View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
brought to you by CORE
provided by University of Huddersfield Repository

University of
HUDDERSFIELD

University of Huddersfield Repository

McCulloch, Richard

Whistle While You Work: Branding, Critical Reception and Pixar's Production Culture

Original Citation

McCulloch, Richard (2015) Whistle While You Work: Branding, Critical Reception and Pixar's Production Culture. In: Storytelling in the Media Convergence Age: Exploring Screen Narratives. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 174-189. ISBN 978-1-349-48192-7

This version is available at http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/28691/

The University Repository is a digital collection of the research output of the University, available on Open Access. Copyright and Moral Rights for the items on this site are retained by the individual author and/or other copyright owners. Users may access full items free of charge; copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided:

- The authors, title and full bibliographic details is credited in any copy;
- A hyperlink and/or URL is included for the original metadata page; and
- The content is not changed in any way.

For more information, including our policy and submission procedure, please contact the Repository Team at: E.mailbox@hud.ac.uk.

http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/

Citation for this book chapter:
McCulloch, R. (2015) “Whistle While You Work: Branding, Critical Reception and Pixar’s Production Culture.” In Pearson, R. and Smith, A. N., *Storytelling in the Media Convergence Age: Exploring Screen Narratives*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 174-89.

Whistle While You Work: Branding, Critical Reception and Pixar’s Production Culture

Richard McCulloch

The sheer quantity of media articles that have been written about Pixar demonstrates a commonly recurring desire on the part of journalists and film critics to explain the studio’s track record of critical and commercial successes. Writers have variously justified their coverage in terms of going in search of the company’s ‘secret’, ‘how they do it’, or ‘what makes [them] so special’.[1] Particularly interesting is the frequency with which the writers look beyond the studio’s films, and even the key creative staff that make them, and instead focus on Pixar’s headquarters in Emeryville, Northern California.[2] As William Taylor and Polly LaBarre of the *New York Times* succinctly put it in 2006, ‘The secret to the success of Pixar Animation Studios is its utterly distinctive approach to the workplace.’[3] Bill Capodagli and Lynn Jackson also hint at this idea in their introduction to *Innovate the Pixar Way*, describing the organisation as ‘a childlike storytelling “playground” …a place that enables storytellers to create tales of friends and foes who share great adventures in enchanting lands’.[4] Note the choice of language here: Pixar is not merely a studio, company, or group of people, but a *place*.

In other words, credit for the imaginative narratives of Pixar’s films – toys coming to life (*Toy Story*; *Toy Story 2*; *Toy Story 3* [1995-2010]); an elderly widower attaching balloons to his house and flying to South America (*Up* [2009]); a Parisian rat who dreams of becoming a gourmet chef (*Ratatouille* [2007]) – is frequently attributed to the company’s creative production culture. By analysing the representation and mediation of Emeryville across a range of paratextual materials (primarily critical reception and DVD bonus features), this chapter argues that coverage of the studio space both informs, and is informed by, critics’ responses to

the studio's film output. Emeryville acts as a physical space for the reification of Pixar's intangible brand values – a nexus point for the conceptions of creativity, fun and innovation that purportedly distinguish its films from those of its rivals. More broadly, the chapter elucidates the relationship between on-screen narratives and off-screen spaces within a brand, focusing in particular on the commodification of a media company's production culture and the way in which this process can impact upon a brand's cultural value. In doing so, it argues that Pixar's screen narratives have frequently come to be understood in relation to the discursive representation of their production context.

Added Value: A Note on Brands, Paratexts and Intertexts

While the topic has been studied and discussed in an enormous variety of ways, academic and journalistic definitions generally see brands as being closely linked to reputation – as Teemu Moilanen and Seppo Rainisto put it, a brand is 'an impression perceived in a client's mind of a product or service'.[5] According to Celia Lury, brands regularly perform the role of 'silent salesmen' that add 'value' to products or services, as strategists and marketers seek to invest them with 'character' or 'personality' that transcends functional properties alone.[6] Audiences can of course enjoy a Pixar film without knowing anything at all about the company or people behind its production, but production narratives are circulated so readily that they become an integral part of what Eileen Meehan would term Pixar's 'commercial intertext'.[7] In relation to Batman, Meehan argues that such intertexts are comprised of a 'complex web of cross references …into which we fit ourselves'.[8] Very rarely, if ever, will all of these references be circulating simultaneously in a given moment of reception, yet their potential for shaping a film's meaning or reputation is significant.

