ANIMATING GEO-POLITICAL CHARACTERIZATIONS:
AN ANALYSIS OF HYBRID SOCIAL AND MATERIAL SOURCES OF MEANING
IN DISNEY'S *ALADDIN*

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines certain aspects of the hybrid sources of meaning within the film *Disney's Aladdin*. Using a transdisciplinary approach combining Social Theories of Discourse, Film Theory, Narratology, Visual Perception Theory, Cultural Studies, and Political Studies, this film is recontextualized in order to highlight specific material manifestations of prevalent discursive formations characterizing geo-political relations in recent history. The analysis in this thesis describes three particular sites of meaning: the genre to which this film belongs, the relevant geo-political context, and the textual instantiation of meaning through the three modes of narrative, colour and caricature within three segments of the film. It is suggested that certain discursive formations within North America characterizing the Islamic Orient provide potential social frames through which textual unity is partly created in Disney's *Aladdin*.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overall aims

This thesis process began with one overarching purpose – to critically investigate the ways in which meaning and unity of text are generated within the pop culture family-oriented animated movies of the Walt Disney Company. The text chosen was Disney's *Aladdin*. However, the hybrid nature of the subject of analysis necessitated a hybrid approach to analysis. The compositional elements of films such as Disney's, and their social sources of meaning are so varied that boundaries of disciplines had to be crossed within the research process. This in turn led to a second overall purpose driving this venture – to explore interdisciplinary epistemologies of communication and to advocate transdisciplinary approaches to textual analysis. While the naming of theoretical constructs differs between disciplines, there is a comforting degree of overlap at the conceptual level. This thesis attempts to create dialogue between theories in an effort to respect the complexity of film. This dialogue situates film as an instance where the social and the material meet to create a hybrid entity of communication.

1.2 Social significance of the analysis of this text

Within the past two decades, Disney Animation Studios have produced a body of feature-length movies that are set in locales quite distant from the Hollywood Hills. Not only are these animated settings spatially distant, but the narratives often originate in the temporally distant worlds of the past. Further, these texts, as multimedia cultural artefacts, are consumed in temporal and spatial separation from their time and space of

production (Fairclough, 1992). The folk tale/ fairy tale “Disneyfied” has become a genre of film that has enjoyed wide commercial success. During the past decade Disney has produced such movies as *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1995), and *Mulan* (1998) which draw heavily on traditional folk tales from cultures outside of the culture in which they are produced. They do, however, as present day socially situated texts (Halliday 1978; Kress & van Leeuwen 1996; 2001) reflect and influence current, familiar social contexts.

In light of recent geo-political events, a particularly fascinating study can be made of Disney’s *Aladdin*, which was under production during the 1991 Gulf War, and emerged in 1992 – one year after the Gulf War officially ended. The visual representations of the Islamic Orient in this text (albeit an animated, fictitious one) have clear relevance in a world that is influenced by and, in turn, has influence on social discourses surrounding ethnicity, race and power relations (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; van Dijk, 1997a; 1997b; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). As international organizations, and world communities grapple with issues surrounding the recent Gulf War in this, the year 2003, the characterizations of peoples of the Islamic Orient and Americans within communicative events, such as films, seems ever more relevant.

1.3 Origins of research motivation, and research questions

When I first viewed this particular movie at its time of release, I had some ambiguous feelings. On the one hand, judging from the reactions of fellow audience members, as well as ticket and video sales figures (Wasko, 2001), it was highly entertaining and appealing to children and adults alike. On the other hand, it left me

feeling perturbed by what I perceived were racial stereotypes. I remember asking myself, “Why did all the good guys have North American-accented English, while the “bad guys” had *other* accents? Why, if these characters were all from a fictitious Arab land, did the hero look representative of the North American racial majority while the villain and others looked ‘foreign’?” A decade later, having been exposed to more empirically powerful tools than my own hunches, I am attempting to uncover how the film *Aladdin* achieves its textual coherence through both material and social semiotic resources within the current geo-political climate. My agenda for this analysis is not to assume that the producers of this text purposefully create a racial hierarchy in this artefact: intentionality can explain only some aspects of socially-situated texts. Choices that are made at the level of production can be both conscious and unconscious and such choices may reflect options that are available within institutional practices and within a broader social reality at a given time. As such, I would like to assume fluid notions of power in which participants, discourses and materials (Foucault, 1971; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Latour, 2000) discursively interact in the meaning-making process of socially situated communicative events. The purpose of this endeavour is to contribute to critical discussion around Disney’s animated texts leading to constructive dialogue and development of multiple discourses on texts that have often been thought to be “innocent” of ideological content and impact.

This thesis will not label the Walt Disney Company, its founder, or its products as categorically “imperialist” or “bad”. Nor will I advocate that socially conscientious consumers avoid this movie and all Disney products; to promote the widespread boycott of this mass-media giant would not only be beyond the power of this thesis, but

it would also serve to marginalize this attempt at finding valid alternative voices in expressions of cultural power relations. What this thesis does suggest is that critical dialogue surrounding such texts be widened. The movie, *Aladdin* is very popular, and employs some brilliant intertextual devices that allow it to reach audiences of all ages. In order to have achieved this popularity as an entertainment text existing within a social and material world, a network of forces – both social and material – have been mobilized. Beyond its entertainment value, this widely popular cultural artefact can serve as a kind of mirror in which to locate the images and schema that are discursively and materially co-produced within North American society. While power relations within society are subject to constant change, cultural artefacts such as this are permanently (or at least semi-permanently, if restored) recorded. This permanency allows us to look upon these artefacts as evidence of some of the shared societal perceptions and values which shape and are shaped within a certain set of circumstances or network of influences within a specific time and place. In order to uncover some of the mobilizing forces in the production and consumption of this text, I would like to begin with the following research questions:

1. How does Disney's *Aladdin* socially and materially create meaning?
2. What are some of the relevant social frames and intertexts that create order in the production and consumption of this text?
3. What discursive formations are mobilized in this text and how do they mesh with other semiotic systems in this multi-modal text?
4. How can we incorporate *alternative* readings in productive critical dialogue on such cultural artefacts?

1.4 Theoretical orientation

In developing the specific methods for analysis of the data in this thesis, I have called on previous research within: Social Theories of Discourse, Film Studies, Animation Studies, Visual Perception Theory, and Cultural Studies. Part of the task of uncovering the discursive meanings present in this text is to examine how they are realized materially in the film. While many systems or *modes* are at work in this text, this thesis will concentrate on the visual images. Folklorist, Jack Zipes has described the way that animation operationalizes narrative coherence: “Images and sequences engender a sense of wholeness, seamless totality, and harmony” (1995, p.19). In an effort to discover some of the underlying elements beneath the seamlessness of this text, this thesis will explore modal and social forces that launch and uphold the narrative trajectory of Disney’s *Aladdin*. Throughout the research toward this thesis, the notion of narrative has proved paramount. While the original intent was simply to analyze aspects of visual semiosis, no mode can be discussed within these films without determining its relevance to the narrative. Therefore, the textual elements that will be explored are:

- (1) the narrative code
- (2) the use of colour
- (3) the caricaturization of animated personages

1.5 Limitations

It is important to reinforce that these are simply three of the many semiotic modes available for analysis. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to be able to analyse

all of the systems at work throughout the whole of the text. The two elements – colour and caricature – have been chosen because of their ability to expose and reinforce discursive patterns and themes in the ‘flow’ of the narrative. Further, the particular modes and contexts chosen as relevant for analysis in this film are not necessarily relevant to analyses of all films. Some of the results of analysis may imply that animated films need to be re-cast as sites of socially created knowledge, but the methods of analyzing relevant social context and the materialization of social meaning within films must be sensitive to the specific contexts and modes at work in specific films.

Finally, it is recognized that there are many social sources of meaning in this film that are not related to the geo-political context that is under analysis in this thesis. There are many different readings that can be made of any film and this is simply one. Although there is significant scholarly support for this perspective, there have been no original empirical studies of audience response in the process of this thesis.

1.6 Organization of chapters

Chapter 2 highlights key literature within the fields of Film Studies, Animation Studies, Social Theories of Discourse, and Visual Perception Theory in order to account for some of the meaning-making forces at work in Disney’s *Aladdin*. This chapter ends with a summary list of transdisciplinary theoretical assumptions that influence the methods of analysis.

Chapter 3 presents a methodological framework with which to analyze the data. The macro-perspectives and micro-perspectives of analysis will be outlined, and the

rationale for the choice of three film segments for analysis will be given. The conceptual tools of analysis and the particular modes under analysis will be described.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of two contexts within which this text derives meaning – the generic and geo-political context – in what is called a macro-perspective on analysis. This chapter also presents the micro-perspective focus on instantiation of meaning through an analysis of the opening ten minutes of *Aladdin* as constituted by the narrative and reinforced by the colour and caricature modes.

Chapter 5 offers a discussion and interpretation of the analysis in terms of the relevance of contextual discourses in the meaning-making mechanisms of Disney's *Aladdin*, and concludes by suggesting the relevance of multi-modal social textual analysis and presenting alternatives to the popular interpretation of such popular culture artefacts.

1.7 Construction of participants in this thesis

Before I proceed to the next chapter, I would like to explain the use of the discursive “we” (instead of “I”) throughout this thesis. Although some may object to what is sometimes perceived to be the *royal* “we”, I heavily sympathize with Bakhtinian notions of *shared* construction of text. As such, I feel that it is not I alone who has created this text. Other participants involved in this thesis are the authors of scholarly research whose work I have called upon, and also the readers who bring with them their own “significant others”. That is not to say that any blame for theoretical holes should be evenly distributed among these participants – I accept this

responsibility. I simply hope that readers will understand that the intent is the use of an *inclusive* “we” rather than a *royal* one.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Due to technological advances and corresponding proliferations in varieties of media and modes, the last century has produced nothing less than a communication revolution. While language was once thought to be limited to a small number of forms and operations, changes in communication techniques and textual forms have necessitated parallel shifts in epistemological assumptions about the nature of language and other systems of communication and the social role of such systems. Recent scholarship has been interested in pursuing the conventions of communications systems within the different modes, so one can now discuss the *language of music* (Barthes, 1977), the *language of art* (O'Toole, 1994), the *language of moving pictures* (Metz, 1974; Mitry 2000), etc. The recognition of conventions within these separate modes has driven attempts at developing appropriate “grammars” that encapsulate representational systems in each mode. Such grammars have met with varying degrees of success – complications have arisen due to their inherent linguistic-orientation and their inability to express a universally generalizable code (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Mitry, 2000). Further complicating the issue in the case of films is the fact that many of these distinct communication modes are operating symbiotically; thus the various modes are difficult to “tease apart” in an effort to analyze how meaning is made. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) have recognized this complexity of multi-modal texts:

Where traditional linguistics had defined language as a system that worked through *double articulation*, where a message was an articulation as a form and as a meaning, we see multimodal texts as making meaning in multiple articulations....(p 4)

The following literature review will highlight research from Film Studies (and its associate, Animation Studies), Social Theories of Discourse, Narratology, and Visual Perception Theory in order to explore some of the “multiple articulations” through which meaning is realized within Disney animated feature films. The first section will briefly gloss the evolution of approaches to Film Studies and identify the current theoretical assumptions that necessitate transdisciplinary methods of inquiry before describing some of the associated tenets of Animation Studies. The next section will delve into the field of Social Theories of Discourse in order to situate the film’s relationship within a larger network of meaning-making. Next, recognizing that one of the most important articulations of meaning in this film is through “story”, we will explore the field of Narratology from the perspectives of Film Studies, Literary Studies, Psychology and Linguistics. While stories are traditionally “told”, the film uses multiple modalities to realize the narrative; the primary mode in film and the particular interest of this thesis is the visual “telling”, so we must next identify aspects of Visual Perception Theory with particular attention to colour as a way of creating meaning.

2.2 Film Studies

The film as a communicative event has evolved from its amoebic state at the beginning of the twentieth century to its current technological and social complexity as a multi-appendaged entity. Similarly, Film Studies as a critical pursuit has seen an array of different means of analyzing films: from *auteur* theory – in which a filmic text is seen to be representative of the producer’s own reality (Nasta, 1991; Mitry 2000) to *psycho-analytic* theory in which Freudian signposts that are created through specific editing techniques are thought to represent “universal” elements of desire etc in film.

(Bordwell, 1985; 1989; Turner 1999; Silverman, 1983). Within the past three decades, Film theorists have used the principles of Semiotics in the analysis of film. Christian Metz imported the linguistic structural notions of *Semiotics* to the study of meaning in film as early as 1968. He and his followers attempted to find within the image of film, cinematic equivalents of linguistic *signifiers* and *signified* (Metz, 1974). This work made possible the perception of cinematic text as *language*, but it ultimately failed in its attempt to identify a specific *grammar* or *code* of cinema that applies equally and universally to all films (Buckland, 2000; Mitry, 2000, p. 21) Part of the reason for this failure was no doubt due to Metz's narrow view of film as a closed object. Film, he said "... constitutes (contrary to cinema) a delimitable space – an object devoted from beginning to end to signification, a closed discourse... (Metz, 1974, p. 17). While film may in fact be a *delimitable space*, the sources of signification are not all text-specific, nor are they all a result of specific editing "grammars". This limitation is shared with its parent approach – Saussurean Semiotics – where signification is thought to occur in more arbitrary and systematic ways without reference to the social context. Another weakness of Metz's film Semiotics was the bias toward the conceptual framework of language. Instead of fitting all meaning-making ventures under the rubric of language, current Social Semioticians recognize that language is one among many semiotic resources used in the articulation of meaning. Although Metz's earliest efforts to create a universal "code" of film were not necessarily successful and received numerous attacks, he later responded to criticism by becoming conceptually sensitive to variation among films (1974). In particular, his thoughts on film segmentation and minimal units for analysis have become more flexible and fluid to accommodate variation in purpose

and filmic “code” under analysis. As such, we will re-visit his theory in order to justify the units of analysis in the Methodology Chapter (3.4.1).

More recently social constructive movements within film theory have begun to look at how the meaning of a film is socially constructed by a viewer’s position within society or viewers who are positioned by society (Bordwell, 1989; Mitry 2000; Nasta, 1991). This move acknowledged the meaning-making that occurs within society; thus marking a departure from previously conceived theories of fixed cinematic meanings that placed the universal *viewer* as interpreting film in a singular way in response to cinematic cues brought on by editing techniques. (ie “the close-up” shot universally indicates a certain intimacy between audience member and image (Mitry 2000, p. 13)). The struggle amongst film theorists since the inception of this discipline seems to lie in the *objectivity* versus *subjectivity* of the meaning-making process in film. To argue either that the meaning of the film lies entirely within the aesthetics of the text, or conversely, to argue that the meaning is wholly created by social processes alone seem equally unproductive ventures.

The most sensitive and cross-disciplinary approaches to film within the discipline of Film Studies have emerged within the last two decades. Turner (1999) has conceived of film as *social practice* which encompasses structures that exist in society (such as narrative) as well as socially constructed elements (such as ideology). Mitry (2000) similarly suggests that “in the cinema, as in other contexts, signification is not absolute”, rather that socio-cultural aspects mediate meaning and stipulate treatments of form and content (p 257). Further, he states that form and content are inseparable, “the one continually justifying the other” (Ibid).

One of the most comprehensive approaches to film can be found within the work of David Bordwell who recognizes that film-making and viewing entail a combination of materials, and practices. Bordwell suggests that all theories around film be sensitive to the specific environments in which a film has come about; thus, a “poetics of film” would identify the cognitive, perceptual, social, and historical aspects of film (1989, pp. 266-274). His work on narrative and visual perception are particularly rich sources of analytical theory, and as such they will be discussed in greater detail in later sections. The broad strokes of his “poetics of film” (which he calls a “conceptual framework”, rather than an approach or a theory) capture the subtleties and complexities of film, and call for an interdisciplinary approach to film:

As a historian of forms, genres, and styles, the poetician starts from the concrete assumptions embedded in the filmmaker’s craft. Sometimes these are articulated by practitioners; sometimes they must be inferred from the product and the mode of production. The poetician aims to analyze the conceptual and the empirical factors – norms, traditions, habits – that govern a practice and its products. Poetics thus offers explanations, of an intentionalist, functionalist, or causal sort. It has a propensity to the problem/solution model, to institutional frames of reference, and to rational-agent explanatory assumptions. At present, research into early cinema, genre history, stylistics, and narratology manifests the gradual emergence of a self-conscious poetics of film (Ibid. p 269).

The tentacles of Bordwell’s poetics are far-reaching as are the sources of meaning within (and from outside of) film; thus, scholarly treatments of film necessitate interdisciplinary knowledge. As the discipline of Film Studies itself has become transdisciplinary, the work of film theorists will be further explicated in following sections, but first we can situate this particular film within the its own filmic tradition by looking at the work of Animation Studies scholars.

2.2.1 Animation

One of the problems with studies in the field of animation is that it is “an enormously wide and heterogeneous category... [ranging from] Hollywood cartoons to abstract modernist animation, from puppet films to types of special effects cinema to computer-generated moving imagery...”(O’Pray, 2000, p 50). As Pilling suggests, “there is no taxonomy of animation styles on which writers can draw” (1997, xiii). Recently, there has been even more confusion surrounding the defining concepts of animation with the advent of new technologies “that increasingly blur the distinction between live-action and animation” (Langer, 2002, p.2). This recognition of the diversity of animation stipulates a context-specific attention to particular schools or conventions in animation. Within the genre analysis of Disney animated tales in Chapter 4.1, we will go into further detail in order to situate *Aladdin* within the institution of Disney animation; but for now we will simply acknowledge some general aspects of animation and the conventional structures that come to bear on these animated works. In doing so, we will highlight three key ways in which meaning-making occurs. Conventional animation relies on (1) a bias toward reality; (2) the popular perception of animation as innocent; and (3) the control of animators.

The bias toward reality within animation can be traced to its early roots in the flipbooks of the 1800’s, according to Media scholar, Paul Wells. These frame-by-frame images were literally “moving pictures” that helped to pave the way for the development of cinema, and specifically animation (1998, p.12). It is important to acknowledge these early foundations, explains Wells, because the early animated works

and indeed many animated films that are produced currently, relied on the production, assembling, and “bringing to life” (*animare*) of a series of drawn images. Wells also notes that much of the creative and magical potential of early animation was lost due to the fact that cinema photography seemed to be of greater interest to the early industry and so the drawn image was relegated to a somewhat permanent secondary role. Thus, live action films became the more publicly recognized manifestation of cinema, and recognizing this bias toward “the real”, the mainstream animation industry became caught up in creating an “illusion of life”. (Neupert, 1999; Wells, 1998). O’Pray (2000) also notes the early movement of animation toward realism, but attributes this shift to the “introduction of sound [which] established a tendency in cartoons away from a modernist anti-realism, with its stress on the picture plane, and towards a deep-space naturalism-cum-realism” (p 51). Raffaelli (1997) proposes that Walt Disney’s intention was to “invent a parallel reality” (p.115). This evolution of animation has led to a certain acknowledged convention: though it is clearly not live-action cinema, conventional animation is clearly biased toward an imitated version of reality. An intrinsic element in this mimicry of reality is the depiction of *movement*, which is part of the process of visual perception as mentioned above. Zipes also calls attention to this process: “Animation is trickery – trick films – for still images are made to seem as if they move through automatization” (1995, p. 33).

The second major way through which meaning is realized pertains to the perception of Animation within society at large (and even among scholars until fairly recently) as ideologically-unencumbered (Giroux, 1995; 1999; Raffaelli, 1997; Wasko 1997; Wells, 1998). Wells suggests that animation is seen as “an innocent medium,

ostensibly for children” (p 187) and he points out that even Sergei Eisenstein – the father of Film Studies – said that Disney is “beyond good and evil” (Ibid p 189). When combined with the previous acknowledgement that animation shares a relationship with “reality”, this theme seems paradoxical. We believe that animated images are innocent because we are aware that they are not “real” but we engage with them using real life experiences, knowledge and beliefs. Wells calls attention to the spectator’s role in this process. “Distinguishing between the representative fantasies and fictions of the cinema and the exactitudes of the real world has always been problematic, largely due to the spectator’s desire to confuse the codes and conditions of their experience” (1998 p. 225). Wells further illuminates the structuring aspects of the film narrative and the investment we bring as spectators when we interact with it to identify with certain elements, dismiss others and to indulge in the general narrative flow (Ibid).

The last way (related to the previous two) in which animation operates to produce meaning is through *control* of specific elements of representation. The animator literally materializes all that we see. “Endemic to animation is the dominance of the plastic sign system in terms of its versatility, control, and mastery...” (O’ Pray, 2000, p 50). Animator and film theorist, Alexeieff proposes:

Contrary to live action cinema, Animation draws the elements of its future works from a raw material made exclusively of human ideas, those ideas that different animators have about things, living beings and their forms, movements and meanings. (1994, p xxii).

Of course, the animator does not create such ideas and entities independently. As previously articulated, producers of text make choices both consciously and unconsciously within social contexts; however they do have a larger degree of “play” in materializing meaning than within live action. “It is through the artful use of images

that one can sway audiences and gain their favor” (Zipes 1995, p. 33). Two of the representational elements (and indeed “modes” in their own right as we shall see in section 2.3) through which audiences may be swayed are *caricature and colour*. We will explore the theory of colour in the discussion on visual perception (Section 2.5.2) and in the analysis of genre in Chapter 4.

2.2.1.1 Caricature

Bendazzi, in his comprehensive history of international animation, reveals that some of the originators of early animation were caricaturists for print media who made the transition to cinema when technological conditions were ripe (1994, pp 8-9). Even the great Walt Disney himself entertained his fellow soldiers with caricature during his time as a Red Cross volunteer at the closing of World War I (Ibid., p 61). Disney acknowledged this aspect of animation in a note written in 1935 in which he said “the first duty of cartoons is not to picture or duplicate real action or things as they actually happen – but to give a caricature of both life and action” (Ibid., p 65). To this day, caricature remains an integral part of animation because of both its satirical and aesthetic properties:

Cartooning has always been informed by the tradition of caricature, that both operates as a *satirical mechanism* which makes comment through exaggeration of certain physical traits, and *as a design strategy*, which concentrates on redefining and exaggerating aspects of the body or environment, for purely *aesthetic* purposes (Wells, 1998, p. 188).

The notion of visual depiction of character through caricature necessitates visual depiction using exaggeration. The choice of what to exaggerate within a caricature pertains to representativeness and identifiability within a given social milieu. That is to

say that because it has to represent someone to a wider group, it has to *over-represent* an aspect of a person/category of persons that will *distinguish* this person/group among others. Caricature must thus operate using shared social beliefs about norms and differences. In this respect, cartoons and animation sometimes activate racial or gender stereotypes. The history of criticism of caricature is as long the history of caricature itself due to its dependency on stereotyping (Felperin, 1997; Giroux, 1995; 1999; Reitbrerger & Fuchs, 1972). From an analytical perspective, the function of caricature can easily be studied by comparing filmic character representations and noticing what stands out as different or *hyper-real*, and what is simply *naturalized* through a shared sense of normalcy.

