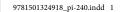# INTRODUCTION

Noel Brown, Susan Smith and Sam Summers

Toy Story (John Lasseter, 1995) is a cinematic landmark, a commercial phenomenon and an icon of contemporary popular culture. Very few films have been so popularly and critically celebrated or so influential. As Hollywood's first wholly computer-generated feature, and the first full-length film to be produced by Pixar Animation Studios, *Toy Story*'s significance was apparent well before its initial theatrical release in November 1995. An immediate box office hit, it went on to become the highest-grossing film of the year in North America, and eventually earned over $300 million internationally. The film's success can also be gauged by the numerous awards it has received, the glowing testimonials and its consistently high ranking in surveys of the best films ever made.[1] Indeed, *Toy Story* has become a hugely lucrative multimedia franchise that encompasses three theatrical sequels (at the time of writing) and numerous books, games, theme park rides and merchandise and licensing tie-ins. All of these have extended the parameters of the text into different media, each with their own storytelling possibilities. At the centre of the franchise, of course, is the original *Toy Story* film. It is, in our view, one of only a handful of Hollywood animated films that can legitimately be said to have redefined the medium.

As the chapters in this book demonstrate, there is a great deal that can be said about the *Toy Story* phenomenon. While many responses to the film have centred on its technical accomplishments, critics have also noted its particular appeal to adults as well as children, its 'hipness', its modern sensibilities, its indebtedness to postmodern literary and artistic movements and its engagement with tropes and conventions of Hollywood cinema (and of consumer culture more broadly). Almost single-handedly, *Toy Story* established computer-generated imagery (CGI) animation as a central pillar of the contemporary Hollywood cinema, and announced Pixar as a major creative force. The post-*Toy Story* generation has come to think of animation primarily as a computer-generated form. Computer animation had widely been used to augment cel-animated films in Hollywood during the 1980s, and director John Lasseter's acclaimed CGI short films for Pixar, *Luxo, Jr.* (1986) and *Tin*

Toy (1988), demonstrated its aesthetic potential. But *Toy Story* was the critical intervention, proving that it could sustain an entire feature-length production; every subsequent computer-generated animated film has followed in its path. Although CGI animation draws on many of the conventions of cel animation dating back to the 1920s, *Toy Story* introduced new aesthetic styles and production methods that later films have built upon.
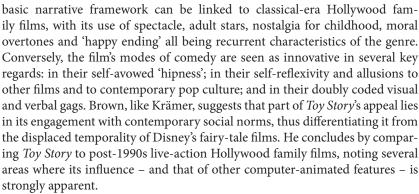
Toy Story is a relative rarity in being a mainstream animation that has attracted a good deal of scholarly attention. It is the subject of a recent volume in the British Film Institute's 'Film Classics' series, and of the international conference (*Toy Story at 20*, hosted in November 2015 by the University of Sunderland) that is the precursor of this book; it is also, as one chapter in this volume explicitly argues, a work of 'art'. Prior to the release of *Toy Story*, popular perceptions of animation were of a traditionally hand-drawn form in the classical Disney mould, despite the long history of other styles, such as three-dimensional puppet and stop-motion animation. The seriousness with which *Toy Story* was received by film critics undoubtedly contributed to the subsequent growth of animation studies as an academic discipline, as well as to the upsurge in scholarly literature on children's films and family films. Like the *Toy Story* films themselves, these areas of enquiry are now global in reach (a fact reflected in the international calibre of contributors to this book).

This volume builds on such prior research, but explores *Toy Story* with greater breadth and depth. It examines the film's industrial and cultural contexts, production history, aesthetic innovations and reception and legacy. In pursuing these themes, we have aimed for a comprehensive but wide-ranging selection of chapters that encompass a variety of critical, theoretical and methodological approaches. The collection begins with Peter Krämer's chapter, '*Toy Story*, Pixar and Contemporary Hollywood'. Krämer here contextualizes *Toy Story* within broader developments in post-1970s Hollywood cinema, particularly concentrating on the mainstream trend towards adaptations and sequels, and Pixar's incongruity as a successful developer of 'new stories': those that are neither adapted from other sources nor sequels to previous films. Krämer goes on to identify other areas in which Pixar has differentiated itself from its competitors. He notes the unprecedented commercial success of its films both domestically and internationally, pointing out that the critical responses to Pixar releases, similarly, are far more favourable than is typical for animated features. Finally, he situates the themes of the *Toy Story* films – especially their engagement with everyday concerns – in relation to those of Hollywood family-orientated blockbusters more broadly.

Noel Brown's chapter, '*Toy Story* and the Hollywood Family Film', also situates the film within broader histories of mainstream Hollywood cinema. Brown points out that while *Toy Story* has often been discussed in terms of its technological innovations, it is also a key text in its engagement with the inherited conventions of the family film genre. More specifically, the film embodies a dialectic between consolidation and innovation. Brown argues that the film's

basic narrative framework can be linked to classical-era Hollywood family films, with its use of spectacle, adult stars, nostalgia for childhood, moral overtones and 'happy ending' all being recurrent characteristics of the genre. Conversely, the film's modes of comedy are seen as innovative in several key regards: in their self-avowed 'hipness'; in their self-reflexivity and allusions to other films and to contemporary pop culture; and in their doubly coded visual and verbal gags. Brown, like Krämer, suggests that part of *Toy Story*'s appeal lies in its engagement with contemporary social norms, thus differentiating it from the displaced temporality of Disney's fairy-tale films. He concludes by comparing *Toy Story* to post-1990s live-action Hollywood family films, noting several areas where its influence – and that of other computer-animated features – is strongly apparent.