In his influential work on paratexts, Jonathan Gray has drawn a link between advertising and media studies, arguing that 'hype and surrounding texts' establish 'frames and filters through which we look at, listen to, and interpret the texts that they hype'.[9] Adam Arvidsson would agree, describing brands as 'not so much [standing in] for products, as much as [providing] a part of the context in which products are used'.[10] Brands and paratexts thus perform a similar function – framing,

filtering meaning, and providing context for the consumption of specific products or services. Accordingly, this chapter locates the Pixar brand within various forms of paratexts, since it is in these media spaces – *between* producer and consumer – where brands can be seen to crystallise.

If media publications are so keen to consistently publish articles about Pixar's studio space, to what extent do these paratextual stories collectively form a consensus about the company? What exactly it is about the building, its people and its corporate culture that commands so much attention? And what role, if any, do these discourses play in laying conditions for the reception of the studio's films? In order to answer these questions, it would be useful to begin by interrogating the very idea of what it means to go 'behind the scenes' at a film studio.

Let The Right Ones In: Privileged Consumers and DVD Bonus Features

Although physical access to Emeryville is heavily restricted – a point to which I return below – Pixar frequently invites its audiences inside the studio through a range of media, especially DVD. As Craig Hight notes, making-of documentaries (MODs) and other behind-the-scenes features that provide fans with 'insider' information have been staple inclusions of DVD releases ever since the medium took off in the late-1990s.[11] In her work on home cinema cultures, Barbara Klinger argues that such texts place the viewer in a position of privilege. Privy to a seemingly 'secret' world of information, the collector is schooled in detail about the film production process, creating a 'cognoscenti' among them.[12] Pixar has consistently nurtured fannish consumption and positive (i.e. sympathetic) interpretive frameworks by courting privileged individuals – journalists, authors, fan bloggers, business executives, etc. – who are then encouraged to spread the word to their own audiences. Emeryville is constructed as a space that not only *can* be occupied (vicariously, if not physically), but one that *rewards* audiences for pursuing that kind of relationship.

Behind-the-scenes featurettes are by no means a new media phenomenon. Hight, for instance, has likened their function to electronic press kits, while John Caldwell notes precursory trends in 1940s television programming and the emergence of the star system.[13] However, these features have become increasingly

important since the late-1990s, with industry reports suggesting that the consumer proclivity for bonus features played a key role in the emergence of the DVD as a medium, a trend that Blu-ray, with its increased storage capacity, capitalises on.[14] In their analysis of the *Monsters Inc* (2001) DVD, Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus discuss what 'capitalise' might mean in this context. They argue that Pixar used MODs to position itself as not only distinct from Disney at a time of industrial conflict, but as an autonomous creative unit with an emphasis on 'fun' and 'quality'.[15] The DVD bonus feature, in other words, is capable of performing a key role in the establishment of an auteur reputation, with the author in Pixar's case shown to be a group rather than a single person. Pixar is of course not alone in taking advantage of the marketing potential of this technology, but the studio's distinct reputation arguably stems from its consistency in repeating themes, characters, motifs and values across multiple platforms. Christopher Anderson makes a similar point about brand coherence in relation to the *Disneyland* television show (1954-1958) and the ways in which it presented Disney to 1950s American audiences. He argues that, by dissecting the animated production process and continually illustrating how it works, using examples from the studio's own back catalogue, *Disneyland* positioned itself as an outlet for commentary on the studio's films. It encouraged audiences to see continuities across Disney's films, to develop an appreciation for the production process, and to recognise the studio's body of work as a 'unified product of Walt's authorial vision'.[16] Inviting 'critical' analysis in this way invests the films with a degree of cultural value (positioning them as *worthy* objects of study), but on terms that have been forethought (by providing answers to its own questions). However, in one crucial way, the relationship between Disney and the *Disneyland* series differed from Pixar and its own attempts at producing studio exposés. As discussed above, Pixar is, for the vast majority of people, an exclusive place that they will never be allowed to visit, whereas *Disneyland* existed largely to encourage audiences to physically travel to the amusement parks.

