

The Circle of Life: Nature and Representation in Disney's *The Lion King*



Seth Giddings
University of Southampton

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From the day we arrive on the planet
And blinking, step into the sun
There's more to see than can ever be seen
More to do than can ever be done
There's far too much to take in here
More to find than can ever be found
But the sun rolling high
Through the sapphire sky
Keeps great and small on the endless round

It's the circle of life
And it moves us all
Through despair and hope
Through faith and love
Till we find our place
On the path unwinding
In the circle
The circle of life(1)

The Lion King's circular narrative begins and ends not only with the birth of the king, but also with the film's title as a logo, dramatically linking the birth and rebirth of the narrative, the king and the corporation. Released in August 1994, it marks the tenth anniversary of Michael Eisner's chairmanship of Disney, his appointment resulting from the climax of a decade-long feud within this family company. The film's success marks the fruition of this new management's efforts to restore Disney's reputation and growth, after a decade of cautious and conservative management which saw it nearly destroyed by the threat of hostile takeover. Strategies of boosting public interest in Disney through merchandising, carefully controlled exposure of the studio's back catalogue on retail video, inroads into new television and film markets and relaunching the company's animation division (under Jeffrey Katzenberg), have been widely credited as reviving the company's fortunes

(not least through their generation of interest in, and new source material for, the most lucrative division of Disney: its theme parks). I will argue later that the content of *The Lion King*, as well its success, can be seen, in part, as the result of these upheavals.

This essay will examine the ways in which the *The Lion King's* imagery, narrative and themes (primarily those of family and nature) articulate contemporaneous cultural and political discourses around ethnic difference and class in the United States in the early 1990s to produce contradictory visions of both Africa and America. These concerns will be related to the particular contexts of the film's production (to animation as a film form, to the demands of merchandising, to the specifics of Disney as a studio and company) and to considerations of the film's target audience.

The Lion King's visual imagery is the culmination of an animation aesthetic of realism established by Disney in the 1930s with *Snow White*. Although all Disney's animated feature films have relied on simulating live-action conventions: 'classical realist narrative', three-dimensionality in characters and their movements, depth shots, pans, zooms, and edits, they can also be roughly divided into two trends: the cartoon-like graphic simplicity of films like *Dumbo* and the detailed 'naturalism' of *Bambi* or *Sleeping Beauty*. *The Lion King* on the whole follows this latter formula. From the start the animators studied the movements of real animals to achieve, in part through computer-generated sequences, a verisimilitude, that would complement the epic solemnity of the story. Throughout the film the African landscapes: plains, desert, jungle and elephants' graveyard, are animated with vivid colours and dramatic sunsets and storms.

The opening sequence sets the tone for the rest of the film. A spectacular sunrise stirs a multitude of gracefully drawn animals to move across misty plains, past waterfalls, with flocks of flamingos overhead, to pay homage to the new-born cub of the lion king and queen. Held up to be illuminated by rays of sunlight the new lion king is adored by the ranks of animals who bow with exaggerated chivalry.

Though initially intended to be serious and 'realistic' throughout, 'a story about nature, about animals, about responsibility'(2), confidence in it flagged in the early stages of production(3), and it was turned into a musical, resulting in the incongruous addition of songs and comic characters. The overall tone is therefore highly theatrical, with exaggerated lighting, melodramatic scenarios and apocalyptic volcanic eruptions and storms, set against frantic comic sections and distinctly cartoon-like animals. Africa itself appears only as landscape, except for traces in the graphics of the credits and merchandising (a geometric woodcut style that has served as a generic signifier of Africanness in recent advertising), and as echoes in the background of the music and songs of Tim Rice and Elton John.

The element of realism in the film would appear to have caused problems in another aspect of its production context, that of merchandising, as the traditional stylisation of cartoon characters, with their easily recognisable features and clothing, has been felicitous for copyright purposes. This is evident in Pumbaa the warthog for example, but in the relative naturalism of the lion protagonists, the other mainstay of Disney's marketable imagery, cuteness, has to be maximised. The licensing and merchandising of Disney characters, established as highly profitable in the 1930s, now forms one of the company's three largest divisions. A new film such as *The Lion King* is expected not only to make money at the box office and through related merchandising, but also to sustain interest in, and provide new attractions for, Disney's primary business: its theme parks.

