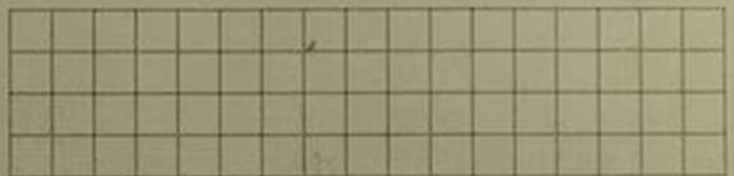**FUJI** SP LP **FUJIFILM** VHS

NOISE REDUCTION: ON OFF
SUPPRESSION DU BRUIT: MARCHE ARRET
STEREO MONO | HI-FI HQ | PCM

Research master's thesis
written by Georgios Tsolakis (2092700)
under the supervision of
dr. Dana Mustata

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 A B C
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FUJI   E-30 E-60 E-120 E-180
E-195 E-210 E-240 E-300

VHS

*Remediating
Disney Classics*

FUJI

PLAY ▶

Remediating Disney Classics

A Study into Disney's Transition from Cinema to Home Video Technologies

RMa Media, Art, and Performance Studies

Utrecht University, August 2023

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Supervisor: dr. Dana Mustata

Table of Contents

Abstract

The research focus of this thesis is to investigate the various ways in which different technologies of storage and consumption forged specific relations between the Walt Disney Company and audiences in ways that generated various forms of value and capital for the mass media enterprise at different points in media history. More specifically, I will be looking at the release and rerelease practices of some key, classic animated films by Disney for different technologies of consumption ranging from cinema to home video, both in analog and digital formats. With this study, I opt to illustrate how the (re)release and (re)circulation of Disney material resulted in an intricate web of dynamic relations with audiences and answer to the emerging question: What are the various forms of capital acquired by Disney in their transition from cinema to home video? Mediated through various cutting-edge technologies, it is through these ranging dynamic relations, that different forms of value and capital emerged – and are still emerging – in ways that may help us understand Disney's long-standing status and place within Western popular culture and in media history.

Keywords: remediation, nostalgia, capital, value, aura, Disney, curation, media, archive, content, viewer, user, home video, cinema, analog, digital, aesthetics, (collective) memory, 'Disney Vault', paratextuality, interactivity.

Introduction

With a history that dates back a century now, Disney has seen a wide range of changes, including changes in the organizational realm and policy regulations as well as in the style of animation and production. Throughout the years, the company has not been without instances of controversy that have sparked public debates. The treatment of specific characters and cultural representations, particularly in early Disney productions, have received significant notice. Some older Disney films have been criticized for perpetuating racial and gender stereotypes, sparking discourse about cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, and criticizing Disney as a product of the Western culture that has often reproduced Western-centric values accordingly, namely white, capitalist, and patriarchal. Despite its infamous and problematic at times history, Disney has somehow managed to maintain an ongoing allure and cultural impact not only in Western pop culture but arguably, on a global scale as well. I believe that, at least to a certain degree, this impact stems from the fact that they have transitioned their most prized, classic productions to different media environments at key points in media history. This dynamic adaptation of Disney not only ensures alignment with the most recent technologies of consumption but also serves as an effective means of inspiring nostalgia and rekindling relationships with viewers across different generations.

In this thesis, I am looking in empirical and historical terms at how Disney released and rereleased some of their classic productions for and through different technologies of consumption. In doing so, I am taking an interdisciplinary approach in combining a historical perspective on how Disney transitioned from the cinematic medium onto home video and the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology and use of the term *capital* (1979). As such, I will be concentrating on specific technologies of consumption that emerged in different periods in media history. My goal with this empirical and historical investigation is to uncover Disney's continuing influence within Western popular culture and media history, notwithstanding the

company's controversies. I believe that a thorough comprehension of this enduring status may be gained by attentively investigating how Disney utilized numerous content and film consumption technologies, as well as the complex (re)release practices and strategies linked with them. In doing so, Disney developed and fostered various forms of – and what Pierre Bourdieu (1979) understands as – *capital*,[1] relying on fundamental relationships with audiences of various generations within the context of ever-evolving media technologies. Essential to this inquiry is a thorough comprehension of how Disney's strategies of (re)releasing fostered and constructed *new* forms of capital and value, while also recycling *old* ones, and this is particularly evident by the company's long-standing affiliation with nostalgia and nostalgic imagery that draws intricate connections between the present and the past.[2] Thus, the exploration of capital and value takes center stage in this thesis, as we unravel the intricate strategies that Disney's followed to enhance and maintain their cultural impact.

Having said that, the focus on these release and rerelease strategies does not imply a restriction on a straightforward top-down hierarchy of producer-consumer where Disney strategically produces content and alters the relationship that audiences have with the movies. Instead, while Disney's marketing and production strategies paint a big part of the picture, it would be more accurate to claim that its status and value emerge from a triangular relationship between Disney, audiences, and the technologies of consumption and that it moves in multiple directions rather than a single one. This is apparent particularly toward the more recent, digital technologies, like digital home video, that foster user interactivity with content with a more use-centric approach to the releases. As a result, the crux of my research looks into the subtle

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[1] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Eighth printing (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996).
[2] 'Nostalgia' here is understood as one of the distinctive cursors that reappear throughout Disney's media and (re)release history. Etymologically, it refers to a sentimental longing for the past. In the context of this thesis, the study aims to show how, in the entertainment sector, Disney has capitalized on this consumer nostalgic desire, recycling its old films through new technologies and, as a result, maintained an attraction founded in this longing for the past.

interplay of Disney's release and rerelease practices, orchestrating specific interactions between the firm and its consumers within diverse contexts of viewing, consumption, and content (re)circulation. Equally important, a remarkable number of varied kinds of capital emerges from the dynamic configurations of Disney's audience and the emergence of unique consumption technologies, especially since the digital revolution. This intertwined triangle of Disney, audiences, and technologies that forge close connections with film content, facilitated particularly by rerelease and recirculation, weaves an essential part in the complicated tapestry of Disney's ongoing cultural significance.

To refer to and theoretically situate in current media discourse the patterns of release and rerelease of classic Disney titles, the use of Bolter and Grusin's (2000) *remediation*[3] is also central. The term, as we will see later, refers to the interaction between older and newer media, in which newer media refashion older forms and older media adapt in response to the introduction of newer ones; this can help us unravel the constant interaction between the old and the new facilitated by Disney, like when old productions, viewing practices, and cultural status meet new technologies that in turn generate forms of capital in Bourdieu's understanding of the term.

Another key concept that I keep referring to throughout the thesis is that of *affordance.* Although James Gibson (1977) coined the term within the field of biology to suggest a specific combination of properties in an environment that enables prospective actions or behaviors on behalf of the animals that inhabit it,[4] in this thesis, following other media scholars, I borrow the term to describe similar qualities found in media studies. More specifically, I am referring to the term to describe how various forms of media and technologies of film consumption provide   users   or   consumers   with   certain   options   and   facilitate

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[3] Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2000).
[4] James J. Gibson, "The Theory of Affordances," in *Perceiving, Acting, and Knowing: Toward an Ecological Psychology*, ed. Robert Shaw and John Bransford, 1st ed. (Lawrence Erlbaum, 1977). 67-68.

particular behaviors. It refers to how the design and qualities of the technologies convey cues or indicators about how they can be interacted with or used. Nonetheless, my understanding of the term does not entail a deterministic view of technology. Instead, I want to emphasize the dynamic relationship between users and media, underscoring how the design and functionality of media impact user behaviors, interactions, and experiences, as well as how users can independently decide how to use the technologies hand. At best, the term *affordance* assists us in comprehending how various media shape and mediate human engagement, communication, and cultural practices.

As mentioned before, the nature of this thesis is rooted in an empirical and historical understanding of Disney's tradition of remediation and is theoretically embedded with the help of some key terms and concepts from the field of media studies. As such, this project aims to contribute to the studies of media history because it historicizes Disney release and rerelease practices through the lens of technological developments within the realm of media. More specifically, I am looking at different periods in media history through the lens of technologies of consumption. Secondly, the thesis is also akin to film studies because it investigates Disney, a mass media enterprise that holds immense prestige in the Hollywood movie industry. Moreover, it can be situated and function as part of reception studies, although not in the sense of empirical knowledge from audience studying, for instance, ethnography or interviewing; I do, however, look at how Disney as an enterprise corporation and film production company, has forged specific relationships with audiences and viewers, and I do explore these relationships in the context of consumption and viewing cultures relating to Disney productions. Finally, Because I am historicizing Disney productions through the release and rerelease practices in relation to different technologies of consumption, some discussions may border upon the field of science and technology studies as a sub-area of media studies. Looking at different media technologies within a broader societal and cultural context might give us a

more thorough understanding of the intricate interplay between media technologies, audiences, and producers as well as the forms of capital generated by that.

When it comes to the structure of this thesis, this comprises three chapters that represent three indicative eras each marked by the birth and rise of certain media. As such, based on relevant media literature, I will be investigating not only the ways in which the same classic Disney films were adapted to fit into each of these media settings but also how the introduction of new technologies has spurred remediation practices in the form of re-releasing classic films onto new media carriers that, in turn, fuelled certain forms of capital in Bourdieusian terms. At the core of these practices, we may find the novel ways in which Disney (re)connected with old and new audiences, the emergence of new contexts for cultural appropriation, as well as the recycling or reinventing of Disney's distinguishable historical significance. With this chapter division, we may also learn about the distinctive values connected to each media turn, which could provide valuable insight into the cultures and societies that have been utilizing them. Even though not exhaustive, the technologies in focus are central to marking consumption cultures in Western media and provide a vantage point to look into how Disney has recycled and reinvented relations with its audiences that were at the heart of how different forms of value were generated each time. A brief overview of the chapters is provided below.

Chapter 1: In the first chapter, I explore early Disney productions and their strong historical ties to nostalgia. My investigation includes a look at how these works have been successful in fostering consumption and viewing habits that founded later sentimental longings for old Disney productions and prestige. Disney's cinematic release and rerelease patterns can be examined to shed light on the historical development of the company's marketing and advertising strategies and how these strategies fostered the emergence of different forms of capital for Disney. As I examine the construction of the company's early cultural prestige in

its beginning years, this chapter includes methodologies such as textual and critical analysis of Disney productions, release practices, and marketing accordingly.

Chapter 2: The second chapter looks at Disney's re-releases of classic films for analog home video technologies. In doing so, I scrutinize the different forms of value and capital that these re-releases bring about when transitioning from theatre to home video. Furthermore, this close investigation may illuminate some of the affordances of home video in the context of family and domestic viewing and how this shaped the values associated with the classic remediated titles in this context. Disney's various approaches to home video are examined thoroughly through close reading and textual analysis of some indicative VHS trailers. Additionally, I am critically analyzing some of Disney's (non)release strategies that emerged in that era by contextualizing them in relevant media debates, history, and literature.

Chapter 3: In Chapter 3, I look at Disney re-releases for digital home video technologies and investigate how these enable remediation practices that built upon Disney's old historic status and historical documentary features while generating new forms of value for the media conglomerate. More specifically, I critically analyze some affordances of DVDs and Blu-ray discs from the 2000s and 2010s in terms of the values and capital they enable. These affordances include *paratextuality*, *fictional liveness,* interactivity, and historical embedding, concepts that I will analyze later in the thesis. Apart from critical analysis, I also briefly adopt the walkthrough method as I navigate the DVD menu and its relevant affordances shedding light on the enhancement of value and capital.

To sum up, as mentioned before, at the core of this thesis lies a critical examination of Disney's remediation practices of classic movies in the form of re-release patterns through the

lens of different technologies of consumption. In doing so, this thesis provides a historicization of how Disney positioned itself in relation to its audiences over time within a shifting media and home video landscape. Accordingly, this thesis aims to investigate how the simplicity of these classic productions has been given multiple dimensions within different media and to add to the growing body of knowledge in media studies and popular culture.

The *Dispositif* & Forms of Capital

Approaching cinematic texts, particularly classic productions like those from Disney, as part of a configuration or *dispositif* that includes technology, texts, and spectatorship/viewing contexts is essential, especially in light of this research focus that aims to understand how such cinematic texts generate diverse forms of capital. As such, cinematic texts are viewed as interrelated pieces that participate in a complex interplay within the larger cinematic and media world. Accordingly, I recognize that the experience of watching a Disney picture extends beyond the sheer filmic substance by considering it as part of a larger setup that includes the consuming technology involved, as well as the surrounding cultural texts that influence the audience's viewpoint and perception of the film's cultural impact.

According to Frank Kessler's unpublished seminar paper, as quoted by Tim van der Heijden (2018):

> "At different moments in history, a medium can produce a specific and (temporarily) dominating configuration of technology, text, and spectatorship. An analysis of these configurations could thus serve as a heuristic tool for the study of how the function and the functioning of media undergo historical changes."[5]

Whether be it traditional cinema, home video, or online streaming, these different mediums of consumption impact the audience's accessibility and involvement with the cinematic text, adding layers to the viewing experience and influencing perceptions of its cultural value. Furthermore, the dispositif allows us to investigate the changing landscape of media and

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[5] Tim van der Heijden, "Hybrid Histories: Technologies of Memory and the Cultural Dynamics of Home Movies, 1895-2005" (Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University, 2018), https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20180118tvdh. 44.

content consumption, where the interplay of different elements continues to shape the development of cinematic texts, their cultural impact, and the complex relationships between Disney and its audiences.

In a similar vein, media historian Andreas Fickers (2014) argued that "historicizing media dispositifs (…) could serve as a heuristic tool for the changing functions of technologies and to investigate the constant renegotiation of their meanings and functions in different consumption environments."[6] Following this, practical applications of the concept of the dispositif in media historical research enable consideration of various readings of the same text within various exhibition contexts, or, in Roger Odin's words, "spaces of communication" (2014).[7] The experience of viewing a movie at a theater differs from watching it in a classroom, at home on television, or on a smartphone, for example.

In order to comprehend how the osmosis of various elements contributed to the longevity and relevance of classic Disney productions, it is crucial to first establish a theoretical groundwork to situate the understanding of the term *capital* in the context of this research. The term 'capital' was extensively used by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1996) to essentially describe how privilege and power are distributed in society.[8]

> "Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor."

[6] Andreas Fickers, "'Neither Good, nor Bad, nor Neutral': The Historical Dispositif of Communication Technologies," in *Journalism and Technological Change: Historical Perspectives, Contemporary Trends* (New York: Campus Verlag, 2014), 30–52.
[7] Roger Odin, "The Home Movie and Space of Communication," in *Amateur Filmmaking: The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 15–26.
[8] Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.

In the context of my research, I am looking at Disney films through the lens of capital to see how they fared at various moments in media history, producing and maintaining Disney's power and influence in the media and entertainment landscape. People, or in this case, companies, can deploy or acquire many types of capital. Within the sphere of film entertainment, Disney has deployed and acquired various types of capital, securing its position on the Western, and maybe worldwide, media entertainment scene.

To begin with, *economic capital* refers to financial assets held by individuals or companies, such as savings, investments, real estate, and revenue. Being a global media conglomerate, Disney is a major player in the entertainment business as has expanded into an empire including film and television production, theme parks, retail, streaming platforms, and more. Disney's economic capital stems from its broad ownership and control over production resources and distribution channels. With a plethora of successful film studios under its ownership, including Pixar, Marvel Studios, Lucasfilm, and 20th Century Studios, Disney possesses a vast library of intellectual properties that continue to generate significant revenue through box office successes, home video sales, and licensing deals. Also, its network of distribution channels, which includes theatres, television networks, and its own Disney+ streaming service, guarantees that its material has a broad reach and accessibility, cementing its economic supremacy globally. With this convergence of production and distribution power, Disney has been able to capitalize on the continuing popularity of its productions across different media propelling them to the forefront of the entertainment business.

Cultural capital relates to a person's knowledge, abilities, and cultural experiences as well as cultural habits and one's cultural and educational background. Education, linguistic proficiency, and familiarity with culture are a few examples of this. In analyzing Disney texts, regardless of the medium they appear in, collective memory practices, like watching a film together at home or in theaters can construct a society's collective memory and shared cultural

experiences, therefore, generating cultural capital for Disney. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital can exist in three forms:

> "in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state," which often overlaps with the objective state but it is important to remain separate as it possesses slightly different qualities especially when it comes to educational institutions. (reference)

Particularly when it comes to the objectified and institutional cultural capital, Disney has greatly acquired it through repeatedly hinting at the cultural importance of their classic productions in their re-release practices, highlighting slightly different values in their marketing with the rise and overtake of a new medium each time; this will be demonstrated in greater detail in the next chapters and sections. What is more, the inclusion of classic Disney films in the National Film Registry (NFR) also assigns them value and institutional cultural capital, as they become recognized by an official, prestigious organization for their artistic and cultural contribution to the film industry.