In his chapter, 'The Cowboy, the Spaceman and the Guru: Character and Convention in the Screenwriting of *Toy Story*', Andrew Gay considers the role the film played in developing Pixar's reputation for strong and effective storytelling. Asking how a team of animators inexperienced in feature film writing learnt this craft to such effect, Gay pinpoints two shaping influences over the development of *Toy Story*'s screenplay: the storywriting principles of Robert McKee and the genre conventions of the buddy picture. By exploring how each of these find their way into the specifics of *Toy Story*'s script, Gay then poses the question: how can Pixar's reputation for inventiveness be reconciled with this adherence to convention? He finds that the answer lies (as for Brown) in an interaction between innovation and convention in *Toy Story*. In particular, he points to the film's ability to avoid cliché by reworking storytelling conventions in new, imaginative ways as central to *Toy Story*'s success, establishing an approach that would be adopted elsewhere in Pixar works.

Heather L. Holian's chapter, 'New and Inherited Aesthetics: Designing for the *Toy Story* Trilogy One Film at a Time', explores the visual aesthetic that characterizes the entire film series. With particular reference to the design work of Pixar's art director, Ralph Eggleston, Holian outlines some of the key creative decisions that led to the 'look' of *Toy Story*. She describes the design process as collaborative, with Eggleston and his team working with creative input from John Lasseter. Drawing on personal interviews with many of the design team, Holian argues that the film's aesthetic was dictated, to some degree, by technical limitations at the time of production. She notes the influence of the painter Grant Wood and the illustrator and painter Maxfield Parrish on the film's often saturated colour palette and bright lighting. However, the design work also contains pertinent allusions to other films; the upstairs carpet in Sid's house, for instance, resembles the hotel carpet in Stanley Kubrick's horror film *The Shining* (1980), reflecting the darker mood of these sequences. Holian then moves on to discuss the design work in *Toy Story 2* and *Toy Story 3*, noting that these sequels retained a high degree of fidelity to the visual aesthetic established in the first film, despite the technical advances made in the intervening years.
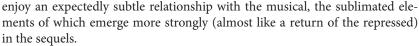
In 'Rough and Smooth: The Everyday Textures of *Toy Story*', Lucy Donaldson also considers the film's visual aesthetic but does so in relation to debates about the dramatic limitations or possibilities of CGI. Considering critiques of the film in terms of whether digital filmmaking promotes merely a surface sheen and hence lacks depth or offers possibilities for achieving materiality, substance and sensory engagement, Donaldson finds significance in *Toy Story*'s ability to create a fictional world that is expressively textured according to a counterpoising of rough and smooth surfaces. Analysing key elements of the film, Donaldson demonstrates the ways in which surfaces are distinctly rendered, layered and their scale manipulated. Acknowledging the collaborative contributions of *Toy Story*'s visual effects artists, she reveals the importance of texture in materializing *Toy Story*'s universe in ways that are deeply imbricated with the dramatic concerns of the film, have the capacity to connect with the everyday nature of our own lives and are fundamental to shaping the kinds of feelings that certain spaces and characters evoke.

Christopher Holliday's chapter, 'Toying with Performance: *Toy Story*, Virtual Puppetry and Computer-Animated Film Acting', argues for computer animation in general, and *Toy Story* in particular, as a site of digital puppetry. Animated characters, as Holliday observes, are 'virtual marionettes' controlled by the animator. *Toy Story*'s various instances of on-screen puppetry – in which Andy is seen manipulating his toys in various ways – serve as a creative analogue of how computer-animated film performance is engineered through a similar encounter between an invisible performer (the animator) and the visible performing object. Holliday also emphasizes the collaborative nature of film performance. On-screen characters like Woody and Buzz, while inflected with the vocal performances of actors Tom Hanks and Tim Allen, also bear the imprint of creative and technical personnel such as artists, animators, designers, painters and sculptors. *Toy Story*'s visions of puppet manipulation, Holliday argues, are thus inherently self-reflexive, acknowledging the techniques of puppetry that are fundamental to the illusionism of the medium itself. Holliday's analysis of *Toy Story* through this lens adds to an ever-expanding body of scholarship on performance in digital cinema.