The close links between animation and its cartoon characters and the industries of merchandising and advertising are explored in relation to television by Stephen Kline. He charts the invention and rise of Hanna and Barbera's 'limited' animation (to the virtual exclusion of any other form of children's television) as determined almost exclusively by the commercial requirements of advertisers. By using formulaic plots, two-dimensional movement and characters, it proved its viability as a cheap form of production, attracting advertising through merchandising spinoffs and toy product tie-ins.

Animation and advertising are thus closely linked. Although Disney's expensive and innovative techniques, revelling in the possibilities of animation, can on one hand be defined in opposition to the intensely formulaic narratives, characters and images of television cartoons, yet on another, be seen as still closely related to commodification. Animation has always spun narratives about objects and given them life. From the early cartoon shorts in which the whole natural and urban world is characterised by what Eisenstein described as 'plasmaticness': objects and machines coming to life to disrupt the lives of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck; to the anthropomorphised domestic objects of *Fantasia* and *Beauty and the Beast*, animation can be seen not only to generate merchandising ideas, but also to strongly suggest the 'animism' of capitalist society (commodity fetishism) as described by Marx:

The form of wood... is altered, by making a table out of it. Yet, for all that, the table continues to be that common, every-day thing, wood. But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than "table-turning" ever was.(4)

In the toy spinoffs from Disney films can be seen not just commodified objects, but commodified culture: personalities and identities acted out in children's play and adults' nostalgia. Raymond Williams (describing advertising) calls this commercialised culture a 'magic system':

products do not represent things so much as the potential transformation of our experience... through advertising marketers bring objects to life by filling in the product's 'story'. Goods are not just symbols, but narratives that dramatise our existence...(5)

Disney's theme parks appear as the utopian culmination of this animism: a corporate world of animatronic characters and simulated places: 'the "animation" not only of animals and plants, but of the entire objective world'.(6)

The Lion King's story has been described as 'less an allegory than a convenient peg on which to hang its visual splendours'. I would argue the

opposite however: that there is a direct relationship between the epic, realistic imagery of the film, and the narrative and thematic intentions of the film's makers. Jeffrey Katzenberg wanted a story about 'the responsibility we have as torch-bearers from one generation to the next'(7). The result is not the story of a child first abandoned, having some adventures and then refinding his own place, as in *Jungle Book*, but of Simba the lion cub fleeing his family and destiny due to (misplaced) shame over the death of Mufasa, his father (whose death was engineered by Scar, Mufasa's treacherous and ambitious brother), pursued by murderous hyenas. Simba's 'no worries' life with Timon the meerkat and Pumbaa the warthog is always underlined by his rejection of responsibility and destiny. The baboon Rafiki (a witchdoctor or shaman), not only finds Simba, sending him back to the Pride Lands and the other lions, but also sees him reborn in the image of his own father, Mufasa, and all the kings before him. This mythic tone sets the scene for the final violent confrontation in which Simba returns to reclaim his kingdom from Scar's misrule and vanquishes Scar with fire and storms raging.

This is not a fairy story, despite superficial similarities to *Sleeping Beauty*, and despite its 'serious' pretensions, neither is it (as the studio half-joked) 'Hamlet with fur'. In fact the pompous tone and mythic register suggest, despite vastly superior animation, marked similarities with the fantasy-adventure genre of television animation, programmes such as *Thundercats* or *He-Man*, described by Kline as:

Filled with high-action... focused on the heroic exploits of a superior being - a man on a quest, a survivor, an individual of power, someone who knew right from wrong... basic tales of cosmic scope whose characters confronted the enduring struggles of life - human progress, enlightenment, personal triumph and moral rightness.(8)