Symbolic capital refers to the esteem, approval, and authority that an object or a subject hold in society. Among these are things like distinctions, honors, and public acclaim for accomplishments. In the case of Disney, this also extends to their professional status and how they are perceived within popular culture and modern, Western societies more broadly. This kind of capital is highly prized in disciplines like the arts, sciences, and literature. For example, the inclusion of Disney films in the National Film Registry (NFR) can also be seen as a form of assigning symbolic capital. The National Film Registry is a collection of films chosen for

preservation by the National Film Preservation Board of the United States (NFPB); each film is chosen for its historical, cultural, and aesthetic achievements since the NFPB's founding in 1988.[9] As we will see later on, particularly in Chapter 4, discussions about the symbolic significance of such productions often involve considerations of preservation from one medium to another while paying attention to their aesthetics, and by safeguarding the unique filmic qualities and textures associated with them. Apart from symbolic capital, films included in the NFR also gain historic capital.

Historic capital encompasses the importance of something in connection to history based on its connections to important historical events, movements, or periods. Historians, cultural specialists, and other experts who examine and appraise the significance of certain cultural artifacts, venues, or events frequently decide the historic value. The NFR can be seen as such a committee deciding upon the historic worth of films, including Disney productions, but Disney's historic capital can be understood even more profoundly by looking at how it was acquired throughout the years; this is what this research aims to do in accordance with media history and changes.

Finally, social networks and connections that one has, are referred to as *social capital.* While I recognize the frequent overlaps between all these forms of capital, I particularly came to repeatedly meet the convergence of social and cultural capital since culture is determined and defined by society. As a result, I often combine the two as "socio-cultural" to better reflect their interrelated nature. In this thesis, the social value of Disney animation is examined within the social relationships that arise from storage and consumption technologies, for example, the domestic values strongly associated with early home video technologies and entertainment, and the interactivity of digital home video releases. Last but not least, the distribution platforms

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[9] "National Film Preservation Board," Library of Congress, accessed April 22, 2023, https://www.loc.gov/programs/national-film-preservation-board/about-this-program/.

examined here relate to both social and economic capital and, especially in the world of media, these are closely linked as the more sizeable the audience and the outreach, the higher the revenues.

All these forms of capital, in Bourdieu's view, are interconnected and can strengthen one another rather than existing in a vacuum. For instance, access to cultural and social capital may be made possible by having economic capital, and enhanced symbolic capital may result from possessing cultural and social capital, or even historic capital. While Bourdieu's theories on cultural capital, symbolic prestige, etc. have been influential in understanding social structures and power dynamics of individuals, I find that they can also serve as a fruitful theoretical framework for analyzing media industries, corporations, and media consumption. As such, I believe that they will prove to be invaluable lenses to investigate Disney's journey across diverse media landscapes.

Chapter 1

The Early Productions

& Cinematic Releases

With this first chapter, I investigate early Disney productions, marketing, and fictional universes highlighting some of the ways Disney forged its capital in its beginning stages. Sections 1.1 and 1.2 focus on productions from the 1930s and 1940s that have corresponded to nostalgia and accorded with nostalgic viewing practices over time. Here, *nostalgia* is understood as a sentimental longing for the past specifically to show how these productions and their fictional universes were partly rooted in Walt Disney's own longing for a different America and his own childhood. This analysis of Disney's beginnings and establishment as a company and a brand is crucial as it offers valuable insight into the ways it nurtured the audience's own longing sentiments and, as a result, generated relevant values and capital accordingly. Having said that, it also sheds light on some of the problematic aspects of nostalgia as this imagery often beautified a past that was extremely bleak for non-white people.

Based on secondary sources, YouTube and Filmic Light,[10] sections 1.3 and 1.4 cover the adaptation, production, and theatrical premiere of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). As such, I see how the German folk tale was adapted for an American audience putting in the forefront relevant portrayals and values. Disney's marketing strategies and association with Hollywood's prestigious figures also come later into play to show how Disney's theatrical

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[10] Filmic Light (https://filmic-light.blogspot.com/p/about.html) is a non-commercial, fan-based blog is dedicated to the archiving of things related to the first feature-length animated movie by Disney, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937).

releases garnered a specific place within a Western, American(ized) media culture which put the company at the forefront of the audience's mediated collective remembering.

All the above cases are investigated in terms of how they are connected with different forms of capital, ranging from cultural to economic to symbolic historic, and so on, following Bourdieu's understanding of the term.[11] Therefore, the aim is to understand how a media enterprise such as Disney engineered different forms of value and capital for their productions and did so, in close relation with their audiences, their viewing contexts, and by positioning themselves within the broader media landscape.

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[11] Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste.*

1.1 Disney's Early Depictions of the Past and

The Double Agency of Mickey Mouse

Even prior to the advent of feature-length animated films,[12] Disney was producing cartoons that featured imagery of bygone eras and past realities that were quite often depicted in a more favorable light than what the actual events entailed. One notable example is the image of the Wild West and the idyllic rural America, where characters such as cowboys and farm animals appeared regularly. This is particularly evident in cartoons such as *Musical Farmer* (1932) which portrayed an idyllic, carefree farm life steeped in simplicity and musicality. Another notable instance is *Two-Gun Mickey* (1934) which focuses on a cowboy chase featuring stock characters such as the hero, the thief, and the damsel in distress. The thematic focus on the American West continued even after the introduction of feature films, with notable examples like *Californy 'er Bust* (1945) featuring Goofy as a scout ranger on a road trip in the Wild West.[13] All of these examples featured characters and settings from America's past that were heavily filtered through a romanticized lens evident by the humorous scenarios they employed that were far removed from historical reality and, as a result, they generated particular types of value and capital for specific segments of the American population.

These cartoons can be viewed as nostalgic in the sense that they feature historically romanticized pop culture figures like the 'cowboy hero', the 'farmer', or the 'villain' and also cultivate a sense of longing for rural and old-times simplicity with predictable plots and comedic gags that appear far more appealing when juxtaposed to the American industrialization of the 1930s.

Svetlana Boym (2001) defines nostalgia as:

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[12] That is, prior to 1937.

[13] *Musical Farmer*, Animation (Columbia Pictures, 1932); *Two-Gun Mickey*, Animation (United Artists, 1934); *Californy 'er Bust*, Animation (RKO Radio Pictures, 1945).

"a longing for a home that no longer exists or has ever existed. Nostalgia is the sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship. Cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a super imposition of two images- of home and abroad, past and present coma, dream, and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface."[14]

While I do not hold any findings resulting from real-life audience reception in the 1930s, reflecting on the cartoons' imagery from the perspectives of "distance" and "displacement" that Boym refers to, might help us grasp how this imagery might cultivate a more positive understanding of the past. Having these emblematic American figures cemented in popular animation held unique value for Disney in the context of the Great Depression because it offered a strong sense of American identity in an era characterized by economic instability and identity crisis by extension.

Such nostalgic depictions were often the result of the creator's own longing for his childhood saturated with fantasy elements. Walt Disney actually met Buffalo Bill during his Wild West Show in 1906 when he was five years old, according to the book authored by Neal Gabler (2006).[15] Walt and his family were then residing in a small Missouri farming village, where they would stay up until Walt became eleven years old. Walt was profoundly affected by it, even if it only lasted a short while, and his future artwork displays his strong yearning for the America he believed existed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[16] As a result, black and white cowboy chases, faded watercolors, and Mickey Mouse comedies that primarily took

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[14] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001). xiii.
[15] Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006). 24.
[16] Gabler. 3.

place in small towns, rural America, farms, and barnyards, set apart Walt Disney's early 1930s artwork. Although Walt's world only existed in his imagination, nostalgic visions and tendencies became an enduring part of the Disney brand because they proved to be an effective formula that generated content value and capital for the company, as we will also see in the following sections.

As shown in Gabler's biography of the famed director, Disney's depiction of a cherished past and picture of the western frontier was a reflection of his nostalgic longing for his own upbringing and Mickey served as a vessel for this exact reason. Historically, the character of Mickey Mouse, who was often the protagonist in such cartoons like the ones mentioned above, has been used as a vessel to get across the company's shifting values in different historical settings, while also frequently invoking a nostalgic yearning for the past as illustrated in *Mickey: The Story of a Mouse* (2022).

In the documentary, we also learn that although the character evolved to be more of a shapeshifter over time that embodies various nuances of American ideals since the 1920s, Mickey Mouse started out as a character who mainly represented the working class frequently appearing in cartoons where he is seen in blue-collar, industrial working settings as well as on farms which might explain, in part, the appeal he held to people from working classes and economically disadvantaged groups.[17] Among numerous examples, *Building a Building* (1933) and *Mickey's Steamroller* (1934) both stand out as they depict the title character working on construction sites and are both suggestive examples of the character taking on a working-class persona within the context of the Great Depression. Fairly simple – yet complex in the sense

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[17] America had severe struggles during the 1930s, including the catastrophic impacts of the Great Depression. A substantial section of the population was impacted by the economic crisis, which was characterized by widespread unemployment and financial instability. The nation also had to deal with the devastating effects of the Dust Bowl (1930-1936), which severely damaged agricultural regions, at the same time. A second recession further interrupted the cyclical structure of the economic recovery, which resulted in a dramatic rise in unemployment rates. These difficult conditions produced a tremendously difficult atmosphere for the people who lived throughout this time.

that he was receptive to projection – Mickey who dominated the world of animation in the 1930s was an emblematic figure that symbolized innocence, optimism, and perseverance in the face of adversity, generating respective American cultural values associated with the Disney brand and fostering the company's cultural capital.

Among these socio-historical lines, Mickey Mouse also possessed symbolic value as he was thought to represent the American Dream in the 1930s and was connected to American ideals of development, innovation, and individualism, concepts that were also met with appeal across different segments of the population worldwide.[18]

Gabler says:

> "For all the subliminal attractions of his shape or his size or his sexuality, Mickey's secret, the appeal of which is obvious and not limited to Depression America, is that he can always make things right in his head—just as Walt Disney, the escape artist, could. In the end Mickey Mouse was the eternal promise of cheerful solipsism."[19]

While Mickey Mouse simplifies the projection of heroic attributes that overcome challenges and receive rewards in cartoons – for instance in the case of *Two-Gun Mickey* (1934), this sometimes takes place at the expense of other narratives, especially those of minorities and POC. The problematic ways in which this kind of iconography portrays non-white cultures, particularly African and Native Americans, have also drawn criticism. Looking at the cartoons at hand we can argue that Disney's nostalgia heavily depended on stereotypes and racialized figures, for instance in the case of *Californy 'er Bust* (1945) where one can find insensitive caricatures of Native American populations. According to bell hooks (1992), the

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[18] *Mickey: The Story of a Mouse*, Documentary (Disney+, 2022).
[19] Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*. 195.

Hollywood portrayals of these populations in the mainstream media have helped to keep a colonial mindset alive and have had a significant impact on minorities. hooks draws attention to the fact that movies and television still frequently portray red and black people in dehumanizing ways, which contributes to their marginalization and stereotyping in society.[20]

Under this light, when examining the cultural products of Walt Disney, such as short films and features, we can infer that they were tailored to, and held cultural value for a very specific segment of the American population. Walt's idealized vision of America was portrayed as a land populated by white, rugged outdoorsmen who conquered the Wild West and became legendary folk heroes.[21] Accordingly, the values manifesting in the face of Mickey Mouse, like positivity, pioneering, and self-reliance, to name a few, were also mainly directed toward white audiences, and Disney's cultural relevance was crafted as such. This idealized version of America, was a romanticized portrayal that catered to a specific cultural narrative, perpetuating a particular image of the white American identity while perpetuating negative stereotypes of POC populations. *Mickey's Mellerdrammer* (1933), for instance, is one example of the films and cartoons from the time that alluded to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853), and it depicted Mickey in blackface in a stereotypical portrayal of black people.

Therefore, during this time in Disney's history, nostalgia frequently took the form of a longing for an idealized version of a bygone era especially one that exalted the colonial times, like in the case of the cowboy chases that highlighted values such as valor and heroism wrapped in a humorous plot and comedic gags. So, in the sense that they present an appealing as well as comedic version of the past, these early productions drew on American imagery and elements that would appeal to mass audiences and encourage a longing for a single-dimensional and predictable way of life by providing a comedic break from the harsh realities

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[20] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992). 186.
[21] Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*. 10, 563, 585, 661, 665.

of the time. In this light, aside from mere entertainment, these cartoons would offer appeasement to an audience questioning their cultural identity in times of crisis and mitigate lingering doubts about the intricate tapestry of the American cultural values that, as a result, generated cultural capital for the company itself. however, nostalgia can also be viewed as fostering racialization since it displays a desire to idealize and perpetuate a period when white rule was greatly favored. In this way, nostalgia serves as a tool to maintain racial hierarchies because it selectively recalls and valorizes historical events that support colonial principles while ignoring the experiences and viewpoints of marginalized groups of people.

Therefore, to begin untangling the complex workings and nuances of nostalgia and how it connects to the generation of capital, I see 1930s cartoons and Mickey Mouse serving as double agents that while embodying American ideals and generating associated desirable forms of cultural and social values – namely, positivity, resourcefulness, etc. – they did so within the context of colonialism and white supremacism. Mickey Mouse's evocation of nostalgia for America's colonial past can be understood as creating a type of cultural capital for Disney as this yearning for the past reveals a desire to identify with an assumed great historical past and might serve to support and uphold prevailing cultural norms and values. In addition, Mickey Mouse's portrayal of the lower middle class provides an intriguing viewpoint as he transforms into a symbolic figure with whom people from these social strata can identify by aspiring for particular qualities depicted on screen, such as optimism, resiliency, and the pursuit of success.

1.2 The Infamous *Song of the South* (1946)

As Katharina Niemeyer (2014) suggests, within various media landscapes, nostalgia is often found and instrumentalized as a popular tool for generating content value.[22] Accordingly, my focus on nostalgia provides insight into how forms of capital are generated through the implied audiences and reception cultures Disney addresses with its nostalgic imagery. Disney, as a well-known and established entertainment company, has repeatedly utilized nostalgia to reinforce and maintain its longevity, quite often, and especially in the 1930s and 1940s, ignoring the narratives of marginalized groups of people as we have seen in the previous section. Texts like "The African American Image in the American Cinema" (Bourne 1990) document that during highly racially segregated times, black representations, let alone accurate ones, were unsurprisingly not prioritized by major mass entertainment production companies like Disney.[23] Instead, they were often created by independent, non-mainstream filmmakers found in smaller theaters. Even though Disney started as a small company, by the 1940s, the company had already developed into a mass media corporation and as it marketed itself as *mainstream* entertainment, Disney began to transform "from a heedless entertainer to a cautious corporate leader" in the context of a growing conservatism.[24] For Disney, the problem was that he yielded to a concession of creative expression, an exercise in excessive nostalgia no doubt influenced by his memories of his hometown, but still altering the direction of the company. In the words of Gabler, "in celebrating small-town life and small-town values, he had ostensibly gone over to Norman Rockwell territory and reinforced his new postwar image not as a daring folk artist but as a conservative folksy artist".[25]

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[22] Katharina Niemeyer, "Introduction: Media and Nostalgia," in *Media and Nostalgia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1–23, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137375889_1. 1.

[23] St. Clair Bourne, "The African American Image in the American Cinema," *Taylor & Francis, Ltd.*, The Black Scholar, 21, no. 2 (1990): 12–19.

[24] Gabler, *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*. 566-567.

[25] Gabler. 597.

One particularly controversial example of Disney's nostalgic, conservative tradition was the film *Song of the South* which came out in 1946. With the release of the completely animated version of the Brothers Grimm's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937, Disney Studios had established itself as the leading American provider of children and family entertainment as well as the leading adaptor of fairy tales into films. By turning Harris' Remus stories – sort of American fairy tales – into movies, the company aimed to repeat this achievement. But in order to adapt these tales into Disney's brand of family entertainment, the aggressive undertones of Uncle Remus's story had to be toned down and the animal tales had to accord with the more conservative values of the 1940s, which eventually produced "Disney's most notorious film" in 1946 according to Daniel Stein (2015).[26]

The film is set in Georgia during the Reconstruction era, which follows the end of the American Civil War and the abolition of slavery. The plot revolves around a seven-year-old boy, Johnny (Bobby Driscoll), who is staying at his grandmother's plantation for an extended period of time. Johnny befriends Uncle Remus (James Baskett), an elderly plantation worker, and enjoys hearing his stories about Br'er Rabbit, Br'er Fox, and Br'er Bear. Johnny learns from the stories how to deal with the difficulties he faces while living on the plantation. Since its initial release, the movie has been a source of controversy, with critics characterizing its portrayal of African Americans and plantation life as racist and insensitive. What sparked such criticism was the view of the post-Civil War South which came across as heavily romanticized erasing or minimizing black narratives.

Boym argues that globalization encouraged stronger local attachments[27] and the American South is a setting associated with wealth and prosperity for those who belonged to the economic and social elite. For those who benefited from the South's plantation system and

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[26] Daniel Stein, "From 'Uncle Remus' to 'Song of the South': Adapting American Plantation Fictions," *University of North Carolina Press*, The Southern Literary Journal, 47, no. 2 (2015): 20–35. 23-24.
[27] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*. xiv.

agrarian economy, which were both constructed on the shoulders of slaves, it was possible to live opulently and feel like an included member of society. In the words of Boym:

"In counterpoint to our fascination with cyberspace in the virtual global village, there is a no less global epidemic of nostalgia, an affective yearning for community with a collective memory, a longing for continuity in a fragmented world. Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals."[28]

Through this scope, we may discover that nostalgia functions as a revolt against the modern notion of time, history, and linearity. By refusing to accept the irreversibility of time, which is an inevitable condition for humanity, nostalgia erases the real past and transforms it into a personal or societal mythology that holds cultural capital because it reinforces people's connections to their past all while concealing its problematic aspects. And whether on purpose or not, that is exactly what *Song of the South* did. Through nostalgic lenses, this mythology depicted in the movie becomes a shared cultural experience that fosters a sense of comfort, belonging, and connection with the past. Intangible assets, symbols, or ideas that have value and significance within a society or culture can generate cultural capital. In this setting, nostalgia generates cultural capital since it shapes people's conceptions of history. It develops a sense of cohesive cultural story and tradition among individuals by eliciting sentiments of longing for a presumably better or more plain time.