We will return to the work of film and other communication theorists in the sections on Narratology, (2.3) and Visual Perception Theory (2.4).

2.3 Social Theories of Discourse

Traditionally within the field of Linguistics, supposedly static language forms were analyzed systematically without attention being paid to the social context in which language invariably exists. According to Halliday (1978), one of the founders of a social theory of language, such attempts at objectively analyzing language led to “the construction of elegant self-contained systems that are only of limited application to any real issues since the objects themselves have no such boundary walls” (p 3). Halliday argues that language and society are inseparable; therefore, one must conceive of language as social semiotic. This means “interpreting language [and other semiotic resource systems] within a sociocultural context, in which the culture itself is interpreted in semiotic terms – as an information system” (Ibid, p 2). Far from being a

static, objective system, "...language actively symbolizes the social system, representing metaphorically in its patterns of variation the variation that characterizes human cultures"(Ibid).A disciple of Halliday, Leckie-Tarry states that "a text cannot be considered autonomously, divorced from social, political and historical determinations (1995, p. 15). Similarly, Chouliaraki & Fairclough attest that "language is socially structured at its core" (1999, p 50). Clearly, Halliday's premise has heavily influenced the evolving theories of Social Semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; 2001; O'Toole, 1994), Systemic Functional Linguistics (Butt et al, 1995; Leckie-Tarry, 1995) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1995; 1998). Recently, such theories that have evolved out of social perspectives on language, have recognized that language is just one among many of the semiotic resources (images, sound, etc.) through which meaning is made. (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Hodge & Kress, 1993; van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001).

Another characteristic of language theoretically grounded within Social Theories of Discourse is its dual orientation; not only does discourse reflect knowledge and values within a shared culture, it also constitutes this knowledge. As Halliday states, "language not only serves to facilitate and support other modes of social action that constitute its environment, but also actively creates an environment of its own..." (1978, p.3). Likewise, Chouliaraki & Fairclough contend that "...the semiotic and linguistic features of the interaction are systematically connected with what is going on socially, and what is going on socially is indeed going on partly or wholly semiotically or linguistically" (1999, p 113). This theoretical move allows the analyst to avoid the structuralist versus constructivist debate; within structuralist frameworks, little attention

is paid to the role of agency; rather, somewhat fixed social structures ‘out there’ act in predetermined ways upon society. While in constructivist approaches the process of production of society is analysed without regard to any pre-existing structures. Some of the most sensitive Social perspectives of Discourse suggest a “structuralist-constructivist social theory” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p 141). Language and other semiotic systems are viewed dialectically as structured and structuring (Fairclough, 1995; Halliday, 1978; Hodge & Kress, 1993; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; 2001; Leckie-Tarry, 1995; Lemke 1990; 1995). Because of this dialectic quality of semiotic systems, the context that produces and is produced by a text is key to analysis; but before we look at what is meant by context, we must first understand what is meant by “text” and see what research questions emerge for a social analysis of text.

2.3.1 Analyzable units and research questions

Halliday defines text as “...the instances of linguistic interaction in which people actually engage: whatever is said, or written in an operational context...text is a semantic unit...text can be defined as actualized meaning potential” (1978, pp 108-9). We can see that while the first part of his definition heavily favours language in text, the latter part is more ontologically open – thereby leaving room for the other semiotic systems through which meaning potential is actualized. The particular way through which meaning is articulated is not important within the defining terms of text; what is crucial is the notion of unity or coherence: “...a text is a harmonious collection of meanings appropriate to its context” (Butt et al 1995, p. 11). While the text itself is an important entity for analysis, theorists within this paradigm are interested in the ways in which meanings are created using semiotic and social resources. Such a theoretical

point de départ yields research questions such as: “How do people decode the highly condensed utterances of everyday speech and how do they use the social system for doing so? How do people relate the social context to the linguistic [or other semiotic] system? In other words, how do they deploy their meaning potential in actual semantic exchanges?” (Halliday, 1978, pp. 108-9). Such questions inevitably lead outwards to the contexts in which texts occur.

2.3.2 Contexts – Register and Genre

The recognition of socially mediated texts where “the context plays a part in determining what we say; and what we say plays a part in determining the context” (Halliday 1978, p 3) is pivotal in this approach. But what is meant by “context”? The term “context”, as it is widely known, is clearly too vague to serve as an analytical tool to describe the arena of human social and linguistic interaction, so further defining of terms has occurred within various disciplines. The field of Systemic Functional Linguistics and related theories such as, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), rely heavily on Halliday’s descriptions of the distinctions between the “context of situation” and “context of culture” originating in the work of anthropologist, Malinowski. The context of situation “consists of those general properties of the situation which collectively function as the determinants of the text, in that they specify the semantic configurations” (p. 110). Halliday further breaks down the context of situation into: field – “the social action in which the text is embedded”; tenor – “the set of role relationships among the relevant participants” and; mode – “the channel or wavelength selected... it includes the medium” (1978, p. 110). This analytical framework has

become known as the theory of register within Systemic Functional Linguistics (Eggins, 1994; Halliday, 1978; Leckie-Tarry, 1995).

The other type of context, the context of culture can be described as the systematic ways through which “people use language to achieve culturally appropriate goals” (Eggins, 1994, p. 25). These contexts are characterized by routinized patterns within recognized institutions of shared knowledge and beliefs (Leckie-Tarry, 1995). The context of culture has become equated with genre within SFL-influenced paradigms (Eggins, 1994; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Leckie-Tarry, 1995).

There has been criticism lodged against those within the SFL tradition who use only these two types of contexts to explicate textual meaning (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Leckie-Tarry, 1995). If the “genre” refers to the routinized textual practice, and the “register” refers normally to the topic, relationships and choices of materials immediate to the textual situation, then one can see an element of context is missing (Ibid). Where is the larger context that may permit the acknowledgment of the role of history or socio-political events that may bestow meaning upon texts? Clearly in many textual instances it would be highly inappropriate to simply write this particular context off as “background”. After all, what is the benefit of “foregrounding” context if aspects of context may be relegated to “background”?

2.3.3 Intertextuality

While many theorists (especially within Systemic Functional Linguistics school) remain closely allied to the Hallidayan roots by acknowledging the context of culture/context of situation approach as sufficient, others attempt to respond to criticism

of “missing context” by calling attention to the notion of “intertextuality” (Fairclough 1995, 1998; Lemke, 1990; 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). Although the term was coined by Kristeva (1980), the foundations of “intertextuality” emerged within the work of Russian literary critic, Mikhail Bakhtin, who suggests that meaning within a text is not produced solely by the author. Rather, a text obtains its meaning in a somewhat organic process that involves a dialogue between the intentions of the author and the reader/listener within a social environment. Bakhtin further extends the notion of dialogism to suggest that not only does a text rely on a two-way relationship between author and receiver, it also depends highly on a network of voices and texts outside of the primary text.

...no living word [or text] relates to its own object in a singular way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other alien words about the same object, the same theme....The living utterance, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness...cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue (Bakhtin 1981, p 276).

Hodge and Kress also describe the relationship of a primary text to a network of other texts:

...the operations of power can only be studied via texts, which are scrutinized for the various traces and clues they contain; either secondary texts whose narrative seems to guarantee an object, power, that exists outside of its own textual frame, or texts which carry traces of the processes themselves by which power is or was mediated and constructed (1993, p. 159).

In a similar vein, Fairclough has been influenced by Bakhtin and Foucault in his claim of the importance of discourse practice within the interpretation of a text. This notion includes the intertextual elements of both overt secondary references within the

primary text and those that are more covert orders of discourse surrounding the text (Fairclough, 1995; 1998) "...my focus here and more generally is on intertextuality: on how in the production and interpretation of a text people draw upon other texts and texts types which are culturally available to them" (Fairclough, 1998 p. 145). Wodak also states that one of the levels of context inherent to any text is "the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses" (2001, p. 67). Her "discourse historical approach" is particularly occupied with historical social relations and how they shape the texts that follow. (Ibid.). Lemke further deconstructs the notion of intertextuality by conceiving of three subcategories: (1) co-thematic – "texts that share the same thematic pattern", (2) co-actional – "belong[ing] to another element in the same activity structure; and (3) co-generic – "hav[ing] the same genre structure": (1990, pp. 204-205). Lemke suggests that actual texts may have multiple genres, activities and themes. Of these sub-categories of intertextuality, the most useful addition to the previously conceived concepts of registerial and generic contexts is the notion of co-thematic intertextuality: "A real text will have many thematic strands, many thematic formations which it links together to make its arguments...thematic analysis of the meaning of a text is part of general text semantics (Ibid. p. 205). The recognition of the intertextual themes that coalesce within a given text yields a methodological approach with which to uncover the missing context that is excluded from register and genre. Lemke's three theoretical categories of intertextuality also point out the complexity of texts as hybrid entities; as such, his theorizing on these categories will be pivotal as a means of seeking the intertextual and extratextual sources of meaning within Disney's *Aladdin*.

2.3.4 Interdiscursivity-Hybridity-Orders of discourse

Chouliaraki and Fairclough similarly extend the notion of intertextuality by calling attention to two levels: the first is the obvious level of words and strings of semiotic units heavily borrowing from other texts; the second level refers to the “combination in discourse of different genres, or, we might add, different discourses” (1999, p 49). They call this second level “interdiscursivity”. Through the analysis of a specific text, these authors point out that hybridity of genres is often a feature of texts. (pp. 56-57). Respecting the constitutive subtleties of complex texts, Chouliaraki and Fairclough suggest that an “active” text is also a “hybrid text, and that understanding its hybridity is the key to understanding its activeness” (Ibid., p. 57). To simply call a text a member of one specific genre would not do justice to the other co-existing genres or modes that work together to produce semantic cohesion and render meaning. These CDA scholars suggest that any text may be made up of different genres and different semiotic resource patterns, but that within this diversity there is a kind of logical unifying connection. They further propose “the social structuring of semiotic hybridity as itself constituting a system – what CDA calls the ‘order of discourse’ “(Ibid., p. 143). This is “an open system characterized by shifting boundaries and flows between its constitutive elements” (Ibid., p. 146). This notion was borrowed from Foucault’s concept of orders of discourse which will be defined below in section 2.2.6.

Chouliaraki and Fairclough’s methodological approach stipulates that:

The analysis of discourse proper is simultaneously oriented to structure and to interaction – to the social resource (orders of discourse) which enables and constrains interaction, and to the way that resource is interactively worked, i.e., to interdiscourse, and its realization in language and other semiotics. Realization itself involves the same double orientation

– to semiotic systems, and to how selections from the potential of semiotic systems are worked in textual processes (Ibid., p 63).

Because of the pervasiveness of “intertexts” within society and therefore within texts, the analyst’s quest for intertextual traces may be infinite; scholars within this field do however, stipulate that such a quest must be limited to the “relevant” contexts that mobilize the text (Leckie-Tarry, 1995, p 25; van Dijk, 1997b, p. 11).

2.3.5 Motivation and orientation of text

Social theories of Discourse see the production of meaning within texts as “motivated” (Halliday, 1978; Hodge & Kress, 1993; Leckie-Tarry, 1995). Instead of simply regarding the rules of meaning-making within language as ascribed by the language system, an analysis of text needs to “specify who uses the rule or regularity and under what circumstances” (Hodge & Kress, 1993, p 209). Choice is always exercised in the production of meaning. The semiotic resources that are chosen to produce meaning in a given text have certain properties that enable the coherence of the text as a unit. According to Bakhtin, the characteristics of a text are linked to a “particular referential semantic content” and the choice of the means of articulation and the genre are dependent firstly, on the exigencies of realizing this content, and secondly, on the “expressive aspect” that includes the “subjective emotional evaluation” and attitude toward the content. (1986, p. 84). Lemke also states that one of the functions of language is its “orientation” which is manifested through evaluative stances toward the subject within a text. “When used in a text or discourse formation, a thematic formation is always given, in a particular community or social group, not only a set of semantic relations to other formations, but also a set of value relations” (1990, p

206). For Lemke, a thematic formation is an existing semantic pattern that “recur[s] from text to text”(1995, p. 42). Such a formation may be materialized differently in different instances, but it recognizably belongs to a semantic set replete with value orientations. (Ibid) Lemke’s conception of thematic formations owes much to the founding principles of Foucault’s *discursive formations* (outlined below). Using these concepts to analyze discourse helps to reveal the power dynamics within a text by highlighting relevant social frames and intertexts that help to create textual order.

2.3.6 Text as a site of power struggles

In their treatment of language and power, current Social Theories of Discourse are indebted to Michel Foucault, who conceived of power as an omnipresent and ever-changing social network of production, rather than an oppressive negative top-down force (1977). Similarly, current Social Theories of Discourse treat language and other semiotic resource systems as both fluid social forces unto themselves and also as malleable resources that are susceptible to other co-existing semiotic forces: “unity is an achievement that has to be won and maintained in and through language” (Hodge & Kress, 1993, p 154). Language and other semiotic resources within texts may either act symbiotically with others, or they may subsume others, or yield and be subsumed in order to mobilize a text in a particular way; thus a text may be seen as a site of power dynamics where forces of varying degrees of strength interact with each other. This relationship of forces acting and being acted upon can be described by Foucault’s notion of the “order of discourse” (1971). In his discussion on this notion, Foucault posits that our social world is not mediated by a universal, timeless, natural order governed by truth, but rather, it is ordered by discursive versions of reality (which are

themselves ordered). Discourses, he argues are not stable fixed entities, but rather subject to historically and societally-bound values; thus discourses are externally ordered. They are also internally ordered through both processes that are tied to institutions and become routinized (societal canons), and through the specific conditions of use in material representations (classifying, ordering, allying, and distributing of various discourses) (Ibid.).

Foucault also describes *discursive formations* that are somewhat stable epistemological expressions within a particular period of time (1972, pp. 146-8). While these formations occur in heterogeneous manifestations, there is an underlying “enunciative homogeneity” (Ibid., p. 148) that reflects a given set of socio-cultural and historical conditions (Ibid.).

Chouliaraki and Fairclough take *order of discourse* further and describe it as “the socially ordered set of genres and discourses associated with a particular social field, characterised by the shifting boundaries and flows between them” (1999, p. 58).

Using Foucault’s notions of power relations among discourses as sources of constitutive meaning within texts, Hodge and Kress (1993) coin the term “ideological complex” for a set of relations that forms a way of representing social groupings:

Far from an ideology being a single consistent but biased version of reality, it normally comes complete with its own negation, in a deeply contradictory set of versions of reality whose contradictions are intrinsic to their functionThere are two components that contribute to the contradictory character of ideological complexes. One component represents the world in a way that blurs differences, antagonisms, conflicts of interest. We will call this the solidarity function, or the S-form. The other expresses the interests of the group against its others, so that it exacerbates the difference, hostility, superiority. We will call this the power function, or the P-form. (p.157).

The ideological complex speaks to the same semiotic function as outlined in Lemke's discussion of value orientation within thematic formations. This complex orients the semiotic resources to express similarities and/or differences. Notably in the P-form of this complex where differences are highlighted, differential evaluations of entities are integral to the meaning-making process where such values and biases illustrate a shared version of reality among participants in textual construction and interpretation.

Especially where value orientations lead to expressions of superiority of one of a set of binary opposites, such functions lead to the manifestation of P-form ideological meaning-making in a text. This notion is particularly important in narrative texts that rely on oppositional relations, such as folktales. As we will see in the section on Narrative (2.4.3.1), Claude Lévi-Strauss' reveals the lasting significance of a given narrative within the paradigmatic choices that attribute values among different elements. Chouliaraki & Fairclough also underline this aspect of meaning: "Language is seen as a system of signs in which the value of any sign derives from its relation to other signs – its being equivalent to or different from other signs" (1999, p. 96). As we shall see within our exploration of narrative, "particular genres set up particular discourse positions for people" (Ibid., p 96). Because of its folktale-derived narrative in which there are clear archetypes (villains and heroes), Disney's *Aladdin* relies heavily on the *P-form* within the ideological complex; that is to say that differences are exaggerated and repeated in order to mobilize an unimpeded continuity of plot. The struggles over power within a text are not without relevance to our daily lives and to the present human condition: "Struggles over identity are also struggles over difference....But the question of how to dialogue and act with others who are different

is quite as urgent in late modern societies as the question of who I am or who we are” (Ibid).

The previous sections have focused completely on the social aspects of communication, however, we must explore one last aspect of meaning-making that is pursued to varying degrees by scholars within Social theories of Discourse. Because these theories are based dominantly on the social, *cognition* is not usually considered and it therefore often stirs controversy and sometimes defensiveness amongst purely social theorists (Lemke, 1995); however, an analysis of a film requires sensitivity to the socio-*cognitive* ways in which meaning is made.

2.3.7 The role of cognition in meaning-making

One of the foremost scholars of CDA, Teun Van Dijk, distinguishes his theoretical approach from others by acknowledging the role of psycho-social processes in meaning making. He draws attention to the fact that, in regarding meaning-making as social, we must not ignore the realm of the mind: “It is obvious that a fully fledged theory of discourse would be seriously incomplete without a mental (cognitive or emotional) component” (1997a, p. 17). Van Dijk suggests that meaning making involves knowledge, beliefs, opinions, ideologies that are activated through engagement with both shared social processes and through individual cognitive processes (schemata, etc). He calls this process “sociocultural cognition” (Ibid.). In the tradition of psychology and cognition, van Dijk argues that understanding text requires both “bottom-up processes of word and sentence understanding...combined with abstract top-down ‘guesses’ about the expected structures of a sentence story or conversation” (Ibid., p.18). The mental process involved is constructive and the goal is

to make sense of communicative interaction and to act appropriately in a “fast and efficient” way. (Ibid.). Thus textual construction and understanding requires us to build and engage mental models or “schematic representations” that are not in fact representations of the text in question, but rather abstractions drawn from subjective beliefs, knowledge, ideologies, etc. Following in the conceptual footsteps of van Dijk, Condor and Antaki discuss the “marshalling and filtering powers” of such schemata highlighting their reductive and organizational properties (1997, p. 327).

Other discourse analysts within this tradition suggest that cognition involves “accessing words in the mental lexicon, activating concepts in long-term memory, searching for information, comparing structures that are in working memory, and building structures by adding, deleting, rearranging, or connecting information” (Graesser et al, 1997, p 293). Building on van Dijk’s early research into discourse and cognition, Graesser et al highlight the notion of inference generation in creating meaning. These researchers have drawn the distinction between: “text-connecting inferences” whereby text-specific concepts are connected to provide meaning and; “extratextual inferences” that “embellish the situation model by copying or deriving information from world knowledge” (Ibid., p. 308). These two kinds of inference processes illustrate how consumers of texts may bring what Lemke calls co-actional, co-generic, and co-thematic intertextuality to bear on texts. The mere fact of the existence of intertexts does not necessarily indicate how people, as socio-cognitive entities, interpret these intertexts, but by outlining the neural processes involved in schemata and inference-making, the connection is made. Further, Graesser et al call attention to the rapidity of this entire process suggesting that the automatic,

unconscious “lightening –speed” processes can be measured in milliseconds, while the slower, more deliberate processes can be measured in seconds (Ibid.). Research in this field is continuing involving participants who are cued to re-construct a communicative text after the fact, or to choose the closest representation of a text from memory. Such research illuminates the order-creating mechanisms at work in interpreting and relaying language (Ibid., pp. 306-9). Not surprisingly, narratives have provided much of the textual material for these studies “because narrative texts embody episodes that resemble everyday experiences and that activate an extensive mass of world knowledge” (Ibid., p. 308).

Highlighting the potentially contentious issues of social cognition, Condor and Antaki (1997) point out the two different research foci of the two “camps” involved in social cognition theory. While one model (mentalist) suggests that individuals respond using their individual “sense-making” mental faculties to make sense of a social world (including discourse among other sources of information), the opposite model refutes the individualist mentalist approach and posits that all cognition and perception is the result of socially constructed, and shared knowledge (pp. 321-339). The polarity of each of these distinct approaches does not capture the subtleties of the ways in which meaning is created and interpreted in communicative events. As Chouliaraki and Fairclough succinctly admit, “there are both biological and social bases to semiosis. It therefore makes sense to see language in terms of an intersection of the biological and the social” (1997, p 20). Clearly, one must adopt an appreciation for both neural-perceptual processing and social knowledge processing, particularly in the case of multi-modal texts, such as films, in which sensory organs are the first intermediaries in

the up-take of socially produced information which must then be ordered in some way. The debate between whether the need for order comes from nature (bio-cognitive functions) or from nurture (social functions) is not only trite, it is a moot venture – akin to the chicken/egg debate. We cannot analyse an idealized individual who does not exist in a social environment, so we must concede that the need to make sense of things and the means with which to make sense of them comes both from within and from without. Returning once again to Halliday, we can see the order-creating social function of language (and indeed all semiotic systems):

Language has to interpret the whole of our experience, reducing the indefinitely varied phenomena of the world around us, the processes of our own consciousness, to a manageable number of classes of phenomena: types of processes, events and actions, classes of objects, people and institutions, and the like. (1978, p. 21).

The human need to organize information is evident in the language systems and other semiotic resource systems with which we order our universe.

A multimodal text such as an animated fiction film, is one manifestation of an arrangement of diverse semiotic resource systems. Since much of the previous theoretical work within these Social Theories of Discourse has favoured treatments of traditional language systems, a group of Social theorists (owing its roots to Halliday and Bakhtin among others) has been particularly occupied with accounting for the new modes and combinations of modes characteristic of current textual articulations.

2.3.8 Multi-modal systems

The word “mode” is a potentially troublesome term because it is used to describe different concepts within different theoretical frameworks. As we will see

within discussions on narrative, Aristotle conceived of two *modes* of representation – *diegetic* (“telling”) and *mimetic* (showing). Traditionally within the field of Semiotics, “mode” has been seen as one of two channels – oral or written – through which language is actualized (Eggins & Martin 1997, p 238); however, more recently within Multi-modal Social Semiotic approaches, the different modes recognized have included “language, image, music, sound, gesture, and so on” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, Preface). These scholars who have been at the forefront of Multimodal Social Semiotics as a critical pursuit have now come to identify even *colour* (Ibid., pp. 28-29) and *narrative* (Ibid., p. 22) as different modes. So how can we fix the notion of mode so that it refers to a specific set of ways of articulating meaning, regardless of the text or time and place in which it occurs? Quite simply, we cannot. As Kress and van Leeuwen indicate, “...it was our focus on *practices* and our use of the notion of *resources*, rather than a focus on fixed, stable entities, which allowed us to make progress with a multimodal approach to representation and communication” (Ibid., p. 4). Therefore, we can perceive modes as “semiotic resources which allow the simultaneous realization of discourses and types of (inter)action” (Ibid, p. 21). Because this definition overlaps with some of the concepts of *media* that are widely used within current communication studies, Kress and van Leeuwen have sought to distinguish mode and medium while retaining a sense of their interconnection:

Modes can be realized in more than one production medium. Narrative is a mode because it allows discourses to be formulated in particular ways...because it constitutes a particular kind of interaction, and because it can be realized in a range of different media....It follows that media become modes once their principles of semiosis begin to be conceived of in more abstract ways (as ‘grammars’ of some kind). This in turn will make it possible to realize them in a range of media. They lose their tie to a specific form of material realization. (Ibid, p 22).