In her chapter 'Toy Stories through Song: Pixar, Randy Newman and the Sublimated Film Musical', Susan Smith focuses on musical performance, an aspect central to the appeal of *Toy Story* and its sequels yet all too often marginalized by scholars writing in this area. Arguing that such neglect manifests itself even in places where one might expect the *Toy Story* songs to receive fuller attention, Smith considers Randy Newman's contribution in terms of his role as collaborator rather than *auteur* and interrogates the idea that Pixar's innovative approach to music and sound arises from a rejection of the Disney animated musical format. Using close analysis of the three songs in *Toy Story* and the various reworkings of 'You've Got a Friend in Me' in *Toy Story 2* and *3*, she explores the ways in which these are sensitively attuned to the conditions of the toys' existence. This leads her to contemplate that *Toy Story* may actually

enjoy an expectedly subtle relationship with the musical, the sublimated elements of which emerge more strongly (almost like a return of the repressed) in the sequels.

An integral part of the landscape of *Toy Story* is, of course, the toys themselves, many of which are drawn directly or indirectly from actual, ownable playthings. In 'From Shelf to Screen: Toys as a Site of Intertextuality', Sam Summers looks at how the filmmakers bring to life familiar real-world products, as well as original characters inspired by common toy archetypes, in order to root the action of the film in a setting recognizable as contemporary North America. By manipulating intertextual fields, including tapping into the uniquely intimate and nostalgic feelings associated with childhood toys, the film compounds the emotional affectivity of its settings and characters, whether this be the comforting familiarity and innocence of Andy's room or the visceral body-horror and uncanny anxiety of Sid's house.

In her chapter on 'Fear, Guilt and the Future of Play in *Toy Story*', Karen Cross takes a psychoanalytical approach which shifts focus from the typically Oedipal, father-centric readings of the film to look at the narratives of play which are enacted through its story. Moving on from the extra-textual understanding of nostalgia and familiarity introduced in Sam Summers's chapter, Cross examines the relationship between toy and fictional child, and how this evolves over the course of a trilogy which spans Andy's childhood. This discussion acts as a platform to address the Toy Story series' articulation of the maternal bond, as well as anxieties surrounding consumption and even its own mode of production.

In 'Mirrors and Shadows: Duality, Illusion and the Divided Self in *Toy Story*', Jane Batkin confronts the reflection in *Toy Story*'s many sheen surfaces, providing a Lacanian psychoanalytical account of the binary oppositions established in the film. Drawing on the symbolism of the mirror, the shadow and the doppelganger, and the history of these concepts in psychoanalytical theory, Batkin shines a light on the duality of the film's characters, illuminating the ways in which Woody and Buzz, Sid and Andy reflect one another and the dualities that they reveal within themselves.

In 'Woody, Buzz and the Koons Corollary. . . Or Why *Toy Story* Is Art', Paul Wells provocatively enquires how the film (and the trilogy) is allied to the cultures of 'Art'. Noting some of the issues arising from discursive use of this term and its application to a work of mainstream animation and popular entertainment, Wells considers *Toy Story*'s eligibility for such status within several contexts and with regard to the film's (and series') ongoing cultural relevance and significance. Ranging far beyond Hollywood, animation and cinema, he situates *Toy Story*'s emergence in relation to North American arts culture and the film's eligibility as (pop) art, arguing that artist Jeff Koons offers a compelling point of comparison with Pixar, especially where this film and trilogy are concerned. Through detailed scrutiny of their creative rationales, Wells finds parallels in Pixar and Koons's shared interest in speaking directly to adults while at

the same time rooting their approach, among other things, in an association with children and childhood and a belief in the power of their work to provoke emotional and imaginative engagement.

With a view to the film's legacy, Helen Haswell takes a retrospective look at the film and its sequels in 'Story Is King: Understanding the *Toy Story* Franchise as an Allegory for the Studio Narrative of Pixar Animation'. The focus here is on Pixar's creative culture and the emphasis the studio places on narrative when developing its films. Using this as a basis for a reading of the trilogy as a metaphor for Pixar's complex relationship with Disney, casting the high-tech Buzz as the innovative CGI studio and the antiquated Woody as the older corporation, the chapter also serves as a definitive history of the often-fraught creative collaboration between the two entities.

In the book's final chapter, 'An Interview with Steve Segal', the *Toy Story* animator provides a valuable insight into the production process of the film, and on the challenges and motivations for an independent animator during the 1970s and 1980s prior to being employed at Pixar. Segal begins by recalling his childhood making flip-books and the prize-winning series of short films he made as a student at Virginia Commonwealth University. He discusses his subsequent career making commercials and educational films, as well as the film he spent almost ten years animating with co-director Phil Trumbo, the cult success *Futuropolis* (1984). Segal moves on to talk about his friendships with John Lasseter and screenwriter Joe Ranft, and how this eventually led to his employment as an animator on *Toy Story*. Finally, Segal gives some revealing insights into what a 'typical day' working on the film was like, the creative process during production, his thoughts on Lasseter as an 'auteur' and the feeling of anticipation at the studio shortly before the film's release.

Note

1　The film's accolades are too many to fully enumerate here, but they include its addition to the US Library of Congress's National Film Registry; its three Academy Award nominations and eight Annie Awards; and its placing of #44 in *The Hollywood Reporter*'s 'Hollywood's 100 Favorite Films' poll, #99 in *Empire Magazine*'s survey of the 500 greatest movies, #101 in the IMDb's user-generated list of the best films ever made, and #95 in Rotten Tomatoes' list of the best-reviewed films ever made.