Importantly, then, despite Pixar's willingness to allow various groups of people access to Emeryville to photograph, film, and/or write about the building and its people, the majority of people's "access" is virtual. Seeing inside Emeryville is easy, yet this access is almost always mediated, virtual and entirely on Pixar's terms.

Visiting *in situ* is a highly exclusive practice reserved for selected commentators, relevant film industry insiders, or the occasional school group. The studio space has thus become subject to what John Urry calls the 'tourist gaze' – an attitude towards the experience of places, spaces and objects that situates them in opposition to everyday life, and against regulated, organised work in particular.[17] He argues that, although tourist relationships exist in the journey towards a destination and a period of stay there, tourist consumption is visual above all else.[18] Although the public is denied access to Emeryville, it is somewhat paradoxically presented as a space governed by principles of fun and inclusivity that invites the tourist gaze.

Goofing Off: Identifying with Pixar's Production Culture

Both the American and British media have demonstrated an increasing fascination with Pixar's Emeryville studio since the company moved there in 2000, with detailed behind-the-scenes exposés having appeared in publications such as *Variety*, *Empire*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Telegraph*, *The Independent* and *The New York Times*. Such articles are curiously consistent in both tone and content, a phenomenon self-consciously remarked upon in one such piece by Sam Leith in *The Telegraph*:

> As a journalist …you want to dislike Pixar; or at least find its dark side. Where's the story in "happy people make brilliant films, get well paid for it, love their work"? But all the evidence points to that being the case. [As] much as you tire of hearing about the silver scooters, the primacy of storytelling, the staggering attention to detail (you hear stories – one animator spent days watching videotapes of his own eyeballs) and the fanatical determination to get it right, you cannot get away from the fact that not only is most of this stuff demonstrably true, it has given the company an unbroken record of hit movies. Good hit movies.[19]

Here, Leith not only acknowledges the constant repetition of the same stories but also that 'this stuff' is precisely *the* reason why Pixar has become so successful. The implication is that employees' use of silver scooters to transport themselves between offices is an equally important part of success as hard work and 'attention to detail'. However accurate an assertion this may be, the fact remains that the

critical consensus that has built up around Pixar is heavily reliant upon a detailed knowledge of the studio's 'wacky' production culture, with a particular emphasis on its unusual 'childishness'. These stories are repeated across various forms of media – newspaper articles, television broadcasts, behind the scenes documentaries – and what emerges is a sense of a place that collapses notions of age, which in turn enables it to create films that connect with as many people as possible. 'Normal' adult behaviour is replaced with 'childish' behaviour, yet always in a way that is controlled and safe, as demonstrated by one article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* by Jessi Hempel: 'In most companies, it's extremely bad form to deck your boss. Not so at Pixar, where Technical Director Bill Polson clocked the president over the head – many times – shortly after he was hired. His weapon: long, thin red balloons. His audience: 12 classmates, ranging from janitors to animators to executives. His motivation: the teachers told him to.'[20]

Such idiosyncratic behaviour is something that never seems to escape the attention of outside observers who come to visit Pixar, but it is also worth noting that the company goes out of its way to bring it to their attention. The implied address of Pixar's production narratives is aimed at an assumed audience of both children and those who would like to be children. This is of course not unique to Pixar; the Hollywood box office has long been dominated by what Robin Wood calls 'Lucas-Spielberg Syndrome', which he describes as, 'films that construct the adult spectator as a child, or, more precisely, as a childish adult, an adult who would like to be a child'.[21] In this vein, Pixar's promotional paratexts deliberately and consistently appeal to the childish adult.