The fact that *The Lion King* is the first story that the studio has generated in-house is significant, as in it can be seen a more direct figuration of the concerns of the film-makers. In particular, the concept of family, both as target audience for Disney, and as a key factor in the company's traditional world-view is crucial to this narrative's construction. The family as a target audience was developed by both Disney from the 1940s, and by television advertisers

from the late 1950s. Animation again playing a central role. Disney's early cartoons did not initially target a family audience, but the early success of product licensing and merchandising in the toy industry helped lead it in this direction. David Forgacs argues that Disney's profitable move towards 'cuteness' in his characters from the late 1920s, had a double effect, attracting the protective instincts of parents, as well as appealing to children. By the 1960s the company as a whole had developed a well-organised and highly lucrative strategy of targeting this audience through rereleases of established films for new generations (relying on their parents' nostalgia for these films) theatrically or on television. This generational construction of audience relies on 'relays between past and present, adult, adolescent and child.'(9)

Evidence of these strategies appear in Disney narratives: Forgacs identifies triangular structures of father, son and buddy/protector in numerous animated features: *Pinocchio*, *Bambi*, *Jungle Book* (symbolically), arguing that these stories are about negotiating the end of childhood, a narrative of maturation aimed at the whole family: (10)

When adults and children watch them together, the films set deep mutual separation anxieties to work and yet offer a reassuring set of resolutions in fantasy of the pain of separation.(11)

At the time Walt died in the late 1960s, this family audience was undergoing fundamental changes. Adolescents, targeted or not, have always been the largest group of consumers of Hollywood products and with changes in demographics and family structure, and developments in youth culture, an 'autonomously youthful' audience began to demand its own films, films to be seen without the family unit. Roy O. Disney, speaking in the early 1980s, recognised this threat (albeit tempered with a certain optimism):

There was a period of cynicism that we went through in the sixties and seventies with Vietnam and all of those things that were tearing families apart in lots of ways. I think that psychology has begun to disappear and families are seeing that being together is a good thing to do.(12)

The Disney corporation has been looked to by conservative forces to preserve a nostalgic vision of the national past (and its building block the nuclear family) in the face of social change. That this position had near disastrous commercial consequences in the late 1970s and early 1980s, shows the extent to which Disney not only mythologises the family, but also itself. Until very recently the company was a dynastic and patriarchal family business, and Walt, and his widow and nephew after his death, saw themselves as representative of certain traditional values. Disney is seen, therefore, as something more than another competitive large corporation, rather as one of the last vestiges of an optimistic, affirmative and moralistic capitalism of early Twentieth Century myth. For example, the company's shrewd strategy of pulling *The Lion King* from American screens at the end of the school summer holidays, and preparing a new advertising campaign ready for a rerelease for the profitable Thanksgiving season was greeted with shock at 'cynicism' that would go unremarked were it shown by other less romanticised corporations.

The Walt Disney company's own corporate history and philosophy are therefore (alongside investment in the family and reliance on merchandising) significant constituents of *The Lion King's* production context, to the extent that *The Lion King* could be seen as a fable about Disney itself: of its own dynastic structure; the corporate struggles in the 1980s; conflict between cousins; silent mothers stoically preserving the established order; and of course the ghostly influence of dead fathers. Pride Rock being finally rescued from its neglect by unsuitable family members and its threatened destruction by 'greenmailing' hyenas, and returned to prosperity.

Disney's success (and in particular its recent revival) is due to aggressive marketing of children's culture, but if, as Stephen Kline argues, commodities and commodified cultural products are used 'to construct and articulate the social relations of the family'(13), and if the values and dynamics of the market are thus often reflected in children's television, films, toys and play as violent and disturbing, then it would be expected that both Disney and its products would have to work hard to maintain their narratives of innocence and morality. Disney, then, has to repress its entanglement in this paradox ,

that of relying on certain social formations and ideologies, whilst, through the operations of commodification and capital accumulation, simultaneously undermining them.