As in the case of the American West and Mickey Mouse, my critical reading of the movie stems from the company's broader propensity to romanticize the past in their films; in this case by calling on nostalgia for the American South. This is happening through a purposefully uncritical depiction of the symbiosis of black and white people on the plantation

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[28] Boym. xiv

combined with idyllic scenery and bright colors. This is especially problematic when we consider the fact that the pasts being romanticized when viewed in a nostalgic way are often ones that are deeply painful for many, particularly people of color. In addition to its problematic portrayal of race and history, *Song of the South* also provides a window into Disney's implied audience and audience presuppositions. By examining the modes of production and marketing used for the film, we can infer that the implied audience was predominantly white, a pattern that is evident in many other films from the same era. Moreover, by looking at the studio's reaction when it came to the assessment of the movie and its subsequent release – or in this case, non-release – on home video, we may gain a deeper understanding of how Disney reacted to the shifting social values to protect their reputation and social positioning; in other words, to maintain their capital.

One look at today's media and we see that *Song of the South* is notably missing from Disney's streaming service, Disney+. While Disney has taken some accountability for problematic and inappropriate portrayals of non-white characters in their films in different home media contexts,[29] I believe these instances only scratch the surface of a much larger issue since Disney only addressed these issues in their bigger and more well-selling films on Disney+. Such films include *Peter Pan* (1950)*, Dumbo* (1941)*, Aladdin* (1992)*,* and *Lady and the Tramp* (1955)*,* because not only those films were more successful, but they also hold a lot more economic capital for the company as they are deeply ingrained at the core of the Disney classic brand and could not possibly be excluded from the official streaming service like *Song of the South* is.

Even though Disney has never made *Song of the South* accessible on any home video format in the US, when it came to theaters, following its first run, it was re-released no less

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[29] Bryan Pietsch, "Disney Adds Warnings for Racist Stereotypes to Some Older Films," *The New York Times*, October 18, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/18/business/media/disney-plus-disclaimers.html.

than four times: in 1956, 1972, 1973, 1984, and 1986.[30] The fact that this production was re-released in theatres repeatedly, but not for media technologies aimed at home video consumption offers a crucial understanding of the perceived affordances of media technologies such as home video, and cinema, respectively; these affordances are also tightly linked to the generation of different forms of capital for Disney. To be more specific, a movie can only be experienced once in theaters, and while it remains a powerful force for memory formation and collective experience, its nature is more transient than home video. Owning a film in any type of home video format would imply a sense of permanence and greater availability, which can potentially amplify the impact of criticism. People are more likely to rewatch and engage with a film that they own at home, increasing the likelihood of encountering problematic content and eliciting more scrutiny.

More specifically, John Ellis (1982) argues that the essence of television is defined by immediacy, closeness, and a sensation of presence that unfolds in the here and now.[31] In contrast to the intense gaze associated with attending the movies in theatres (more on that in Section 2.2), television viewing frequently functions with a more transitory and intermittent focus characterized by times of casual glancing. In television, an additional invocatory impulse emerges: the compelling force of sound. The aural component takes center stage, demanding attention and encouraging interaction that extends beyond the visual. The establishment of a direct address, sound, and a dynamic force that envelops the observer, ensures a continual thread of involvement. The viewer holds a distinct place within the ebb and flow of television's aural and visual currents, engulfed in a domain of immediacy, intimacy, and personal connection.

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[30] "Song of the South," The Disney Wiki, accessed April 2, 2023, https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/Song_of_the_South.

[31] John Ellis, *Visible Fictions* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982).

From a political and economic point of view, the market for home consumption of such controversial content may not have been seen as being as productive as the more controlled theatrical (re)releases that were already producing revenue by the white audiences the content was mainly intended for. This makes even more sense when we consider that, prior to the US's legalization of desegregation, the studio would have had greater control over where the movie could be screened, allowing them to target locations with predominately white populations. Interestingly, Matthew Bernstein (1996) accounts for the fact that as a black man, the lead actor himself, James Baskett, was not able to attend the premiere in Fox Theater, Atlanta because the state was still racially segregated at the time.[32] At the same time, theatrical (re)releases gave Disney the opportunity to engage their desired audiences in settings and locations that aligned with their marketing strategies, while still allowing them to regulate and generate profit and economic capital, as opposed to the home video market that would entail greater loss of control over who can have the movie and for how long.

Ultimately, because of the criticism the release of *Song of the South* has received, it provides an opportunity to reflect on the implications Disney holds for the audiences they target and how they construed different forms of value and capital around their productions and brand; namely economic capital by making the film available only where it could be profitable, but also cultural by employing once again nostalgia as a means to relate to audiences in the realm of emotions. Drawing a parallel with the prior example of Mickey Mouse, we may conclude that *Song of the South* also preserved distinct cultural values associated with an idealized portrayal of America's history, in this case, the deliberate absence of the dehumanizing aspects and harsh realities of the colonial times; as such, its absence from the

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[32] Matthew Bernstein, "Nostalgia, Ambivalence, Irony: 'Song of the South' and Race Relations in 1946 Atlanta," *Indiana University Press*, Film History, 8, no. 2 (1996): 219–36.

US home video market combined with its sustained presence in theaters only shows Disney's strategic handling of the controversy that would generate more capital for the company.

1.3 Adapting the Grimm Brothers

The first feature-length animated film by Disney, *Snow White & the Seven Dwarfs* premiered in 1937 meeting very positive reception. When I look at the film, I discern the cultivation of capital stemming from a number of values that have particular weight to them in their historical context. Such values, from the aesthetic and artistic choices of the movie to the paratextual elements in the live broadcasting of the premiere, were strategically employed during the production and the theatrical release to attract the American audience of the 1930s. As such, this section is about how Disney locally adapted established representations from other cultures, in this case, Grimms' German folktales. During the decade, European folk imagery already held some cultural and historic value.[33] The Grimms' tales, in particular, hold a specific type of value for the American – and by extension, the global – audience due to Hollywood's early adaptations and recontextualizations of Grimms' tales into silent films.[34] Examples of this include *Cinderella* (1914), *Snow White* (1916), *Hansel and Gretel* (1923), and *Little Red Riding Hood* (1922).

In *German Life* (March 1996), a popular American magazine, Simon J. Bronner finds an article describing that the United German-American Committee requested a National German-American Heritage Museum and Cultural Center in the capital as if to draw attention to the fragmentation and need for unity among German-Americans. The group's conception of ancestry and culture greatly revolved around folklore. Folk tales, it becomes clear, were an enduring allusion to tradition and the idea of togetherness and connection from German to English and from Europe to America.[35] "Americanization" techniques were extensively used as early as the first Disney feature film, *Snow White,* to enhance its appeal by making it more

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[33] Simon J. Bronner, "The Americanization of the Brothers Grimm," in *Following Tradition* (Logan, Utah: University Press of Colorado; Utah State University Press, 1998), 184–236, 197-198. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46nqtf.9.

[34] Bronner. 206-207.

[35] Bronner. 185.

relatable to American audiences. By bringing the original text closer to the American values and ideals for the time, the production team acquired cultural and economic capital, first by updating the 19th-century source material to a film that spoke to the people in the 1930s – as I will demonstrate further below – and second, by marketing the film as such to attract viewership. The phenomenon of *Americanization* is thoroughly explored by Bronner (1998), as he mentions that the German quality of the original folk has been adapted by media fantasy as Walt Disney and other children's authors have reimagined Grimms' fairy tale figures for widespread consumption. They have evolved into specialized platforms for genres of popular entertainment including comedy, music, and romance that are joyfully animated for the big screen. *Snow White* (1937) epitomizes such practices as it employs all these qualities.

An illustrative example is the figure of the peasant which has been thoroughly instrumentalized as a vehicle to convey values that would resonate in the context of the 1930s. More specifically:

> If there is a German connection within mass culture, it is in the Grimm reference to the German peasantry as the quintessential folk. Assumed to be old and of earthy appearance, isolated and communally rural, poor yet socially content, peasants are depicted as unusually telling stories, often for children, and being fairy tales unto themselves.[36]

The peasant imagery in Disney's films of the late 1930s and early 1940s is recontextualized within the framework of the Great Depression in America. Characters such as *Snow White's* (1937) seven dwarfs (Figure 1) and *Pinocchio's* (1940) Geppetto (Figure 2) are depicted wearing poorly patched clothes and are designed as lower-class individuals, which adds depth to the film's praising of American ideals in the 1930s like rooting for the underdogs

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[36] Bronner. 187

and perseverance and optimism in the face of extreme economic and political adversity; values that contributed to the adaptation's successful receiving by American audiences.
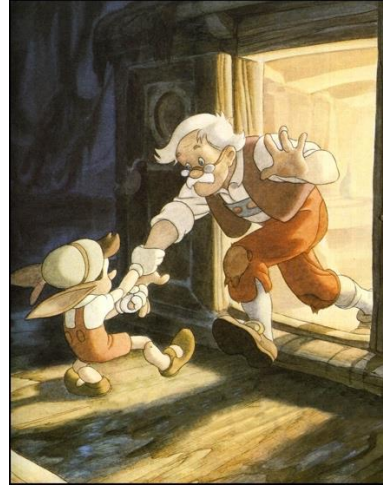

Figure 1

Figure 2

Bronner also accounts for the changes the written text of *Snow White* underwent to resemble the American vernacular. In the passage of Snow White's awakening, one reads:

"Wh-wat is it?" whispered one.

"It's might purty:' said another.

"Why, bless my soul, I think it's a girl!" said a third. And then Snow White woke up.

"Why, you're not children," she exclaimed. "You're little men. Let me see if I can guess your names."

And she did-Doc and Bashful, Happy, Sleepy, and Sneezy, and last of all Dopey and Grumpy, too.

"Supper is not quite ready:' said Snow White.

"You'll have just time to wash."

"Wash!" cried the little men with horror in their tones. They hadn't washed for oh, it seemed hundreds of years. But out they marched, when Snow White insisted. And it was worth it in the end. For such a supper they had never tasted. Nor had they ever had such an evening of fun. All the forest folk gathered around the cottage windows to watch them play and dance and sing. (Grant and Werner 1952)[37]

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[37] Campbell Grant, *Walt Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (Golden Press, 1952).

Bronner says: "[w]ith dialogue mimicking American vernacular delivered by recontextualized characters in technicolor wizardry, Disney had created a fairy tale he would call his, and America's own. He gave the impression of a folktale without reference to the folk. It became *Walt Disney's Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*."[38] In other words, this adaptation allowed Disney to provide a version of the story that was engaging and relevant to the target audience by aligning it with American principles. This transposition aided in the reinforcement of particular cultural values and standards while embedding them in the story, so enhancing the cultural capital that Disney was able to acquire from the film. This cultural capital was derived from consumers' favorable associations and emotional attachment to Disney's interpretation of the story, cementing the company's status as a cultural influencer.

The depiction of rural life and the underlying themes of resiliency and hope in the face of difficulty provide symbolic value to the movie. By portraying these tales and characters as representations of optimism, aspiration, and the possibility of upward mobility, they embrace and support the myth of the American dream by portraying a specific form of American identity. Cultural ideals connected to empathy, resiliency, and social justice are reinforced through depictions of lower-class characters that are more realized with the American vernacular in place. The movies match themselves with the cultural values of the time by showing the underdogs in a favorable light, which appeals to the audience's collective consciousness and, socially, these depictions help viewers feel connected and identified, especially those who may have gone through comparable economic problems during the Great Depression. The movies create a social capital that unites people via shared experiences and a common sense of hope and determination by portraying animated characters who bare real

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[38] Bronner, "The Americanization of the Brothers Grimm." 207.

similarities with real-life people, instead of the more abstract, surrealistic cartoons that preceded them.

Esther Leslie (2002) contends that after *Snow White* (1937), feature-length animated films reinstate the laws of perspective and gravity in contrast to the depicted flatness that preceded while producing conventional dramaturgical characters. In accordance with the aesthetics of Dadaism and surrealism, earlier animated works had been notable primarily for their celebration of freedom from fixed form. Later animation no longer seems to unleash the analytical and surrealistic dynamite of the ocular unconscious upon the world. Studios like Disney differentiated their work from avant-garde art, which incorporates fragmentation and disintegration into its laws of form. This aesthetic shift and the artistic and historic environment that led to it affected many facets of animation, such as audience involvement and the creation of cultural capital. Prior to realism, dadaism and surrealism both had an influence on Disney's animated works, with *The Skeleton Dance* (1929) and *The Haunted Mansion* (1929) being particularly notable examples. Among many techniques, the surrealist representative movement used odd juxtapositions and imagery that did not accurately correspond to the laws of physics, to arouse awe and confusion. In contrast to the more avant-garde cartoons of the 1920s and 1930s, the business launched a more realistic style of animation with *Snow White*, that completely changed the course of the studio and animation in general.

This move to new animation aesthetics holds implications that go beyond simple visual alterations. The intentional change in the artistic style had far-reaching effects, particularly in terms of the types of capital and resources that Disney intended to acquire, as well as the impact on how audiences received the film. The more stylistically realistic portrayal of the working class and other characters serves as a trigger for a variety of positive results. The inclusion of realism in the portrayal of the working class and other characters not only enhances the credibility of the characters but also builds a deeper emotional connection between the

audience and the narrative of the movie. This increased realism heightens the characters' relatability and resonance, effectively magnifying the audience's ability to empathize with the aspirational American values and ideas that Disney wished to portray with his characters. In effect, Disney obtained significant capital as a result of this strategic shift in animation technique. Disney secured a broader socio-cultural and symbolic influence within the historical context of the times by strengthening the link between the viewer and the characters. This increase in influence translates into increased socio-cultural and symbolic currency, giving Disney a greatly enlarged role in influencing the prevailing cultural environment and becoming a more prominent participant and distributor of the time's mainstream ideas and narratives. In this way, Disney's carefully strategic animation alteration appears as a practical way for amassing both cultural relevance and recognition within the socioeconomic milieu.

1.4 The Premiere of the Animated Feature Film as a Media Event

The theatrical premiere of *Snow White* in 1937, retrieved from *Filmic Light* and YouTube,[39] stands out as a particularly well-documented event, not only because it was the first full-length animated feature, but also due to the fact that it was attended by numerous well-known actors, like Marlene Dietrich and Douglas Fairbanks Jr. (Figure 3) and employed many elements that added to the festive atmosphere that generated revenue. The event was covered live through a thirty-minute radio broadcast on the NBC Blue Network, with announcers Don Wilson and Buddy Twiss providing commentary on the evening's festivities.[40] The duo spoke with Hollywood celebrities as they walked by, with Twiss stationed on a slightly raised platform (Figure 4). The staging of the premiere, its eventfulness, and the exceptional character of the broadcast may qualify as what Dayan and Katz define as a *media event* (1992) which in effect, generates different types of capital for the production and for Disney.

Figure 3

Figure 4

Dayan and Katz make an extensive analysis of the affordances of broadcasting media events and find that the latter are presented with reverence and ceremonial attitudes to

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[39] "75th Anniversary of Snow White's World Premiere," *Filmic Light* (blog), December 21, 2012, https://filmic-light.blogspot.com/search?q=premiere; "Premiere of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (Carthay Circle Theater: NBC Radio, December 21, 1937), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXlgwSrqeRc&t=1021s.

[40] "75th Anniversary of Snow White's World Premiere," *Filmic Light* (blog), December 21, 2012, https://filmic-light.blogspot.com/search?q=premiere

compensate for their lack of physical presence.[41] When talking about television, they mention that broadcasting events consist of three partners: the organizers – in this case, Disney – of the event who bring all the essential elements together to propose the event's historicity; the broadcasters who re-produce the event by recombining these elements; and the audiences, in-person or at home, who take the event to heart.[42] Also, according to Dayan and Katz, media events monopolize audiences across different media (print, broadcasting, cinema, etc.).[43] This also seems to be the case here, as the premiere was covered live on radio extending its reach beyond the attendees in-person. In a similar vein, "broadcasting has transformed public events, rhetorically and politically, by adding the voice and technology of a commentator who is independent of the organizer even if (in the case of ceremonial events) he is also his authorized agent."[44] The broadcast of the premiere alone stages the film as a historic landmark with remarks like "the film is going to make motion picture history that it is as significant as the introduction of sound", "stupendous occasion", "glare of floodlights", and "big, happy, important event". All these remarks highlight on numerous occasions the significance of the premiere through an excited voice-over commentary that thoroughly cultivates and markets the movie's cultural contribution to the realm of animation.