One exemplary behind-the-scenes featurette on the *Finding Nemo* 2-Disc DVD shows how the company's promotional paratexts emphasise the 'childish' and 'wacky' nature of the workplace.[22] It begins with co-directors Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich recording dialogue with Alexander Gould, the young actor who provides the voice of Nemo, the film's eponymous clown fish. When Gould finishes his take and asks, 'How do you turn my voice into the talking fish on the movie?' Stanton offers him a studio tour so that he can 'see how [they] do it'. However, the director is soon distracted and led away by a crowd of employees, leaving Gould to show

himself around the building and seek out his own answers about the making of the movie.

Travelling around the building on roller shoes – mirroring the silver scooters that employees use – the boy explores various departments, including story, animation, character design, and lighting and effects. Pixar employees are consistently shown to be avoiding work where possible – juggling, playing video game tournaments, eating junk food and panicking whenever they suspect Stanton may be nearby. Their deliberately histrionic acting is complemented by cartoon aesthetics (music, sound effects and an iris-out ending), clearly signalling a tongue-in-cheek approach to the tour, masking its marketing function, and further downplaying any suggestion that Emeryville is a place of work. Along the way, Gould is helped by friendly employees who essentially teach him how to avoid working hard – encouraging him to engage in 'story think time' (i.e. napping), eating cookies and generally 'goofing off'.[23] Of particular significance here is the use of a child as the short film's point of identification, a device that is replicated across multiple Pixar DVDs. In a narrative that loosely mirrors *Finding Nemo* itself, the featurette ultimately makes light of the young boy's separation from adult authority figures (Stanton and Unkrich), and depicts Emeryville as hospitable, caring, nurturing and educational. However, Pixar's appeal is not limited to children or even the childish adult; the brand seeks to encompass all age brackets.

Architecture with a Plot: Reifying Pixar

Pixar's Emeryville studio has been described in a variety of laudatory terms, existing in the eyes of the media as a 'digital dream factory', 'an incubator for creative minds', 'a sprawling playground', 'an eclectic campus of free-spirited artists', and in the words of John Lasseter (Chief Creative Officer of Pixar and Walt Disney Animation), 'a home that reflects how cool [they] are'.[24] Labels such as 'campus' are used again and again to refer to the site, evoking images of universities and colleges – places that strive to be at the cutting edge of scientific, technological, philosophical and cultural thought. The term 'dream factory' is especially telling, evoking the glamorous reputations of classical Hollywood studios, and hinting at a place that

combines efficiency and productivity with limitless creative possibilities. Having appeared in at least three separate newspaper articles, in the United States and the United Kingdom, the term neatly captures the peculiar line that Pixar is seen to tread – between being a serious (and extremely successful) producer of culturally important films, and, to use Chloe Veltman's words, 'behaving like children'.[25]

Notice, however, that the above list of descriptions spans different stages of a person's life, from incubator, through to playground, campus, a factory and a home, reflecting the seamlessness with which the Pixar brand manages to slip between different age brackets; by extension, it is a brand one never outgrows, while Emeryville is positioned as a space that nurtures and develops *people* as well as films. But how do specific features of the studio play into this idea?

Karen Paik writes in her 2007 book *To Infinity and Beyond* that the Emeryville studio space was designed with two goals in mind: to 'renew the sense of community that had begun to dissipate in the company's piecemeal expansion', and 'to make sure that the new space wouldn't inadvertently kill the intangible "rough and tumble magic" that had flourished at [its previous headquarters in] Point Richmond'.[26] The suggestion is that Pixar's renowned creative culture was, at some point in the late-1990s, in danger of disappearing and that a new site was needed in order to restore or even enhance its effectiveness. This may simply be public relations rhetoric, but in terms of Pixar's reputation, it is the story, not its veracity, that is important here; the Emeryville studio space has consistently been depicted as an indispensible contributor to the company's success.