Thus while paint can be referred to as a *medium* (and indeed further specified as oil, acrylic, watercolour), colour may be referred to as a *mode* inasmuch as there are institutionalized ways of using colour to produce certain semiotic effects regardless of the medium. To extend this art analogy further, following the defining concepts of mode according to Kress and van Leeuwen, even the use of small dots of colour as a means of representing reality within the Impressionist School could be thought of as mode since (1) it represents a “particular interaction” - a visual representation of stylized reality produced by someone for an audience, (2) it has become a recognized convention; and (3) it can now be realized using different media – computer software can now make an impressionist version of any image. Perhaps this analogy has been stretched a little, but the point is to corroborate Kress & van Leeuwen’s notions of mode and medium, and to illustrate that to impose fixed universal limits on what is considered a mode may be theoretically insensitive in a world where communicative forms, resources, and practices are constantly changing. Therefore this scholarly pursuit in general, claim Kress & van Leeuwen, should not be preoccupied with the question “what is a mode”, but rather, “how do people use the variety of semiotic resources to make signs in concrete social contexts” (Ibid., Preface).

There can be no question, however, that textual and contextual analysis must recognize semiotic resource systems and treat them both individually and holistically; different modes allow different possibilities and impose different constraints on expression and interpretation. As Chouliaraki and Fairclough suggest, “an articulatory change in discourse changes the formal potential within a particular social space...and hence within its semantic potential by opening up new combinations of forms...”

(1999, p. 106). In order to unpack some of these combinations of articulations, Kress and van Leeuwen suggest the following kinds of questions:

- What modes are used and therefore what materials are invoked, and therefore, what are the senses which are involved?
- What differential possibilities of perception and cognition are invoked through the uses of different materials and modes?
- What difference in kinds of meaning is produced in the use of different modes and materials – the kinds of meaning usually referred to as emotive, affective, aesthetic, and the kinds of meaning referred to as semantic, rational, logical, ideational? (2001, p. 28)

Such questions are most relevant in the analytical treatment of the animated feature films of Walt Disney. These films are hybrid composites not only of multiple genres, but also of multiple modes and articulations, as is evident in the following account of one of the structured and structuring modes deployed in Disney's *Aladdin*.

2.4 Narratology

The first mode that we will consider in the analysis of conventional fiction films is narrative. The study of narrative has become a meeting point between many disciplines including Psychology, Literary Studies, Anthropology, Linguistics, and Film Studies. This topic is of particular interest in the analysis of films as social and material practices because narratives are found not only within the boundaries of films as products, but also within the everyday existence of human societies. "The relationship between animation and fairy- and folk-tales has been well recognized and

suggests an approach to narrative analysis in which narrative functions and elements are identified and relationships between them are established” (O’Pray, 2000, p.52). The narrative is the foundational communicative system upon which all the other communication systems build within conventional animated Disney films. Before a character or landscape can be depicted, the story framework is one of the variables that dictate the range of possibility within depiction. In order to understand the role of narrative within filmic communication, we must first uncover some of the conventions that operate within narrative systems in conventional American cinema.

Narratology is a relatively new field of inquiry, although its roots can be traced to Aristotle’s *Poetics* (Berger, 1997; Bordwell, 1985; Leitch 1986; Onega & Landa, 1996). Aristotle’s discussions on the “imitation” or representation of life through drama and poetry, formed the foundation of theories which distinguish between the telling of the story (diegesis) and the showing of the story (mimesis). These two terms are still used to frame much of scholarly discussion on the topic of narrative, but these ontological distinctions have become somewhat problematic. Within 19th Century literature, for example, the successful traits of the novel were articulated in terms of visual elements, thus blurring the traditional lines between the novel as diegetic, and the theatre as mimetic (Bordwell, 1985, pp.7-8). Early film theory conceived of film as a mimetic mode of narration similar to theatre, but within the past half century, more linguistically-oriented diegetic biases have been prevalent (Ibid. pp. 16-19). Given the degree of multi-modality in present-day manifestations of narratives, perhaps the relevant question is no longer what mode (mimetic vs diegetic) constitutes narrative?; but rather, how do different modes impact on the production and consumption of the

narrative? We will return to this important question at the end of this section, but first, we will explore some general aspects of narratives independent of their mode of articulation. These aspects are: (1) the social role of narrative; (2) structural characteristics of conventional narratives; (3) narrative devices employed by authors/producers; (4) audience competencies and knowledge of intertexts that are required in order to engage with narratives; and (5) the ability of narratives to transform given changing conditions. As we shall see, the narrative is a key resource employed in the mobilization of Disney animated films.

As contemporary narratologists grapple with a common definition of narrative, recent definitions have avoided using the conventional *diegetic* model of language-bound “telling”, evident for example, in the Onega and Landa (1996) definition: “A narrative is a semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way” (p. 3). Clearly, this view of narrative encompasses the multitudes of modes through which narratives can be realized. A more traditional view of narrative texts, emphasizing the telling, suggests they are:

...sequential texts that tell stories through the actions of characters, through a narrator’s voice, or some combination of the two. This term is usually applied to works of fiction, although, of course, when people talk to one another they often tell stories about things they or others have done (Berger 1997, p 66).

2.4.1 The Social Role of Narrative

Though a unifying definition of narrative still eludes narratologists, all agree that we engage with narratives as a way of organizing and displaying

information/knowledge. Turner (1999) explains that narrative "... provides us with an easy, unconscious, and involving way of constructing ... [and]... 'making sense' of our social world, and sharing that 'sense' with others" (pp, 78-79). This sense of "sharing" mentioned by Turner is also echoed in the acknowledgement of narrative as a "display mode" by Leitch (1986). Narratologists also agree that narrative transcends culture: "Its universality underlines its intrinsic place in human communication" (Turner, 1999 pp. 78-79). Berger (1997) notes that narratives are a key part of our every day life, and that they are manifested in everything from jokes to obituaries (pp. 161-174). Jerome Bruner sees not only individual life episodes as narrative, but also the whole notion of *life as narrative*, arguing that there is "no other way of describing 'lived time' save in the form of a narrative" (1987, p 12). This pervasiveness of narrative underlines its epistemological role in society.

Vladimir Propp, arguably the father of contemporary Narratology, strongly emphasizes the social role of one particular kind of narrative - the folktale – which he sees as belonging to people of the "lower social strata" (1984, p 5). He traces the roots of such narratives in the systems of feudalism where oppressed people created stories in which those on the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy are vindicated by outsmarting kings, or by enlisting the help of other forces to earn victory over others in positions of unearned power and privilege (Ibid. pp. 16-38).

2.4.2 Narrative – Fact or Fiction?

As we have seen within the defining concepts, narrative may be fact or fiction. However, when we tell a factual story about something that has actually happened, or will happen in the future, the events do not unfold in real time as they do in real life

(except perhaps in the case of a present-situated commentary – for example in sports).

Narrators make choices to highlight salient events and descriptions that support the logical “flow”, and to omit details that would encumber the plot and interrupt the audience’s comprehension process (Turner, 1999, pp.. 91-92). Therefore, even a ‘true’ story is a representation of a real event that is abstracted. A folk or fairy tale is a representation of a fictional event, so it is, in a sense, yet another level of abstraction further from reality. As Propp states:

The folktale is deliberate and poetic fiction. It never passes itself off as reality.... What makes the folktale attractive if the representation of reality is not its purpose? First of all its unusual narrative. The lack of correspondence with reality, fiction as such, offers special delight (1984, p.19).

However, even fictional representation, Propp admits, shares a relationship with reality:

Folklore, like any other art, derives from reality. Even the most fantastic images are based on reality....Independently of the intentions of its creators and performers, folklore reflects real life (Ibid., p. 38).

This paradoxical aspect of folktales as fiction and twice abstracted reality makes them, at once perplexing and compelling entities for analysis. Perhaps it is best to concede the dialectical nature of narrative: “Narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative” (Bruner, 1987, p. 13). What is it about narrative that makes it such a prevalent form of expressing life and its imitative forms? Surely some of the answers must be found within the structure of narrative and its structuring capacity.

2.4.3 Structures of Narratives

From a macro-structural perspective, Barthes (1974) likens the narrative to a journey which involves a sense of completion and logic: “fear of forgetting engenders

the appearance of a logic of actions; terms and the links between them are posited (invented) in such a way that they unite, duplicate each other, and create an illusion of continuity” (p 105). Similarly, Chatman (1978) suggests that narratives “...manifest a discernible organization ...[and] entail both transformation and self-regulation” (pp 21-22). Within Chatman’s structuralist model, the two parts of narrative are: (1) story, and (2) discourse. These two aspects can be further divided as follows:

Figure 2-1 Chatman's Narrative Model (1978, p. 26)

Chatman’s narrative model seems to subsume all aspects of linearly-organized communicative artefacts that have a narrative foundation, while other theorists tend to refer to narrative as only those aspects that are found within Chatman’s “story”. It is interesting to note, however, that even those theorists who do not include the “discourse” aspect in their definition of narrative, do acknowledge that the material

representations of the narrative have an impact on the way in which narrative is comprehended (Bordwell, 1985; Leitch, 1986). For the purpose of this research we will define narrative as limited to the “story” aspect of Chatman’s model and return to what falls under his notion of “discourse” within other theoretical frameworks. The aspects within his category of “discourse” in the model will be addressed using other frames of reference in later sections dealing with modality (2.4.6, 2.5).

Some scholars of narrative refine structural models even further by concentrating on specific kinds of narrative or genres. Of particular relevance to this analysis is scholarly interest in the folktale.

2.4.3.1 Propp’s Morphology of the Folktale

Russian Folklorist, Vladimir Propp has made great contributions to the understanding of narrative forms, structure, function and transformation. He especially concentrates on the folktale whose nascent form he describes as “the art of the lower strata of all peoples” (Propp, 1984, p 5). Having studied one hundred different Russian folktales, Propp identified 31 sequential functions from which folktales derive their structure. The following, suggests Propp, is a complete list of the possible “functions of *dramatis personae*” that can be found in folktales (though not necessarily all the functions will appear in every folktale):

- 1 One of the members of a family absents himself from home.
- 2 An interdiction is addressed to the hero.
- 3 The interdiction is violated
- 4 The villain makes an attempt at reconnaissance.
- 5 The villain receives information about his victim.
- 6 The villain attempts to deceive his victim in order to take possession of him or his belongings.
- 7 The victim submits to deception and thereby unwittingly helps his enemy.
- 8 The villain causes harm or injury to a member of the family.
- 8a One member of the family either lacks something or desires to have something.

- 9 Misfortune or lack is made known; the hero is approached with a request or command; he is allowed to go or he is dispatched.
- 10 The seeker agrees to or decides upon counteraction.
- 11 The hero leaves home.
- 12 The hero is tested, interrogated, attacked, etc, which prepares the way for his receiving either a magical agent or a helper.
- 13 The hero reacts to the actions of the future donor.
- 14 The hero acquires the use of a magical agent.
- 15 The hero is transferred, delivered, or led to the whereabouts of an object of search.
- 16 The hero and villain join in direct combat.
- 17 The hero is branded.
- 18 The villain is defeated.
- 19 The initial misfortune or lack is liquidated.
- 20 The hero returns.
- 21 The hero is pursued.
- 22 Rescued of the hero from pursuit.
- 23 The hero, unrecognized, arrives home or in another country.
- 24 A false hero presents unfounded claims.
- 25 A difficult task is proposed to the hero.
- 26 The task is resolved.
- 27 The hero is recognized.
- 28 The false hero/villain is exposed.
- 29 The hero is given a new appearance.
- 30 The villain is punished.
- 31 The hero is married and ascends the throne.

Propp, 1968 (pp. 26-65)

It is interesting to note that the transcribed and translated original version of Aladdin from *The One Thousand and One Nights* closely adheres to Propp's 31 functions. We will address the effect of the influence of Hollywood and the *Disneyfication* of the folktale within the next section (2.4.3.2) and within the analysis of *genre* (4.1)

While Propp's studies were limited to Russian folktales, his work has been foundational in theories of general narratology because of its applicability to folk, fairy tales, and because of its transcultural implications (Berger, 1997, pp. 24-27). Indeed, many film critics use Propp's functions as a means of analyzing feature films and television series (Turner, 1999, p. 82). Turner suggests that this connection "underlines

the possibility that the modern feature film and the primitive fairy-tale serve similar functions for their respective audiences” (Ibid.).

Claude Lévi-Strauss, a critic of formalism, credits Propp for his profound contributions to the field of narrative studies; however, he suggests that Propp has largely ignored the ethnographic context of folktales by insisting on a “constancy of form”. In *Morphology of the Folktale*, Propp admits to an arbitrary permutability of content, but not a permutability of functions. Lévi-Strauss, on the other hand, suggests that both content and function are permutable and that variance in both is not arbitrary, but rather subject to ethnographic context (1976, p. 136). Another criticism by Lévi-Strauss suggests that Propp did not distil his functions enough:

Among the thirty-one functions which he distinguishes, several appear reducible....several of Propp’s functions would in reality constitute the grouping of transformations of one and the same function. Thus one could treat the “violation” as the reverse of the “prohibition,” the latter as a negative transformation of the “injunction”. The “departure” of the hero and his “return” would appear as the same function of disjunction, negatively or positively expressed (Ibid, p. 136-7).

Thus, Lévi-Strauss appropriately draws our attention to the need for paradigmatic as well as syntagmatic consideration in textual analysis. While Propp’s formalist theory focuses highly on syntax (elements arranged sequentially), it is not sensitive enough to paradigmatic structures (reflecting choices between elements that are textually present in opposition to others that are absent, but understood – thus the notion of “return,” derives meaning only in opposition to “departure”). Lévi-Strauss further highlights the necessity to draw attention to the meaning-making potential within the paradigmatic relationships because these are venues for the strongest contextual relevance in the time and place of textual production and consumption: “the narrative is both ‘in time’ (it

consists of a succession of events) and 'out of time' (its significant value is always current)" (1976, pp.137-8).

One of the manifestations of narrative that has become highly conventionalized is the Hollywood version of "story". We can see that Propp's functions become further reduced and simplified according to one specific template when the folktale *goes to Hollywood*.

2.4.3.2 Bordwell's Canonic Narration in Classical Hollywood

Bordwell (1985) suggests that there exists such a thing as the conventionalized *canonical* story:

Nearly all story-comprehension researchers agree that the most common template structure can be articulated as a "canonical" story format...

- introduction of setting and characters
- explanation of a state of affairs
- complicating action
- ensuing events
- outcome
- ending

Distortions in comprehension and recall tend to occur at points when the narrative violates or ambiguates this ideal scenario...(p. 35)

He further specifies the classical Hollywood film depicting:

...psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem....The principal causal agent is thus the character, a discriminated individual endowed with a consistent batch of evident traits, qualities, and behaviors (p. 157).

The primacy of the character within this canon emerges within the "star system" of Hollywood where recognizable stars assume a place of great importance in attracting audiences (Ibid.). Further, within this structure, there is a "double causal structure" -

two plot lines consisting of: a heterosexual love story; and a “mission or quest” These story lines, Bordwell suggests, are “distinct but interdependent”. The two plots may end at different times, “but often the two lines coincide at the climax: resolving one triggers the resolution of the other” (pp. 157-158). This Hollywood version of the story as described by Bordwell is certainly the template that has been applied to the pre-existing folktale of Aladdin.

Propp’s original work can still be seen as extremely relevant to the analysis of the folktale. Indeed, when one considers tales heard in childhood through the template of Propp’s functions, it is still suggestive of the existence of a metanarrative of folk tales. When combined with Lévi-Strauss’ recognition of syntagmatic and paradigmatic meaning-making within narratives, Propp’s structural analysis as well as Bordwell’s structural model of the “canonic story” form the basis for a strong theoretical foundation for the analysis of the role of narrative in Disney animated films. This role will be analyzed in chapter 4 with respect to co-generic, co-actional and co-thematic intertextuality.

2.4.4 Narrative Devices

Scholars suggest that at the level of production, narrative devices of a more micro-structural nature provide consistency and meaning to a chain of events (Berger, 1997; Chatman, 1978). These devices can be seen as even more relevant in light of paradigmatic considerations. Berger highlights the techniques and devices that are employed at the production level to ensure the continuity of the narrative through the conveyance of information:

When authors offer descriptions through their choice of nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives they are actually speaking to readers, telling them what they should think about certain characters or events...A great deal of what authors do when they write stems from their psyches and functions at an unconscious level, so writers can't explain why they used this word rather than that one or had a character do X instead of Y (1997, pp. 44-45).

Of the list of eleven “common authorial devices” delineated by Berger, three – *descriptions, characterization, and stereotypes* – are most relevant for this analysis.

Clearly there is a definite degree of overlap in the preceding devices. Berger's explanation of *descriptions* suggests that “they tell us what characters look like and how they behave, help situate actions and generate feelings and attitudes in readers” (Ibid., p. 45). Berger speaks almost exclusively of character description, but landscape or setting description is often of equal importance – especially in film narratives as visual entities; therefore, description of setting will be addressed in the analysis of colour as it supports the narrative. *Characterization*, states Berger can be conveyed “through description and dialogue, as well as through action” (Ibid., p. 52). The two most important aspects of characterization are manifested in the “...description of (a) what a character looks like and is like and (b) how a character behaves” (Ibid.). *Stereotypes* are simplistic representative generalizations. According to Berger, “despite, its illogicality, stereotyping is often used in narrative texts because it allows authors to provide motivations and to characterize people very quickly and economically” (Ibid., p. 54).

Similar to Berger's notion of conveying information through description, Chatman describes characterization and narrative “traits”; “a trait may be said to be a narrative adjective out of the vernacular labelling a personal quality of a character, as it

persists over part or whole of the story” (1978, p. 125). Such traits operate systematically and repetitively at the level of production to allow audiences to identify a consistent character type. “The relative persistence of a trait is critical...that traits generally overlap is equally significant, at least for classical narratives. It contributes to that sense of the verisimilar consistency of characters that is the cornerstone of fiction” (Ibid., p. 122). In a kind of morphological analysis of the structure of narratives, Chatman states the differences between *events* that occur in the story and *traits* that describe characters. While discreet events are localized and make sense within the context of the narrative, traits “...may prevail throughout the work and beyond, indeed, as long in our memory as does the work itself” (Ibid., p. 128). Traiting creates transcendental characters and settings that emerge for audiences to file in memory for future use. Some of the most powerful and memorable traiting of characters and landscapes emerges within paradigms composed of binary oppositions – beautiful/ ugly; young/ old; dark/ light, etc. While this understanding of traits as operating somewhat independently outside of the given text may seem evident, it is a crucial theoretical move in order to establish the way texts create meaning in an *intertextual* way.

Narrative devices such as those mentioned above reinforce the unity of the narrative because they cue the audience to activate certain competencies and perform certain operations as described below.

2.4.5 Audience Competency

Traditional narratologists have received criticism for concentrating too heavily on narrative analysis without acknowledging the participation of audiences. Critics of a

solely structurally-oriented narratology, or of an enunciation-oriented narratology (where only the authorial act is analysed) claim that the role of the audience must be explicitly built into theories surrounding narrative (Bordwell, 1985; Leitch, 1986; Onega & Landa, 1996). In order to explore the nature of narrative and the role of the audience, Leitch borrows from fellow narratologist, Robert Scholes, the term *narrativity* – “the process whereby an audience constructs a coherent story from the fictional data presented in a given discourse” (1986, p. 34). Leitch claims that we learn this general skill as children simply by being exposed to narratives around us. He breaks down the notion of narrativity by describing three skills inherent to the audience’s process of making meaning in narratives: “the ability to defer one’s desire for gratification; the ability to supply connections among the material a story presents; and the ability to perceive discursive events as significantly related to the point of a given story or sequence” (Ibid., p. 34). Leitch further elaborates this audience process:

...narratives commonly manipulate their audiences by engaging their narrativity along certain lines – that is, by implying certain connections and encouraging certain speculations rather than others....the audience’s narrativity must be active enough to construct a story according to the cues a given narrative provides but not so active that it transgresses the narrative’s guidance....The audience...will be required to add connections and interpretations of their own, but will not be able to add just anything (Ibid. pp. 36-37).

Leitch’s discussions on narrativity illuminate a further paradox of narrative: it is both “open” - in the sense that in order to derive meaning, one must bring something to it from outside; and “closed” – in that it has a beginning, middle and end (even in the case of serial narratives, closure may be delayed, but it is implied and anticipated), and in that it guides audiences to a unified interpretation.

Bordwell's version of "narrativity" recognizes the role of the audience by using cognition and perception as a basis for a theory of narrative comprehension. Bordwell (1985) appropriates schemata theorist, Reid Hasties's terms : *prototype*, *template* and *procedural* schema to suggest a model for audience understanding: "...comprehending a narrative involves engaging '*prototype schemata*' – identifying characters – individual agents, actions, goals, and locales...[of a] particular configuration...; '*template schemata*' or filing systems...can add information when it is absent and test for proper classification of data....perceivers tend to use this master schema as a framework for understanding, recalling, and summarizing a particular narrative;... [and] '*procedural schemata*', those operational protocols which dynamically acquire and organize information" (pp. 34-36).

In most cases the perceiver does not patiently isolate each datum and slowly assemble a narrative event....Instead, the spectator selects salient cues, then draws on prototype schemata and template schemata specific to narrative structure. Guided by something like the canonic story, the perceiver "chunks" the film into more or less structurally significant episodes" (p. 35)

With a similar analytical goal, but from a social linguistic perspective, Onega and Landa (1996) draw on the work of Bakhtin and Kristeva to suggest that the reader may draw on four kinds of intertextual relationships between the text and: "(1) other literary texts....; (2) generic conventions.; (3) other social discourses...; and (4) critical commentary of the text" (pp. 32-33).

Having established that the narrative functions in a social way, and having explored some structures for specific kinds of narratives and how we engage with them, we must now examine how narratives may change through temporal and spatial displacement.