Dayan and Katz also note that, unlike tangible items, ceremonies are self-defining; their performance entails the declaration of their identity, and by relaying the crucial details by which this identity is announced, television and radio help viewers understand the essence of the event.[45] Much like culture itself, *Snow White* encompasses both tangible and intangible elements, first in its material, technical nature and, on a second level, in the portrayal of the characters and values it depicts on screen – for instance moral ones, the language they use etc.

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[41] Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: Harvard University Press, 1992). 7.
[42] Dayan and Katz. 54.
[43] Dayan and Katz. 222-223.
[44] Dayan and Katz. 55.
[45] Dayan and Katz. 80.

The staging of the premiere comes across as quite apparent in the sense that it ensures that both the tangible and intangible elements of the film would be explicitly communicated with the broadcast.

The best way to understand the central idea of media-event aesthetics is to examine the changes it makes to the well-known dramaturgy of the news broadcast. When an occasion is accorded media-event status, it is taken out of the news and translated into a fictional register. The result is a work that reconciles the tension between fact and fiction, creating what Jérôme Bourdon describes as *fictional liveness*. Bourdon (2000) uses the term to analyze how fictional universes and characters interact with real life. He argues that "[o]n television, liveness gave a coefficient of reality to what was happening that was of no value for fiction".[46] Here, fictional liveness broadcasted as a media event was one of the tools employed by Disney to generate capital for their production and brand.

The blurring between fiction and reality and the spilling over of fictional worlds into reality hold implications for what Bourdon calls the instilling of regimes of truth and 'belief in liveness'[47] when it comes to fictional live media; this regime of truth lends authority to Disney's fictional worlds as well as 'believability' for audiences which in turn are forms of both symbolic and social capital. Symbolic because of their representative nature and social because they enable ways for audiences to relate to the productions at hand. The playful elements, such as replicas from the movie and people in costumes playing the characters, further add to the fictional aura, sense of spectacle, and symbolic capital that consists of representations and associations between the film and the overarching brand, or franchise, of Disney, creating a sense of narrative continuity. The interviews with voice actors and the humorous improvisation of Walt Disney add to this sense of whimsy and playfulness.

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[46] Jérôme Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise," *SAGE Publications*, Media, Culture, and Society, 22, no. 5 (September 2000): 531–56, https://doi.org/10.1177/016344300022005001. 536.

[47] Bourdon. 535.

The characteristics of fictional liveness can be observed in both the world of reaction and in the realm of performance due to the nature of public events and the equally significant role of the audience. The inclusion of interviews with characters like Mickey, Minnie, and Donald (Figure 5) also adds a playful and lighthearted element to the broadcast, appealing to younger audiences and, for a while, immersing the broadcast receivers in the fictional universe of Disney. The radio broadcast, in particular, is noteworthy for the way in which it works in tandem with the film's release. The reviewer asks specific questions about the characters, highlighting their catchphrases and personalities, which serves to promote the film while simultaneously documenting the event.

The program emphasizes the impression of attendance for the audience listening to the radio broadcast with remarks like "you're going along too as we take you to the Carthage Circle Theater for the premiere of Walt Disney's full-length technicolor production (min. 0."21' - 0."26'); this adds to the participatory impression and social value of the event. As Dayen and Katz argue, broadcast directors emphasize the shared aspect of the experience and the crowd's unanimity in embracing the values and symbols being presented.[48] The act of sharing those values creates social capital for Disney being the draw that brings all these elements together. At min. 2."50' we hear: "everyone caught the spirit of the old fairy tale, and they are going to see it portrayed on the screen". Such statements not only draw on the unanimity of the audience but also state the film's connection to its German origins and the cultural value it holds, as we have seen in the previous section.

The presence of Hollywood celebrities like Shirley Temple (Figure 6) and their celebrity status is lent to the event and enhances the social and symbolic capital cultivated around the premiere. This, in turn, creates revenue for ticket sales and generates economic capital. The broadcast particularly capitalizes on the glamour and glitz of Hollywood, which

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[48] Dayan and Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*. 80.

adds to the allure and prestige of the event. Hollywood's social networks helped to cement the film as socially significant by associating it with elite Hollywood personalities and by separating it from the animated cartoons that preceded it. The notion that Hollywood personalities have symbolic value is closely linked to celebrity culture. Celebrities are frequently viewed as cultural icons who stand for particular values or ideals, so their support for a movie might influence how culturally significant people perceive it to be. For instance, the presence of A-list actors and directors in a movie premiere can indicate that it is a significant cinematic and cultural production deserving of praise from critics and prizes which also carry symbolic capital in their turn.

Figure 5

Figure 6

Finally, worth noting is that alongside the inclusion of extensive descriptions of the festive atmosphere with characterizations like "almost unreal atmosphere" (min. 1."51'), the commentator repeats on numerous occasions that the film is the first feature-length animation feature claiming historic value as a pioneer in animation. This is especially evident at min. 3."13' where he states that the film "is going to make motion picture history". I see this as an instance of forms of capital merging together and not simply coexisting independently as I believe that by claiming a position in the American media and cinema history, the movie also acquires cultural capital by being staged as a cultural media event that elevates animation to a

new level highlighting its positioning as being the 'first' of its kind. As Dave Hand, the film director remarks: "we have only scratched the surface of the wonderful possibilities of the full-length animated feature" (min. 20."00')

In conclusion, the investigation conducted in this chapter provides an insightful perspective of the various forms of capital that Disney cultivated and accumulated in their beginnings. Within the early productions, a reoccurring motif of nostalgia emerges as a consistent currency that generates cultural, symbolic, and other forms of capital. Notably, a detectable tapestry of cultural, social, symbolic, and historic capital interweaves itself with the very core of American identity against the backdrop of the 1930s and 1940s. This is evident in depictions of the Wild West and the American South, as seen in Mickey Mouse cartoons and the film *Song of the South* (1946) respectively. A closer critical examination problematized this romanticized image of America's colonial past as a contested issue because it marginalized the narratives of minorities and reimagined American history.

This study also indicated that the birth of capital extends beyond animated creations and steeps into the complex domains of advertising and broadcast distribution, orchestrating an intentional positioning of the movies within a prestigious media and film environment. In the case of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), Disney's first feature-length animated film, we see a convergence of cultural and historic relevance when we investigate both its content, particularly in the adaption from its German origins and the complexities of its theatrical premiere. Notably, the study showed that the movie's capital derives in part from its symbolic associations with German folklore and its well-established elements that already held value in American culture and Hollywood. These symbolic ties extend from the movie's basic source material to its association with celebrities in the context of its Hollywood rendition. At the premiere, the orchestrated grandeur surrounding the release of the film serves as an instructive case study, emphasizing that, in addition to the film's intrinsic form, the meticulous orchestration of its theatrical debut substantially affects the multifaceted capital for both the film and Disney at large.

Thus, the findings of this investigation highlight the intricate interplay of capital and cultural identity within Disney's cinematic narratives, providing a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted relationship between content, context, and the accumulation of various forms of capital. A distinct mosaic of capital also emerges as a result of an intricate interplay between media influences. On the one hand, Disney expands its influence and relevance in the realm of cinema through radio broadcasts, curating and advertising the essence of the picture and the company's expansive impact. This intertwining emphasizes the complex web of media elements that were crucial forces in shaping and reinforcing the company's value and capital.

Chapter 2

The Analog Home Video

Subsequent to the tradition of theatrical release, this chapter focuses on the emergence of the home video medium. Here, I delve into the intricate web of capital and value formation in the context of domestic viewing and advertising. In this context, a critical analysis is conducted to shed light on Disney's cautious approach to entering the market of home video distribution. This strategic reluctance and opposition to the VCR technology are briefly accounted for in Section 2.1 as a historical backdrop alongside the prevalent preconceived notions about the medium's potential and affordances. Afterwards, an analysis of the strategic rereleasing of the classic movies also takes place upon Disney's eventual entrance to the home video distribution market. These strategies, provide useful insight into the various ways that Disney used its marketing strategies in accordance with the medium's affordances. As such, this chapter explores how Disney's classic cinematic productions were made available for domestic consumption to generate new forms of capital.

The slow but steady takeover of home video provides an intricate embarking point to analyze Disney's acquisition of new forms of capital. This, I argue, was to a degree, because for an extensive period of time, their classic animated titles were not released on home video, and even when they became available, that was under careful marketing that would help cement their place in the domestic and family sphere. As a result, the forms of capital associated with Disney in the era of home video were slightly different than the ones cultivated in the context of theatrical (re)releasing.

The focus on the rereleasing of Disney productions through home video technologies, I show, is inherently connected to strategies like the 'Disney Vault' (Section 2.3), a figurative

vault where Disney would put their movies after their theatrical run or their home video release until the next re-release years later; this strategy aimed at raising the value and demand of the productions based on limited availability. Through this analysis, I will also demonstrate how the Vault stands out as a marketing gimmick that even though it kept Disney at a distance from the home video market, that was precisely one of the reasons it fostered economic capital later for Disney in the form of profitable ventures like selling and advertising.

While Sections 2.1-2.3 cover Disney's encounter with home video and subsequent strategies of (non)releasing, Section 2.4 analyzes two indicative VHS trailers, that of *Fantasia* in 1991 and *Snow White* in 1994. In those cases, we can notice many examples of capital arising in the form of nostalgia, and collective and individual memory that transgresses to the domestic sphere. In this context, it is vital to take into account the changing dynamics of the viewing experience, especially when moving from public theatrical settings to domestic family settings. As the viewing experience becomes more entwined with familial ties, this change entails social capital.

Finally, as mentioned before, the transition from theatrical releases to home video, especially since the 1980s when Disney began releasing their most highly valued titles, provides fertile ground for analyzing the presuppositions of the new medium's affordances and the shifting forms of capital that came with it. As demonstrated, different sorts of resources that are gained, safeguarded, and enhanced through particular social interactions and connections are included in the idea of capital. The resources that may constitute capital can come in the form of social networks and – in this case – connections when it comes to the domestic sphere; the inherent social relationships in the watching experience generate social capital stemming from the affordance of the home video medium and the new ways it allowed to look and engage with the movies.

2.1 Sony Corp. of America v. Universal Studios Inc.

VCRs, also referred to as video cassette recorders, gained popularity among media consumers over the second part of the 20th century. Christian B. Long (2017) mentions that with increasing affordability, by 1987, 50 percent of homes had a VCR, a percentage that increased to 80 percent in 1987.[49] VCRs were the primary home video recording device before digital recording technologies were developed, and they had a significant impact on the home entertainment market and environment.[50] The main impact of VCR technology lies in its ability to preserve and share content for domestic and private use, allowing users to record and watch their favorite shows and movies again at home. Additionally, the creation of a vibrant market for video tapes was made possible by this technology, which made it easier to share and distribute recorded media. For that reason, many big studios, including Disney would approach "the money-making potential of video rental in a convoluted way". A pricing-for-rental and pricing-for-sale system eventually gained root, with studios pricing many films at the high end of the spectrum that video stores would purchase, rent out, and sell secondhand later, and pricing some films for personal purchase.

VCRs then, can be seen as a starting point for a more personal media environment that entailed a higher sense of viewing interactivity in the domestic sphere. To quote van de Heijden:

> "An important difference with film projection, for instance, was the
> ability of the video recorder to stop, pause, rewind and fast-forward the
> videocassette. As a result, home video screening practices were much more

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[49] Christian B. Long, "Politics for Couch Potatoes: Video Rental Success Stories," in *The Imaginary Geography of Hollywood Cinema 1960–2000* (Intellect, n.d.), https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv9hj8kf.10. 139.

[50] Jonah Engel Bromwich, "The Long, Final Goodbye of the VCR," *The New York Times*, July 21, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/technology/the-long-final-goodbye-of-the-vcr.html.

dynamic compared to film projection practices, in which the film was usually

projected without too much interruption."[51]

Prior to this, in the mid-1970s, the advent of Betamax and VHS fundamentally altered the landscape of home video entertainment. While movies by other studios were made available for home media consumption, Disney notably diverged from this trend. The company was concerned that the ability of home media to record broadcasted films would result in widespread piracy because consumers would be able to easily create illegal copies of their films thanks to technology; this would result in a loss of control over their intellectual property and could cause a significant drop in sales. As a result, Disney and Universal Studios filed a lawsuit against Sony claiming that the company's development of the Betamax video cassette recorder infringed copyright laws.[52] Sony Corp. of America v. Universal Studios, Inc. was the case that the US Supreme Court eventually heard, and it determined in 1984 that the sale of Betamax VCRs did not constitute a contributory violation of copyright laws. This decision was a major victory for the home video entertainment sector and laid the groundwork for the transparently legal usage of VCR technology.

This case highlights the complexities surrounding the transition from cinema to home video. Despite its eventual reveal as a formidable vehicle for Disney's future forms of capital and sales, home video was initially met with skepticism and uncertainty. When these two succeeding mediums – cinema and home video – are historically juxtaposed, the tension between them becomes even clearer. This interplay is a vivid depiction of the changing media consumption landscape, in which every medium asserts its role in Disney's capital generation narrative.

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[51] van der Heijden, "Hybrid Histories: Technologies of Memory and the Cultural Dynamics of Home Movies, 1895-2005." 217.
[52] Douglas G. Baird, "Changing Technology and Unchanging Doctrine: Sony Corporation v. Universal Studios, Inc.," *The University of Chicago Press*, The Supreme Court Review, 1984 (1984): 237–53.

2.2 The 'Untouchables'

Despite the increasing prevalence of the television screen and the VCR in the second half of the 1980s, Disney's classic animated feature films held a unique character in the sense that they had never been shown outside of theaters.[53] When Disney Home Video launched as a Disney branch in the 1980s, some live-action and animation titles were released on VHS but what was notably missing from this series was Disney's feature-length animated classic films including titles such as *Snow White* (1937)*, Pinocchio* (1940)*,* and *Fantasia* (1940).[54] According to Eisner (1998), even when the studio began to recognize the potential benefits of home media as a fertile ground for content distribution rather than an impediment to their control over intellectual property, there was a notable polarization of opinions regarding the decision to release their classic films for home video distribution.[55]

To provide a brief historical context, prior to Disney's broad implementation of home video, there was a deliberate effort to market animated Disney feature films as culturally significant and sometimes *exclusive* in an attempt to generate first and foremost economic capital and establish the cultural value of the films. Central to this idea was the tradition of strategic theatrical re-releasing.[56] Following the success of the theatrical re-release of *Snow White* in 1944,[57] other re-releases of Disney movies followed every five to ten years; this carefully staggered re-release strategy created a sense of limited availability, which in turn can be seen as having enhanced the perceived significance of these productions for audiences. As such, when it came to home video, while some executives were proponents of it, recognizing the potential for increased revenue streams, others expressed concern that such a decision

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[53] Michael Eisner and Tony Schwartz, *Work in Progress* (New York: Hyperion Books, 1999). 185.
[54] "Walt Disney Home Video (1980) Promo (VHS Capture)," accessed April 2, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hM4cK01bpI8.
[55] Eisner and Schwartz, *Work in Progress*. 185
[56] History.com Editors, "Disney Releases 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,'" History, November 13, 2009, https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/disney-releases-snow-white-and-the-seven-dwarfs.
[57] "Release Dates & Distributors," *Filmic Light* (blog), accessed April 24, 2023, https://filmic-light.blogspot.com/p/release-dates.html.

would adversely discourage audiences to see the movies in theaters during their reissue periods impacting the viability and profitability of theatrical re-releases.[58]

Disney's reluctance to enter the home video market also holds political and symbolic implications due to the belief that theater would preserve its productions' value and cinematic relevance. As such, they compiled a list of their most lucrative and highly valued films, commonly referred to as 'The Untouchables'.[59] Those were titles that would only be shown in cinemas and never be released on tape as they were deemed 'too worthy' for mass reproduction. Eisner's (1998) accounting for the convoluted meetings held with the company's executives in the 1980s further demonstrates the uncertainty surrounding home video as opposed to the more established and profitable theatrical-cinematic media outlet for their classic movies that steadily generated cultural value and relevance for the company.

Walter Benjamin's terminology can be used to acquire a deeper understanding of how Disney's strategies in response to home video cultivated a sense of originality, rarity, and exclusivity around the productions they chose to include in the 'Untouchables' lineup. In particular, the idea of safeguarding the *aura*[60] of their productions (2015) can offer insight into the acquisition of capital stemming from the 'Untouchables'. For Benjamin aura is strongly linked with the idea of authenticity. He says that at the turn of the 20th century, technology had advanced to the point where it was capable of accurately reproducing works of art, which had a substantial impact on how people engaged with them.[61] Benjamin looked into how an original work of art's validity and public perception are altered through mechanical reproduction. Because of this, he argues that the public's understanding of what art is and how it should be

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[58] Eisner and Schwartz, *Work in Progress*. 144, 185, 189.

[59] Tom Spain, "DISNEY'S UNTOUCHABLES," *The Washington Post*, April 28, 1988, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1988/04/28/disneys-untouchables/663acfb3-94ff-4d37-a42f-617b4bfa2478/.

[60] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (The Bodley Head Ltd, 2015), 217–51.