Co-founder and majority shareholder Steve Jobs was reportedly the most heavily involved executive in a design process intended to foster community and creativity, so much so that the building and its grounds are occasionally referred to as 'Steve's movie'.[27] Architecture firm Bohlin Cywinski Jackson was commissioned to design the building, which upon completion comprised a 200,000 square foot, two-storey construction of steel and brick, set amid 15 acres of landscaped grounds. Designed for 600 employees, master planning was also carried out for expansion to house over 1,000 employees in the future.[28] At the hub of the building lies a vast atrium, with the wall that houses the main entrance being comprised entirely of glass and steel. Filled with natural light, the atrium acts as a point that has to be

traversed regularly in order to get to different parts of the building, housing essential features such as eateries and restrooms, therefore encouraging employees from different departments to run into each other regularly throughout the day.[29]

As well as forming the core of Pixar's physical studio space, this area also serves as a central component of the discourses that surround the space, and the studio more generally. Almost every single article, interview or DVD feature that takes audiences or readers behind the scenes at Pixar will either mention the atrium explicitly or use it as a filming location. Accordingly, this communal space is positioned as the starting point not only for studio visitors ('corporeal travellers', as Urry would refer to them), but also for anybody interested in finding out about Pixar and its production culture.[30] Employees are routinely shown walking or riding scooters across this floor space as they go about their business, and frequent gatherings and company announcements are often shown to take place in the lobby. The consumer of these 'behind the scenes' features is thus positioned as a participant in the Pixar community, sharing in the studio's paper plane throwing competitions, or celebrating as the opening weekend box office figures for the latest film release are announced.[31] To employ Zahid Sardar's analogy of the atrium as Pixar's 'town square', reading about or watching footage from inside Emeryville is akin to accepting an invitation to become a citizen.[32]

The insider/outsider dichotomy discussed above becomes most apparent when considering which areas of Emeryville act as recurring motifs for journalists or camera crews visiting the studio. Aside from the atrium and its adjoining areas (which include a café and a free breakfast cereal bar), footage is often shot inside employees' offices, with Lasseter's toy-filled shelves providing by far the most common interview backdrop. Lasseter's 'childlike' behaviour has often been contrasted with his status as the creative head of Pixar (and, since 2006, Disney too), serving as the symbolic embodiment of what Pixar represents – the injection of a child's sense of creativity and fun into the serious business of filmmaking.[33]

Animator Andrew Gordon's office also acts as a common stopping point, but this is no reflection of his status within the company. In fact, Gordon himself is generally not named, or mentioned only in passing; it is his *office*, or rather, one specific part of it, that takes centre stage. For example, in Jeffrey Young and William

Simon's biography of Steve Jobs, this space is the only part of Emeryville to be mentioned except the atrium. As they put it, 'Off in one corner [of the building] is a waist-high passageway into the Love Lounge, a stainless-steel lounge for on-the-job relaxing that embodies the unique spirit of the place.'[34]

Reports about the Love Lounge speak to the heart of the Pixar brand. The space is actually an air-conditioning shaft that Gordon (purportedly) 'discovered' in his office and subsequently decorated with furniture, fabrics, photographs and a variety of 'kitsch' items before it eventually became popular among employees (and the media) for its unusualness. Young and Simon's implication that the Love Lounge was intentionally part of the building's design is thus misleading, but also telling with regard to how readily they attribute an unusual feature to Pixar's creative vision. Their use of the phrase 'on-the-job relaxing' illustrates the way in which discourses surrounding Emeryville (and Pixar more generally) combine vocational words and/or descriptions of labour with contrasting leisure terminology. I contend that the Love Lounge features so heavily in reports of Emeryville precisely because it is seen to embody 'the unique spirit' of Pixar – the studio brand in microcosm.