2.4.6 Narrative Transformation and Hybridization

The field of narratology seems fairly united in its recognition of the role of history within narrative analysis. This fact is no doubt in large part due to its relative recency as a critical pursuit, and its inheritance of Foucauldian notions of historical fluidity of knowledge and power. Vladimir Propp, however, as one of the founders of Narratology must also be credited. While Propp's studies of folktales were originally done in the 1920's, prior to these widespread post-modern critical sensitivities, his considerations of history and hybridity in his later works are testimony to the strength of his analytical rigour:

Historical study should show what happens to old folklore under new historical conditions and trace the appearance of new formations.... The old and the new can exist not only in a state of unresolved contradictions; they may also enter into hybrid formations ...the old can be reinterpreted, the types of reinterpretation being numerous. The old is changed in accordance with the new life, new ideas, new forms of consciousness (1984, pp. 11-12).

Propp evidently witnessed the transformation of some of the folktales in his studies, and noted that while the 31 functions remained stable as an inventory of possibilities, changing social conditions over time caused some changes to the tale and would continue to cause changes. For example, although he saw folktales as "the art of the lower strata of all peoples", he predicted that the social role of such a narrative would change with a transformation in the class system. Folktales would undergo "qualitative change" and come "closer to literature" (Propp, 1984, p. 5). These acknowledgements are suggestive of the Marxist intellectual climate of his time, in which contemporary class structures were seen to be subject to a process of evolution; however, the implications of a somewhat organically-changing representational

structure lend potency to enduring applications of Propp's theories. Berger's charming modifications to Propp's functions suggest that:

Instead of the hero's getting married and ascending the throne, he may get married and get a good job with his father-in-law, or he may not get married but end up making love to the moral (or is it immoral?) equivalent of the princess figure (1997, p. 25).

Not only are the internal structure and form of narrative susceptible to transformation; but also the material manifestation is subject to change. Narratives were once simply oral forms of communication; however, with time and technological change, they have found life within a variety of media and modes. Chatman, a narratologist and film theorist, suggests that narratives are structural entities that are not dependent on any particular medium (1978). Similarly, Leitch posits that audience narrative competencies do not depend on a particular medium. "Narrativity itself is not specific to a given medium of presentation; and it is a residual narrativity, a narrative competence independent of medium, that allows us to feel our way into the conventions of a narrative medium hitherto unfamiliar to us" (1986, p. 35). However, he does acknowledge that there are different ways in which to engage our narrative competencies in different media manifestations. "The application of an audience's narrativity varies with the medium of presentation (and indeed with the genre and storyteller...)" (Ibid.).

This discussion of media and mode in a sense returns us to the original debate surrounding narrative as "diegetic" or "mimetic". We have seen that since narratives themselves appear in many modes within current society, they are not dependant upon a specific medium or mode. However, the analyst must surely recognize that there are

some fundamental differences in what is being supplied and what is being perceived and understood when narratives appear in multimodal texts that engage with multiple human senses. The importance of this analytical consideration can be illustrated by taking into account the assumptions of Propp on the nature of the folktale as an oral (and perhaps even written) form:

The narrator...and the listener are interested only in the action and nothing more. They have no interest in the surroundings of the action ...Nor [are they] ..interested in the characters' outward appearance... The art of the portrait is absent from...narrative genres...We do not know what ...folktale personages look like....The same applies to landscape....[There is]indifference to the circumstances under which the action is performed and to the outward appearance of the characters... (1984, p.21).

When we think about tales from childhood that may have been read or told to us without pictures, we can remember being told often “there once was a beautiful princess/ handsome prince” without great detail about what specific characteristics constitute beauty (except, perhaps in the case of Snow White because her physical traiting and naming were one in the same). In this case of lack of character and landscape description, our imagination *fills in* the details in order to form a picture of the setting and characters. Of course, imagination itself is subject to social influences and based on experiences that become part of our schemata; however, there is room for difference among audience members in how description is manifested by the imagination. In imagining a personage, we may supply a preferred hair colour/ body type/ height/ and even a preferred race to our hero/ heroine. This description is *left to the imagination* and it does not necessarily become a topic of interest. We do not think to ask the storyteller: *What do you mean by ‘ugly’ – what did he/she look like?* Nor does the storyteller regularly ask: *How did you picture the princess?* (unless, of course, the

storyteller is also a psychoanalyst, sociologist, etc). When images are not supplied within the material of the narrative, such images are within a *private* domain; not only are they private, but they are *unconsciously* supplied to create an efficient engagement with the narrative. We are not even aware of the prototypes we are supplying. While their imaginary existence is relevant to the unfolding of the plot, its particular manifestation is not. As Propp suggests, action is supreme within the folktale. As long as we have characters in 'our mind's eye', the narrative continues. When we hear stories we do not find ourselves thinking: *wait a minute, the image I have of that person is not quite right...let me change that image at this point of the story...* The only time we are aware of a prototype we are creating in our imagination within a narrative is when there is some kind of disjuncture. Take for example the well-known narrative brain teaser:

A son and his father get into a serious car accident. The boy is taken in one ambulance to a hospital, and the father is taken in another ambulance to a different hospital. Upon reaching the emergency room, the doctor looks at the boy and says, "I can't work on this patient. He is my son!" How is this possible?

(Retrieved from <http://www.ntu.edu.sg/home/mlsong/brain/brain.htm>)

This brain teaser operates on the assumption that we are socially conditioned to impose a male prototype on those labelled "doctor". This exposition of the application of inappropriate prototype schema is beginning to lose its potency as historical conditions favouring one medical professional prototype over another begin to dissipate; however the narrative riddle exemplifies: (1) our lack of awareness of the degree to which we use *prototype schema* or *character traiting* within everyday narratives; and (2) the relevance of highlighting the distinction between *telling* a story and *showing* a story. If the previous narrative had been *mimetic* instead of *diegetic*, its purpose would have

been entirely lost. Although the structure and function of this narrative example differs from a folktale, it does share the diegetic tradition with folk and fairy tales. What happens when we are shown, instead of told, a folktale?

2.5 Visual Perception

Those of us who are sighted can certainly attest to the power of visual images; when we read or hear a story, we tend to create a visual text to accompany it and when we dream we tend to favour visual perception over others. We *visualize success*, create things in *our mind's eye*, and *believe* that which we can *see*. When we understand a notion that is being explained to us we denote deep understanding by saying '*I see*'. Film theorist, Jean Mitry notes that "we think with images as much as we do with words" (2000, p. 255). Vision is a truly powerful perception through which we construct our world and our identity within it. However, those of us who are sighted are generally unaware that our eyes do not present the objective "real" world in a universal way. Communication theorist, Ann Barry, succinctly encapsulates the complexity of the act of viewing:

The visual world...is an interpretation of reality but not reality itself. It is an image created in the brain, formed by an integration of immediate multisensory information, prior experience, and cultural learning. In short, it is a mental map, but it is not the territory (Barry, 1997, p 15).

Drawing on constructivist psychology theory, film theorist, David Bordwell illuminates the role of perception and cognition in the act of viewing. Inference-making is necessary in the process of viewing, he argues, because sensory stimuli cannot provide all of the information necessary for comprehension (1985, p. 30).

2.5.1 How vision works

Much research has been done on the physics and physiology of optics. For the purpose of this thesis, these theories will not be explored in depth, but some aspects will be revealed as they pertain to the act of viewing a film. One of the most important components of viewing has to do with *movement*:

Our eyes move in rapid short jerks (“saccades”) because to achieve clarity of detail, we must continually redirect the fovea [the light/dark/colour pattern-interpreting part at the back of the eye] around the scene. The image that we perceive as a result is a mental one, which results from gleaning what remains constant while our eyes are moving.... Movement is thus essential to vision because our eyes function by noticing and recording change (Barry, 1997, p. 32).

Barry explains that up until 1960, Optic theory was based on the *content* of material and the light energy within the content, however, with the work of visual perception theorist James Gibson, in the 1960’s, *relationships* and *boundaries* between constituent elements became more important than content itself:

it was the *transitions* in the natural optic array, not the energy content of the light beam itself, which signal objects as “out there”. It is primarily the *differences*... [between content that we see]. It is therefore *change* that signals vision and *relationship* that carries meaning (Barry, 1997, pp. 40-41).

The act of viewing, is a difference-dependent interpretive act (as is reading as is listening to music...). Therefore, for us to see and recognize a “tree”, we need to observe boundaries and differences (colour, shape, depth, texture, size, etc) between it and the “person” who is standing in front of it, or the “building” that is behind it.

Another important aspect of viewing emerges in the works of E.H. Gombrich (1959; 1979), on the psychology of art. His studies reveal the human quest for order in

perceiving the visual: “We have a tendency to probe both the real world and its representations with a hypothesis of regularity which is not abandoned unless it is refuted” (1979, p. 5). Just as Bordwell suggests, this inference-making is what we bring to visual perception. Gombrich also highlights the *active* role of the perceiver:

In contrast to any stimulus-response theory I would wish to point to the need to regard the organism as an active agent reaching out towards the environment, not blindly and at random, but guided by its inbuilt sense of order. (1979, p. 5).

This scholar also illuminates the conditions in which our perceptual process may be most turned on: “....it is the contrast between disorder and order that alerts our perception” (Ibid., p. 6). We can all recall a new situation in which we have been highly aware of what we are seeing and in what way(s) this new vision conforms or does not conform to our existing schemata. Perhaps the most pronounced example of this perceptual disjuncture occurs when we first travel to a country whose natural and semiotic systems are drastically different from those to which we are accustomed. In such cases, everything from flora and fauna to architecture and traffic signs can give a “jolt” to our existing sense of order. While we see it, it is, in a sense, a source of wonder or disbelief because it does not fit within our mental schemata. At this point, we try to make it fit by stuffing it into an existing schema. We may say: this reminds me of... or it’s sort of like.... We are, in a sense hyper-aware of that which we are viewing because in order to make sense of it, it must be compared, contrasted, categorized, and ordered. However, once entities are ordered, the initial stage of wonder ends and the act of perception becomes less conscious. “When the expected happens in our field of vision we cease to attend and the arrangement sinks below the threshold of our

awareness (Gombrich, 1979, p. 9). These kinds of processes happen in the act of viewing artistic representations, suggests Gombrich:

Illusion, we will find, is hard to describe or analyse, for though we may be intellectually aware of the fact that any given experience must be illusion, we cannot, strictly speaking, watch ourselves having an illusionWorks of art are not mirrors, but they share with mirrors that elusive magic of transformation which is so hard to put into words (1959, p. 5).

For the purpose of this analysis, three aspects of “viewing” from the above mentioned perception theories need to be emphasized as relevant to the analysis: (1) that we generally recognize vision as the most reliable sense through which to understand the world; but that we are not aware of how much we *impose* on things seen; (2) that the act of viewing involves perceiving *light, movement, change and relationship*; and (3) that we bring to the act of viewing both a need for order, and the psychological and social tools with which to create that order.

2.5.2 Colour Theory

One of the specific elements involved in the process of viewing is colour. The perception of colour, too, is dependent on relationships, and experiential and associational meanings:

Like movement, depth, and form perception, color perception thus appears to be not only innate, but a perception so meaningful that it is core to our entire being. An experience derived from the presence of reflected light, color vision is ultimately a construction of the visual cortex, but the process begins in the retina, where different wavelengths of radiant energy are absorbed by chemicals in its visual receptors (Barry, 1997, p. 127).

Social Semioticians, Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) suggest that the appeal of colour operates “via sight and its physiology, and via both the physiological/ experiential

meanings of colour for humans as biological/ physiological beings and the cultural/experiential meanings of colour” (2001, p. 27). Therefore, they explain, meanings generated by colour are a result of “specific cultural provenances and physiological/ experiential/ emotional effects” (Ibid). Besides being simply a source of attraction and appeal, colour descriptions can be purposeful. Those of us who are not colour blind tend to rely heavily on colour to capture the ontological property of an entity. However, colour is not “out there” as an immutable element in nature:

Although we are inclined to treat color as if it were a property - an affordance - of things in themselves, color is a subjective phenomenon that is never registered in isolation and can be perceived only in dynamic interaction....Moreover, color is relative to context. Seen next to another color, it changes characteristics and may seem lighter, darker, or different in hue (Barry, 1997, p. 128).

Colour theorist, Linda Holtzschue (2002), also highlights the context dependency of colour perception. Further, she draws attention to the stages in the process of viewing colour, from sensation – “an incomplete event” – to perception:

Most perceptions occur unconsciously and at such high speed that they seem simultaneous with sensation...but what we think of as the “sensory” experience of color is really a fusion of sensation and perception. Unlike a sensation, a perception cannot be measured. It can only be described. (2002, p. 35).

Holtzschue states that colour perception is an act that involves “deciding” on the nature of the sensation and “identifying” it, followed by “recognizing”. The act of recognizing involves relying on individual social, cultural, environmental and formal learning that we store in “libraries” to which we refer in new sensory environments (Ibid).

“Something new is recognized, rightly or wrongly, because it is associated with some familiar thing that has similar characteristics” (Ibid). Like Gombrich, Holtzschue sees that human colour perception is highly geared towards creating a sense of order:

“Creating order out of random stimuli is a fundamental function of human intelligence. Things are categorized in order to control and understand the flow of information” (Ibid.). Barry (1997) cites research in which young children, when asked to group objects, do so according to colour first rather than function, suggesting that one of the first aspects through which we categorize and organize our world, is colour (p. 130).

While the origins of colour theory developed within the framework of Newtonian physics and physiology, the evolution of this field of inquiry has seen the acknowledgement of the experiential/socio-cultural meaning-making of colour. Colour theorist, Mahnke, suggests the following pyramid as a model for the levels of response in the experience of colour:

Figure 2-2 The Color Experience Pyramid (1996)

We can see that the upper four levels of response correspond to socially learned meanings of colour. While some associations with colour remain somewhat stable, others may be specific to a genre or textual situation. The top level of response is not of interest within this social perspective on colour meaning within texts for the obvious

reason that we are interested in how texts are popularly perceived, rather than personally because of some individual association with a particular colour (from childhood for example). The colour meanings that are assigned or symbolic (the third lowest level of Mahnke's pyramid) are of particular interest in the case of Disney's *Aladdin* as we shall see in Chapter 4. Colour is not a constant, and even social values of colour vary. An example of cultural variance in symbolic meaning is "the white that symbolizes purity in Western culture [and] is the color of mourning in India." (Holtzschue, 2002, p. 41). Even within the same culture, the value of a colour is subject to change over time. Film/Cultural Studies scholar, Richard Dyer (1997), notes that throughout history Caucasian people have sought to make themselves look whiter through cosmetic means, but within the twentieth century, there has been an obsession with tanning – the new symbol for healthiness and a life of leisure (pp. 48-49). Even the semiotics of colour surrounding bread have changed; where white bread once connoted wholesome goodness, now the darker the bread, the more wholesome.

In order to advance the analysis of colour as a meaning-making mode in Disney animation, we must consider two particular aspects of colour theory – *Saturation* and *Equilibrium*.

According to Holtzschue, saturation refers to the expression of "hue intensity, or the contrast between dull and vivid" (2002, p. 64). She goes on to suggest that the notion of "brilliance" should not be confused with saturation. "A brilliant color can be – but is not necessarily – a saturated colour" (Ibid., p. 65). For example, a saturated colour may be *diluted* with some white and be *brilliant*, but it is no longer *saturated* (Ibid). Kress & van Leeuwen discuss saturation and suggest that deeply saturated

colours evoke a kind of hyper-reality, while slightly diluted colours come closer to our perception of natural. They call particular attention to the use of illumination:

“Naturalistic depictions represent participants as they are affected by a particular source of illumination. Less naturalistic images, on the other hand, may abstract from illumination”(1996, p. 167). It is this abstraction that serves to create a kind of “hyper-reality”effect. In animated films, the elements that are naturalized are those which we most associate as depicting our version of “reality”, while those that are *hyper-real* evoke a sense of *other-worldliness*.(see Chapter 4).

Holtzschue advances another effect of the pertinence of continuity in levels of saturation: “Color compositions are most successful when the level of saturation is relatively constant. When a general level of saturation has been established, any atypical element disrupts the composition” (2002, p. 9). This idea of *disruption* can be seen as a potentially productive notion within a sequential text which relies on relationships of similarity and difference among elements in order to achieve meaning. Therefore a break between scenes in a film can be indicated by a marked disruption in colour saturation. This disruption can also serve as a functional way to mark an axiological turn in the narrative.

The other aspect of colour perception that will assist in our analysis is *Equilibrium*. This purely physiological response has to do with the simultaneous presence of red, yellow and blue:

When the three primary colours are present in the field of vision, the eye is in a state of *equilibrium*. Equilibrium isn’t just a descriptive term. It is a physiological state of rest that the eye requires....It is not necessary for the primaries to be present as equal areas for the eye to be at rest, just that all three be present in some mixture or proportion (Ibid., p. 54).

At its extreme, disequilibrium can cause the eye to struggle to deal with each colour separately, and in its attempt to create harmony, may even produce “vibration, headache, blurred vision and dizziness”(Ibid., p. 54). Because this is a physiological response, affects produced are completely involuntary.

The theoretical assumptions provided by colour theory in many ways corroborate our general assumptions from the literature thus far. Clearly some of the ways in which we engage with colour are the result of social processes and learned response, but others are dictated by physiology. As Holtzschue states:

There is no way to deny the evidence that a great deal of what we find harmonious is dictated not by conscious choice, but by the involuntary responses of our eyes and minds. Color choices are affected by the need for equilibrium, the comfort level of vision, and logic in perception. We have a built-in bias toward certain combinations (Ibid., p. 101).

2.7 Conclusion

Though the subject of analysis of this study has necessitated a jaunt through the territory of a number of different disciplines, this foray has yielded the discovery of a surprising amount of shared theoretical space. No theory unto itself has provided enough sensitivity to analyze Disney's *Aladdin*, so the answer is obviously a transdisciplinary approach that places the film at the centre of a number of social, material and cognitive meaning-making processes. The following list of transdisciplinary assumptions arises from the previously highlighted theories, and influences the methodological approach to follow.

- 1) Animated films (as do other texts) share a dialectical relationship with society (ie they are mutually shaping).

- 2) As such, the sources of meaning come from within the text and from outside the texts (in contexts or intertexts).
- 3) Meaning potential within the film is realized through different semiotic resource systems – including modes.
- 4) Meaning is derived through relationships between similar and different elements within semiotic resource systems and the value orientations of these elements.
- 5) Because of its framing capacity, one of the most important modes through which meaning is articulated in this and other ‘conventional’ films is *Narrative* (specifically, folktale in this case).
- 6) The visual modal systems (especially colour & caricature) at work in films create certain ways of engaging with ‘stories’.
- 7) Both the act of articulating meaning and interpreting meaning involve creating a sense of order.
- 8) The way we order the elements of texts to produce meaning involves:
 - a) perceptive and cognitive capacities
 - b) socio-cultural behaviour and knowledge
- 9) Certain social frames (*genre* and *discursive formations* within a geo-political context) provide support in the creation of textual order.
- 10) The role of such order-creating mechanisms within conventional animation is often ignored; however, it must be highlighted in order to create meaningful dialogue surrounding texts.

Analysis of visual records of human experience is a search for pattern and meaning, complicated and enriched by our inescapable role as participants in that experience (Collier, 2001, p 35).

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In order to frame a methodology for the analysis of *Aladdin*, we can extend Collier's characterization of textual analysis in two ways: first, by recognizing that the process involves identifying human order-making capacities, and the patterns that surround us in our social world that contribute to the joint production of meaning; second, by acknowledging that analysts themselves are implicated in this order-making process. An analyst cannot stand on a Cartesian point outside of the socio-cognitive process of textual meaning-making and render an objective interpretation. In one sense, the analyst can access the social meaning-making network by being a participant in that society – by making oneself aware of that which is normally an invisible process. However, “all analysts are operating in theoretical practices whose concerns are different from the practical concerns of people as participants, and all analysis brings the analysts' theoretical preoccupations – and categories to bear on the discourse” (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999, p. 7). Thus, the goal of an analyst is not to present an objective account of textual meaning, but rather, to *recontextualize* aspects of the meaning-making mechanisms in an attempt to expose how textual order may be achieved.

3.2 A Sense of Order

Recognition of recurring patterns is an integral theoretical foundation within the analysis of Disney's *Aladdin*. Even "new" forms and content of texts and semiotic resource systems rely heavily on their antecedents in defining what can and will be articulated and how. The methods of analysis must acknowledge what the primary text owes to its forebears with regard to both form and content. Not only does any text rely on historical antecedence, it also calls upon neighbouring, co-existing intertexts to create meaning. Additionally, texts depend upon internal coherence through intra-textual patterns – especially in the case of narrative film where sequence and chronology provide a horizontal thread, but relationships and patterns provide a vertical thread - an imperative in creating meaning.

This analysis intends to uncover aspects of the order-generating mechanisms at work in *Aladdin*. Without patterns and the recognition of patterns, not only would textual analysis be both irrelevant and impossible, but *texts themselves* would not be able to *mean*. As Lakoff (1987) suggests, conceptual structures that develop through the operations of the mind and through lived experience lead us to *categorize* as a way of achieving meaning and understanding. As we have seen, the process of making sense of texts involves recognizing relationships and patterns inside texts and outside of texts. The patterns are both 'out there', socially, and within us as socio-cognitive beings who have *schemata* (Bordwell, 1985; van Dijk, 1997a; 1997b), or *libraries* (Holtzschue, 2002) on which to draw in the act of analyzing, classifying, and ordering. The analysis will thus proceed based on the primary text's contextual, intertextual, and intra-textual

relationships and how we bring such relations to bear on the socio-cognitive process of making meaning.

3.3 Instantiation of system in text vs. Intertextuality

This analysis aims to be sensitive to a potentially contentious issue by striking a balance between attention to the specific instances of actualized meaning within the primary text and to the extratextual sources of meaning. Martin (1998) describes the divide that plagues the potentially congenial pursuits of Systemic Functional Linguistics and humanities-based “critical perspectives” (Ibid, pp. 7-10). Although he does not specifically explain what he means *by critical perspectives*, he seems to be referring to approaches within the disciplines of Media Studies and Cultural Studies. The shared values across the divide stem from a common “concern with textualisation as the site of semiotic and thus cultural change” (Ibid., p 8); however the methods of uncovering *textualization* may be different. Martin suggests that the divide originates in the disparate “trajectories” of each. One trajectory relies heavily on Halliday’s model of instantiation – “the manifestation of system in text” (Ibid.). While this approach does take into account the routinized practices surrounding the primary text in what is called the “context of culture”, the theory is most elaborated with regard to the “context of situation” or *register* which attends to the detail-oriented grammatical systems and relations that operate to produce meaning *within the text*. The other trajectory, more heavily influenced by Bakhtinian notions of *dialogism* and *heteroglossia*, attempts to use the concept of *intertextuality* as an apparatus for locating sites of meaning *across* textual instances (Ibid.). Instead of adhering to frameworks that lead to close textual

analysis this trajectory seeks “explicit frameworks for tracking intertextual relations” (Ibid.). Martin notes that at their polar extremes, there is a great deal of discrepancy between these two trajectories. At its extreme, the functional linguistic trajectory “foregrounds the system over the instance to the extent that the processes whereby instantiation reconstrues the system are obscured” (Ibid, p. 9). On the other hand, in extreme cases, the critical perspective trajectory “foregrounds the instance and its relation to other extant instances, so much so that the relation of the instance to the meaning potential of the culture as a whole is obscured” (Ibid). Martin notes that recently some scholars have been working toward bridging these theoretical spaces – notably Fairclough (1992), Iedema (1993), Kress (1985), and Lemke (1990) – however:

The gap between textual and social analysis is one that needs closing, as linguists get better at formalising readings of more and longer texts at deeper levels of abstraction and as critical theorists get better at focusing their readings on the details of instantiation (Ibid.).