The significance of the family to Disney has been discussed, and the company's anxieties about its changing structure touched on. *The Lion King's* narrative follows the established Disney film structure of the triumvirate of father, son, sidekick/buddy (Mufasa, Simba, and Timon/Pumbaa) and the child's transition to adulthood and reconciliation, but with crucial differences. One of the most important is the introduction of adolescence. The near obsessive emphasis on Simba's abandoning of a slacker lifestyle of instant gratification and accepting responsibility seems to operate on one level against popular consumer culture (which is predominantly youth-orientated), and on another addresses specific concerns of the 1980s and early 1990s in relation to the family. Here the crisis is seen to be not that of generational splits in family, but with fears of the family's fragmentation, of single parenthood (specifically single motherhood), and concomitant anxieties over the lack of masculine role models. *The Lion King* reflects these anxieties, hence the film's emphasis on masculinity, on responsibility and the reconstruction of the shattered family unit.

The response of the popular press in Britain to *The Lion King* highlights these concerns in a broader cultural and political context, and give useful pointers the film's underlying contradictions. Following an established pattern of response to Disney products the journalists assert the 'innocence' of childhood, and by association, children's culture in general. (14) The criticism focuses not on the film, but on apparent 'politically correct' criticism in the United States. The *Sunday Telegraph* and *Mail on Sunday* reported that 'feminists, race activists and other aggrieved victims groups'(15) attacked the film for its sexism (the female characters are ultimately victims and the men [sic] power-driven competitors), racism (Scar is darker than the other lions and has a black mane, the hyenas are black), and misrepresentation of Africa (the only aspect of Africa to be celebrated is its wildlife). Perhaps protesting too much, the right-wing press asserts that the film is just 'a simple story of

good triumphing over evil'(16) that 'these crackpots don't want you to see'.(17) The papers point out that Scar, although darker, has an upper-class English accent (his voice is that of Jeremy Irons) and conclude that no racial inference can therefore be made. But, although the (apparent) arguments of the 'PC police'(18) are over-simplistic, this does not mean that issues of race are not raised by the film, indeed they are of great significance (a point to which I will return). Giles Coren, in a *Times* article, rather more thoughtful than the rest, points out that at least Disney can be seen to be culturally insensitive and politically naive:

Black and white can represent good and bad without being equated with skin colour, but in the context of a film about Africa, with anthropomorphised animals standing in for humans, the possibility for misinterpretation is strong. Some might see the return of the king to rule a starving land, ruined by ill-disciplined hyenas and internecine strife, as extolling the virtues of imperial white rule in Africa (19).

Throughout the film characters, images and narrative are formed through the condensation of diverse, even contradictory, character types, cultural references and ideologies. As Coren notes, unintended (or unconscious) associations can be made. Scar's appearance, for example, is in part drawn from Disney's own genre of the reworked fairy tale, his dark scrawny frame and languid power-lust well-established in Maleficent, Cruella de Vil and Jafar. On another level however his lazy decadence, world-weary camp and his own constant assertion of his superior intelligence is strongly reminiscent of the established Hollywood tropes of European aristocrat and English colonial.

The film's politics can similarly be seen to be a fusion of various discourses, some related, some apparently disparate. Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, writing in *The Sunday Telegraph*, appraises *The Lion King* as being:

squarely back in the old tradition. It is about shame, honour, filial piety, and learning to carry the burdens of adult life: themes that seem to have great resonance in the shattered culture of post-liberal, post-Christian America (20).

Although Disney's cheerful public face would perhaps frown on such a bleak picture of contemporary American culture, this passage neatly sums up the

film-makers' stated concerns in the production of *The Lion King*. The mistake Evans-Pritchard makes, and in making it highlights the key to the film's 'unconscious' themes, is that 'shame' and 'the burdens of adult life' are not the old tradition in Disney's world, but are new arrivals. They are specific responses to 'the shattered culture of post-liberal, post-Christian America'. To unravel the articulation of these anxieties about contemporary America by *The Lion King* (and Disney), it is necessary to look at how the film's images and story revolve around, and mythologise, concepts of nature.