[61] Benjamin. 219.

produced, experienced, or appreciated has changed. He believed that although copies of the original were more widely available to the public, the copied work's quality is always devalued because it lacks the authenticity of the original. More specifically:

> "[T]echnical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record,"[62] - in our case, a VCR and a TV set.

When viewed from this perspective, the initial absence of the 'untouchable' Disney films from the home video market differentiated them from other titles readily available for home media consumption. The value of the classics lied in their authenticity and historicity that connected them to the realm of theater where they originated in, which entailed distinct forms of capital.

John Ellis (1982) argues that cinematic viewership is intricately linked to the interplay between presence and absence, similar to Roland Barthes' concept of the *photo effect*. It exists within the regime of *vision*, which is defined by the dynamics of the *gaze*, the act of looking, and the role of the spectator. This medium requires and arouses careful concentration, inviting the viewer's attentiveness. This act of focused observation is inextricably tied to the invoking drive of scopophilia, which denotes the act of staring. As a result of this delicate visual relationship, voyeurism emerges, in which the spectator, while immersed in the movie experience, becomes a passive observer in a world of pictures and narratives.

The cinematic spectatorship generates specific values and varied types of capital, which are inextricably connected with the distinguishing aspects that characterize this experience.

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[62] Benjamin. 220.

One of these values is awe and reverence, an emotional response elicited by a confluence of reasons; the very ambiance of the theatrical environment, with its dimmed lights and immersive sound, combined with the act of fixing one's gaze upon the screen, as Ellis argued, creates a unique atmosphere that contributes significantly to the accumulation of prestige for the productions shown there and the medium itself.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the theatrical screening was a well-framed media event that worked in a specific historical and social context balancing between event documentation and fictional liveness.[63] The capital stemming from cinematic releases was to a great degree cultivated by a confluence of factors and media, like radio, that staged the premiere as an authentic, exclusive, and unique event. Watching a movie at home would not be the same as going to the theater because, even though it holds its own unique affordances, the former lacks the atmosphere, sense of reverence, and symbolic capital that comes with the established cinematic form.

The positionality of the "untouchable" films within the theatrical realm confers symbolic capital. The theater, which has always been an incubator for cultural and artistic expression, lends to these films symbolic meaning that goes beyond their narrative content. The theater conjures up images of artistic excellence, creative production, and the embodiment of cultural values. As a result of the films' relationship to the venerated world of theatre, these films inherit its symbolic capital.

Furthermore, *gazing* (Ellis 1982) as a mode of cinematic spectatorship singles out the exhibitionistic qualities of cinema and the exhibit value of the movie. As such, the projector becomes an apparatus that displays the moving images to the audience, who are seated and watch from a distance, much like the distance there is between the audience and the exhibit in a museum. Thus, the traditional cinematic mode of viewing centralizes the focus on the exhibit

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[63] Chapter 1, Section 1.4.

value of the movie by guiding the audience through its linear narrative. The interactivity of home video like pausing, rewinding, or skipping would entail greater influence on the behalf of the viewer over the movie, and therefore disrupt the gazing mode of cinematic experience and the exhibitionist character. Finally, individuals who go to the cinema engage in a cultural practice that is frequently associated with refinement and intellectual appreciation. The act of entering a specific place for cinematic consumption contributes to the sense of the cinematic experience as a culturally significant event, thus boosting its prestige and cultural capital.

To conclude, the various forms of value capital reside within this nuanced and delicate ecosystem of cinematic spectatorship and its socio-cultural connotations. As Benjamin put it, "the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence."[64] Indeed, theatrical (re)releases can give the impression that a film is unique in the sense that it is shown to a specific audience at a specific time – maybe with the exception of instances when someone decides to purchase another ticket to rewatch the film. With the VHS format, the traditional cultivation of distance and uniqueness that was previously associated with the theatrical experience collapses. Disney VHS cassettes could be seen in homes together with other movies and home videos. The old idea of the aura – as far as it is based on distance and reverence – is put to the test by the move towards a culture of immediacy and closeness with VHS.

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[64] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." 221.

2.3 The Disney Vault

Even upon releasing the 'Untouchables' on VHS, the company did so on the basis of scarcity once again implementing the 'Disney Vault'. The Disney Vault was a marketing strategy that pertained to the systematic re-releasing of classic feature-length animated films every five to ten years after their initial cinematic debut or later re-release.[65] The practice originated in 1944 with the theatrical re-release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, after which films leaving cinemas were not seen again in theaters until subsequent theatrical re-releases; the term Disney Vault itself started being used more explicitly with the advent of home video in the 1980s and was even featured in animated trailers for VHS tapes and later for DVD releases in the 2000s[66] (Figures 7 and 8). The underlying notion behind this tactic for home video releases was similar to the theatrical re-releases; in fact, the two of them overlapped for a while. Through this strategically interrupted pattern of re-releasing, the re-releases targeted a new generation of young viewers every five to ten years to maximize financial benefits.

Figure 7

Figure 8

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[65] Drew Taylor, "A Rare Trip Inside Disney's Secret Animation Vault," *Vulture, New York*, February 3, 2017, https://www.vulture.com/2017/02/the-disney-vault-is-real-heres-what-its-like-inside.html.
[66] "Disney Vault Ad- Scarcity Principle of Persuasion," accessed April 29, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T4JPpUL-Nus.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wle-XIbiHM&list=PLe7sUQeQ0pheV5q__0MG-vtv9PDSc6kQD&index=2.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=STXxvpgclbs&list=PLe7sUQeQ0pheV5q__0MG-vtv9PDSc6kQD&index=8.

Therefore, following this pattern, previous Disney 'classics' would be reintroduced to theaters – the dominant and most lucrative setting for films – and then made available for home video, only to be taken off the market again within a few months and strategically placed back into the 'vault' until a subsequent theatrical rerelease, which typically occurred six or seven years later. Regardless of the home video being a medium that was still somewhat subject to debate regarding its coexistence with cinema-going, it did serve as a means to generate significant revenue for Disney.[67] As a result of Disney's employment of the Disney Vault to adjust to the home video market, the idea of the vault and its implications instilled a higher sense of urgency among customers, creating a sense of urgency and scarcity which can cultivate symbolic capital; that of something that is scarce and comes in limited supply, which in turn can arouse interest and desire among audiences.

The success of this marketing tactic is accounted for in Eisner's (1998) assessment of the sales surge in the 1990s that followed the release of *The Little Mermaid* (1989).[68] Not only that, but this strategy also helped to develop demand among customers who wanted to acquire and preserve these limited-edition items. On a symbolic level, the vault was employed to preserve the value of the feature films that bore the 'classic' label. The same label would also be featured in later collection releases like the Masterpiece Collection (1994-1999), the first home video collectible release featuring all the previous 'untouchable' titles.[69] The branding value was reinforced through commercial campaigns that heavily emphasized expressions like "get them before they disappear" (Figure 9) and "for a limited time" (Figure 10) to make matters more urgent for the consumers.[70]

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[67] Eisner and Schwartz, *Work in Progress*. 144, 185-188.
[68] Eisner and Schwartz. 196.
[69] "Walt Disney Masterpiece Collection - Promo," 1994, https://youtu.be/WuS-Va0XTCc.
[70] "2002 'Tarzan' & 'Mulan' VHS / DVD Commercial"; "Disney Vault Ad- Scarcity Principle of Persuasion";
"Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs Diamond Edition Commercial - Going Back into the Disney Vault (2011)."

Figure 9

Figure 10

2.4 VHS Trailers

This chapter looks at some indicative VHS trailers for two of Disney's 'untouchable' titles to see how they actually corresponded to the previous theatrical (re)releases and fostered capital upon release for home video. Most of the trailers I am looking at were featured on other Disney videocassettes of different movies uploaded by the individuals who owned the VHS cassettes and were retrieved from YouTube in their digitized form.

Being one of the 'untouchable' classics, *Fantasia* (1940) had been kept away from home video until the financial profits of home video became too high to ignore.[71] The movie was released on VHS in 1991 with a promotional trailer featuring a father surprising his baby with the cassette before jokingly admitting that he actually bought it partly for himself while reminiscing about watching it in theaters as a child.[72] The ad features Mickey Mouse in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1940) and then it goes on to show the baby and father reacting to it. The choice of featuring Mickey Mouse not just in the ad but also on the cover of the VHS helps to instantly distinguish Disney's brand because it works as an icon[73] – in Dominique Chateau's terms – that is instantly recognizable and effectively addresses the target audience, which is children and families. Furthermore, the ad closes with the father remarking on the movie's limited availability as the cassette was "their only chance to get it, and he didn't want to miss it."[74]

Adding to the notion of placing the viewing experience within the context of the family, we can remark that VHS movies as a medium that initiates and shapes social dynamics within a domestic environment acquire social capital as they promote shared experiences and feelings of closeness among family members as shown in the 1991 trailer. This shared experience can

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[71] Eisner and Schwartz, *Work in Progress*. 190-92

[72] "Fantasia - VHS Commercial (1991)," accessed April 2, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yj6mXhkt95o.

[73] Dominique Chateau, "Between Fascination and Denial: The Power of the Screen," in *Screens: From Materiality to Spectatorship – A Historical and Theoretical Reassessment* (Amsterdam, 2016), 186–99.

[74] "Fantasia - VHS Commercial (1991)." 0:18.

raise the production's value because family viewing and family discussion render the film socially meaningful. Conversations are sparked by VHS films as viewers and family members can discuss the plot, characters, and themes of the film, exchanging ideas, interpretations, and opinions. As a result of these shared experiences and interpersonal interactions, the social capital of VHS films is increased inside the domestic sphere.

The idea of *reminiscing* also gives the watching experience an additional layer of cultural and symbolic value and capital. The father is able to relate nostalgically to the production, a sentiment that he then shares with his son thinking back on his own childhood. The trailer shows that VHS films frequently elicit a sense of nostalgia, prompting people to reflect on previous watching experiences. By placing the watching experience within the domestic sphere and utilizing the cultural and symbolic capital of the previous cinematic experience – through nostalgic reminiscing – the production's value is enhanced not only through the values associated with family and home as core landmarks in modern societies but also by association to the symbolic capital of the cinematic medium. Therefore, sharing personal stories about special movie evenings or discussing favorite films from the past strengthens generational bonds and develops a sense of continuity among families. These nostalgic dialogues help to spread values, customs, and cultural references between generations, thereby increasing the production's social and cultural capital.

According to Eisner, *Snow White* underwent a similar release on VHS in 1994[75] where the act of reminiscing is equally apparent in one of its promotional trailers.[76] In the trailer, we see testimonies of people of various ages making brief fond remarks on the movie. Younger ones sing the songs of the movie while older ones reminisce on small details and quotes about the movie and the experience of watching it in theaters. It is interesting to reflect on this

[75] Eisner and Schwartz, *Work in Progress*. 190
[76] "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1994) VHS Release," accessed April 2, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8dhjnXKNX4.

advertising choice because here while Disney promotes highly prized productions on VHS, they deliberately do so by relying on conjuring up images from theater and cinema.

With messages like "Everyone has a memory of Walt Disney's Snow White" (min. 0."6') and "Now you can bring those cherished memories home forever," (min. 0."13') the trailer expertly demonstrates how the symbolic capital of theater transitions into the realm of home video, where home releases are portrayed as a natural extension of the cinematic journey. This transition ensures the continuation of the productions' capital within the domestic sphere. This advertising campaign skillfully frames the production's release as a graceful continuation of media and a seamless successor to the movie journey all accomplished without lowering the intrinsic value of home video. Rather, the trailer deftly exploits the evocative power of nostalgic remembrance, smoothly weaving a link to the film's cinematic past. The movie's value and capital in the domestic sphere are enhanced by infusing the production with the acquired capital of earlier cinematic viewing experiences while simultaneously emphasizing the special possibilities of home video, that is, watching the movie with the whole family.

At min. 0."13' a man briefly introduces himself and expresses excitement for rewatching the movie "through [his] son's eyes". This intergenerational link strengthens the release's social and symbolic capital, imbuing it with a feeling of heritage and continuance. Similarly, at min. 0."21', a woman uses the inclusive pronoun "we," a subtle yet persuasive reference to the collective viewing experience shared with fellow individuals in the theatre environment. This modest but accurate feature highlights the advertising's purposeful evocation of the film's potent social capital, underlining the social interactions made between moviegoers during shared cinematic experiences.

We see, therefore, that the act of reminiscing in the form of nostalgia is prominent in both trailers, and by displaying people remembering it draws attention to the film's theatrical past and also historic capital. Bolter et al. write:

Although Benjamin does not make the point explicit, we could say that from a modernist perspective the connection between involuntary memory and aura is that both are nostalgic. An involuntary memory concerns an event that is now recoverable only through association: it carries with it a sense of remoteness, of distance-no-matter-how-near.[77]

Upon further reflection, the involuntary memory that Benjamin refers to is triggered by the VHS release in the trailers. I would also argue that this memory is also nostalgic in the sense that it encompasses a sentimental longing for the past. Evidently, in *Fantasia* (1991)*,* it is the father who remembers seeing the movie back in theaters, while in *Snow White* (1994) there is an assembly of people that do so in response to the movie's VHS release. Depicting this new type of involuntary memory, that is the recollections that people have from the movie in previous viewing situations, the trailers call back to the theatrical aura of the films that are shown to have left a long-lasting impression on the minds of many generations which adds to their historic capital by having withstood an indicative test of time and relating to people across generations. Following Bolter et al.'s reasoning that both involuntary memory and aura are nostalgic, I see this new type of nostalgia for previous viewing situations as another tool that cultivates the sense of "remoteness" and "distance-no-matter-how-near"[78] because by relating to the production nostalgically, the people in the trailer implicitly acknowledge its distance and remoteness. Yet, at the same time, the VHS has a very tactile and material sense to it, so it creates a paradox: on the one hand we have the material proximity of the VHS that the trailers advertise while on the other, we have a conceivable remoteness of the theatrical experience.

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[77] Jay David Bolter et al., "New Media and the Permanent Crisis of Aura," Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies, 17, no. 6 (2006): 21–39, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856506061550. 25.

[78] Bolter et al.

The two of them merge into a sense of "distance-no-matter-how-near" which enhances the films' importance and capital in the home video market.

We see, therefore, that two of the most highly regarded classic Disney movies made their transition to home video and videocassettes only after much skepticism around the medium and with depicting a very strong sense of nostalgic reminiscing in their promotional trailers. This functioned as an important currency for socio-cultural, historic, and symbolic capital. The forms of capital that the trailers hint at appear to be connected to intergenerational relations – for instance, the depiction of fathers and sons sharing the viewing experience in both trailers – the act of remembering, and the symbolic and historic capital associated with the realm of cinema. The association with cinematic forms of capital makes further sense in light of Benjamin's arguments of mechanical reproduction according to whom, the originals are perceived to lose part of their unique aura and authenticity when made more widely available through technical reproduction. Reviewing trailers from the late 1980s and 1900s reveals that the connections to the films' pasts and theatrical origins are heavily called on through nostalgic remembering enhancing or "reminding" the films' value to potential home video consumers. In other words, the theatrical mode of spectatorship's symbolic capital is lent to the VHS release by association and reminiscing.

In light of these factors, we can see that the idea of content value is changing as it is placed inside the context of the domestic sphere. When considering Disney's strategic approach to home video, we may conclude that the acquisition of capital is not solely dependent on actively participating or harnessing the inherent affordances of a medium; intriguingly, absence or non-participation can also yield distinct value. Disney's deliberate absence from the home video market fostered a feeling of scarcity and exclusivity that meticulously characterized their brand. The 'Untouchables' and the Disney Vault stand out as particularly meticulous marketing strategies that built upon the popularity of the theatrical re-releasing of Disney classic films and rendered them equally valuable in the home video market.

There is a particular type of customer/viewer ownership and proximity that emerges when a movie, typically shown in theaters for years, actually enters the personal space of a home. Household video equipment like VCRs, DVD players, and streaming services today have all contributed significantly to the development of cultural, economic, and social capital for mass production companies like Disney. The introduction of home video technology has contributed significantly to the development of a rich tapestry of cultural capital through proximity, collapsing the traditional distance that is found in a theatrical space. At the same time, the capital of Disney's productions was also enhanced by association with their cinematic releases as shown by the analysis of two indicative VHS trailers. This is done again through the employment of nostalgia in the form of audience reminiscing and the highlighting of Disney films as intergenerational linkages that bring family members closer.

To sum up, home video has diversified the way people interacted with cinematic and film content. Even though somewhat limited as to the amount of interactivity it offered, VCR paved the way for a more intimate relationship with Disney films as we will see in the next Chapter.