Inspired by Martin’s call to attend to both holistic social factors and to textual instantiation, this analysis aims to uncover aspects of the (1) macro-processes of meaning making in the textual whole and extra-textual semiotic resources; and (2) micro-processes of meaning-making through a focus on the visual instantiation of meaning potential within the opening 10 minutes of *Aladdin*. It is not the contention of this thesis to suggest hard lines of distinction between the ways in which macro and micro processes occur; these two perspectives are simply theoretical constructs for recontextualizing elements in an effort to see how order is achieved. It is recognized that meaning is generated in more holistic ways than by simply activating macro-processes and micro-processes.

3.4 Macro perspectives – Genre and context of relevant geo-politics

One of the ways through which a text derives meaning is through its membership within a recognizable larger pattern of similar texts and practices within a particular institution. The term *genre* has come to describe this notion of family resemblance amongst texts. More concretely, Bazerman (1998) has defined genre as:

...a kind of activity to be carried out in a recognisable textual space. That activity embodies relations with readers and kinds of messages to be developed in order to carry out generically appropriate intentions and interactions – to complete the rhetorical and social possibilities of the genre...it is the recognizable shape by which participation is enacted and understood (p. 24).

By analysing the genre of Disney animated feature films, we will not only gain insights into the meaning-making practices that creators of these films adhere to as conventions (both consciously and unconsciously), but also appreciate the expectations of consumers – who have prior experience with similar texts – as key to making meaning. This is the location of what Lemke (1990; 1995) refers to as *co-generic intertextuality* (as discussed in Chapter 2.3.3). The socio-cognitive process that helps participants bring order to textual instantiation, is *extratextual inferencing* (Chapter 2.3.7) using libraries of stored knowledge of similar genres. This is a top-down process where the pre-existing schema is applied to the instance of the text.

Another critical component in the macro-processing of meaning in this film is what this thesis will call the *context of geo-politics*. In some textual analyses the geo-political climate may be described as a kind of background to the primary text; however, in the case of *Aladdin*, the geo-political environment leading up to and including the release of the film is fundamentally relevant, and therefore, should be foregrounded. This thesis contends that this context is one of the most powerful sites of

what Lemke calls *co-thematic intertextuality* (1990; 1995). That is to say that the thematic formations that exist within the text also occur within a larger societal sphere – replete with value orientations that indicate a shared corpus of knowledge and beliefs. These both reflect and shape our ways of understanding and engaging with the world around us. Within this particular text, the thematic formation describes the *Power-form* of the *ideological complex* (Hodge and Kress, 1993, as described in Chapter 2.3.6) in which differences between people and places (both in the text and in the geo-political world) are highlighted as a way of creating textual order. The socio-cognitive engagement of this context, also reflects a top-down extra-textual inferencing process among participants.

3.5 Micro perspectives

In order to ‘zoom in’ for a more detailed account of the textual instantiation of semiotic systems within *Aladdin*, an analysis will be conducted of the initial three scenes (Scene 1; 0:00-2:47; Scene 2: 2:48-6:14; Scene 3: 6:15-10:06: for a total of ten minutes and six seconds) as they create meaning through the narrative mode and the colour and caricature modes. This analysis will reveal aspects of *co-actional intertextuality* (Lemke, as discussed in Chapter 2.3.3). Participants engage socio-cognitive bottom-up *text-connecting inferences* to generate relationships among co-actional elements. This micro-perspective necessitated deciding on sequential and spatial minimal units for analysis since filmic semiotic resource systems exist both in time and in space.

3.5.1. Chronologically-determined minimal units

In choosing a sequential piece of text within this film, “experts” from film theory have been consulted in order to find out what constitutes an appropriate unit of cinema (Bordwell, 1985; 1989; Metz, 1974; Kuntzel, 1980). Responding to criticisms that his earlier work too rigidly defined units within a supposedly universal cinematic code, Film Semiotician, Christian Metz directly addresses the problem of locating such universal “distinctive units” within cinematic code as there are within language code (1974, pp.184-204). Calling on a film-specific and code-specific determination of such units, he suggests that in some filmic instances, the image of a single filmed object may serve as a minimal unit for analysis – especially if it has an “iconic designation” because of its recognizability and its recurrence (Ibid., pp. 199-200). However, recognizing variation he reveals that:

...in other cases (in other codes), the minimal unit occupies a much larger filmic segment: thus in narrative codes,...codes which appear on the screen as well as elsewhere, the distinctive units – whether their definition centers around the action, the sequence of actions, the character, the actant, or the function, etc – may each occupy several minutes of the film strip. (Ibid, p. 200).

Bordwell, meanwhile states that a film is “always broken up into segments” (1985, p.158); He further describes a somewhat transparent segment-creating mechanism at work within conventional Hollywood cinema:

Hollywood narration clearly demarcates its scenes by neoclassical criteria – unity of time (continuous or consistently intermittent duration), space (a definable locale), and action (a distinct cause-effect phase). The bounds of the sequence will be marked by some standardized punctuations (dissolve, fade, wipe, sound bridge) Ibid.

Bordwell also recognizes “that each film establishes its own scale of segmentation” (Ibid.). As Metz and Bordwell indicate above, the narrative modality provides a certain degree of transparency of minimal units - if one chooses to attend to such “punctuations” or “the variation in their material form between sequences” (Metz, 1974, p. 199). The implication is that pieces of text that are chosen by the analyst are not arbitrarily chosen; they are chosen for both their text-suggested segmentation and their ability to illustrate the “code” at work (*code* is used by Metz to refer to a semiotic resource system in the same way that Kress & van Leeuwen use the term “mode”). In this specific film, certain punctuations provide a logical division of narrative scenes. Byrne & McQuillan (1999) and Wasko (2001) have noted that one of the ways in which narrative segments are demarcated in Disney movies is through song. This kind of demarcation is certainly evident in *Aladdin* where many of the scenes begin or end with a song that encapsulates a key axiological index within the narrative. Disney also provides, through the dialogue and through other punctuative film techniques (fade, zoom, etc) cues that suggest a partial closure of one segment and a segue to the next. As we shall see in the analysis, colour and caricature also operate as modes that serve to reinforce the narrative modality.

Having glossed the ways in which to determine a minimal unit, we can now focus on the choice of the particular 3 opening segments. The rationale for this choice stems from the discourse-mobilizing nature of the opening of the film. The narrative is launched in this portion, and the audience must “buy-in” at this stage in order for the rest of the text to function as a whole. As Bordwell posits, “[b]ecause of its agenda-setting function, a film’s beginning typically becomes a summary segment for its

interpretation. Here the critic often finds the film's major semantic fields locked into place" (1989, p. 190). Similarly, Kuntzel (1980) suggests that beginnings of films are fascinating for the analyst because of their unique ability to "sketch out the filmic mode of functioning." (pp. 24-25). The beginning "not only participates in but sparks off the functioning of the body as a whole: it is the controlling organ" (Ibid., p. 25).

The three initial units of the film are functionally important for the mobilization of the narrative mode in *Aladdin*. The first segment, in which the narrator is present, frames the entire story and launches the intrigue, while the second and third segments ontologically define the antagonist and the protagonist respectively.

3.5.2 Clarification of "mode"

As we have seen in Chapter 2, the term *mode* is a slippery one because it has been used to describe many different notions at many different conceptual levels. The Kress & van Leeuwen definition, most sensitive to the hybrid texts of this age, stipulates that a mode allows for a "particular kind of interaction" and "particular ways" of discourse formation that "can be realized in a range of different media" and "whose principles of semiosis begin to be conceived of in more abstract ways" (2001, p 22). Thus these authors suggest that narrative (p 22) and colour (pp 25-27) are both indeed modes although they seem to be on different levels of realization of meaning. Although as Martin (1998) suggests, many theorists would like to advance more detailed concrete theoretical constructs to account for these different levels, it would be more situationally sensitive to leave such constructs as 'mode', ontologically open as have Kress and van Leeuwen. What may be more valid in the cases of these hybrid texts is to determine what mode or modes are "constitutive" and what modes are "ancillary".

These terms are used by Butt et al (1995) to help answer the role language plays in analysis of mode within SFL, but they can also be used to explain the *interdiscursivity* or *orders of hybrid modes* in animated films. As Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999) have noted, understanding how hybrid systems work within texts is a crucial theoretical move in the quest to understand how meaning is made. Therefore, in analyzing the visual modes at work, we must first determine what mode constitutes the text and what visual modes help mobilize this constitutive mode.

3.5.3 Narrative as Constitutive Mode

It is the contention of this thesis that narrative is the pivotal mode around which all other modes revolve in this film. Therefore, while a visual analysis is the focus of this study, such a task cannot be performed without direct reference to the narrative mode. While we often dismiss the narratives in film by saying “it’s just a story”, we use the narrative to structure meaning within texts and within societal contexts. Before the actualization of meaning occurs within film, the storyboard is constructed – this framework dictates the kinds of choices possible within other semiotic systems in the text. By recognizing the role of the narrative as a modal system, we can access the necessity within film to mimetically uphold the narrative through the mobilization of visual ancillary modes. Exactly what visual modes are employed and how they are articulated is the next area of critical pursuit.

3.5.4 Colour and Caricature as Ancillary Modes

Particular to this genre is the way in which the visual modes, colour and caricature are used. In many ways, Disney has set and upheld industry standards in

these departments. Neupert describes Disney animation's award-winning use of the colour technologies of Technicolor in the 1930's which created "an ideal prototype, pointing the way for subsequent color stylistics throughout the industry" (1994, p. 108). Some of the expressions of colour within Disney's *Aladdin* adhere to the conventions that Disney has set since the production of *Snow White* in 1937, while others are film-specific systems; all of these articulations of colour are intended to reinforce the narrative structure. In each of the chosen three narrative segments of analysis, colour is used in characteristically different ways to produce different meanings and to demarcate different narrative and ontological spaces. The way colour is analyzed in this thesis is on a whole-scene basis, since the articulation of this mode in each of these three scenes is suggestive of a qualitative holistic approach. In particular, the analysis will focus on Disney's juxtaposition of naturalized scenes and hyper-real scenes within the three segments through the use of *equilibrium*, *saturation*, *hue tinting* and *disruption* of continuity of colour (as explicated in 2.5.2)

Similarly, Disney's use of caricature is famous (and sometimes infamous, as described in discussion on stereotyping in Chapter 2.4.4 and Chapters 4 and 5). There are animation manuals and scholarly research into Disney's heroes and villains and what about their drawn manifestation makes them so heroic or villainous (Bendazzi, 1994; Byrne & McQuillan, 1999; Johnston & Thomas, 1993). The unit of analysis within each narrative segment will be the main character depicted in each piece: respectively, the narrator, the villain – Jafar, and the hero, Aladdin. While the caricature is the main mode through which representation of animated personages will be analyzed, there will be mention of the wider *characterization* of the narrator, Jafar and

Aladdin. The concept of *traiting* (Chapter 2.4.4) using *prototype schemata* (2.4.5; 2.4.6) will be key in this analysis.

3.6 Sketch of the process of analysis

The analysis will proceed by (1) identifying the features of the genre from which this film emerges and to which it owes its *co-generic* intertextual meaning; (2) examining the constitutive role of the narrative mode and the ancillary roles of the colour and caricature modes – relations of *co-actional* intertextuality; and (3) determining the influence of relevant geo-politics in producing *co-thematic* intertextual meaning. All of these intertextual elements are brought to bear on the meaning making process of the text through the recognition of relationships and patterns, and the socio-cognitive processes of creating order.

The model below is a visual representation of the socio-cognitive frames and processes that contribute to meaning-making in Disney's *Aladdin*. Knowledge of the genre and the relevant geo-political conditions leads to top-down extra-textual inferencing on the part of participants (producers and consumers) in the creation of meaning. Information and knowledge supplied within the text itself (through constitutive and ancillary modes) triggers bottom-up text-connecting inferences.

Figure 3-1 A Model of Aspects of the Meaning-Making Network in Disney's Aladdin

4 ANALYSIS

This analysis will proceed first, by examining the characteristics of the genre within which Disney's *Aladdin* operates. Then, the detailed modal analysis (micro-perspective) of the chosen segments (ten minutes and six seconds) will be presented. Finally, an analysis of the relevant geo-political context will be suggested. Although both the first and the third categories of analysis are "macro" perspectives, they each exert different influences on the textual instantiation. The geo-political context is a more global sphere of social influence than the institutional generic context of this movie, therefore, it will be addressed in the last part of analysis as a way of leading in to the discussion portion of this thesis.

4.1 Genre

Disney's *Aladdin* exists within a wider set of texts characterized by a number of institutionalized practices that constitute a "genre" of communication. "What genre does is recognize that the audience watch any one film within a context of films, both those they have personally seen and those they have heard or seen represented in other media outlets" (Turner, 1999 p. 97) As Wasko (2001) states: "It is ...possible to refer to these products and characters collectively because they generally include a specific style, a standard formula of story and characters, as well as a set of common themes and values" (p. 110). The Disney animated film has largely succeeded because it has led the industry in creating a body of works that combine specific (1) marketing, (2) narrative, and (3) multi-modal practices to produce a recognized form (Neupert, 1994; Zipes, 1995; Wasko, 2001) While no form of text is permanently fixed in its

characteristics, this recognizable form has achieved relative stability as a *genre* based on the above mentioned common attributes. This genre will be called “Disney Feature Animation” in this thesis; there are other animation studios (such as Pixar) that produce movies in this genre, however literature suggests that Disney was the leader in creating these kinds of texts (Bendazzi, 1994; Wasko, 2001; Wells, 1998).

4.1.1 Marketing strategy and audience orientation

This first aspect of this genre exerts a strong influence on all others. The way the industry packages a given film and to whom are key considerations in the production of Disney animation. Animated Disney films are cultural capital that may be used not only in the movie theatre, but also at home for the video/DVD- viewing public, and even in department stores and other consumer outlets in the forms of action-figures and other widely diverse companion consumer products (Smoodin, 1994). As such, these films must be built with wide appeal to a large audience. The demands, expectations and desires of the consuming public are subject to constant societal change, but the Walt Disney Company has been using measures of analysis to determine audience behavior and opinion since the 1930’s (Ibid, pp 18-19). Gallup surveys have been among the primary tools used to respond to audience interests. However, as Smoodin suggests, the perceived interests of the audience are not the only controlling force determining the shape of the film. The audience may also be selected and shaped by the film and by the marketing practices of the company (1994, p. 18). Citing research since the 1920’s, Smoodin suggests that as well as shaping films “to meet the public taste quantified by Gallup... [producers try] to control possible

audience response” through cross merchandising of products, clubs, theme parks and other leisure activities (Ibid). These mutually-reinforcing arenas of cultural production ensure that there will always be a target for current and future Disney cultural artefacts:

More and more, changes in the public’s leisure trends and also in Disney production practice have led to an emphasis on creating and controlling audience response, or, more properly speaking, on concentrating on the largest possible audience group even while advertising its products as appealing to everyone (Ibid p. 19).

Although Disney’s products may create “the illusion of diversity”, in order to succeed, they need to cater to the reality of “the white middle class family” as their widest audience, suggests Smoodin (Ibid, p 19). This group represents the largest demographic group in North America at present. Given the current global reach of Disney artefacts, I would propose that this category of people might be extended to include those who share similar values and ideologies. This group may not necessarily be identifiable by race, but they subscribe to the middle-class American ideology of “the trinity of the palliative power of fun, the transcendent potential of family, and the child just trying to get out in all of us” (Ibid, p 20).

The specific family audience-orientation of Disney animated films is one of the characteristics of the genre, and this orientation dictates many of the choices that are made within other aspects of the genre.

4.1.2 Narrative and “Disneyfication”

The second characteristic of this body of works relates to the story chosen for depiction and the narrative processes it goes through to meet the generic specifications of *classic* Disney feature animation. Disney conceived of the transformation of the

literary folk/fairy tale in the early years of the studio with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), and the tradition continued with *Pinocchio* (1940), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), and *Aladdin* (1992). Children's fairy tales have inspired other Disney short cartoons such as *The Three Little Pigs* (1933).

Disney often used, and still relies quite heavily on, classic folk and fairy tales as the basis for feature films and even shorter cartoons. Indeed, Disney's versions of some of these stories are sometimes better known than the originals, especially in the USA.... Stories and characters typically go through a process of Disneyfication, which involves sanitation and Americanization (Wasko, 2001, p. 113)

Although, as Wasko says, the Disney renderings may be better known than the original tale, it is also true that these stories were cultural capital in North America before their Disney versions; as such the narratives are both familiar and *familial* to children and adults alike. These fairy tales evoke cozy childhood memories of *once upon a time*. While the original folk/fairy tales may have revealed a number of complex, multi-dimensional, and divergent themes, characters, events, descriptions and morals, the Disney versions are subjected to a formula – what Bordwell (1985) calls the canonic classical Hollywood narrative structure (Section 2.4.3.2) which renders a more simplistic, easy to digest text within the feature format. According to folklorist, Jack Zipes:

The diversion of the Disney fairy tale is geared toward nonreflective viewing. Everything is on the surface, one-dimensional, and we are to delight in one-dimensional portrayal and thinking, for it is adorable, easy, and comforting in its simplicity (1995, p 40).

The uni-dimensionality to which Zipes refers is not indicative of the topology of the Disney film itself as a meaning-making text, but rather of the way in which we engage

with these films. We perceive them as innocent – *beyond good and evil*. As previously indicated, this is one of the ways in which conventional animation operates (Chapter 2.2.1).

Further, among a myriad of fairy tales and folk tales from which to choose, Disney tends to choose love stories, or those in which romantic themes can be made prominent (with the exception of *Pinocchio*). As such the narratives fall into Bordwell's category of canonic classical Hollywood by adhering to the "double causal structure" featuring a 'love' plot and a 'mission' plot (Section 2.4.3.2). Other critics have described different narrative formulae that function as templates of all classic Disney animation (Bell et al, 1995; Giroux, 1995; Wasko, 2001). Wasko describes "The Classic Disney" characteristics in great detail and summarizes the overarching narrative commonalities in the following chart:

The Classic Disney

Style

- light entertainment
- music
- humor (usually physical gags and slapstick)

Story

- often revised fairy tales or folklore
- classic Hollywood cinema model

Characters

- anthropomorphized, animal characters
- formulaic heroines, heroes, villains, sidekicks
- stereotypical representations of gender and ethnicity

Themes/Values

- mainstream American
- individualism
- work ethic
- optimism
- escape, fantasy, magic, imagination

- innocence
- romance, happiness
- good over evil

(Wasko, 2001, p. 113)

4.1.3 Modal Hybridity

Before we look at the use of some specific individual modes that Disney uses, we can briefly re-visit the theme of Animation *Disney-style* as described by Wells (1998) in discussions of the early roots of the animation industry (2.2.1). Early Disney cartoons tended to embrace the creative possibility of animation and received praise from early film theorist, Eisenstein, for their “plasmaticness”, or their ability to resist “being fixed and stable” (Wells, 1998, p. 22). However, soon the revolutionary beginnings of animation gave way to conservative and conventional attempts to represent reality:

With each technical development...Disney moved further away from the plasmatic flexibility...and coerced the animated form into a neo-realist practice....Even though Disney dealt with what was a predominantly abstract, non-realist form, he insisted on verisimilitude in his characters, contexts and narratives....As Disney's studio grew and embarked on ever more ambitious projects, most notably the creation of a full-length animated feature, Disney's animators undertook programmes of training in the skills and techniques of fine art in the constant drive towards ever greater notions of realism (Ibid, p 23).

The first full-length animated feature, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, argues Wells, showed evidence that “Disney had aligned animation with aspects of photographic realism....[and] perfected a certain language for the cartoon and the full-length feature which took its model from live-action film-making” (Ibid, p 24). In describing the evolving state of animation and the aesthetic and foundational approaches of its different creators, Wells conceives of three kinds of animation: “Orthodox”, “Developing”, and “Experimental”. Cel animation (a series of drawn images that are

slightly different from each other and when assembled, produce the illusion of movement) of the Disney variety falls under the category of “orthodox”, because this type of animation has subsumed all others to provide a kind of recognized traditional standard (Ibid. pp 35-37). This standard dictates how the hybrid modes contribute to the unity of the film.

4.1.3.1 Practices within the musical mode

A defining way in which Disney animated feature films belong to a recognizable set is through the use of music. Some critics have noted that these Disney feature films owe much to the genre of live action musicals of the 1930-50’s – the time in which Walt Disney created his first animated films. In fact, this shared heritage is a contributing factor in the ease with which these films have been adapted to the Broadway musical stage. (Hahn, 1996). While the semiotics of music warrants a separate and equally in-depth analytical study (beyond the limitations of this analysis), the way music functions in this genre bears brief mentioning. Songs in Disney animated features introduce and support important themes and values. They are given “narrative or psychological functions” (Bendazzi, 1994, p. 67). As is the case in live action musicals, animated characters launch into song as hyperbolic expressions of emotion or description of relationships, the world, and their perceived place within their society and environment:

Far from being mere adjunct to the animated narrative, musical interludes between anthropomorphic action, these songs represent some of the decisive indices in which the Disney ideology is most securely embedded. They structure the film...(Byrne & McQuillan, 1999 p 8).

Disney animators have noted that songwriters play an integral role in the mobilization of the story within this genre because songs “express the major turning points in the story” (Hahn, 1996, p. 13). Further, these songs are generally what remains etched in one’s memory after the viewing of the film. Disney songs are semiotic traces that encapsulate the main messages of the film. From the early animated works have emerged, *Some day my prince will come*, *When you wish upon a star*, *Whistle while you work*: all immediately recognizable to the population of North America who have grown up within this culture, and all containing a definite socio-cultural ideology prevalent at the time of production (and some of enduring prevalence). More recently, the Disney strategy has enlisted the support of recognizable pop music personages to sing the title tracks from movies; thus the songs work both cooperatively alongside other modes in the film and also separately as pop music commodities. These songs, such as *Beauty and the Beast*, and *A Whole New World* (from *Aladdin*), provide the musical summary of the global theme of the movie, while the other songs in the films highlight other themes and reinforce specific moods and messages that are integral to the narrative.