'Nature' forms the content of *The Lion King* in the obvious sense that the film is about wildlife in a particular landscape, but also appears as an important element of the production context. Current ecological anxieties (the lions' environment is explicitly figured as an ecosystem with numerous references to genetics) are combined with a vision of Africa as an archetypal wilderness, it is significant that this is the first Disney animated feature to have no human characters or presence. Early on in the film Mufasa explains to Simba how, in the circle of life, it is possible to be a good king whilst still eating your subjects, however despite this apparent lack of sentimentality, and many jokes about the food chain, the film is uneasy about this aspect of nature. Apart from Simba, Timon and Pumbaa's meals of brightly coloured worms and beetles ('slimy, yet satisfying!') the hyenas are the only characters seen eating other animals. The lower orders, i.e. herbivores, don't speak, and function either as decorative elements in the sections of spectacular animation and song-and-dance routines, or as mute subjects of the lion kings. As the Pridelands are demarcated as 'everything the light touches', as an ecosystem (the 'circle of life'), and hence as nature itself, so the area beyond the Pridelands, the 'shadowy place' where the hyenas live, dark and subterranean, is defined in opposition as unnatural.

If *The Lion King* is seen as an allegory of Disney's recent history then the concepts of nature set up as the fable's universe are themselves allegories of contemporary human society, and much can be read from the confusions and repressions generated by this world-view, not least in its definitions of certain places and characters as 'unnatural'. The next section of the essay will

suggest some direct and indirect sources of this conflation of nature and (specifically corporate) culture, showing both how more general debates in culture can function as context to a film.

'I'm gonna be a mighty king
so enemies beware!

Well, I've never seen a king of beasts
With quite so little hair' (21)

The two lion kings in Disney's version of *Robin Hood*, Richard and John, correspond to Mufasa/Simba and Scar. Here too good and evil take on the physical attributes of muscular against skinny, and in each the mane functions as emblem of masculinity and power, as patriarchal signifier. Prince John has no mane, and in *The Lion King* constant reference is made to the cub Simba's status in relation to his lack of mane. Robert Bly's book *Iron John*, a bestselling inquiry into contemporary masculinity and its crises in terms of a reading of mythology and sexual politics is similarly preoccupied with the hirsute, asserting that, 'the mythical systems associated hair with the instinctive and the sexual and the primitive'(22)

Both Bly and Disney draw on European folk myths in their interpretations of the modern world, both *Iron John* and *The Lion King* draw on general anxieties regarding contemporary culture, both frame these anxieties in terms of a crisis in the family with particular emphasis on the father-son relationship, and both seek resolution in the epic register. Bly's argument is that due to the economic and social changes of industrialisation, and particularly the recent rise of single motherhood, men have lost their traditional male role models and due to the impact of feminism have rejected their natural 'fierceness'. He believes that rites of initiation hold the key to adult masculine identity, and that this initiation and the identity to be gained are figured in the mythic hairy 'Wild Man': 'the Wild Man... resembles a Zen priest, a shaman, or a woodsman...(23). This could easily be a description of *The Lion King's* Rafiki: he is a hairy man, an anthropomorphised baboon, using tools and painting pictures, and at various points in the film appears as a mystic, a shaman or

witchdoctor, an eastern mystic in the lotus position or martial arts fighter. It is Rafiki who finally 'knocks some sense into' Simba, whose eventual decision to return to his responsibilities is triggered by Rafiki hitting him on the head with his stick. This initiation marks the end of adolescence and is very similar to an African story related by Bly in which a boy's passage into manhood is begun with a blow to the head from his father's axe. Bly shares Disney's misgivings about adolescence, characterising it in terms of hippy or New Age culture that also accurately describes Simba's life with Timon and Pumbaa in the Edenic jungle:

Here we have a finely tuned young man, ecologically superior... sympathetic to the whole harmony of the universe, yet he himself has little vitality to offer (24).

Even the moment before Simba's 'initiation' when, seeing in a reflection the stars that Mufasa told him were past kings watching over him, he begins to remember his father and see his face in his own, seems to be lifted straight from *Iron John*:

But when we look into our own eyes, whether we do that staring into a mirror, or a pond surface - we have the inescapable impression, so powerful and astonishing, that someone is looking back at us(25).