Chapter 3

Transitioning to the Digital Home Video

In this chapter, I examine the concept of paratextuality hosted in home video technologies of the 2000s and 2010s, namely DVDs and Blu-ray discs, to better understand and theorize from a historical perspective how the content relevance and content value were maintained and revitalized through the affordances of DVDs and Blu-rays. Focusing on the first digital home video technologies, this chapter adds to the discussion of repackaging and re-releasing classic Disney movies for different media and showcases how that phenomenon garners different forms of capital. More specifically, the environment of such technologies creates forms of capital employing the affordances of digital viewing, namely interactivity and increased user-centric viewing practices, where users have more control over what they watch, when, and how. We can see how the advent of digital features like DVD menus has fostered the formation of new social capital within the context of the viewing experience. By providing paratextual elements and behind-the-scenes footage, these tools give a chance to increase the capital of Disney works while bolstering the already-existing associations with historicity and cultural significance. Furthermore, the bonus material, especially the documentaries featuring behind-the-scenes footage provides a context that in turn serves to inform the viewers' frameworks for interpreting and assigning value to the productions. Such material not only historicizes the film but also cultivates associated forms of capital, like historic and symbolic values. Synergies like these, utilize the affordances of different media in a way that they safeguard the capital of the original movie and highlight its value in the present day.

As a method for collecting the data, in the form of navigational descriptions of the menu environment, I am borrowing the walkthrough method that is typically applied in game and

app studies and analyses. "The walkthrough method is a way of engaging directly with an app's interface to examine its technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and shapes their experiences."[79] In this case, these descriptions apply to the DVD menu and my inquiry on its structure and fictional spaces that unifies it with the movie itself. Then, I am conducting a close reading of the paratextual material to critically reflect on the synergies of form, that is the digital menu environment, and content, meaning the actual bonus material that accompanies the main film, as I believe they were crucial in the curation of value and relevance for Disney films in digital form in the 2000s and 2010s.

For this thesis, I will be focusing on two Disney titles as examples that I believe are representative of Disney productions on DVD, as they employ most of the affordances of the DVD technology which makes them rich cases to study. Of course, other titles from the classic Disney canon that received the 'Platinum Edition' treatment would suffice as well, but since my focus here has to be more compact and centralized, I will be looking at the Platinum Editions of *The Lion King* (2003) and *Sleeping Beauty* (2008), to illustrate some of the ways the menu environment is formed and saturated in playfulness to evoke a sense of audience engagement in a user-centric way. Finally, this chapter focuses on the extra featured material which enhances the main text – that is the movie – with paratextual value and auratic elements to maintain its value and reinforce its cultural capital and relevance once again in the digital realm.

In my investigation of the existence of these classic animated movies in the context of shifting media landscapes, the term *content* is often encountered in the context of digital media and especially on digital platforms. The term is particularly associated with the digital media landscape with reference to *content creators* or *making content for social media platforms.* In

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[79] Ben Light, Jean Burgess, and Stefanie Duguay, "The Walkthrough Method: An Approach to the Study of Apps," *SAGE Publications*, New Media & Society, 20, no. 3 (2018): 881–900, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816675438. 882.

this chapter, I am deliberately using this term interchangeably with 'productions' or 'animated films' to, first and foremost, connote some of the parts that are *included* somewhere, be it a specific media infrastructure or a virtual/digital environment, but also to refer specifically to information such as videos and pictures that are part of a digital space, like a DVD, or a digital disc in general. In other words, everything that is *contained* within something.[80] Furthermore, with this choice, I also wanted to emphasize the continuous and interrelated way in which media are constantly redefining one another as technology progresses. As such, 'content' is used to draw attention to the connection between digital technologies of the early 2000s and today's more diverse digital media landscape and digital platforms. Finally, 'content' also decentralizes top-down understandings of media and allows for discussing user-generated content as well.[81] In this sense, when talking about Disney productions one can speak both of content produced by Disney as well as content generated by users and audiences. In the context of my research focus, I believe it is important to reflect on this decision to use this term, as this also helps us understand the intermedial and cross-platform nature of media, thus allowing for the existence of Disney films across different platforms and through different media technologies.

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[80] To be more precise, by 'content,' I suggest Disney material that extends beyond the filmic productions and highlights those productions as an integral part of a larger media environment. For example, Disney productions are inextricably linked to the technological ecosystem of the DVD, which includes a menu and a user-driven navigation affordance; similarly, they are also inextricably linked to other videos and images in online ecosystems like Disney+. In conclusion, referring to Disney films as 'content' enables one to view them as part of a history of evolving media technologies while also viewing them as an integral part of the larger media ecosystems in which they operate.

[81] Content included in DVDs served as a basis for media users to get even more creative with it because digital technologies made copying processes easier than their analog counterparts. Therefore, their affordances facilitated the hosting of this material elsewhere as now, we may find this paratextual material on YouTube or TikTok etc. So, alongside the film, bonus featured content is characterized as such because of its nature to shift hosting technological environments.

3.1 The DVD as an archive & the concept of *Authorship*

The technologies used for the storage, consumption, and access of digital material are thoroughly examined in this chapter. For this section, I find it helpful to think of the DVD as an archive as well as a reproduction technology. By adopting this viewpoint, I aim to examine the paratextual content of the DVD and Blu-ray discs as archived material that hold historic value. To conceptualize DVDs as playful home archives presents a paradigm that emphasizes interaction and increased control of the user within the world of personal media consumption.[82]

Jacques Derrida (1995) examines the idea of the 'archive' and its importance in *Archive Fever*. Going beyond the conventional definition, he says the archive is more than just a collection of papers or records; rather, he views the archive as an intricate structure with processes for selection, preservation, and interpretation.[83] It is a dynamic and contentious environment where power dynamics, historical narratives, and processes of knowledge production are all at play rather than just a repository for information. A DVD is a digital space that holds many of these features as it is packed with extra, meticulously selected content and documentation of past decades, like documentaries that give historical context about the movies and invite the viewer to get a glimpse of the animation processes at play. Such choices hold political connotations because they assign value to the main text by providing the necessary knowledge to the viewers as to how to appreciate them. Derrida contends that the archive serves to institutionalize and regulate the past by deciding what should be preserved and what should be ignored or minimized. Therefore, the process of archiving has political and

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[82] While this is true, it is worth mentioning that interactivity was not introduced with DVDs. It has been demonstrated that it was actually an essential part of analog home technologies as well, even though somewhat limited mainly to pause, rewind and fast forward. However, Platinum Editions and later digital renditions raised the level of interaction by including actual games in their titles, like the 'Timon and Pumbaa's Virtual Safari' in The Lion King (2003), a virtual jungle walkthrough both on land and water where the POV of the camera adopted the perspective of the viewer, mimicking popular games like the Call of Duty franchise. Additionally, throughout the game you can hear the voices of characters commenting on the travel adding a comedic character to the whimsy of the game. The fact that we never see the actual figures on screen maintains the illusion that they are experiencing the journey from our perspective as viewers.

[83] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

ideological ramifications that shape collective memory and affect how history is perceived and represented.

Elizabeth Evans (2011) delves into instances of transmedia storytelling to describe and analyze the dissemination of a movie or a story across numerous media platforms and screens such as television, YouTube, and social media.[84] Throughout this dissemination, the content frequently bears a constant stylistic identity, that in this case functions as a marker of *authorship*. This consistency in style indicates that the content is generated and molded by a single author. The unifying artistic imprint and coherent aesthetics that exist across different media platforms, technologies, and distribution outlets encapsulate the meaning of *authorship*.

The idea of DVDs as archives emphasizes their status as cultural artifacts with deep symbolic and historic value. As I will illustrate in the upcoming sections of this chapter, the distinctive Disney stamp and the authorship it represents serve as a strong reminder of the curated procedures that surround DVDs as historical items. In a similar vein, the paratextual components that are incorporated into DVD creations are infused with the authorship of the creators. DVDs are examples of cultural objects that capture the narratives, beliefs, and values of their particular historical times, particularly with the featurettes that offer brief documentation of older animation processes and situate the movie historically.[85]

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[84] Elizabeth Evans, "Transmedia Texts: Defining Transmedia Storytelling," in *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media, and Daily Life*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2011).

[85] To name a few examples: *Eyvind Earle: The Man and His Art* (2008) provides a profile of the colorist and background artist who created Sleeping Beauty's distinctive aesthetic. The issues of animating Princess Aurora's expensive and ambitious forest stroll are discussed in *Sequence 8* (2008). An excerpt from a 1958 Disneyland program called *4 Artists Paint 1 Tree* (1958) describes the teamwork that resulted in Sleeping Beauty's artwork. Or at least that's how it begins before artists Marc Davis, Eyvind Earle, Josh Meador, and Walt Peregoy start talking extensively about how they represented trees in their works.

3.2 The rise of DVD & digital technologies

As Tim van der Heijden argues in *Hybrid Histories: Technologies of Memory and the Cultural Dynamics of Home Movies, 1895-2005*, digital technologies took over the home media market in the 1990s and 2000s; these various digital media technologies and platforms, including high-end home personal computers, the World Wide Web, digital cameras, CD-ROMs, DVDs, memory chips, LCD touch displays, flat-panel television screens, laptops, tablets, and smartphones.[86] The majority of these technological advancements and conversions were based on the shift from analog to digital media, which ushered in the so-called "digital age," "computer age," or "information age," a new era in which the economy was predicted to become more information and computer-based. Although the switch from analog to digital video systems was heralded in evolutionary terms, especially for home moviemakers and amateurs, the introduction of digital video was not always seen or felt as a breach or rupture. Instead, once again, it created a practice of media continuation.[87] And this is evident, by the resemblance, especially of early DVD players with late VCRs.

In my view, DVD and Blu-ray technologies occupy a special space in the history of digital media. Together, I see them as mainstream representatives of digital home technologies during a time when the internet existed but had not yet dominated the media landscape as it does today. In the meantime, much like other big companies, Disney had to deal with the emergence of digital piracy while digital home video was still relatively new. In keeping with VHS's legacy, DVDs shared a lot of traits and promotional tactics as further sections will demonstrate in greater detail. However, the following discussions are more guided through the titles I use as case studies rather than the analysis of the technologies themselves. Looking at phenomena applying to DVDs and/or Blu-rays provides an understanding of how digital

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[86] van der Heijden, "Hybrid Histories: Technologies of Memory and the Cultural Dynamics of Home Movies, 1895-2005." 226-227.
[87] van der Heijden. 227

technologies were used in a way that garnered specific forms of capital and engaged viewers in a certain way.

In the early 1990s, Sony, Panasonic, Thompson, and Philips, among other manufacturers, collaborated to develop the Digital Video (DV) system as a digital video standard, also known as Digital Video Cassette (DVC).[88] DV offered a greater image resolution and lessened sensitivity to dust and other outside factors than analog video systems. The most significant benefit, however, was that users could copy movies and video recordings without obvious quality loss because of the digital method of information processing. This not only enabled the copying and sharing of many films but also, in the context of the media continuum discussed before, paved the way for a more interactive relationship with (Disney) films and later user edits on TikTok and other platforms.

Just like its predecessor, that is analog home video technology, the digital way of engaging with movies cultivated a particular type of viewer 'ownership' towards film content that emerges when a movie, typically shown in theaters for years, enters the personal space of a home. Additionally, the affordances of discs and digital technologies cultivated a sense of enhanced user control contained within limited digital environments like a DVD menu. Enhanced user control is another form of social capital because it redefines the relation between viewers and the content they watch, in ways that enable the centrality of the viewer within that dynamic and emphasize their enhanced control over what, where, and how they watch that content. In the sense that it shapes a more dynamic viewing experience – connected to the digital consumption technologies – this type of engagement can arguably be found more prominently in videogames but in these early encounters of viewing and storage cultures with the digital, we may observe a lot of these affordances sipping into the digital home video consumption practices.

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[88] van der Heijden. 228.

3.3 Paratextuality & The Platinum Edition

Following the popularity of the Masterpiece Collection (Figure 11), which at the time was the first home video compilation to contain all the acclaimed Disney films, Disney launched the Platinum series. This collection was the first DVD series that made extensive use of supplemental elements to improve the viewing experience, capitalizing on paratextuality. When it comes to cinema and films, digital media environments have allowed for the existence of many paratexts. *Paratext* is a term first used by French literary critic Gérard Genette (1997) to describe a text that interacts with or mediates the primary work in a way that makes it possible for the work to be finished and received *in a certain way* by its audience or the public in general.[89] Since then, the term has been used extensively to include not just written texts but also other types of peripheral digital content like trailers, online databases, fandoms, etc.

By providing paratextual material like documentaries, behind-the-scenes footage, and images such as concept art and storyboards, the Disney Platinum series gave the viewers extensive historical context about the movies. Viewers were able to learn more about the films and appreciate them from a new angle due to these supplemental materials. By taking advantage of paratextuality as an affordance of digital storage and consumption technologies, Disney provided a richer and more thorough experience, and the content was extended beyond the main attraction which was the movie. From *Snow White* (1937) until popular titles of the 1990s, the Platinum collection was the first digital line that featured all of the studio's 'untouchable' films. This new shift towards paratextual value was designed to draw in viewers who were interested to learn more about the well-known films that they were already somewhat familiar with. At the same time, it also signaled a major turning point, which prompted the creation of a new framework of evaluation for the original productions, wherein values such as

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[89] Gerard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997). 3-5.

the historicity of the material and the media adaptability of that content stood front and center. This evaluation system highlighted the value of historical context as well as the digital adaptability of the movies, that is, how well the films would translate digitally. This is evident by the indicative trailers provided below; to be more specific, they demonstrate the company's emphasis on paratextual material and the digital remastering of the respective movies in trailers of the Platinum and the subsequent Diamond editions.[90] A look at the trailers of our case studies will confirm that. Much like in the previous chapter, the trailers analyzed here are retrieved from YouTube and were made available by independent users. Regardless, they are official trailers directed by Disney.
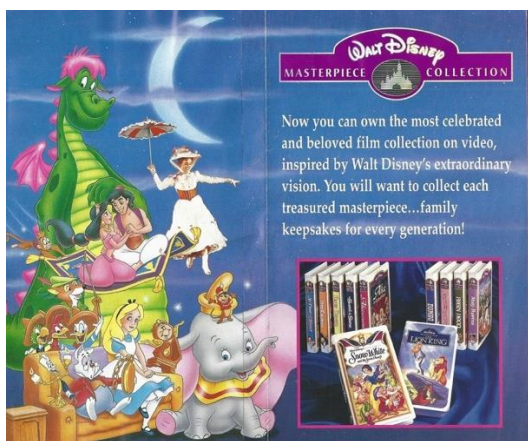
Figure 11

Figure 12

Paratextuality is prominently featured in the 2003 trailer for *The Lion King*, which heavily emphasizes fresh behind-the-scenes material and interviews with Elton John and other musicians who worked on the film.[91] This purposeful attention can be seen as a nod to the cultural value Hollywood stars received during the 1930s and 1940s in relation to movie

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[90] A successor to the Platinum Edition line, the Walt Disney Diamond Editions featured the same titles on more high-definition formats like Blu-rays, DVDs, 3D, and digital copies. The collection spanned from 2009 to 2015 and was followed by the Walt Disney Signature Collection in 2016 which is the last physical Disney media collection to be released to date.

[91] "The Lion King - 2003 Platinum Edition DVD Trailer #2," accessed May 22, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgfRgbyM-KY.

releases by Disney, similar to the premiere of *Snow White* in 1937 which has been discussed in Chapter 1. This can be seen as a case of remediation of Disney's older strategies of garnering social and symbolic capital for their productions; or, a translation of their older strategies into new media contexts. In this case, however, the focus is on presenting the making of the movie through an 'exclusive' behind-the-scenes view that emphasizes the *collaboration* with celebrities and creatives, beginning with Robin Williams' voice acting in *Aladdin* in 1992.[92] This also emphasizes that these productions always functioned as part of the broader Hollywood ecosystem, much like they functioned as part of the broader media ecosystem. For instance, Elton John had a significant role in *The Lion King* as a member of the creative team and the composer of numerous of the songs; as such, he is heavily featured in the trailer as well.

The menu setting and the abundance of extra content, including deleted sequences, references to actual animals, and interactive activities, are also shown in the trailer (min. 1."26'). These components take advantage of digital home video's interactive affordances to provide engaging activities for kids and families which reiterate and redefine the ways they interact with and see the movie. The trailer ends with the encompassing line "It's more than the movie!" (min. 2."09') which accentuates the expansive role that digital media plays in boosting the enduring appeal of classic material as it translates into other technologies. Such statements allude to implied social capital because they redefine the way viewers relate to the digital releases in comparison to previous analog ones and they can be read as an effort to make the films relevant again in a digital context claiming, once again, a place in the domestic sphere.

Similarly, the trailer for *Sleeping Beauty* features more prominently the technological enhancement of the movie emphasizing that the film is "coming to life" (min. 0."18') with digital refinement and even featuring a split screen with before and after digital optimization

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[92] Eisner and Schwartz, *Work in Progress*. 157.

results at min. 1."1' (Figure 13).[93] Interestingly, instead of 'before' and 'after,' the split screen reads: "before" and "restored". One might pass over this small detail, but I feel that dwelling upon it can reveal more than one might expect. The word "restored" implies that something had a particular form before being altered, signifying an initial state of being. Merriam-Webster defines the phrase as "to bring back to or put into a former or original state."[94] This may allude to the fact that the digital *newness* that Disney practiced also aimed to bring us closer to an *older, original* state of being. This viewpoint inadvertently puts into perspective the relationship between digital and analog media. Just from the perspective of their materiality, analog technologies are known to deteriorate in quality over time and usage. This is particularly revealing in the context of the digital remediation of Disney films because it implies that the original release had already deteriorated and needs more profound methods of preservation. This, I believe, is *how* digital technologies are instrumentalized as promises of "restoring" a film to its original state in ways that maintain the aesthetics and the value of previous analog releases.