4.1.3.2 Practices within the colour mode

In general since the introduction of Technicolor in the 1930’s, Disney’s use of colour within animation has reinforced the imitation of reality. Richard Neupert’s analysis of Disney’s colour prototypes cites research within Psychology and Perception Theory indicating that colour is “one of the most active cues for depth perception and spatial orientation (1994, p.109). According to Neupert, “it was the ability to supply stronger perceptual cues for reading depth into flat surface that really helped Disney’s

images create an even more complete and complex scenographic space” (Ibid). Disney used this technology not only to imitate reality, but also to reinforce “the larger story and narration structures” (Ibid, p. 110). Thus, colours were *narrativized* within the Disney tradition.

When one looks at the feature animated Disney films since the 1930’s it is easy to recognize recurring themes within the patterns of colour use. The two common patterns consist of (1) a naturalistic use of colour and (2) a “hyper-real” use of colour.

To uphold what is called *Disney’s realism* many of the scenes create a naturalistic feeling by painting the backdrop sky blue, and creating green trees, etc, thereby imposing a kind of natural order on the animated image. According to Bendazzi, “many sequences become minute, decorative copies of reality” (1994, p. 65). Of course, colour technology has changed since *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* – in fact with technological innovation, the more recent films have been even closer to images of reality – however, since this first feature, Disney animators have been occupied with creating as convincing an *illusion of life* as was technically possible. Neupert suggests:

...the Disney image typically uses a pale background with colors that allow the main characters to be painted with brighter harmonious colors but also bright spots of contrasting color, lending distinction, personality, and depth. Disney animators even mention that color reduced the number of close-ups they could use because close-ups flatten the image with their large expanses of color (1994, p 112).

There are, however, uses of colour within some narrative sequences that do not suggest reality, but rather, an overly-characterized altered reality. This use of colour disrupts the natural order and suggests a new order over which evil presides. The way

that this occurs is through the use of saturated colours (colours in their purest hue intensity – Chapter 2.5.2) or by tinting hues with grey or black to create a screen-dominating darkness. When the villain is introduced or occupies the entire screen within these movies, we often sense this exaggerated reversal of the *natural* order. As Neupert suggests, Disney animators are aware that the use of colour and close-ups presents an un-realistic image, but they sometimes use this technique anyway to introduce villains, so the result is that the villain exists in a kind of hyper-real space, thereby reinforcing the Disney order.

4.1.3.2 Practices within the caricature mode

In discussing “Disneyan rules” animation scholar, Raffaelli, suggests that characters must be clear, simple, knowable entities:

Disney exalts the poverty of spirit of the good characters, simplifying them as much as possible, in social terms...the evil characters...are evil, by their very nature, and that's it....The characters are stable in their roles and characters, the wicked die wicked, the virtuous survive to live virtuously (1997, pp 18-19).

Obviously then, Disney caricatures must serve the narrative purpose of creating clear protagonists and antagonists thereby creating respectively a sense of empathy through identification, or a sense of horror through repulsion. What a delicious task for the animator who can materialize such entities where they do not materially exist! In the process of *Disneyfication*, the heroes and heroines come to embody the aesthetic virtues that are conventionalized within North American popular culture. “Disney heroines are always beautiful, shapely, and often sexually attractive” (Wasko, 2001, p 116). Disney's heroes are also boyishly attractive. Meanwhile the villains are “often ugly,

extremely fat or extremely thin, with exaggerated facial features” (Ibid). Typically, the heroes and heroines are depicted as youthful, while the villains tend to be more senior in age. Many Disney villains (and indeed villains within the wider institution of Hollywood), have British accents characteristic of standardized “Received Pronunciation” creating a prototype of the “Sophisticated Evil Genius” based on American stereotypes prevalent in the industry (BBC, 2003). The villains in the American-produced Disney movies, *The Aristocats* (1970), *101 Dalmations* (1961), *The Jungle Book* (1967), *Robin Hood* (1973), *Aladdin*(1992), *The Lion King*(1994), all have British accents, suggesting an institutionalized practice in potential conceptions of villainy within this genre. Disney animators, Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas in their book, *the Disney Villain*, proudly boast of the “lasting impact on the public” of Disney’s caricatured villains (1993, p. 15) who for the most part “come from real life, colored by our imagination and our believing and living with dreams” (Ibid, p. 16).

The animators within Disney who joyously create these material manifestations are not only narrating for the viewing public, they are also filling in much of the story that, in a previous diegetic mode, belonged to the audience’s imagination. The result is that “audiences can no longer envision a fairy tale for themselves as they can when they read it. The pictures now deprive the audience of visualizing their own characters, roles, and desires”(Zipes, 1995, p. 33).

4.2 Modal Analysis of Actualized Text

Scholars of social communication have recognized the value of understanding

hybridity as key to textual meaning (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Foucault, 1971; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Latour, 1986). Although the modes within this film are diverse, they operate symbiotically to produce cohesion in *co-actional* ways.

The following modal analysis will proceed by describing each segment in sequential order. The narrative mode will be analyzed first in each section focusing the description on the narrative mode itself; however, since the narrative is actualized through many modes, in some instances other modes will be mentioned (especially lyrical) as evidence of a particular manifestation of narrative. The caricature of the main personage of each segment will next be analysed – considering respectively, the Narrator, Jafar, and Aladdin in terms of the visual depiction of physical traits in conjunction with the narrative behaviour and characterisation of these three personae. There are a few auxiliary characters in each of these segments, but clearly, the presence of one personage occupies each of these three segments in a way that one can really say *this is his scene*. The final mode under analysis will be colour as it holistically reinforces the narrative function of each segment, the breaks between segments, and the character traiting.

4.2.1 Segment 1 : Frame story - Invitation to an exotic narrative journey

4.2.1.1 Narrative

This segment, as the opening to the narrative, is a critical one. Following what film theorist, Bordwell, characterizes as the canonic story format, this portion introduces the setting and the characters of the story.

4.2.1.1.1 Setting

The narrator literally welcomes us, the viewers of this narrative to his land, and invites us to join him on a journey. The setting of the story is established in a number of ways – notably, by the narrator in lyrical form through the opening song, *Arabian*

Nights:

Oh, I come from a land from a faraway place
Where the caravan camels roam
Where it's flat and immense and the heat is intense
(Where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face) original lyrics in theatre*
It's barbaric, but hey, it's home

Most evident from these lyrics and from other modes interacting to create this narrative frame, is the fact that the narrator is introducing his *foreign* culture to the present audience from a *local* cultural perspective with different values. Although he is from the land in which the narrative takes place, he characterizes it as a “faraway place” that is barbaric, thereby framing it for a present audience whose cultural lenses would also characterize it in this way. By framing his homeland in this way, the narrator seems to be indicating that his own cultural norms are set by some outside culture, or perhaps by a perspective that is somehow beyond culture - a universal position that might judge his land to be strange and contrary to a civil society. The fictitious village, *Agrabah*, is a place that we immediately find mysterious and exotic based on the description of the narrator and the visual depiction.

Another aspect of the setting in this opening scene is a street market. Because the narrator is cast as a street merchant peddling his wares, his sense of audience – as

potential consumers of his products – pervades this segment. He speaks directly to us, as he displays various articles for sale – including “Dead Sea Tupperware” and a “combination hookah [smoking pipe] and coffee maker” which also has the capacity to make “julienne fries”. His behaviour, characterized by the stand-up comedy of Robin Williams – the voice of the narrator/peddler – is humorously reminiscent of American infomercials. Eventually when he thinks we are losing interest in his wares, he pulls out the *pièce de résistance* – an ordinary-looking, but extraordinary lamp.

4.2.1.1.2 Introduction of characters – the lamp, the hero, and the villain

In the process of attempting to sell this lamp to us, the narrator “gets to the point” and launches the narrative trajectory of the rest of the film briefly introducing the characters of this story. The first is the ordinary-looking, but extraordinary lamp itself. Although at this point in the story, the lamp still seems to be an inanimate object, the narrator alludes to its animate powers that will be revealed later in the narrative. This lamp is what narratologist, Vladimir Propp calls the “magical agent” whose purpose is to mediate relations between good and evil forces in the story, as well as to eventually secure the victory for *the good over the evil*.

The narrator compares this lamp to another equally seemingly ordinary, but extraordinary character in the story – a “diamond in the rough” (2:30). He does not use the name Aladdin, but we can infer this by our knowledge of the tale and through the framing of the narrator who offers the intrigue of a story of how this lamp “once changed the course of a young man’s life” (2:25) – in this case, the hero of our story.

In order for this young man to be defined as a hero, there must be an oppositional force acting upon him in the story. The narrator launches the story by suggesting that it all began on a “dark night, where a dark man waits, with a dark purpose”(2:37). This man is thus established, in no uncertain terms, as the villain of our story. The narrator’s verbal description and the visual zoom out to the dark night sky segue to the segment depicting this villain and his evil motives.

4.2.1.2 Caricature and Characterization of the Narrator

Our first contact with an important character in this film reveals a small, cute and therefore generally unthreatening man, but one that is most obviously and visibly different from the naturalized prototypical man as defined within a North American context. The turban on his head occupies a space almost equal to the rest of his body. We are slightly suspicious of him initially because he not only evokes stereotypical images of foreign money grubbing street merchants, he also displays behaviour similar to hucksters in our own culture who cunningly try to convince us of the worth of consumer products. Other notable physical characteristics are his thick black eyebrows, a thin black moustache, and a black vertically thin beard that extends in a curly string-like fashion below his chin.

Apart from his turban, his most outstanding physical feature is his nose. At one point in the segment (1:23-30) when the imitation of live-action film is the strongest, the narrator intimately asks us to come closer to him and the camera zooms in to indicate close physical proximity. At this point his nose occupies almost the entire screen and he says “Too close, a little too close!” indicating that we, the audience,

should be a little further distanced from this man who is clearly different as evidenced by the gargantuan size of this facial appendage.

This depiction harkens back to a time when Jews were depicted in this manner. According to Shaheen, “Arabs, like Jews, are Semites, so it is perhaps not too surprising that Hollywood’s image of hook-nosed, robed Arabs parallels the image of Jews [who]....once upon a cinematic time ...boasted exaggerated nostrils and dressed differently” (2001, p. 5).

Two notable hybrid prototypes emerge from the way in which the narrator is cast in this segment. The first one emerges in his role as a salesman. Cross-cultural *swindler* prototype schemata are applied in the creation and understanding of this man. He is first and foremost, a foreign, Middle Eastern merchant, whose ultimate aim is to make money; however, there are parallel kinds of characters within North American society that create an interesting hybrid character who may illicit humour, empathy, and a little suspicion. The foreign merchant stereotype meets North American used-car salesman meets infomercial salesperson meets stand-up comic in this personage.

This pushy, but relatively harmless buffoon of a character also performs another greater role within the narrative frame story. This role is built upon a kind of *foreign tour guide* prototype schema. When we go on a tour in a foreign land, we are happy to have a “local” show us the lay of the land. We may not completely trust this person initially, but we delight in his exotic difference – he is going to show us the *authentic* side of this new, different and therefore somewhat intimidating space. Since he is from the local culture, he is infinitely capable of negotiating with *things indigenous* on our behalf. As this foreigner reveals his knowledge of our own culture, we begin to trust

him more and to value the shared inter-cultural space that we have jointly created. We may even pride ourselves on the fact that we have successfully interacted with a local – even though it is often the case that this local person is often speaking *our* language and skilfully dropping anecdotal evidence of an understanding of *our* culture. Disney has cleverly created this tour guide for us in the personage of the narrator. Although he is not present throughout the remaining story, his role in launching this narrative journey is pivotal.

4.2.1.3 Colour

The opening song, *Arabian Nights*, lyrically depicts a foreign, barren, hot dry land that is reinforced through the mode of colour in the initial minute of this segment. An intense sun-suggestive yellow visually characterises the intense heat of the desert. There is no sign of organic life in the form of green plants or blue water or colourful flowers. Neither is there a reprieve from the yellow in the form of blue sky. The sun-reflecting sand gives the only backdrop in this opening of this segment. The almost monochromatically yellow presence evokes the associative uses of colour in deserts portrayed within live action Hollywood films and even fact-based documentaries of desert life. Although the segment opens during the daytime, the long shadows indicate that it is dusk. Towards the end of the song, the sun sets over the palace in *Agrabah*, a mysterious village. When the yellow fades, dark shadows and night blue create an air of mystery and intrigue. The singing narrator dismounts from his camel, greets us and sets up his travelling peddler's stall in the darkness of night. The dark night blue colour

throughout the ensuing minutes of this segment continues to reinforce the mystery of this small peddler and the intrigue of the story he is launching.

Aside from the associative and cultural values of colour described above in this segment, there is a physiological viewer response to the use of colour in many of the scenes. As we have seen (2.5.2), the eye is most comfortable and at rest when all three primary colours are present simultaneously in the range of vision. In much of this segment red, blue and yellow are not simultaneously present, so as viewers, we feel a physiological disequilibrium. This sense of unbalance ties in well with the narrative function of introducing the intrigue of a plot that presents disequilibrium between opposing forces.

4.2.2 Segment 2 : The villain and his evil quest for power

4.2.2.1 Narrative

After the narrator launches the narrative trajectory, the second segment's narrative function is to introduce the pivotal problem around which the story revolves. This portion serves to further reveal the character of the villain and, as Bordwell describes in the canonic story model of Hollywood, to explain a state of affairs. The state of affairs is characterized in this segment by a quest for ultimate power on the part of the evil villain, Jafar. This segment begins with the moon casting dark shadows over two shady figures who are meeting for a late night business transaction. One of the figures, a small, greedy subservient thief has apparently been commissioned by the evil Jafar to retrieve the missing half of a key whose mate Jafar already has. This thief presents the missing half and the mysterious key is reunited with its mate by Jafar.

Upon its reunification, the key miraculously assumes the form of an illuminated insect that flies off into the night sky. Jafar, his sidekick parrot, and the thief pursue this insect until it reveals a newly uncovered feline-shaped cave in which the magic lamp lies waiting for the right claimant. This lamp is clearly the source of great power and will enable Jafar to rule the world. The evil Jafar and his parrot urge this cowardly, but greedy thief to enter the cave to fetch the lamp, with the promise of jewels as a reward. They are warned by a booming voice that only one may enter the cavernous feline mouth - one who is called “the diamond in the rough”. Although they suspect that the thief is not appropriately virtuous for the task, he nonetheless enters and is swiftly swallowed up by the cave. The cave then recedes into the sand not to reappear until the next attempt to retrieve the lamp by the person who fits the description of a “diamond in the rough”. The narrative occupation in this segment is the evil plot of the evil man.

4.2.2.2 Caricature and characterization of Jafar

The evil villain – the vizier to the Sultan of Agrabah – is depicted as a very tall, skinny dark man with a very gaunt face and exaggerated facial features. In the first glimpse we have of this villain, he is completely backlit by the moon; therefore he appears completely black, with only the whites of his eyes and his teeth as a reprieve from shadowy darkness. Although his exact age is not obvious, the etched lines on his face suggest that he is not youthful (at least in comparison with his rival, Aladdin). His thin black moustache and slightly twisted long, thin beard frame his scowling mouth, and his expressively arched thick black eyebrows reinforce the slant of his eyes and the length and gauntness of his face. Andreas Deja, the animator responsible for his

creation, was inspired by the simplicity of lines employed by famous celebrity caricaturist, Al Hirschfield (Roberge, 1992). Hirschfield was the source of inspiration for the genie, too, but DeJa wanted Jafar to be different from the other characters so he used many “vertical lines” in creating the caricature. He also wanted to underplay the physical action of Jafar, claiming that “he can show a lot by moving his eyebrow” (Roberge, 1992, p 1). Jafar certainly does not move very much in this segment, but he has a large presence. The animator claims that “subtlety” was a big factor in the animating of Jafar. Perhaps the action and dialogue of this character are subtle when compared to other Disney villains, but his physical caricature is anything but subtle (Ibid). His presence in this segment is visually huge and intimidating, as indicated by both the strikingness of his features, as well as his literal size. He occupies a large part of the screen in scenes in which he is present.

Jafar is an interesting *hybrid* villain. Upon his head is a stylized jewel-adorned turban, apparently appropriate to someone of his regal stature within his culture. He is cloaked from head to toe, with only the skin of his gnarly hands and lined face exposed. When juxtaposed with the scantily-clad hero and heroine of this story, Jafar seems suspiciously over-dressed.

This caricature’s hybridity evokes an array of villainous prototypes that we may call upon in understanding his role in the narrative. His scrawny body, dark facial hair and his sidekick parrot evoke schema of the evil pirate, Captain Hook, in Disney’s *Peter Pan*. He is, however also evocative of Middle Eastern stereotypically depicted men with his caricatured nose, and his cloaks that we recognize as reminiscent of images from the Islamic Orient . In later scenes where his black and red cloak is

revealed in natural lighting, one is reminded of Count Dracula. Jafar must also be of the cunningly devious order of villain since the accent of an educated British man is revealed in his well-crafted speech. This use of the Received British English Pronunciation evokes the prototypical sophisticated generic villain as manifested in other Disney classics such as *The Aristocats*, *Robin Hood*, *The Jungle Book*, *101 Dalmatians*, and *The Lion King* (Chapter 4.1.3.2).

4.2.2.3 Colour

As the narrator begins the story, he throws the sand from the magical lamp into the air, and the camera zooms out to the sky where the glittering sand has become the bright stars in the dark sky on a dark night. The background darkness of the night sky remains constant throughout this segment – momentarily interrupted at times when the yellow light is cast on the sand from the cavernous mouth of the feline head of the cave. The fact that this whole segment is narratively preoccupied by the introduction of the evil villain and his plot creates the opportunity for Disney to reinforce this character through the colour mode. The colours in this segment are either saturated – colours in their purest hues, as for example the yellow emitting from the cave – or they are diluted through the use of black and grey to create the evil ambience surrounding Jafar. The villain himself in this segment looks as though his skin is dark purple-brown. Similarly, his clothes are dark brown. Interestingly in other segments of the movie where Jafar shares the screen with other, not so evil characters, we can see that his cloak is red and black, however in this segment, his whole body and being are darkened, with the exception of the whites of his slanted eyes and his grimacing white teeth. When

illumination is evident in this segment, it appears as though the characters are backlit – reinforcing their darkness.

The use of colour in this segment presents a kind of hyper-reality in which the evil and darkness are exaggeratedly depicted. Because this segment demonstrates a reversal of the natural Disney order in which good triumphs over evil, the colour mode works in conjunction with others to present this altered reality. As Neupert (1994) suggests, the use of colour can create a sense of depth, thereby imitating reality, but the use of colour here in this segment coupled with the over-the-top caricature of Jafar are not characteristic of the naturalized Disney landscape.

Further, there is physiological discomfort for the audience in the visual perception of some scenes in this segment. The lack of co-present primary colours within many portions of this segment generates a continuation of the disequilibrium launched in the first segment. As viewers we are trying to create optic and physiological harmony where it is not being supplied to us. We are waiting for a chance to give our eyes a rest and feel more at ease. The opportunity finally arrives with the timely arrival of our hero.

4.2.3 Segment 3 : Description of the “diamond in the rough”

4.2.3.1 Narrative

This segment serves the function of revealing the hero, Aladdin, and describing his current set of circumstances - a narrative continuation of what Bordwell calls an *explanation of a state of affairs*. In this portion, we discover lyrically and visually in the descriptive action, that Aladdin is an orphan who needs to steal to feed himself (and, in

true Disney form, his talking pet monkey, too). He is pursued by big sabre-wielding henchmen for the crime of stealing bread from a merchant. He seems to be having a good time despite the near-death situation in which he finds himself. Further, he is well-liked by many of the other villagers, who aid and abet him in his flight from Goliath-like authority. When Aladdin and his monkey, Abu, finally evade their pursuers, they sit down to relax and eat their hard-won bread. No sooner do they do so, than they see two young, parentless children rummaging through the garbage for food. Aladdin, despite the rumblings of his sidekick, happily gives the bread he has just stolen to the hungry children.

Although Aladdin clearly defies a universal law by stealing, he emerges from this narrative segment on the side of the moral “right” for a number of reasons. Firstly, the punishment of death or dismemberment does not fit the pettiness of the crime within present-day North American society where such “barbaric” measures are considered unjust. Secondly, he is a victim - a mere orphan – trying to get something that other members of the community take for granted – food, and ultimately, survival. Thirdly, he altruistically gives away his own food in a move reminiscent of Robin Hood (one of our society’s narrative heroes). Lastly, he is aesthetically “cute” according to North American conventions (a prerequisite for Disney heroes); therefore, we identify and sympathize with him. This is achieved with the help of the ancillary visual modes, caricature and colour.

4.2.3.2 Caricature and characterization of Aladdin

What is most conspicuous about the depiction of Aladdin in this film, is his *lack*

of conspicuousness within a North American setting. While most of the other personae in this cast of characters have an “exotic” and even “strange” flavour (with the exception of the heroine, Jasmine – a cute brunette of decidedly Barbie-esque proportions), Aladdin is haltingly “normal”. In a book produced by the Walt Disney Company itself, Christopher Finch adoringly describes the artistic depictions of other characters, but admits that:

Aladdin himself is a slightly annoying character, though the problem has nothing to do with the way he is drawn....The problem has to do with the conception of the character. The directors perhaps tried too hard to make him contemporary, so that he always seems out of step with the rest of the cast. Aladdin’s voice...is also jarringly American in the Middle Eastern context of the movie. (1995. pp. 318-19).

Although Finch suggests that the way Aladdin is drawn is not really the problem, the drawing is the visible and material manifestation of the conception. The caricature is the physical evidence of shared institutional and societal values of what constitutes an acceptable hero in this instance. If caricature is based on exaggeration of features, then what is the exaggerated characteristic of Aladdin – his normalcy? Following the Disney tradition, the naturalized hero is not a muscle-bound hulk, nor is he obviously a part of the culture in which the narrative is set; he is small, cute, and slightly etched in musculature. He has large, round eyes and fine facial features. Aladdin’s nose is quite straight and petite especially when juxtaposed with other character’s exaggeratedly large “hooked-noses”. Also, in comparison to the cast of characters, he is remarkably clean-shaven. His smooth face suggests one of three possibilities: (1) he is too young to have facial hair (unlikely, since he is of marriageable age); or (2) he has access to shaving facilities and prioritises this daily ritual within his nomadic lifestyle; or (3) he is simply a prototypical Disney (and indeed North American) hero that we are not

meant to examine. After all, who among North American heroes has facial hair? Certainly not American Hollywood idol, Tom Cruise, whose features served as a model in the creation of this heartthrob character (Felperin, 1997; The Walt Disney Company, 1992). Aladdin wears only a small vest, a small hat and baggy flowing pants, revealing a toned young body and his wavy black hair. His clothes are reminiscent of American rap star *M.C. Hammer*, whose costuming apparently exerted some influence on the animators according to a Company-sponsored web site (The Walt Disney Company, 1992). The same site acknowledges sources of inspiration for animator Glen Keane's heroic creation were, "the confidence, likability and physical traits of Tom Cruise, certain personality elements of Michael J. Fox, [and] the fluid movements and style of rapper M.C. Hammer" (Ibid., p.1). Although Aladdin has some essence of exoticism, the influences on his material manifestation demonstrate that he is clearly *one of our own*.