Jeffrey Katzenberg, speaking about the ideas behind *The Lion King* referred to 'the exact moment when I became a man', losing his 'innocence' in a refusal to be involved in minor political corruption.(26) Other animation executives apparently added their own anecdotes of initiation at the film's early stages and these shaped the film's preoccupations to the extent that it was felt that the introduction of the initiation scene actually solved the narrative problems of the film.(27) The many similarities between the film-makers' intentions, the eventual content of the film and *Iron John* suggest if the film-makers didn't actually read the book, they were certainly aware of much of the media debate around it.

Both *The Lion King* and *Iron John* can be traced to discourses that structure the unfolding of their world-views, discourses about nature that are also

(re)gaining a certain currency in Western culture, discourses that ultimately deny the confused liberal intentions of the creators of these two products. A key sequence in *The Lion King*, but one that significantly has not been featured in any of the publicity or merchandising, occurs as Scar is telling the hyenas of his plans to kill Mufasa and take over Pride Rock. The hyenas are to be the army Scar needs to support him, and as he sings 'Be Prepared' ('Yes, my teeth and ambitions are bared!') the cavern-world of the hyenas erupts with lava and sulphurous gas, Scar is elevated on a high podium of rock, and the hyenas are transformed into goose-stepping SS troops, their eyes glowing red and their bodies adopting a 1930s-style angularity. This invocation of Nuremberg and Nazism is a surprisingly visible symptom of the film's fundamental, if unconscious, entanglement in far-right thinking. To demonstrate how this could happen I will examine further the concepts of nature and biology as propounded by *The Lion King* and *Iron John*.



As Bly's world is fundamentally divided along the lines of gender (with sexual identities not only biologically, but cosmically determined), so that of *The Lion King* is structured not just by patriarchy, but by naturalised power in general, a hierarchical society based on the food chain with lions as the bearers of the divine right of kings. Both products figure contemporary anxieties as crises of the individual, the family, and the relations between the two, the former interpreting the whole of the world's mythology and folklore as blueprints for individual redemption and morality. *The Lion King* makes explicit an significant absence in Bly's arguments, i.e. the implications of the question of what happens to those who do not or cannot make this mythical personal journey.

Although *The Lion King* would seem to offer an allegory of moral responsibility for all (all men and boys at least), its story allows room for only one such redemption: that of the heir to the throne.

Gender, class and race are all articulated in terms of access to redemption. The hyenas Shenzi, Banzai and Ed are clearly to be understood by their accents and mannerisms to be a black street gang. There is a tradition of black gangs in Disney animated feature films, for example the Social Darwinist figuration of the jazz-loving King Louis and the monkeys in *Jungle Book*. Like these apes, the hyenas are marked as urban, but in the context of *The Lion King's* equation of nature with Good, the latter's unnatural otherness is invoked: they live beyond the 'circle of life'. Though they also function within the film as comic relief, the constant referral to their stupidity, cowardice and violence articulates a racist vision, a vision which is then neatly sidestepped by marking them as fascist. This has the added effect of legitimising the film's 'natural' authoritarian hierarchies.

With these 'natural' hierarchies of gender and social position, the labelling of unnatural ethnicity, the conflation of myth and nature and the invocation of fascism, and a depopulated Africa, *The Lion King* can be seen as more than just another Disney fairy tale espousing bourgeois morals and values, suggesting instead the underlying influence of certain arguments prevalent in the magazine and newspaper press throughout the years of *The Lion King's* production. Originating from the political right, books such as the bestselling *The Bell Curve* by sociologists Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein, respond to perceived crises in American society, to fears of a growing, ethnically-mixed underclass, through a discourse combining Social Darwinism with a new form biological determinism derived from current anxieties regarding genetic research. The solutions proposed advocate a kind of corporate liberalism: neither repressing nor assisting the general population, but analysing them on the lines of risk assessment. Though they deny their conclusions constitute a new eugenics, Murray and Herrnstein use the pseudoscience of IQ measurements to link genetics, class, race and social/familial changes to develop an analysis of 'postindustrial' America