Just as DVD bonus features can position viewers as inquisitive insiders, the Love Lounge performs a clear marketing function, existing as a 'hidden' area of Pixar which itself is normally inaccessible to the public, waiting to be discovered by skilled explorers. Clearly there is a contradiction here, in the sense that images and descriptions of this 'secret' area are among the most widely publicised features of the entire studio. For example, when *New York Times* journalist Rick Lyman was given a tour of the studio prior to writing an article about Pixar, at least three separate people asked whether he had 'visited the Love Lounge yet'.[35] This strongly suggests that Pixar are keen for certain areas of the studio to be seen (and therefore written about and discussed) far more than others, insisting that all visitors are shown and educated about very specific features of Emeryville – those that echo symbolic and thematic notions about what the studio is seen to represent. It is, to use Beth Dunlop's phrase, 'architecture with a plot'.[36]

The 'Studio Stories' DVD bonus features afford a clear picture of what 'plot' might mean in Pixar's case. The series is comprised of simple 2-D animated versions of 'behind the scenes' anecdotes, and each one concludes with the line, '99% true,

as far as we remember it!' signalling the studio's self-consciously 'knowing' mythologisation of its own history. The emphasis is on extra-curricular opportunities and social activities, while intensive labour and stressful obstacles are consistently downplayed. 'The Movie Vanishes', for example, details a moment when enormous portions of the data files for *Toy Story 2* were accidentally deleted, yet the animation style, music and sound effects turn the episode into a light-hearted yarn.[37] In the 'Where's Gordon?' instalment of the series, the eponymous animator's discovery of the Love Lounge – finding a mysterious key and hatch, crawling down it and building a 'secret spot' to hide away from his superiors – echoes well-known children's stories such as *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. He ends by documenting the range of guests who have visited the lounge, and then concluding, 'If those walls could talk, it'd be really something to hear.'[38] It is a line that could equally refer to the media coverage the studio has received since it began making movies, which celebrates the room while simultaneously reinforcing its exclusivity. But while this chapter has so far examined the understandings that such discourses establish regarding Emeryville and the production culture it accommodates, the next section connects these discourses to those concerning Pixar's films.

Underlying Carpentry?: Linking On-Screen and Off-Screen Pixar

To what extent have off-screen Pixar (enacted through coverage of its production culture) and on-screen Pixar (located in reviews of the studio's films) impacted upon the other? Gérard Genette argues that paratexts act as 'thresholds' or 'vestibules' between the inside and outside of a text, but as illustrative as this metaphor is, it implies a hierarchical relationship between text and paratext that often does not apply.[39] Firstly, it suggests that the reader/viewer encounters the paratext *before* the text, which may not be the case, especially in relation to DVD featurettes. Secondly, the word paratext itself means 'beyond or distinct from, but analogous to' another text, thus diminishing the relative significance of the object to which it refers.[40] In Pixar's case the flow of meaning between coverage of its production culture and the critical reception of its films is difficult to gauge. Ideas and values spread across multiple media platforms, both before and after the films have been

released. Although I do not claim a direct causal relationship between off-screen and on-screen discourses, the clear overlaps between them, outlined in this final section, do suggest that they are at least mutually reinforcing.

Whatever their responses to a particular film, critics appear to struggle to review Pixar without talking about the studio's reputation; the film's 'value' is defined less by its formal, stylistic or narrative composition, and more in relation to intangible or ambiguous qualities such as success, reliability and innovation. As *The New York Times*'s A. O. Scott wrote in 2008, 'We've grown accustomed to expecting surprises from Pixar, but *Wall-E* surely breaks new ground.'[41] This reputation is a multifaceted discourse, but there does appear to be a correlation between the production narratives described above and the specific ways in which reviewers contextualise their assessments of Pixar's films. Critics repeatedly invoke the studio's production culture as evidence to support their evaluative claims, as the following examples demonstrate. In *The New York Times*, Scott wrote of the *Toy Story* series: '[P]erhaps only Pixar, a company Utopian in its faith in technological progress, artisanal in its devotion to quality and nearly unbeatable in its marketing savvy, could have engineered a sweeping capitalist narrative of such grandeur and charm as the *Toy Story* features.'[42] In reviewing *Up* for *Variety*, Todd McCarthy wrote: 'As Pixar's process is increasingly analysed, the more one appreciates the care that goes into the writing. The underlying carpentry here [in *Up*] is so strong, it seems it would be hard to go too far wrong in the execution.'[43]

These quotes show that knowledge of the company's production culture is clearly not only infiltrating reviews of Pixar's films but also influencing the critics' judgement. The phrase 'underlying carpentry' is particularly revealing, referring to both the structure of *Up*'s on-screen narrative *and* the labour processes that went into its creation. Once these production narratives have been deployed within the review, they then sit as markers of distinction. While the first quote explicitly postulates that 'only Pixar' could have achieved such on-screen results, the second seems to be suggesting that the success of *Up* was inevitable; both writers base their musings purely on their knowledge of the studio's well-publicised drive towards creativity and collaboration.