Figure 13

As previously noted, Disney adopted specific techniques to enhance its home video re-releases, framing them as essential parts of a long-standing historical Disney history. Disney

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[93] "Disney's Sleeping Beauty (50th Anniversary Platinum Edition) Trailer," accessed May 22, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSS9t8ryEGA&list=PLB5knVidw55owL_MN5XtYZscVec9KQpCJ&index=19.

[94] "Restore (Verb)," in *Merriam-Webster*, accessed May 23, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/restore#:~:text=%CB%88st%C8%AF(%C9%99)r-,restored%3B%20restoring,a%20former%20or%20original%20state.

reinforced the idea of historical continuity and strengthens the link between the past and the present by using modern technologies in their established historical framework of production. This strategy enables them to combine their long-standing historical traditions with these more recent technologies rendering it, once again, a case of remediation of their older, well-established practices that had proven successful. Intriguingly, none of the trailers for the Platinum releases mentioned above features the viewers as in previous analog releases. When it came to VHS, for instance in the case of *Fantasia* (1991)[95] the trailer featured the father and the baby, while in *Snow White* (1994)[96] it included the diverse audience's recollections of cinematic viewership. The lack of references to viewers in the digital trailers stays more focused on the content itself without giving a broader viewing context that serves as a denominator of cultural and historic value. Instead, in the case of these trailers, the historic significance of Disney productions was emphasized by means of paratextual elements that offered – among others –a historical context that served as a framework of interpretation and evaluation for viewers.

The idea of 'newness' was a popular source of excitement throughout the technological boom of the 2000s and 2010s. This was especially true in the media and entertainment industries, like Disney, where the introduction and development of digital technology were crucial. In this regard, the films that were released during this period embraced an identity that sought to reinvent movies as 'new products' that tapped into the special opportunities and capabilities made possible by digital technology. By embracing the advancements of digital technology, these films aimed to establish cinema as a live, dynamic form of entertainment that captured the essence of 'newness' while also connecting to their 'original' form. This is an

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[95] "Fantasia - VHS Commercial (1991)."
[96] "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1994) VHS Release."

instance where the cinematic medium is remediated to adjust to the new technological advances while re-claiming or re-asserting its historicity.

Disney engages viewers through such approaches, while also tapping into the appeal of a rich past through the use of words such as "restore" and bonus material as testaments of admiration for past achievements. In this sense, their classic productions are combined with modern technologies, allowing them to serve modern audiences while also nodding to a rich past and historic capital. By bridging past and present and highlighting the enduring quality of Disney's narratives, this fusion of the old and the new helps to preserve and maintain the relevance of these productions among different generations. Furthermore, it ensures that its releases engage with both devoted followers and younger audiences by blending the digital enhancement of new technologies with components that connect to the films' history and this will be explored in more detail in the next sections of this chapter, as I will be looking into the menu environment and some of the bonus features of the Platinum Editions. The use of digital affordances in film production and dissemination allowed for creative methods and improvements that changed the experience of watching a movie at home and Disney seems to have utilized that in a way that balances upholding the values on which the success of their classic productions was based and navigating the constantly evolving media and entertainment industry.

All the above examples showcase how Disney's deployment of the DVD technology makes for a practice of remediation in the sense that their strategies of re-releasing their classic movies employed different technological tools that helped them acquire forms of capital in the digital era. The digital repackaging of the classic films in particular helped Disney reintroduce their productions and cement their place in the digital home video within the domestic sphere.

3.4 Fictional Liveness in Paratextual Material

As a virtual environment, the DVD menu provided a lot of potential for creative and innovative expression, with user engagement and interaction as one of the driving factors to reevaluate the classic films in a – new at the time – digital context. To better demonstrate the playful, interactive turn of the medium, it is worth looking at the Platinum Edition of *Sleeping Beauty* (2008) in its Blu-ray release[97]. In this edition, the menu featured a landscape taken from the film as a still background (Figure 14) but when connected to the internet – for instance when watching on a PC or a smart TV – it also featured the weather by accessing weather data from an online database. Thus, if it was raining in real life, for example, the rain would be featured in the landscape of the menu as well.

This playful first encounter with the disc reinforces the idea of fictional narratives and objects, like the castle, taking life outside of the film itself. This is especially valuable in the case of the castle because it has a significantly recognizable and emblematic value for Disney by being a main attraction in their theme parks and merchandise, as shown in one of their featurettes included in the DVD (Figure 15). In this case, we observe the diegetic universe of *Sleeping Beauty* extending into real life, or at least attempting to do so, by mimicking live weather conditions. The study of different forms of "liveness" by Jerome Bourdon (2000), including the idea of "fictional liveness," becomes central when we discuss how concepts like "regimes of belief" are fostered by liveness.[98]

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[97] The last two releases in the Platinum series, *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) in 2008 and *Pinocchio* (1940) in 2009, were also released on Blu-ray Disc. In addition to the two discs for the movie and bonus features, the Blu-ray releases also included a DVD of the movie for travel purposes and to lure consumers without Blu-ray players into helping to boost sales. These first Blu-ray releases also stood as a test for Disney for evaluating the consumer demand for Blu-rays before starting their next collection in the very same year that featured all the previous titles in Blu-ray format.

[98] Bourdon, "Live Television Is Still Alive: On Television as an Unfulfilled Promise." 535.

Bourdon uses *fictional liveness* to describe how fictional universes and characters intertwine with real life. In the case of the Blu-ray digital menu, that happens when the weather depicted changes according to the real location of the viewer and its weather conditions.

Figure 14

Figure 15

When discussing types of fiction, like in the case of fictional Disney universes, we can make a case that digital home video borrows liveness, which in this case is a television affordance, to generate a kind of value for the movie content. Bourdon mentions that "some fictional genres actually retain proximity with liveness".[99] The fictional landscape depicted in the menu then gains proximity through the affordance of liveness and becomes an interlinked paratextual element to the movie. He also argues that the "liveness" or real-time presence inherent in television broadcasts provides an element of authenticity or truth to the events being broadcasted. In other words, when something happens live, whether real or fictional, there is an impression that it is happening at present time, which can make it feel more real and immediate to the audience. In the case of content repackaging of Disney classics, liveness is given a different value as it facilitates a mode of viewing that closes the gap even more between the spectator and the movie; the playful reflexivity of the menu environment creates a sense of proximity.

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[99] Bourdon. 538.

Following Bourdon's reasoning, I think liveness should be seen as a dynamic element within the history of Disney and media. At least in part, the development of media technology can be seen as an endeavor to close the distance between events and media consumers.[100] This is also a case of remediating their older strategies of closing the gap between fiction and reality when they had fictional characters such as Mickey and Minnie Mouse interviewed live on the radio at the premiere of *Snow White* in 1937.[101] In both cases, liveness is a tool that even if not utilized extensively in other Disney digital releases, it still holds symbolic and social capital by relying on 'regimes of belief' (Bourdon 2000). Once again, the social and symbolic capital of these displays are impacted by the blending of reality and fantasy that instill believability for the fictional world and authority for Disney which are forms of social and symbolic capital. One result, in the digital context, is that viewers engage with the content more playfully and become more engrossed in it. By establishing a connection with the viewer's real-life settings, this immersive quality also secures the productions' cultural capital by claiming a place in daily life as it collides with the fictional universe. Home technologies stand out because they offer individualized viewing experiences and have a designated location in the home. These productions become associated with particular life stages, such as childhood or adolescence and they further cement their place in the memory of the viewer.

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[100] Bourdon. 552
[101] Chapter 1, Section 1.4.

3.5 Digital Interactivity in Paratextual Material

All of the above discussions emphasize that our interaction with cinema and films today extends beyond the theatrical screenings; instead, it is disseminated over several platforms. We frequently interact with a new movie's DVD release which often includes trailers, deleted scenes, storyboards, interactive comments, and other extras. Techno-culturally, Grusin suggests that our perception of the artistic value of movies has significantly changed as a result of the transition from theatrical releases to DVDs and other digital formats.[102] This digital repackaging develops a digital "cinema of interactions," which is a type of cinema disseminated throughout multiple platforms. The way we trace and analyze the movies' current forms of value needs to be reconsidered in light of this; that is, the fact that movies are now experienced in a rather non-linear manner due to the diversified digital media environment and ask the viewer to (re)discover them.

To give an example, the interactive environment of the DVD menu of *The Lion King* (2003) is crafted by drawing attention to the spaces that already exist in the main text, that is the film. Therefore, even though we are never given the option to navigate *through* those spaces – that is, spatially transitioning in a continuum from one point to the next – the menu curates its sections as parts of the same fictional universe, solidifying the continuation of the respective fictional world. Intricate connections exist between the non-diegetic world displayed in the menu and the diegetic world portrayed in the film.

To begin with, by using the walkthrough method, we enter the menu environment of *The Lion King* (2003); there we are guided through a one-minute flight over CGI-generated depictions of the most prominent locations of the film. The flight and introduction of the menu options happen with the escort of Zazu, a blue-feathered African hornbill who is a secondary

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[102] Richard Grusin, "DVDs, Video Games, and the Cinema of Interactions," in *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, ed. Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (Falmer: REFRAME Books, 2016). 71.

character in the film. Zazu is a diegetic character – part of the fictional world – who transcends the fictional world to the non-diegetic environment of the menu becoming a sort of an intermediator between the two worlds who maintains a coherence between them. In that regard, he also enhances the belief in fictional liveness through his transcending because he participates in the interactive environment of the menu where users also engage with the options on screen. Furthermore, he also serves as another element from the main story that enhances the aesthetic coherence of the release, which in turn can be read as a sign of authorship. In other words, the DVD menu keeps the coherence and the consistency of the fictional world on a narrative and aesthetic level and Zazu enhances its authorship value.

His landing happens on 'Pride Rock'[103] where he introduces the menu environment after breaking the fourth wall with a playful first salutation to the viewers. Upon his landing, more playful elements in the menu interface and sections pop up. Here we may observe not only the spatiotemporal construction[104] of different backgrounds as virtual spaces utilized for different menu sections but also the element of mystery and exploration that echoes the themes and aesthetics of the movie. To be more precise, alongside the regular menu sections typically encountered in other conventional DVDs, like 'Play, Scene Selection, Bonus Features, Set Up' etc., we are provided with land names from the film that correspond to different sections of bonus material. As such, our options in disc 1 are, among others: 'Grasslands, Tree of Life, Jungle, and Elephant Graveyard' (Figure 16) which are all location names from the movie. Zazu, then, is giving a brief overview as to what each section/location contains and gives an idea of what the user can find there.

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[103] In the fictional universe of *The Lion King,* 'Pride Rock' refers to the throne and palace of the king of the 'Pride Lands.' It is depicted to be tall enough for someone to see the entire Pride Lands from its peak.
[104] That is, the movie locations transferred to the DVD menu.

Figure 16

With the accompaniment of the movie's soundtrack, this sectioned yet unified menu setting pays homage to the concepts and plot of the movie through the use of interactive affordances and self-reflexivity, forging an aesthetic connection with the film that conjures its spirit upon playing the disc. This is especially apparent and fitting for a film like *The Lion King*, whose colorful, scenic animated African landscape combined with an epic soundtrack and vibrant color scheme embraces the spirit of grandeur and adventure. These components continue to be present throughout the sections of the menu, creating a captivating environment that both introduces the movie and expands the viewing experience by providing intricate CGI depictions of the story's landscapes that lead to various behind-the-scenes documentaries and games. The virtual environment gives the idea that the movie's world is not constrained within its own borders but rather extends by eschewing the linear framework of traditional cinema and what is seen on screen and embracing the interactivity of digital mediums.

The two key facets of Grusin's thesis pertain to techno-cultural, and aesthetic dimensions.[105] Technoculturally, such curation entails a great degree of user interactivity with these digital media. Aesthetically, it forges a sense of authenticity by drawing connections with the 2D film counterpart. According to Grusin, the advent of digital cinema heralds the end of the era of celluloid film.[106] He is not arguing, however, that film will completely disappear. Instead, he believes it will get more and more entangled with the aesthetic, technical, and social

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[105] Grusin, "DVDs, Video Games, and the Cinema of Interactions." 69.
[106] Grusin. 66.

facets of digital media. The fundamental concept of traditional cinema, which was based on photography, is replaced by a digital framework in today's "cinema of interactions." Evidently, the 2D celluloid animation of *The Lion King* is recreated in 3D for the interactive digital menu. Instead of concentrating simply on the representation of the past – that being, celluloid – this new framework emphasizes the anticipation of the future – CGI – similar to video games and other digital media.

A key idea of this argument involves an active viewer in a domestic or social context as opposed to a passive spectator in a theater. The conventional separation between the audience and the screen in classic Hollywood movies becomes more of a continuum, where the viewer's agency and the digital creation fluidly blend more and more. As such, the very nature of a DVD menu entails engagement and interactivity via the remote control; therefore, and more importantly, it invites a new type of engagement with fictional universes that enhances pre-existing celluloid cinema works. In other words, we experience a purposeful reinforcement of the fictional universe through our interactions with the DVD menu, which can deepen our connections to it as it requires active participation and involvement in the navigation process. This type of engagement entails social value because it redefines previous relationships with such content in a home video setting and claims a participatory mode of viewing that guides the viewer/user to a movie's backstory and history of making, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section.

To sum up, DVDs are key components in the distribution of interactive forms of cinematic content as they frequently have interactive elements, such as chapter breaks for non-linear viewing or the possibility to randomly select scenes using the player's controls. In addition, there are 'easter eggs'[107] that viewers can find by playing easy games or seeing

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[107] "A hidden message or feature in a video game, film, comic book, etc. that is not necessary or related to the main content, but adds to the entertainment" (Oxford Learner's Dictionary).

storyboards with soundtracks from the films. As such, digital interactivity and user involvement in the DVD menu validate, expand, and connect the fictional spaces of the movie granting agency to some extent when it comes to what to explore next. Interactivity adds a new layer of social value to the relationship between the viewer and the material on digital home video technologies and breaks pre-existing boundaries between them even more. As discussed earlier, home technologies have changed how we interact with content and media, providing certain watching experiences that extend to social interactions both within the context of the family as well as between the viewer and the movie content. These technologies' paratextual playfulness and interactivity foster new social values by nurturing new relationships between the viewer and the text. I believe this stage of media history is useful to examine in our endeavor to understand how they paved the way for current synergies in today's media environments like streaming services, blogs, and fan edits where interactivity and playfulness are even more prominent with the addition of user-centric content creation. It is when we start tracing those synergies that we begin to understand how the value of film content is molded and slightly transformed to translate well into a new technological medium, utilizing new affordances each time to claim space in the domestic environment.

3.6 Featurettes, Historicity & *Aura*

On a content level – that is, the features included in the menu – paratextual components like behind-the-scenes material, deleted scenes, and director commentary add to the viewer's understanding and appreciation of the movie. These affordances go beyond simple entertainment and provide nostalgic and informative experiences that can appeal to a wide range of viewers.

In the words of Jonathan Grey:

> "[m]any of these bonus materials, such as 'restored' scenes, interviews with creative personnel, commentary tracks, production stills, and making-of documentaries, stamp their texts with authenticity, insisting on that text's claim to the status of great art. While Walter Benjamin famously noted that 'that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art,' today's DVD digital reproduction often proves constitutive in assigning a text a sense of aura."[108]

Even though the concept of the aura has been problematized as a greatly elusive term that is difficult to pin down and define, following Benjamin's reasoning and at the risk of generalizing, we can still infer that it is found in a specific time and space related to a particular socio-cultural context and the idea of originality – or authenticity.[109] Gray argues that while aura was declared as lost by Benjamin through the means of mechanical reproduction and remediation, here it is consciously evoked in the process of remediation when the creators and producers utilize medium-specific tools to curate a unique character for each title in an attempt to reclaim the context and artistic value of the original release. Indeed, there is a noticeable

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[108] Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010). 83.
[109] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." 220.

synergy of tools that hint towards the main text as an artistic accomplishment giving it historical context and value. For instance, music is an integral part of the curation not only in the menu but also in the featured bonus material itself. In *The Lion King* (2003) an uplifting and playful soundtrack accompanies featurettes and behind-the-scenes documentaries about the creative process of the film that included studying real-life animals before animating the animal characters for the film, underscoring the meticulousness of the whole process and the playfulness which transcends from the form of the menu to its content. In scenes where the epic character of the film was mentioned, the music transitions to the more epic parts of the score creating an ambiance of awe and inviting emotional involvement in the process of spectatorship.

In disc 2, under the section *Story* (Figure 17) we may find our way to three featurettes: *Origins*, in which the filmmakers discuss the ideas for the main plot, *Timeless Themes*, which expands on the origins, and *The Story Comes To Life*, which follows the original scripting and production of the movie. In *Story Origins*, several similarities and connections were drawn between the film and primal stories as well as highly regarded Western literature and cultures like Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and elements from the Biblical stories of Joseph and Moses. Based on their links to significant historical events, movements, or periods, these tales carry significant cultural and historic values regarding religion and literature respectively, especially in Western culture; they have sparked many discussions and adaptations in literature, theater, film, and other art forms. By explicitly connecting the themes of *The Lion King* to such texts, its cultural and historic value is saturated by association.

