more consistent with the scientific approach to purification, which is based not on the shedding of blood, but on making the cephalic fork more "brilliant" through the mental control of female nature.

The scientific pathway of purification (the upper fork of the "Y") is represented by the spiritual side of Jedi training. The name of Luke's benefactor, Ben (Obi-Wan) Kenobi, contains the Scottish dialect term for "to know" (*ken*), as well as the anagram of the English word *know*. In addition to his general knowledge, Obi-Wan is in contact with occult forces, and his name is suggestive of *obeah*, a form of black magic practiced in Guiana, a tradition probably known to Lucas through his interest in comparative mythology. In one scene, Ben (Obi-Wan) Kenobi, the trainer of Darth Vader and the benefactor of Luke, wears a *kimono* with a sash tied around the waist, reminiscent of a samurai warrior, and the Japanese word for "sash" is *obi*. The aristocratic element is present too, for O.B.E. means Order of the British Empire, a rank of knighthood; and the part of Kenobi is played by a knight in real life, Sir Alec Guinness. Also, Yoda, the other professional trainer of Jedi knights, has a strong propensity for Zen-speak, which any Californian knows is the religion of the samurai and the spirituality of choice for contemporary technocrats. Thus, in *Star Wars*, the "learned" characters are warriors and warlords, whose spirituality is measured by their prowess with a lightsaber and their willingness to use it. This portrayal of technocratic enlightenment is exactly right, for in natural science, as well as among modern academics generally, the search for truth is a search-and-destroy operation in which one "explodes" previous theories by a "brilliant" piece of work that establishes the scholar as the "top man" in his field—a *battle-field* presumably—while reason itself has become indistinguishable from sexual assault, full of probing questions and penetrating arguments. In *Star Wars*, as in the technocracy itself, knowledge and warfare are viewed as two aspects of the same system, differentiated primarily by their strategies of purification: warfare sheds contaminated blood through rites of male solidarity, whereas science polishes the cephalic head, making it more brilliant. Thus, the modern technocracy is an inherently mythological enterprise, a system of symbolic transformation processes that can be summarized as follows:

1. The first six axioms (including this one) are taboo, and may not be mentioned in writing or formal discourse.

2. The technocracy is the transformation and purification of "female" nature by means of celestial light and a "male" apparatus.
3. A "male" apparatus is one that mimics the imagery of the *Y-forked organ*, namely a Y-shaped piece of heartwood that branches into a phallus with eyes and a brilliant human head. The Y-forked organ and its transformed products have the additional attributes of *celestial, pure, and fiery*.
4. Non-celestial light (that is, light reflected from terrestrial, lunar, or female objects or surfaces) acquires "male" attributes when transformed with a Y-forked organ (the role of photography and related imaging processes).
5. By participation in the technocracy, the biological body of the male becomes a disembodied Y-forked organ.
6. The disembodied Y-forked organ leaves behind a "female body," that is, a biological residue consisting of lower limbs, trunk, gullet, and female genitalia. Femaleness, which is inferior to maleness, entails the additional contextually sensitive attributes of *terrestrial, lunar, incomplete, bloody, and contaminated*.
7. When eNobeled by the King of Sweden or by a comparable agency, the disembodied Y-forked organ is transformed into the symbolic equivalent of a celestial body—that is to say, a *star*.
8. The phallic fork of the Y-forked organ dies, but the eNobeled head is physically immortal, the genitor of a new species of man and of a more advanced society. (This is Nebuchadnezzar's Dream.)

The mythology of bloody stumps and exploding stars could easily be dismissed as absurd psychologizing were it not for the fact that the political life of Europe has been convulsed within living memory by purity and pollution cults very similar to this. As the Austrian scholar Klaus Theweleit has shown in a two-volume study of fascism, *Male Fantasies*, based on analysis of the books and images produced by members of the Nazi Party, the Freikorps, and other militarist reform movements in the German-speaking countries between the World Wars, these groups of soldier males (as he calls them) were held together by androcentric mythologies that celebrated male solidarity and unity, which in

turn was symbolized by the male head in both phallic and martial aspect, and expressed through acts of violence that had the intention of reducing one's male opponent to the state of "a bloody pulp"—which was also their image of women. As Theweleit expresses it: "The texts of the soldier males perpetually revolve around the same central axes: the communality of male society, nonfemale creation, rebirth, the rise upward to hardness and tension; the phallus climbing to a higher level. The man is released from a world that is rotten and sinking (from the morass of femaleness); he finally dissolves in battle."¹⁹

Similarly, Arno J. Mayer, a professor of history at Brandeis University, has analyzed the roots of the Holocaust in his book *Why Did the Heavens Not Darken?*, and he comes to the conclusion that the Nazi program was based on a comprehensive theory of blood and soil (*Blut und Boden*) in which so-called genetically inferior groups, including not just Jews but also Gypsies, criminals, and mental defectives, were seen as sources of pollution that caused diseases in the body politic. In fascist theory, Germany could be cured by restoring the body to its original wholeness (that is, by regaining lost territories) and by acts of purification that cleansed the "blood" (that is, the gene pool) by removing alien elements. This purification process entailed both the elimination of the impure elements and the regeneration of the pure male spirit through martial acts of bloodshed and fire. Significantly, the German term that is usually translated into English as "Master Race," namely *Herrenvolk*, means literally the race of "men" or "masters"; and Theweleit points out that it is necessarily composed only of males, for (in Nazi theory) men are the creative, intelligent, and culturally advanced element, whereas "Women . . . are not even Aryan (though they become so if they give birth as 'white women' to a quantity of master-sons)."²⁰ In other words, the master race is the purified male body, freed of its polluting elements and cleansed by celestial fire. Thus, fascism, in its most virulent form, is primarily a cult of purity and pollution that separates the "male" body from contamination by women and other inferior groups.

Fifty years later, *Star Wars* is celebrating these same themes. In the trilogy, the driving force of history is a militarist male solidarity in which women, when not actual captives, are, at best, spectators of male violence, nominal participants, or desexualized sister-companions in the manner of Diana the Huntress. More significantly, woman's contribution to birth, growth, and nurturance is effectively denied, for the children have no memory of their mothers; their teachers are black-robed

hermits or Y-shaped aliens; and only their fathers reckon in the genealogies. The beauty and sexuality of women is reduced to the court of Jabba the Hutt, in which the half-naked princess is exhibited as a captive, associated with vice and pollution, and paired with a monster vagina dentata.²¹ Moreover, *Star Wars* sucks its energy from a perpetual state of war, with stages of history demarcated by attack and counterattack, victory and defeat, with no discernible difference between the good guys and the bad. Yet it does not even have the honesty of the Nazi, who admitted to loving war and hating inferior races, but wraps itself in allusions to freedom and democracy, to the defense of the republic, and to the rights of savages and women. Significantly, at the end of the trilogy, in the final encounter with Darth Vader, Luke—his transformation complete—is shown wearing knee-high, black leather boots and a close-fitting, black tunic that looks for all the world like an SS uniform without the insignia.

If *Star Wars* were just a movie, a simulation of events divorced from action, it would hardly be cause for concern, but on another level *Star Wars* is an artistic elaboration of the symbolic body of technocratic society, defining what a human being should be, the processes of individual development, the goals of technical activities, and the relationship of human society to the natural world. Moreover, as shown in the next chapter, the logic of purified bodies, as well as the imagery of bloody stumps and exploding stars, is definitive of the scientific method itself.