We can also observe a crossover in terms of point of identification, as it seems significant that the critical reception of Pixar is littered with references to its films' multi-generational appeal. McCarthy, for example, reviewing *The Incredibles* (2004), wrote that the 'script is so packed with wit and imagination on multiple levels that viewers of all ages will feel in on the joke'.[44] *The Washington Post*'s Desson Thomson suggested that the same film is 'the best and brightest family-friendly movie of the year. Not that you need a family to enjoy this. You could take someone else's kids. Or just go yourself.'[45]

Of course, repeated allusions to the age of Pixar's perceived target market are partly a testament to the 'kids only' stigma that has long affected the cultural value of animation.[46] Yet the fact that the critics' claims so closely parallel studio discourses speaks to the success of Pixar's brand construction. In legitimating the hitherto stigmatised animated film for adult consumption, Pixar by extension becomes a brand that brings parents and children closer together, and/or enables the adult viewer to (re)connect with his/her own fondly nostalgic memories of childhood. *The Wall Street Journal*'s Joe Morgenstern was so charmed by *Toy Story 3* that he wrote, 'By now … the song ['You've Got a Friend in Me'] can also speak for a studio that's become our friend. In an era of increasingly cheesy sequels churned out by entertainment conglomerates, Pixar has been the Fort Knox of honest feelings, and so it remains.'[47] This is a remarkable statement from a film critic; Morgenstern does not see Pixar as an organisation, but as a *friend* – a character or personality that any brand strategist would have been proud to cultivate. Note, however, that these critical reception discourses are not simply about production culture, but about the brand as a whole. Said *The New York Times*' Stephen Holden:
'The humor bubbling through *Finding Nemo* is so fresh, sure of itself and devoid of the cutesy, saccharine condescension that drips through so many family comedies that you have to wonder what it is about the *Pixar technology that inspires the creators to be so endlessly inventive*'.[48] The emphasised line in this quotation closely parallels Lasseter's oft-repeated mantra, 'Technology inspires art, and art challenges the technology.'[49] These examples suggest that the production culture at Pixar is just one part (albeit a crucial one) of the studio brand. This broader reputation covers far more than just Emeryville and the people who work there. The texts and paratexts

that carry the brand may be diverse, but, as I have shown, the set of values that pervades them is both incredibly consistent, and reflected in the critical reception of the studio's films.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Pixar's commodification of Emeryville adds value to its films by combining seemingly disparate elements of its own identity; the brand manages to exude inclusivity *and* exclusivity, sophistication *and* frivolity, and its films manage to be both forward-thinking *and* nostalgic.[50] Although Emeryville and its production culture is clearly shown to play an important role in the critical consensus that surrounds Pixar and its work, it seems to me that this has less to do with the building's specific features than simply the fact that it is a physical space for the reification of the brand's intangible qualities. Like the individual cubicles that Pixar animators are encouraged to wreck, decorate, paint on or reconstruct to their own design and specifications, Emeryville is a canvas upon which abstract notions of what the studio represents can become three-dimensional.[51]

---

[1] Jonah Lehrer, 'Animating a blockbuster: How Pixar built *Toy Story 3*', *Wired*, 24 May 2010, http://www.wired.com/magazine/2010/05/process_pixar/all/1; Sam Leith, 'WALL-E: How Pixar found its shiny metal soul', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 22 June 2008, 10; Paul McInnes, 'Inside Pixar: "I haven't thought about anything but *Toy Story 3* for four years', *The Guardian*, 7 July 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/video/2010/jul/07/pixar-toy-story-3-making.

[2] While Emeryville is a small town in Alameda County, California, throughout this article all mentions of Emeryville refer specifically to the Pixar studio space and grounds.