According to director Roger Allers, the team began to find the story's ties to other key mythological stories by structuring the story inside the realm of archetypes. Other behind-the-scenes staff members shown in the featurette expounded on this, emphasizing that the more they strove to endow the picture with authenticity, depth, and resonance, the more it naturally

aligned with the enduring force of great stories. Producer Don Hahn went on to say that when these stories are considered metaphorically and mythically, they take on a distinctly new dimension. They have an uncanny resonance, engaging the audience in a way that is unlike earlier interpretations. Hahn also drew a comparison between Simba, the main character, with the character of Joseph from the Bible, who moves from royalty to exile only to return unrecognized by his own family. In a similar vein, Hahn posed a question stemming from this parallel. If Joseph acquired understanding from the burning bush, why couldn't Simba gain insight from a similar symbolic moment, manifested through the appearance of his departed father? This important scene, as he remarks later, echoes Shakespeare's Hamlet's "to be or not to be" monologue, resonating strongly with the existential dimensions of the story.

Figure 17

In some films, such as *Sleeping Beauty* (2008), we find discs still packed with making-of footage with the addition of Walt Disney's name frequently brought up during cast and crew interviews as they recall instances of Walt's contribution adding to the cohesive authorship and originality for the main text and its paratexts. Upon further examination, one can easily realize that movies that premiered while Walt Disney was still alive as the studio's art director – that is until *The Jungle Book* in 1967 – never miss a chance to make Walt's presence prominent in the bonus material of their DVD releases. Sometimes they include footage of him, memoirs of co-workers, statements, and other paratextual material that reinforce the historicity and

continued relevance of Disney's original releases. As we have seen, as far as one can investigate and pin down such a broad and elusive concept, Benjamin's aura is tightly connected to a specific time and place and relates to a particular socio-cultural context. From that perspective, all the synergies of paratextuality place the movie within a specific socio-historical context that conjures the original aura of the movie by association with the original theatrical release and the production process, and also because it gives the viewer the necessary *context* to be able to appreciate the film. This is done by showing parts of the animation processes, and by inviting the viewer not only to learn about the movie but also to teach them *how* to see and appreciate it situating the movie within the time and place of its production.

Going back to the *archive* discussion, if we examine Disney films and their digital releases as archives or cultural artifacts, we can see that the behind-the-scenes tour not only provides an entertaining way to discover new information about the films that some viewers were already attached to, but it also collectively emphasizes the cultural heritage, significance, individuality, and historic embeddedness of each movie. Combined with the employment of agency that gives a sense of independent discovery, paratextuality established – or renewed – the status of these productions. Among the things that enable an understanding of Disney DVDs as forms of archives, is also this historicity that these paratextual elements carry. To be more specific, the documentaries of *The Lion King* and *Sleeping Beauty* highlight the effort, time, money, and risk that was sometimes required to produce them while portraying them as cultural and creative resets. Being an older film, *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) is also more explicitly viewed as a historic artifact, as an object from another age, and this idea circulates back to the DVD being an *archive* for the movie and everything, even remotely, related to it, which enhances its value in terms of historic embeddedness; this is done through the movie's paratextual material, and by that I mean the behind-the-scenes footage and making-of featurettes.

Featurettes like *4 Artists Paint One Tree*, found in disc 2 of *Sleeping Beauty* (2008), give an extensive look to the work of painters and animators as well as the effort they put in to create an aesthetically cohesive result that would fit the unique tone and the character of the story.[110] This behind-the-scenes look as a paratextual element gives context to the viewer regarding the historic place and time in which the film was made as well as the limitations of the technology of that time. By showcasing bits of the production process and by giving context like that, it implicitly guides the viewer's eye to see and appreciate the artistry and resourcefulness entailed in the film's painting and drawing, rendering it as something worth looking at that carries artistic and cultural value.

Much like in the case of the Shakespeare references in *The Lion King,* the name of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky is mentioned here throughout this feature, having even a separate dramatized short version of his life (Figure 18) that aired in 1959 by Disney to promote the main film.[111] Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* ballet is of great cultural value and is a fine example of the romantic ballet movement's artistic aura. It brings together the artistic realms of music, dance, and visual aesthetics while leaving an enduring imprint on society's cultural fabric thanks to its enduring status and influence. Once again, the paratextual material borrows and expands upon this classical cultural legacy that is of great cultural value to Western popular culture and assigns it to the film by association since the music score is based on Tchaikovsky's ballet.

Alongside, the award-winning short documentary *Grand Canyon* (1958) (Figure 19) which debuted in theaters alongside *Sleeping Beauty* (1959)*,* is also included to historicize and emulate the original theatrical release of 1959. This is a deliberate choice that curates authenticity and aura, by historicizing the production and providing its theatrical premiere

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[110] *4 Artists Paint 1 Tree: A Walt Disney "Adventure in Art,"* Short, 1958.
[111] *The Peter Tchaikovsky Story*, 1959.

companion feature, which assigns symbolic and cultural value to the film and this digital form. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that this form of curation specifically employs and understands *aura* as something that holds historic substance and is embedded in a specific *historical context*.

Figure 18

Figure 19

These unique paratextual elements are strategically included in the Platinum Collection's DVD repackaging in order to increase the cultural and historical significance of the original theatrical release. Younger audiences are carefully encouraged and informed on how to analyze and develop an appreciation for the movie by spending time with the supplementary content, while older audiences' high regard for the film is reinforced. Intentionally attempting to capture the atmosphere and significance of the original cinematic experience, the selection of such value-laden paratexts efficiently bridges generational gaps and fosters a better understanding and connection with the creative and historical value of the film.

To conclude, paratextuality in DVDs has been investigated as a multilayered phenomenon that was facilitated with the advent of digital home video and its new affordances to reinforce old values, like cultural and historical, while also fostering new ones, like the social relationships arising from new ways of virtual interactions. In the digital space of the menu, paratextuality fosters a cohesive aesthetic that matches the film, but it can also be found within

the featurettes and documentaries themselves that more so than others assign symbolic and historic capital to the release. Historic because they essentially situate the movie in the historical *context* of its production and original release, and symbolic when it comes to what that historic situatedness hints that it *represents*, be it, longevity, authorship, timelessness, etc. The convergence of such synergies of content and form from digital spaces like the DVD menu to games featured in such spaces, to documentaries, and many more, situate the main text – the film – as something *significant* that is worth knowing about. This cultivates economic and cultural capital because the films are treated like historical pieces and the DVD renders the viewer *knowledgeable* about the production's history through their contextual and historical material that curate prestige.

To conclude, the idea of DVDs as archives reveals their diverse cultural, historic, symbolic, economic, and social capital. As we have seen, DVDs serve as archives and cultural heritage repositories as well as commercially viable items that express Disney's authorial presence. This is achieved through instances of remediation, for instance, the remediation of fictional liveness and the prestige of Hollywood, as well as through the employment of various DVD affordances.

To name a few, aesthetic cohesiveness between the menu environment and the actual movie stands out as a marker of Disney's authorship and presence throughout the digital re-release. The digital repackaging also claims a *restoration* to the film's original form as shown in indicative trailers, assigning further legitimacy and historic capital to the re-release. Additionally, if Disney DVDs are to be seen as archives, that also points at Disney's positioning within Western/US, but also global – by extension – media. The incorporation of featurettes that contextualize the main film socio-historically and provide a glimpse into the creative processes that followed them also add historic value to the productions and Disney, by extension. Finally, their incorporation into the household setting fosters social interactions and connections that can resonate with viewers of various generations. In this context, interactivity emerges as an affordance that is further enhanced in the context of digital home video with the implementation of the menu and the user-centric crafting of the whole environment, features that cater to the social capital of the re-release and Disney.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the field of cinema and home video provides a rich environment for studying the evolution of those technologies and the resulting changes in the generation and acquisition of capital. Disney's ongoing prominence as a mass media enterprise has been consistent throughout media history, remaining relevant even in the current media landscape. Disney's long-standing impact may be linked to its sustained engagement in the field of cinema and home video, building separate paradigms of value and capital, and establishing ever-so-slightly new and nuanced connections with consumers through harnessing the unique affordances of diverse media technologies. Disney's shift from traditional cinematic mediums to analog and then digital home video domains exemplifies this evolution.

In this thesis, I took an interdisciplinary approach in combining a historical perspective on how Disney transitioned from the cinematic medium onto home video and the perspectives of Bourdieu's sociology and use of the term *capital*; in doing so, I tried to understand how Disney maintained a prominent status through these media transitions by generating and acquiring different forms of capital. Adopting this perspective, I have investigated the subtle interplay between (re)releasing patterns and the curation of capital within an evolving media landscape. With an emphasis on the ongoing legacy of Disney's classic films within popular culture, viewing cultures, and family settings we gain a historical understanding of how Disney's cinematic productions have dynamically engaged with varied socio-historical settings preserving their relevance over time. Remediation emerges as a particularly prominent phenomenon in Disney's capital acquisition, revitalizing the company's priceless cinematic productions within various settings through the use of distinct media affordances.

An exemplary instance of this phenomenon is the concept of 'fictional liveness.' This occurrence is noticeable when investigating Disney's theatrical releases and more specifically, *Snow White's* premiere in 1937. There, fictional liveness was carried

out through the employment of the radio broadcast that accompanied the movie's debut. In this case, the portrayal of Disney's fictional characters being interviewed resulted in a whimsical expansion of the 'belief regime' around the animation universe, molding the audience's connection with these characters and their narratives. As they created a concrete link between the fictitious domain and the actual world, such interactions can be viewed as a technique for generating social capital.

Furthermore, the investigation of 'fictional liveness' transcends to the field of DVDs and digital home video, where the concept is used to generate, again, social capital by utilizing different affordances this time. An example of this approach may be found in the *Sleeping Beauty* Blu-ray menu (2008), where the weather conditions within the displayed scenery dynamically match real-world weather obtained from internet weather data and forecasts. This deliberate use of technology affordance cleverly blends Disney's cinematic universe into the fabric of daily life, anchoring them inside the domestic sphere and imbuing them with a sense of realness through their alignment with reality.

These examples demonstrate Disney's remediation of 'fictional liveness' as a powerful instrument for acquiring capital. The preservation of content relevance and the development of a palpable, interactive connection with consumers demonstrate Disney's awareness of the developing media landscape, substantiating the company's continuous influence and capital in the newer media milieu.

Another example of the remediation phenomenon is the interaction between Disney's works and the prestigious Hollywood status they gain by association. As discussed in Chapter 1, the radio transmission of premieres prominently featured a number of celebrity stars, thus imbuing the film and the corporation with a perceptible aura of grandeur. This strategic presentation highlighted the inextricable link between cinematic dexterity and Disney's corporate brand within Hollywood. An intricate reiteration of this concept occurs in the realm

of DVD releases via a separate remediation technique. In this case, the extensive appearance of Hollywood celebrities in trailers and their active participation in the movie production process, as exemplified by Elton John's engagement with *The Lion King* in 1994, serves as a transformative reimagining of the underlying concept of Hollywood's prestige. By merging these prominent personalities with Disney's cinematic creations, a symbiotic link is created, emphasizing the inherent value of both the film and the related Hollywood tradition.

This investigation reveals an intriguing convergence in which comparable forms of capital are harnessed via different technological affordances. The transformation from radio broadcasts to the modern television screen highlights this dynamic adaptability inherent in Disney's capital creation approach. This remediated use of Hollywood's capital elicits resonance and value, so sustaining Disney's capital status throughout varying socio-technological settings.

Throughout my investigation, I also discovered a progressively user-centric direction to the media landscape with digital media affording more interactive ways of viewing and relating to the movies. The DVD stands out as a particularly notable example where such affordances merge to generate capital for Disney.

Within the context of this study, interactivity indicates a shift in the relation between content consumers and content creators or producers. An important finding derives from the evolution of film experiences, where early theater presentations fostered a sense of remote appreciation and wonderment through the notion of the "gaze" (Chapter 1). As films relocated into domestic settings (Chapter 2) and experienced a slow process of remediation through digital home video (Chapter 3), this paradigm shifted towards a more intimate and personalized engagement with films. This transition has played a significant role in heralding a notable

disintegration of old top-down hierarchies that had previously delineated the roles of content providers and content consumers, as shown in the context of theatrical releases.

The emergence and development of home video technologies shows a transitioning towards a more-user centric approach to the (re)release of Disney productions. What my thesis shows is that a historical perspective on these shifts in the relations between audiences and Disney productions as afforded by home technologies helps us understand how such phenomena fostered not only social capital, but also symbolic, economic, and historic capital. Such understandings can offer a historicization for further studies into the participatory cultures of today's online – and social – media landscapes.

A reoccurring element emerged within the context of this inquiry into the ever-changing technological landscapes, and that is the strategic use of nostalgia, understood as a sentimental longing for the past. This recurring motif has added historic, symbolic, and cultural relevance to classic Disney pictures and has stood out as a phenomenon that persists even as technology advances. Nostalgia is deployed with various technologies, tapping into spectators' reservoirs of memories, like in the case of the VHS trailers, building linkages with their identities, like in the case of the depictions of the Wild West and American South, and evoking associations with the pictures' theatrical history, through the use of "restoration" practices in the digital landscape.

I see this evocation of nostalgia as a powerful cultural currency and as a complex interplay of emotions and memories skillfully combined with technology to elicit a profound resonance. This deliberate use of nostalgia capitalizes on viewers' emotional ties to bygone eras, imbuing the content with a sense of treasured legacy.

Furthermore, nostalgia goes beyond mere emotion. It is crucial in forming collective perceptions and narratives, particularly in the reimagining of an American past (Chapter 1). In that sense, Disney's use of nostalgia both reflects and shapes society's ideals and ambitions.

This dynamic is remediated in the digital sphere, where the concept of "restoration" has become a cornerstone for authenticity. The careful effort of restoring and showing classic films demonstrates a commitment to cultural heritage preservation, thus strengthening nostalgia's currency and Disney's capital holding.

Essentially, nostalgia not only builds a deep connection between audiences and audiovisual material, thus fostering social capital, but it also cultivates value for Disney's productions by connecting threads of memory, identity, and history. As technology advances, nostalgia's enduring existence and symbiotic relationship with technological innovation place it at the center of the delicate interplay between media and the capital acquisition.

The skillful integration of technological innovation and historic resonance serves a twofold function of retaining the timeless significance of initial releases while ensuring their continuing cultural relevance, in addition to nurturing economic capital and revenue. This phenomenon manifests itself in a variety of ways, one of which is visible in the paratextual features that accompany Disney DVDs. These paratextual elements provide a thorough historical context, gradually altering the audience's perception and appreciation of the film.

A manifestation of this dynamic may also be seen in promotional trailers for DVDs and VHS accordingly. Through unique tactics, these trailers function as conduits connecting the films to their 'original' theater presentations. The VHS commercials under consideration constitute works of commemoration, documenting briefly, yet effectively, the collective memories of theatergoers. On the other hand, the trailers for DVD sets frequently emphasize the meticulous restoration process, which employs digital technology to restore the films to their primal splendor, signifying a return to their true form.

The examples above highlight an ongoing tension between the past and the present, a tension with substantial consequences for the many types of capital generated by Disney's

remediation attempts. The pivotal transition from traditional cinema to analog home video serves as a ringing example of this temporal tension. Disney's apparent apprehension in this transition reflects their persistent efforts to retain the essence of the past, particularly the theatre experience, which had previously shown to be an economically beneficial undertaking. This purposeful curation of value, based on theatrical exclusivity, highlights the pull of historical precedent in the face of evolving and new technologies.

The establishment of the "Disney Vault," an archetypal representation of Disney's exclusivity, heightens the cultivation of scarcity even further. Disney maintained an aura of rarity and uniqueness that enhanced the perceived historic and cultural capital of their re-releases by limiting access to their classic films. As seen by the trailers discussed in Chapter 2, this orchestration goes beyond mere exclusivity. These trailers elegantly highlight Disney's films' significant impact on cinematic culture, emphasizing their historic value and therefore boosting their historic and cultural capital.

Ultimately, the investigation of Disney's remediation practices exposes a multifaceted tapestry of capital acquisition that goes far beyond monetary benefit. Instead, it emerges from the interactions between Disney Productions, audiences, and technologies of consumption. All the above findings shed light on the intricate workings of remediation practices, demonstrating how big media enterprises, such as Disney, leverage temporal tensions and technological shifts to cultivate distinct forms of capital within the movie industry, market, and domestic environment.

By focusing on how a media enterprise such as Disney has maintained its status of relevance and prominence throughout media transitions, such as the transition from cinema to home video technologies, this thesis offers understandings into how this status was achieved at the intersection of different forms of capital – from cultural, to social, economic, symbolic or historic capital – which have been continuously forged through remediation practices of the

dispositif comprising of audiences, technologies, Disney productions and the inherent interactions between them. Furthermore, the historical perspective undertaken in this thesis also offers insights that helps us situate those media enterprises and classic film productions that have a long-standing and enduring tradition within ever shifting media environments, a perspective which may also benefit future studies potentially looking into newer media transitions characterizing today's era of convergence and participatory media culture.

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