As well as evoking images of Hollywood idols, Aladdin's visual depiction and his behaviour throughout the action in this segment encourage audience members to schematically apply two particularly potent hero prototypes to this character. The first one is the underdog hero prototype such as *David* in the biblical story of David and Goliath. Evidently, "might" is not on Aladdin's side, but although he has stolen, he nonetheless has moral "right" acting in his favour. The palace guards who pursue him in this segment are much larger and have the might of large swords, but Aladdin cleverly and athletically evades them. Thus, our belief in the power of the weaker, more sympathetic character in battles between forces of disproportionate power is indulged. The second kind of heroic prototype invoked through Aladdin is of the *Robin Hood*

order. In this segment, Aladdin comes off as a pauper dressed in modest clothing who gives food stolen from money-grubbing merchants to those who are needier. The potency of these prototypes in the understanding of the character of Aladdin is in large part due to the depiction of Aladdin as a small, young, cute Caucasian-esque man. Rather than grappling with a foreign-looking caricature that would have to be moulded to fit some kind of North American prototype, the naturalized Disney hero provides an easily identifiable form on which to transfer our institutionalized cultural heroic prototypes.

4.2.3.3 Colour

The stark contrast in colour between the previous segment and this one most clearly demonstrates the narrative and character-reinforcing use of colour within Disney animation. The immediate feeling communicated in this transition is *disruption*. There is a definite break from the dark night sky and the often monochromatic feel of the previous two segments. Suddenly, the lighter blue sky of a cloudless, sunny day forms the backdrop and we see our hero, Aladdin jumping through the colourful village. This scene is immediately recognisable as *naturalized Disney* - the normal order of the Disney world that most closely approximates our perception of reality.

Contrasting colors are used on the details in the foreground, or on central figures. To further lend harmonious balance, bright objects in the foreground are often paired with paler objects in the background, creating a “plausible” color shift reinforcing the representation of depth. (Neupert, 1994, p. 112)

The scenes in this segment correspond to this naturalized Disney order. If one squints, one can almost equate this depiction with live-action cinema. To further reinforce this imitation of life, Aladdin’s physical manifestation and costume also contain “bright

spots of contrasting color lending distinction, personality and depth” (Ibid.). As well as creating a sense of deep space through the use of small areas of saturated colours (Ibid), Aladdin’s costume is also a source of powerful associative cultural values of colours. While the exact colours used vary with simulated changes in lighting (the colour of his vest is alternately blue and purple), his costume is often red, white and blue – further evidence of the use of an *American hero* index in his creation.

Finally, as viewers we are rewarded with the physiological phenomenon of optical *equilibrium* by virtue of co-existing primary colours in many of the scenes of this segment. In fact, the manifestation of Aladdin himself often generates equilibrium when his skin, as illuminated by the sun is portrayed as a yellowish-brown tint, and he is wearing red and blue clothes. The figure of Aladdin both literally and figuratively puts us at ease.

4.3 Geo-political Context

This section will highlight central aspects of the historical and geo-political milieu in which this culturally-mediated text emerged. The purpose of this focus is to answer the call from critics for: a “poetics” of Film Studies (Bordwell, 1989); a sensitivity to historical and social “context” in social discourse analysis (Hodge & Kress, 1996; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; van Dijk, 1997a; 1997b; Wodak & Meyer, 2001); and an awareness of contributing mobilizing factors within seemingly-closed systems (Latour, 1987). While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to render justice to the intricate workings of international negotiations, political alliances, social histories and religious doctrines, there are some aspects of recent geo-political events that have certainly

contributed significantly to the reasons for the choice of this text as a potentially successful entertainment venture. It is important to acknowledge that this geo-political analysis does not pretend to be an objective account of world events and relations, rather it is an attempt to analyse the characterisations of these events and relations within the shared society in which this film was created. Some of these characterizations about the Islamic Orient and the relations with this geo-political region contribute to contemporary thematic discursive formations that are powerful knowledge structuring entities in North American society. These formations will be analyzed below, followed in the last chapter by a discussion of how they are manifested in the narrative thematic formations within Disney's *Aladdin*.

4.3.1 Adversarial relations between ontologically different entities

In order to understand some of the nuances of the world events in the immediate years surrounding the production and release of Disney's *Aladdin*, we must first briefly touch upon the events leading up to the common assumptions and perceptions of relations between *the East* and *the West* in modern history.

Within Twentieth Century and early Twenty-First Century geo-political relations, the need has existed to create overly-simplistic "lines" demarking oppositional forces in conflict. It is difficult (and counterproductive here) to determine the exact source of this "faith in opposite values" (Nietzsche, 1989 p. 10), but clearly, even when complexity warrants a different approach, the default epistemological representation becomes dichotomous – perhaps because our way of representing is through language – an inherently dichotomous system. To illustrate this tendency, we can look at the names of the opposing forces during World War II – the *Allies* and the

Axis. The discursive power of these divisive categories has clear relevance today in the revival of the term “axis of evil” – a term overused by George W. Bush to describe groups of people in various geo-political regions who are perceived to form a network against “freedom” and democracy. Further, the post-World War II period saw the carving up of troubled regions into those whose future development would be overseen by one of two super-powers – the Soviet Union or the United States. The ensuing Cold War hinged on the ideological division between Communist and Capitalist/Democratic (depending on your point-of-view) perspectives, with the two super-powers vying for nothing less than the rest of the globe. These kinds of dichotomous divisions made possible the perpetuation of an overarching *thematic formation* within world politics – the characterisation of *adversarial relations* between two opposing forces. In order for this kind of thematic formation to survive, the two opposing forces must each be defined in monolithic terms where values within one entity are shown to be sharply juxtaposed against the values of the other. As described by Hodge and Kress (1996), rather than showing commonalties between entities, the *Power-form* of an ideological complex, focuses on the differences between them suggesting that one is superior to another (Chapter 2.3.6). This kind of “fear and demonization of the enemy” (Esposito, 1999, p. 214) certainly served to fuel the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, but in the end, the puffed up threat was deflated:

Despite an enormous amount of intelligence and analysis, few seemed to know until the end that the emperor had no clothes. Neither government agencies nor academic think tanks predicted the extent and speed of the disintegration of the Soviet empire. The exaggerated fears and static vision that drove us to take Herculean steps against a monolithic enemy blinded us to the diversity within the Soviet Union and the profound changes that were taking place. (Ibid.).

While some politicians in “the West” may have been self-congratulatory about a victory of sorts, many people saw the futility of “the expenditure of enormous resources and the support of a vast military-industrial complex” that characterized this ideological war (Ibid.). Despite the lessons learned from this long-enduring, but flimsily constructed geo-political barrier, there still exists a need to characterize international relations as a “clash” between adversaries (Huntington, 1993; Lewis, 2002). The collapse of communism has left a “threat vacuum” for a “Western world long accustomed to a global vision and foreign policy predicated upon superpower rivalry for global influence if not dominance” (Esposito, 1999, p. 2). Who should be next cast in this role of adversary? Some of the other geo-political conflicts occurring simultaneously with the collapse of Communism were obvious sources of potential menace to fill this *threat vacuum*.

4.3.2 “Islamic Orient” as Monolithic Threat

A socio-cultural and political-historical phenomenon that can be observed within the later half of the 20th century (and up until the present) is that the aforementioned perception of a cleavage between the U.S. and the Soviet Union has been replaced by a new kind of Cold War (and sometimes “hot”) between “the West” and Islam. The exact terminology used to describe this conflict varies – sometimes “Occidentalism vs Orientalism” or, “the West” vs. “the Arab world”/ “Islam” etc. Whatever the terminology used, the effect seems to be reductive – rendering hugely vast territories, ideologies, beliefs and peoples into monolithic entities at odds with each other (Huntington, 1993; Lewis, 1993; 2002).

A case in point of this characterisation emerges from one of the most important media events of the century in North America – the U.S. Embassy Hostage Crisis in Teheran – the “Western” world was exposed to the first widespread images of people from a region of which little was known:

Never before has an international trouble spot like Iran been covered so instantaneously and so regularly as it has by the media: Iran has therefore seemed to be in American lives, and yet deeply alien from them, with an unprecedented intensity (Ibid, p. 25).

Said accurately depicts the irony of television – we were brought “there” to Iran, but the orienting function of the “here” (U.S. media perspective), actually served to distance the audience from the people of Iran. The images that predominated were of a unifying variety:

What we have...is a limited series of crude, essentialist caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as, among other things, to make that world vulnerable to military aggression (Ibid, p. 26).

Of course the series of events leading up to the Iranian revolution is too complex to explain in detail, but from a North American perspective, much interest in this region resulted from the oil crisis in the early 1970's. The drastic increase in world oil prices at this time posed a threat to the U.S. (among other countries). After all, a region of people so seemingly different and unknown had control over a good portion of a resource so highly necessary in the world. In his book, *Covering Islam*, Edward Said calls attention to a number of critical events of the late 70's and early 80's which served to shape U.S. public opinion around resource distribution and affairs in the Middle East. One such event pertained to a statement made to President Carter by his domestic policy advisor in which he suggested the “mobiliz[ation of] the nation around a real crisis and with a clear enemy – OPEC.” (Eizenstat as cited in Said, 1982, p. 4).

Another media event from a company promoting alternative energy sources featured a TV ad in which:

Film clips of various immediately recognizable OPEC personalities - Yamani, Qaddafi, lesser-known robed Arab figures – alternated with stills as well as clips of other people associated with oil and Islam: Khomeni, Arafat, Hafez al-Assad. None of these figures was mentioned by name, but we were told ominously that “these men” control America’s sources of oil. The solemn voice-over in the background made no reference to who “these men” actually are or where they come from, leaving it to be felt that this all male cast of villains has placed Americans in the grip of an unrestrained sadism. (Ibid, p. 3)

Said goes on to show a number of cases in which pseudo-scholarly articles of this era expose “the perils of U.S. dependence on oil-producing countries” (Ibid. p. 34). All of the above examples and many more (within literature, television, education, etc.) elaborated by Said and others (Esposito, 1999; Shaheen, 2001) show the intimate link between resource distribution and control, dependency, and the increasingly reductive Western perception of an entity called “Islam”. Said contends that the notion of a monolithic “Muslim” world was not so prevalent in the American media before the Oil Crisis; rather, that individual countries were mentioned by name individually. The intention here is not to claim that all of the divisions between the U.S. and the Middle East stem from the battle over oil as a commodity; to launch such an argument would be to fall victim to reductionist tendencies. Rather, what should be evident is that this commodity-based positioning of countries is *one* of the forces mobilized in the production of public opinion on geo-political relations within North America.

More recently, other conflicts have emerged within the Gulf region. In August 1990, Iraqi tanks invaded Kuwait, and the U.S. and its allies launched Operation Desert

Storm against the corrupt power-hungry regime of Saddam Hussein. This initial operation has since metamorphosed into a greater battle – the War on Terrorism – an international witch hunt that has left death and destruction in its wake and whose success can still be questioned (the target “witches” may still be out there). The Gulf War of 1991 was played out on television in real time thanks to the wonders of satellite technology. This media coverage once again led us to feel “there” although we were “here”. We felt informed about this conflict because we were able to see it as it took place. However, we still had the events framed for us by those who did not really understand the local region but whose job it was to render the conflict understandable and simple to people in a distant culture. However, due to the superficial contextualization of events, our understanding remained highly fractured. We knew that oil resources were involved in some way in this conflict because we saw images of burning oil fields. We had a sense that Iraqi and/or Arab Nationalism, and anti-American/Western sentiments were involved because local flags and cultural icons were exalted while American and Israeli flags were burned. We knew that the Middle East was a “troubled” region and that much of this trouble manifested itself in the form of religious conflict – as evidenced by the conflict in Lebanon, the revolution in Iran, and the perennial fighting in Israel/Palestine. The religion that most dominates this region is Islam, and the form of Islam most evident in the news is the radical fundamentalist conflict-inciting variety.

Recently, in the region we, in North America, call “the Middle East”, there have been many conflicts in which “Islam” was implicated. Conflicts have also occurred in Europe, Africa, Asia, and even close to home within North America. Because of the

complexity of issues and parties involved in each of these events, it is difficult for individuals to make sense of them. For whatever reason, be it intentional or unwitting, the media representations available to the North American viewing audience have oversimplified conflicts in order to make them accessible to a public who has little knowledge or experience pertaining to this region. Indeed, during my own youth and coming of age, the images of the Middle East that remain from repeated exposure are: people (men, often with head coverings) seemingly senselessly strapping bombs to themselves; up-risings with an occasional flag or effigy-burning; women silenced, oppressed, and covered; destruction of human lives and heritage architecture, etc. I am sure that my impressions are shared by many of my contemporaries, and perhaps even by those of other generations who share the same culturally received ideas. While the “truth” of the photographic images of these events need not necessarily be questioned, the ideology-shaping function of the framing and repetition of specifically chosen images must certainly be addressed.

When such superficial renderings of distant events are what is available to the public, they become the *de facto* input to shape our world view, and our understanding of something called “Islam”. Western “experts” on the region and on Islam as a religion present the only educated perspectives for those who wish to find out more than is typically revealed in a short news cast or cursory news article. However, even some *scholars* reveal an institutionally-bound and archaic understanding of the Islamic Orient (Huntington, 1993; Lewis, 2001). According to Said, these academics focus on classical Islam, but under the constraints and standards ascribed to them by decidedly non-Muslim institutions whose support often comes from stakeholders in existing

geopolitical hierarchies (1982, p. 18). One founding principle of recent Western scholarly pursuits in this area is the inherent ontological divergence between “the West” and “the East. (Esposito, 1999; Said, 1982) Bernard Lewis, one of the foremost North American scholars of this region, has made significant contributions to the North American understanding of the Near East. However, the mere titles of two of his most recent books – *Islam and the West* (1993), and *What Went Wrong: the Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (2001) – illuminate his epistemological position on geo-political relations. His historical knowledge of the Islamic Orient leads him to characterize current geo-political relations as present-day manifestations of a centuries-old collision course between two mutually-opposed entities. His discussion of the Christian origins of secularism is very interesting (Ibid. pp 96-116), however, by stipulating that secularism is an exclusively Western, Christian notion, he is perpetuating the belief that our much-valued state of “modernity” is beyond countries of the Islamic-Orient. Other scholarly work on the Islamic Orient suggests that Lewis’ assumption may be questioned. Albert Hourani, author of a comprehensive work entitled *A History of the Arab Peoples*, alludes to sensitivity on the part of the Muslim *ulama* (religious leaders and teachers), to the separation of worldly and non-worldly laws. In discussing the case of Iran which has defined itself very strongly as an Islamic state, Hourani states:

In a sense the rule of men of religion was a reaffirmation of tradition, but in another sense it went against tradition. The inherited wisdom of the *ulama* was that they should not link themselves too closely with the government of the world; they should keep moral distance from it, while preserving their access to the rulers and influence upon them: it was dangerous to tie the eternal interests of Islam to the fate of a transient ruler of the world. This attitude was reflected in a certain popular suspicion of men of religion who took too prominent a part in the affairs of the

world; they were as susceptible as others to the corruptions of power and wealth, and perhaps they did not make very good rulers. (Hourani, 2001, p. 458).

This characterization does not seem terribly opposed to what we in “the West” call *secularism*. We will not here engage in further debate about who (Lewis or Hourani) is right in this instance; however, it seems that at least, we must concede that there are differing views amongst scholars about the nature of Islam, just as there are differing views amongst believers of Islam (or believers of Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, etc).

While the Western discursive formation of “Islam as threat” may have been a more recently mobilized force in geo-political relations, this formation has attached itself symbiotically to a somewhat more historically entrenched reductionist discourse – that of Orientalism – “an imaginative and yet drastically polarized geography dividing the world into two unequal parts, the larger, ‘different’ one called the Orient, the other, also known as ‘our’ world, called the Occident or the West” (Said, 1982. p. 4). In his often-cited and influential essay, “The Clash of Civilizations” (published in *Foreign Affairs*, 1993), Harvard scholar, Samuel Huntington advances that “Western Civilization” is going to continue to clash with “Islamic and Confucian Civilizations”. He mentions some manifestations of clashes between Western and Confucian civilisations, but is most scathing in his depiction of world relations involving the monolithic Islamic civilisation. He claims that “Islam has bloody borders” (1993, p. 12) as if a key aspect of this religion is its violence. Further, he basically posits that such clashes are inevitable and almost natural since “conflict along the fault line between Western and Islamic civilizations has been going on for 1300 years” (Ibid. p. 8):

Differences among civilisations are not only real; they are basic....
 These differences are the product of centuries....The interactions among
 peoples of different civilizations enhance the civilization-consciousness
 of people that, in turn, invigorates differences and animosities (Ibid. p.4).

Huntington certainly has a negative perception of inter-cultural interaction. While there have been many incidents of such conflict in world relations, it is a gross generalization to suggest that when “peoples of different civilisations” intermingle, the inevitable result is animosity. If this were true, no one would travel/live outside one’s own native civilization, nor would personal or professional relationships occur between people of different civilization-origin. Finally, pluralistic societies, such as Canada and the United States could not possibly exist.

In describing “Islam” solely as a civilization in these clashes, Huntington has perpetuated the notion that an entity called Islam is unified and monolithic. While it may be the hope of religious doctrine that all people conform to a united vision of God, God’s laws and human code of conduct for life on earth, in reality, there is much diversity among believers in the same faith – be this faith Islam, Christianity, Judaism, or any other. The notion of a monolithic Islam is a myth (Esposito, 1999; Piscatori, 1991; Said, 1981). That is not to say that there is not a similar kind of discursive formation amongst certain people within the Islamic Orient. There have been various attempts to mobilize a united “Islamic” entity against a common enemy; the discourse of *jihad* is one such example. Although this term has many meanings, the one that has been most characterized and depicted in the media within North America is the violent externally-oriented *Holy War* - “the struggle to spread and defend Islam” (Esposito, 1999, p. 31). We have heard calls for such a *jihad* from individuals and groups within the Islamic Orient attempting to unite “Islam” against a common enemy. Notably, some

of the calls to unite against an evil force within this region have been politically motivated by more secular Arab nationalist parties (Ibid, pp 71-73). There remains, however, a divergence amongst believers in Islam with the majority not indulging in violent acts in the name of God and for whom *jihad* connotes a more personal struggle to be virtuous (Ibid. p. 30).

4.3.3 “Islamic Orient” as archaic and uncivilized

As is clear from the above mentioned description of the clash between the West and Islam, many of the “proofs” of the threat of Islam within North America are heavily reliant upon a supporting thematic formation; the notion of Islam as *backward*. Some of the received ideas of “Islamic civilization” within western societies juxtapose our secular, modern views of ourselves against a barbaric uncivilised version of the Islamic Orient:

Among the many illusions that persisted in modernization theory was one that seemed to have a special pertinence to the Islamic world: namely that before the advent of the United States, Islam existed in a kind of timeless childhood, shielded from true development by an archaic set of superstitions, prevented by its strange priests and scribes from moving out of the Middle Ages into the modern world (Said, 1981 p. 28).

Many of the stories we hear about Islamic states reveal harsh descriptions of people being physically harmed for petty crime, women being sentenced to death by stoning for adultery or having children out of wedlock, and other such barbaric punishments. One of the most highly publicized proofs of the barbarism of Islam has been the 1989 *fatwa* (religious decree) issued by Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini ordering the death of Salman Rushdie for blasphemous writings in his book, *The Satanic Verses*. The current Iranian regime has recently annulled this fatwa. While such instances of

human rights violations warrant the attention of international watchdog and lobby groups, they cannot be taken as evidence of “Islam” as characteristically uncivilized and violent.

Another condition of this thematic discursive formation is that “Western” versions of *modernization* are held to be the standards by which development is measured within Islamic civilization. Within North American perspectives on Islam, there is rarely enough knowledge and sensitivity to specific circumstances to aptly and neutrally judge the success of locally-manifested modernization. Although we often see images and characterizations of an archaic Islam, there is a rich depth to the development of Islamic modernism within the twentieth century. (Esposito, 1999; Hourani, 2002). As simply one example of such development, the social reform initiated by Islamic scholars within the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the denunciation of the subjugation of women and the promotion of equality among the sexes (Esposito, 1999, pp 55-57) – a phenomenon that was also simultaneously occurring in “Western” suffrage movements. Islamic modernism “did provide Islamically based rationales for modern reform” and has had a great impact on the continuing development of Muslim societies (Ibid, p. 59). It is inappropriate to judge all of Islam as “barbaric” on the basis of some terrible events that have been carried out “in the name of Islam” by misguided groups and individuals or by politically motivated opportunists.

The three highlighted thematic discursive formations described above are indicative of recent characterizations of a geo-political context within a shared, North American society. Although the formations occur within a heterogeneous array of texts

and have thereby become reified, they are, to a large extent, based on myth. Because of the time and place in which *Disney's Aladdin* was produced and released for public consumption, and because of the geo-political region described in the original narrative, this film relies on these prevalent formations to achieve textual unity.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Original narrative as “available” for Disney hybridization

The Tales of the Thousand and One Nights, the collection from which Aladdin derives, is an ancient orally-transmitted tale. In order to understand how Disney has so successfully managed to hybridize the story and discursive formations within this popular film, we must first briefly highlight how it has come to be so “available”.

5.1.1 An “orphan” story

There are great many “unknowns” about this collection of stories. As literary critic Mia Gerhardt states, “The stories of the ‘1001 Nights’ were created hundreds of years ago, by unknown men; even the anecdotes and tales from erudite works were remodelld by unknown hands” (1963, p 58). The first written version of the tales is thought to have been an Arabic translation of a book of Persian tales with Indian elements, recorded in the 9th or 10th century. It is thought that, to this original group, were added some stories written in Baghdad during the 10th- 12th centuries, and a group of stories composed in Egypt during the 11th – 14th centuries (Ibid p. 9). The frame story of the entire collection – the story of Shehrazad as a storyteller telling stories over 1001 nights to her husband the king – is thought to have come from India (Ibid).