predicated on a 'recognition' of differences in 'cognitive stratification' along lines of class and ethnicity. They predict an emergent "custodial state" with reservation-like treatment of welfare-receivers and certain ethnic groups, characterised as the Dull or Very Dull. Their alternative to this dystopia, couched in a Disney-esque mythology of pre-1960s traditional family and social structures, seems to vary little: authoritarian restrictions on family life and the abandonment of any project of social or racial equality, all masquerading as tolerance for difference in a new conservative multiculturalism.

This rejection of egalitarianism for natural aristocracy reflects the images and narrative of *The Lion King* and in it can be traced the anxieties and contradictions of the film's wider production context: the suppression of the knowledge that despite the apparent triumph of market forces in the economic sphere and Hollywood and Disney in the cultural, utopia seems to be getting further away, disappearing before the new, hard to name or grasp, threats of ethnic tension and ecological risk, of underclasses and commercial genetics, and the deep unrecognised fear that it is corporate capitalism itself that has produced these threats:

'there's far too much to take in here'.

By way of a postscript I would like to mention a very brief sequence inserted into the film's apocalyptic ending. Timon the meerkat, recruited to distract the hyenas from Simba's arrival, enacts a frantic and ludicrous hula song and dance, dressed in Hawaiian grass skirt and garlands. Intended to add a final laugh in the film's extreme pomposity it seems rather to undermine the film as a whole, in a reinscription of the childhood/adolescence that the film militates against. This return of repressed childhood is figured by the disruptive tradition of cartoons and so this eruption of semiotic plasmaticness seems to add another dimension to the relationship between animation and the animism of commodity fetishism: that animated objects in cartoons, whether domestic or technological, never quite did what they are supposed to,

constantly impeded everyday life and reality, and that, perhaps, is why they have been repressed in this film.

footnotes

1. 'The Circle of Life': written by Tim Rice, from *The Lion King's* soundtrack
2. Posner p.81
3. its success was apparently a surprise to its makers, who were considered the B-list to the next big Disney film *Pocohantas*.
4. Marx, p41
5. quoted in Kline, p41-2
6. Naum Kleiman, in Eisenstein, p.xi
7. Hoberman
8. Kline p.133
9. Forgacs
10. Forgacs points out, 'Alongside these images of socialization into a male community made up from boys, buddies and/or fathers and absent/dead mothers there are stories [*Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast*] of girls who confront witches, bad fairies, cruel stepmothers or other kinds of enchantment in order to be rewarded with true love', I have concentrated on boys as *The Lion King* is almost exclusively about masculinity.
11. Forgacs
12. Roy O Disney, quoted in Forgacs
13. Kline, p12
14. Another, contradictory response is that particular products are violent and should be censored (generally films and television, but also some books)Some critics, responding to *The Lion King*, concentrated on its violent content, describing a film that 'dredged up deep-seated insecurities and terrors' , with 'scenes of 'truly terrifying animal-kingdom violence'.
15. Evans-Pritchard, Ambrose 'Disney's 'sexist' lion provokes roars of protest', *Sunday Telegraph*, p.21, 7/8/94
16. Spark, Ronald 'The Disney superhit these cranks don't want you to see', *Mail on Sunday*, pp.44-5, 7/8/94
17. *ibid.*

18. *Sunday Telegraph*, op cit.
19. Coren, Giles 'Disney's Heart of Darkness', *The Times*, p.12, 20/7/94
20. *Sunday Telegraph*, op cit.
21. Zazu and Simba 'I Just Can't Wait To Be King', *The Lion King* soundtrack
22. Bly, p.6
23. Bly, p x
24. Bly p.3
25. Bly p.50
26. Posner
27. Posner

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The *Lion King* Original Motion Picture Soundtrack, score composed by Hans Zimmer, original songs: music by Elton John, lyrics by Tim Rice, Phonogram 1994