The version of this collection that has come to be known as “authoritative” within Europe and North America is the 18th Century French translation by Galland. Apparently, however, some parts of this version emerged from sources outside of any of the previous Arabic collections. One of the sources was a Maronite (a member of an Arabic-speaking Christian sect) from Aleppo, Syria whom Galland met in Paris and

from whom he gathered oral accounts of several stories (Ibid, p 13). There are eight stories of unknown hybrid origins – including *Ala Edd-din and the marvellous lamp* - which Gerhardt designates as “Galland’s orphan stories” (Ibid, p 14). There is even a theory among some scholars that Galland himself wrote the story of Aladdin (Felperin, 1997, p. 139).

Since its original Arabic translation, there have been many translations, interpretations, and versions including children’s versions. The translations that are thought to be most authentic to us today demonstrate, by their capture of all aspects of life including the bawdy, that the tales were not originally intended for children. Rather, they are similar to the “adult” entertainment found in Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* or Bocaccio’s *The Decameron*. Unlike these latter two works, however, *The Tales of the One Thousand and One Nights* have captured the imagination of European and North American society and have been reproduced in a number of different incarnations including opera, theatre, film and poetry. These tales are considered classics within North American society. In many ways they are more considerably favoured by “us” in “the West” than they are in their perceived countries of origin as “classics” where scores of other literature are thought to be more worthy of acclaim than this collection. “In Arabic-speaking countries the collection is regarded from a completely different point of view, and much less fondly” (Ibid. p. 2). Meanwhile within North America, the tales have spread to the more “popular” incarnations of modern culture as is evidenced by this Disney production and other cartoons based on these stories produced since the 1930’s (Shaheen, 2001, pp 50-55).

5.1.2 Elements from original narrative lending to discursive formations

It is neither possible, nor necessary here to give a more detailed account of the history of these tales; however, from what little we know about their origin we can isolate four elements that make the story of Aladdin “available” for Disney’s pop culture manifestation of the three thematic discursive formations – *Adversarial Relations within geo-politics, Islamic-Orient as Threat, and Islamic-Orient as archaic and uncivilized.*

The first element is that it is a narrative that pits forces against one another. Adversarial entities must be found to assume these adversarial roles. The second element pertains to its geographic locale – the Islamic Orient is the original setting for this tale and not so coincidentally, it was (and still is) also the setting of a current real world “narrative” of adversarial relations. The third element making this tale “ripe” for parallel discursive formations is the fact that it is an ancient tale. One might expect the setting, the narrative and the characterizations to confirm an authentically archaic order.

The final element suggesting this narrative as a hybrid venue of the three discursive formations à la Disney, is the hybrid origins of the original story. This collection of stories has come, as we have seen, from such a variety of sources – both temporally and geographically distant – that it belongs to *everyone*, and to *no one*. We, in North America have appropriated *Aladdin* and can revive this narrative within any number of hybrid forms. In fact, this Disney version borrows elements from other narratives in the Tales of the Thousand and One Nights that are not found within the Aladdin story. The magic carpet, for example, that whisks Aladdin and Jasmine off to a

“whole new world, and figures prominently throughout the narrative is not from the story of Aladdin, but rather from *Prince Ahmed and the Magical Carpet* – another story in the collection. Continuing the hybridization in this film are the images throughout, which are a hodge podge of exotic stereotypes from the Eastern and Middle Eastern regions. We see camels, turbans, harems, snake charmers, and other spiritual men who walk on beds of hot coals. Also, the script that is used on signs within the film is Arabic-looking to those of us who don’t know better, but it is not real Arabic script. (Shaheen, 2001, p. 51). Surely this fact alone suggests that the film is intended not for those who do speak or have familiarity with the Arabic language, but rather for those from a distant shared culture to whom these stylized fake images and stereotypes will suffice as “authentic enough”.

The following sections will briefly discuss the general manifestations of the three geo-political thematic discursive formations within Disney’s *Aladdin* as a whole.

5.2 Orphan story meets thematic discursive formations in Disney hybrid

5.2.1 Manifestation of *Adversarial relations*’ formation

We are conditioned to accept an adversarial characterization of human relations through a number of societal interactions that manifest this epistemology – including sporting events, political debate/elections, and on the widest scale, within geo-political conflict. The characterization of oppositional forces at play within the geo-political world ties in nicely with traditional narrative conventions in which conflict exists between two oppositional forces (Bordwell, 1985; Propp, 1968). Disney’s *Aladdin*, like all of the classic Disney folk tales, strongly adheres to such narrative conventions. Within popular culture mediated narrative texts such as *Aladdin*, the particular entities

chosen to represent these oppositional forces are subject to generically recognizable conventions, and also to forces and discursive formations within the geo-political context. That is to say that the particular genre of a film suggests historically successful prototypes that will be understandable to an audience who is familiar with the genre and who will therefore apply the appropriate inferences. In addition, the societal characterizations of a geo-political context suggest certain entities as plausibly cast in the roles of oppositional forces. This latter influence on film depictions of hero and villain is susceptible to the fluidity of geo-political power relations and changing discursive formations so that, for example, those chosen to play the villain often correspond to those characterized as the “enemy” within the wider geo-political sphere. Evidence of such a phenomenon is found within films throughout the politically volatile twentieth century where some of the perceived national “enemies” have often been in turn, German, Japanese, Russian. For example, the early animated Superman shorts of Max Fleischer, saw the inclusion of a “Japateur” (Japanese saboteur) as the enemy. During the Cold War, Russians were often portrayed as enemies on the wide-screen, as in the movies, *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), and *Red Dawn* (1984). Audiences in North America have been “trained” to recognize that certain peoples may serve as “natural” adversarial prototypes by virtue of their perceived difference from the norm within a shared society. The narrative creation of oppositional forces within this genre must seal these entities as ontologically different, so the difference-exacerbating expression of the *Power form* of the ideological complex (Hodge & Kress, 1993) is operating at its highest. Further, this expression must narratively orient one of

the forces to be superior, and thus of an idealized or naturalized order, while the other one must represent a morally inferior, clear threat to this order.

Recently, audiences within North America have been trained to recognize that people from the Islamic Orient operate in ways oppositional to their own (Esposito, 1999; Felperin, 1997; Said, 1982; Shaheen, 2001). Information and representations from such varied sources as scholarly research (Huntington, 1993; Lewis, 2001), popular cinematic texts and television are remarkably unanimous in their manifestation of the thematic discursive formation of adversarial relations (Esposito, 1999; Said, 1982) between the Islamic Orient and “the West”. In light of this training, who would be better than characters representative of the Islamic Orient, to play the antagonistic roles in a modern reinterpretation of this folk tale?

Throughout the narrative of this film, Jafar and Aladdin are often presented as opposites: the one being old, the other, young; the villain being surrounded by the narrativizing dark colour, the hero being naturalized by imitation live action-esque use of colour; Jafar as tall, angular, “hooked-nosed”, power-seeking, would-be Machiavellian ruler; Aladdin as small, athletic, Caucasian-esque, underdog. Their adversarial relationship is brought on by the evil trickery of Jafar in his quest for God-like power. Often, Aladdin is being innocently “duped” by the evilly sophisticated plots of his adversary, or he is acting in defensive manoeuvres against the offensive actions of Jafar.

In fact, the adversarial relations between Aladdin and Jafar are symptomatic of a wider polarity between “worlds” within the narrative of this film. The initial world of imbalance is characterized by (1) the topologically inhospitable environment of the

barren Arab land; (2) the state of affairs in which Jafar, the Sultan's villainous advisor, has some kind of evil hypnotic control over the otherwise morally-upright Sultan; and (3) the strange set of rules governing this land. The law of this narrative land stipulates that Aladdin be de-limbed for trying to nourish himself, and that the heroine, Jasmine, be held hostage in the palace until her marriage is arranged on her behalf. The correction of this imbalanced order, is first introduced with Aladdin and Jasmine's magic carpet ride away from this inhospitable land, and the accompanying song, "A whole new world". This song, which encapsulates the key message of the movie, along with the atmosphere created for its' musical debut in this segment, is suggestive of the freedom and happiness that can be obtained *outside* of this culture of repression and injustice. The song is reprised at the end of the film when the natural, happy order is restored – Aladdin becomes part of the established privileged class by marrying Jasmine, who is allowed to marry for love; the Genie is literally and figuratively "freed" from his confining space within the lamp as slave to a master; and of course, Jafar, is finally outsmarted by Aladdin and this evil villain is banished from this order (until the video-release Disney sequel, *The Return of Jafar* - 1994).

5.2.2 Manifestation of the *Islamic-Orient as threatening* formation

Within the film, the first evidence of this geo-political region as "threatening" emerges from the depiction of the setting itself. An arid, hot, barren region devoid of life-sustaining plants and water clearly poses a potential environmental threat to human life. When the sun sets in the opening segment, we are left with mysterious shadows creating a sinister atmosphere ripe for covert evil plots. Our first impressions of this

fictional region clearly categorize it as an inhospitable, foreign, and potentially dangerous place.

Throughout the film there are continued intimations of *threat* against our “American-suggestive hero” from those who more clearly represent stereotypical images of the Islamic Orient. The huge intimidating swords carried by the order-imposing, rotund, all-pervasive henchmen, threaten Aladdin at every turn in his opening scene.

Finally the fictional “world” itself in its initial incarnation of evil injustices, poses a threat against a more idealized, world – one that is manifested within the societal order within the “happy ending” of this narrative. The restrictions imposed on individuals within the initial order of society in *Agrabah* contravene what we consider “constitutional rights”. Not surprisingly, the desires of the hero and the heroine – embodiments of North American aesthetic values and accents – most strongly represent the societal values that we strive for in North America. It is only when these desires and naturalized values are narratively manifested with the culminating reversal of the evil order, that we feel most relieved. The closer this world approximates our own, the less threatened we feel.

5.2.3 Manifestation of *Islam as archaic and uncivilized* formation

Once again, part of the success of the *threat* formation is due to the characterization of the threatening entity as barbaric and uncivilized. While it must be said that the evil villain in this film, is himself depicted in caricature as a sophisticated, apparently “civil” man, the kind of order he seeks to impose is anything but *civil*.

All indications of his ruling style suggest that he would be a fear-inducing tyrant who would enslave all to his will alone. This kind of malevolent God-figure severely clashes with “modern” ideas surrounding democracy, leadership, and freedom.

Partial source of the dichotomy between *modern* and *archaic* within Disney’s *Aladdin* emerges from the temporal and spatial distance between the ancient origins of the Indo-Persian story itself and the “modern” times and place in which the film was produced. There has been some attempt to provide a kind of authenticity in this text to the original setting of the original narrative. Film scholar, Leslie Felperin Sharman notes that production designers used various sources – including ancient Persian miniature paintings – to create an “authentic” feel. (1993 p.14). The problem is that we do not know what constitutes “authenticity” in these tales. Besides, we would not really expect a modern-day version of this story (least of all of the Disney genre) to honestly attempt to be historically accurate. The issue, however, is not one of accuracy, but of where the dividing lines occur between the depiction of “modern/ civilized” and of “archaic/uncivilized”. Because of the way the discursive formations interact with each other in this film, the lines dividing *the modern* and *the archaic* occur approximately in the same instances of division between heroic American-esque and strangely backward Islamic Orient. We have already seen how Aladdin embodies American prototypes, as well as how his character is strangely contemporary compared to most of the other characters (Chapter 4.2.3.2). The heroine, Jasmine, simply wants to be free, independent and allowed to love whom she chooses – values that are highly “modern”. Perhaps the most astounding embodiment of modern American pop culture is the Genie, who is skilfully voiced by American stand-up comic, Robin Williams. His

comedic acrobatics along with animator, Eric Goldberg's fluid caricatures, transform the genie into an impersonator of a wide variety of modern American pop-culture icons – including Arnold Schwarzenegger, Robert DeNiro in the film *Taxi Driver*, and Ed Sullivan. Williams also 'puts on' a number of accents ranging from African-American street vernacular to California surfer dialect to European varieties of English. As is obvious by the range of impersonations mentioned above, many of the cultural references made by the Genie are inaccessible to those outside of the cultural sphere evoked by this character.

Aladdin, the Genie and Jasmine are the three most heroic and sympathetic characters and are also the personifications of the "whole new world" of modern American values. In juxtaposition, the other characters seem to be stuck in an exotically archaic, often barbarically uncivilized world characteristic of an ancient order. As we have seen within the narrative mode in the second segment, Aladdin is almost decapitated for taking food to nourish himself. Further, in a later segment, the heroine, Jasmine is almost subject to the same punishment when she attempts to give an apple from a street merchant to a starving child. Such themes of incivility characterize the fictional order as unjust. Although this order is of an ancient variety, it is also in step with many of our assumptions about the present-day Islamic Orient (Chapter 4.3). "Like many other Orientalist texts, Aladdin is far less concerned with a representation of any real Middle East than it is with re-presenting older Western representations of the Orient and the story. This self-referential tradition can be traced back to the beginning of the story's circulation in the West" (Felperin, 1997, p. 139).

5.3 Change and continuity of discursive formations

In the years since the 1991 Gulf War and the release of this movie, there have been some terrible events that have at times mobilized the deeper entrenchment of these geo-political discursive formations. From a North American perspective, the most horrific of these events was the September 11, 2001 attack on key American iconic landmarks that left thousands dead. The post 9-11 backlash against certain visible minorities demonstrated the frustration, fear and ignorance of some American individuals who obviously felt angry and vulnerable after an attack from outsiders on “home turf”.

Not all of the social reactions, however, have been negative. Within the past decade, we can also see a movement within North America and within Europe to avoid using such terrorist incidents as evidence of the validity of discursive formations and false characterizations of geo-political relations. While political leaders in “the West” and in the “Islamic Orient” have tried to mobilize national populations by relying on the unity-creating formations against a common “foe”, a significant number of individuals and groups have shown dissent. During the action and dialogue surrounding “The War on Terrorism” in the early part of 2003, voices of dissent certainly had a much larger impact on the handling of military operations than they did in the 1991 Gulf War. While the 1991 event was seen as a “rescue” of sorts of Kuwait, which had been aggressively occupied by Iraq, the latest attack on Iraq was characterized as a quest for potentially threatening “weapons of mass destruction” whose existence has yet to be corroborated. The public expression of a wide variety of opinions on the topic

of political and military action has led to an important potential widening of discursive formations.

These “potential” discursive movements notwithstanding, it is also necessary to recognize the new manifestations of more stable formations characterizing (1) the Islamic Orient as threat and (2) perpetually-existing adversarial relations between (sometimes shifting) global entities.

The Islamic Orient continues to be characterized as a threat within public discourse – especially within fictional entertainment texts. Major American television action and drama series have mobilized this discursive formation within the past two years and are continuing to do so. In the 2002-3 viewing season, for example, the Fox Network aired a critically-acclaimed and highly popular programme called “24”. The audience follows in fictionalized “real time”, a U.S. Counter Terrorist Unit battling terrorist forces originating from the Middle East but attacking on U.S. soil. There were a couple of “good guys” from the Middle East within the narrative, however, more memorable were the images of bearded martyr terrorists who went to the Mosque to pray before going on their deadly missions. No doubt, as an attempt to be politically correct, the writers did not use the names of specific countries when describing threats against the U.S. in the plot; however, the use of the term “Middle East” as a container for these terrorist elements served only to reinforce the whole geo-political region as a monolithic threat.

The up-coming television viewing season will see the pop culture trend continuing with many of the newly created series depicting stories of spies, intelligence and terrorism (Mason, 2003). One of these programmes, a series entitled “Threat

Matrix” created by the ABC network is a very explicit manifestation of the *Islamic Orient as threat* formation. A network summary of the series suggests:

Our nation is a target. Al-Qaeda and other deadly enemies are determined to destroy our way of life...Against this rising threat, the Homeland Security Agency has created a highly specialized, elite task force trained and equipped to counter anyone or anything that threatens our nation...With stories ripped from headlines, *Threat Matrix* is a drama with a ticking clock
(ABC network site; <http://abc.go.com/primetime/preview/2003-04/threatmatrix.htm>).

Other pop culture products that display these discursive formations are found within computer games geared at children and adults alike. Some easily downloadable games featured on web sites are Wham Bam Saddam (<http://www.lanhamenterprises.clicksitebuilder.com>), and War on Terrorism & War on Terrorism 2 (<http://www.flashradium.com>) in which players choose from “search and destroy” missions in mostly Islamic-Oriental regions including Yemen and Afghanistan.

Of these three discursive formations – *Adversarial Relations within geo-politics*, *Islamic-Orient as Threat*, and *Islamic-Orient as archaic and uncivilized* – perhaps the most durable is the one that suggests a perennial geo-political world of adversaries. This formation is potentially all-consuming, and has relevance beyond the particularized instance of Islamic-Orientalism; further, there is a remarkable degree of “enunciative homogeneity” (Foucault, 1972) to this formation across a heterogeneous array of social texts. Such epistemological assumptions are even found within many scholarly fields of inquiry as we have seen (Chapter 4.3). Contrastive cultural studies have certainly played an important role in fields of human inquiry; however, the wide acceptance and subsequent black-boxing of polarized entities fails to capture the

ambiguity and complexity inherent to pursuits of knowledge, and retards mutual understanding. If our macro level understanding of a geo-political region begins with a label that defines the Russians/Islamic Orient/*enemy of the day* as “the other” among a choice of two, we can see how easily our micro-level perceptions of their beliefs, civility etc. are defined in opposition to our own. If we, as a global community, are seriously as interested in increasing interactions and opening borders as recent trends would indicate, it seems imperative that we recognize the difference between understanding each other and articulating complexity, versus characterizing and caricaturizing each other’s differences from the standpoint of our own naturalized cultural values.

5.4 Conclusion

5.4.1 Implications of methodology

Disney’s *Aladdin* is a hybrid pop culture text whose material manifestation occurs at an intersection of modes, materials, genres, discourses and historical and social conditions. The network of meaning-making elements in this film is vast, therefore, this thesis cannot cover all of the semiotic territory; however an attempt has been made to situate its production and reception within the context of some of the socially and materially relevant practices surrounding the film. In order to organize the analysis, three significant intertextual sources of meaning – *co-generic*, *co-actional*, and *co-thematic* – have been used as theoretical constructs capable of capturing the respective importance of the *genre*, the *hybrid modal instantiation*, and the *geo-political context* in uncovering meaning in this filmic text. The implications of this

particular study can be combined under two related central themes. The first suggests the importance of transdisciplinary approaches to multi-modal textual analysis that take into account hybrid social and material networks of meaning. The second proposes that conventional fictional film – especially conventional animated film – be re-cast as a venue of socially influenced and influencing knowledge.

5.4.1.1 Sensitivity to modal and social textual hybridity in analysis

The prevalence of multi-modality in present-day texts has necessitated the construction of transdisciplinary efforts to sensitively capture the sources of meaning within such texts. Obviously in the case of a feature film, there are so many modes working to create meaning throughout a relatively lengthy text, that it would be nearly impossible to analyze how each and every mode creates meaning in each and every filmic segment. Not only would such an analysis be almost impossible to execute, but it would also punish the reader with certain ennui. What has been attempted here is an analysis of some of the relevant modes and contexts, keeping the balance between textual instantiation and social intertexts that jointly create meaning. This process has necessitated the recontextualization of certain modes and discourses in light of specific socio-cultural conditions that fundamentally contribute to the textual order.

One of the most important purposes in social analysis of multi-modal texts, must certainly be the ability to shed light on societal characterizations of pivotal times places and relations. Texts such as Disney's *Aladdin* may serve as “snapshots” of a collective societal expression of *the way things are* at a given time and place.

5.4.1.2 Recontextualizing animated text as a source of social knowledge

Three particular thematic discursive formations that have occurred in heterogeneous texts and settings with increasing regularity over the past two-three decades, have been evidenced within this film. While Disney's *Aladdin* is a great deal more than the sum of these three discursive formations, this film achieve some of its unity because of these patterns of meaning. They may, in fact be the most invisible sources of meaning to a public who is influenced by the pervasiveness of these formations and who generally consume such sources of entertainment without critically thinking of discursive frames. According to animation scholar, Paul Wells:

It is no accident that Disney's *Aladdin* may be read as a thinly veiled metaphor for the USA engagement with Sadaam Hussein and the Iraqi military in the Gulf War. Indeed it is almost the perfect vehicle to represent the enlightened, technologically advanced, self-evidently just rationale of the West, not only in its acts of political intervention, but in its popular entertainment (1998, p. 220).

Wells clearly highlights the particular relevance of the political context in the meaning-making process of Disney's *Aladdin*. He also points out the lack of awareness of such "ideological" considerations on the part of viewers who consume these Disney conventional animated texts: "...the cartoon was largely seen as an amusing diversion and wholly separate from the earnest, often emotionally intense live action cinema" (Ibid, p. 227). Such perceptions of distinctions between animation and live action cinema – even though they are increasingly irrelevant (Langer, 2002; Wells, 1998) – serve to protect animated films from wider critical social inquiry. The work of scholars in efforts to eradicate this false distinction will help give animation the scholarly respect and critical attention it deserves.

5.4.2 Future dialogue

The hope in recontextualizing these kinds of texts for the purpose of analysis is not to claim an objective account of what they mean, but rather to posit that there is no objective meaning – that all socially-situated texts are produced and consumed within frames that are given along with membership within certain communities at a certain socio-historical moment. Further, texts *rely* on the subjectivity that is brought to their creation and interpretation. It is these subjective frames that must also be understood as textual order-creating mechanisms. We do not enter a movie theatre (or home “theatre”) as culturally and geo-politically neutral entities that can watch and listen to a piece of entertainment in a vacuum. We are “apperceptive listeners” (Bakhtin, 1981 p. 293) who bring social knowledge and make socio-cognitive inferences based on relevant intertexts in efforts to create order in filmic texts. Likewise, when we leave the theatre, we are not leaving it in exactly the same state as we were when we entered; in some cases we may have been challenged by what we have participated in, in others, we have had our version of the social world confirmed for us. Even when we know the film is fictional, we apply our real world knowledge and experiences in understanding it and in turn the experience of having consumed a film influences our real world experiences.

Another implication of this study (though it requires separate and detailed treatment beyond this thesis) is that the children who consume films, television and computer games that manifest these discursive formations are receiving important social frames that will potentially shape their world. Children have a more limited socio-cultural repertoire to call on; therefore they may not bring to the communicative event the same frames and intertexts as do adults. Nonetheless, critical dialogue on children’s reception of these texts and formations warrants attention - especially given

that fairy stories provide necessary prototypes with which children identify and around which children can organize their world (Bettelheim, 1976). These prototypes are fundamentally necessary in the development of the child and serve as models for socio-cognitive growth (Ibid).

There is great potential for critical dialogue around texts, such as Disney's *Aladdin*. If a diversity of voices and opinions surrounding popular family-oriented entertainment texts is encouraged within scholarly and educational settings, the networks of meaning and societally circulating discursive patterns will be made more visible and subject to change. Critical dialogue and analysis of socially mediated texts is not only academically interesting, it is also potentially socially productive. It is my hope that this thesis contributes to such dialogue.

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