[3] William C. Taylor and Polly LaBarre, 'How Pixar adds a new school of thought to Disney', *The New York Times*, 29 January 2006, Sec. 3, 3.

[4] Bill Capodagli and Lynn Jackson, *Innovate the Pixar Way: Business lessons from the world's most creative corporate playground* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010), ix.

[5] For an overview of approaches to branding, see Leslie de Chernatony and Francesca Dall'Olmo Riley, 'Defining a "Brand": Beyond the Literature With Experts' Interpretations', *Journal of Marketing Management* 14 (1998), 417-43. Teemu Moilanen and Seppo Rainisto, *How to Brand Nations, Cities and Destinations: A Planning Book for Place Branding* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 6.

[6] Celia Lury, *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy* (London: Routledge, 2004), 22.

[7] Eileen Meehan, '"Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!": The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext', eds Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio, *The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and his Media* (London: Routledge, 1991), 47-65.

[8] Ibid., 47-8.

[9] Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (London: New York University Press, 2010), 3.

[10] Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: Meaning and Value in Media Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006), 8.

[11] Craig Hight, 'Making-of Documentaries on DVD: *The Lord of the Rings* Trilogy and Special Editions', *The Velvet Light Trap* 56 (Fall 2005), 4-17.

[12] Barbara Klinger, *Beyond the Multiplex: Cinema, New Technologies, and the Home* (London: University of California Press, 2006), 68.
[13] Craig Hight, 'Making-Of documentaries on DVD', 7; John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Cultures: Industrial reflexivity and critical practice in film and television* (London: Duke University Press, 2008), 283.
[14] Peter M. Nichols, 'Home Video: From directors, a word, or two', *The New York Times*, 6 September 2002, E26.
[15] Pixar and Disney were, at that time, engaged in a series of increasingly heated negotiations over the terms of the production contract between them. For more on this, see David Price, *The Pixar Touch: The Making of a Company* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008); Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus, 'The Digital Auteur: Branding identity on the *Monsters, Inc.* DVD', *Western Journal of Communication* 69, no. 2 (April 2005), 120-22.
[16] Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV: The studio system in the fifties* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 144. As well as the *Disneyland* series, also see Disney's live-action and animated behind-the-scenes movie, *The Reluctant Dragon* (1941).
[17] John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze* (London: Sage, 2002), 2-3.
[18] Ibid., 2, 111.
[19] Leith, 'WALL-E: How Pixar found its shiny metal soul', 10.
[20] Jessi Hempel, 'Pixar University: Thinking Outside the Mouse', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 June 2003, http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/gate/archive/2003/06/04/pixar.DTL.
[21] Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 162-3.
[22] 'Studio Tour', *Finding Nemo*, 2-Disc Collector's Edition, DVD, directed by Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich (Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment, 2003).
[23] Ibid.
[24] Rick Lyman, 'A digital dream factory in Silicon Valley; Pixar's new digs coddle animators, writers and tech heads', *The New York Times*, 11 June 2002, E1; Sean P. Means, 'Playing at Pixar', *Salt Lake Tribune*, 30 May 2003, D1; Susan Wloszczyna, 'Pixar whiz reanimates Disney', *USA Today*, 9 March 2006, 1D; Robert La Franco, 'Creative Drive: Suits are out. Hawaiian shirts are in with John Lasseter and Ed Catmull at Disney', *Hollywood Reporter*, 9 June 2006, 43; Glenn Whipp, *The Daily News of Los Angeles*, 30 May 2003, U6.
[25] As well as Rick Lyman's article above, see Alun Palmer, 'Inside Pixar's dream factory', *The Mirror*, 13 July 2010, 28-29; Chuck Barney, 'Monster Mash: Pixar expands', *Contra Costa Times*, 1 November 2001, C3. See also Chuck Barney, '"Slumdog Millionaire" is top dog at the Oscars', *San Jose Mercury News*, 22 February 2009, http://www.mercurynews.com/lottery/ci_11763654; Chloe Veltman, 'Fun Factory', *The Telegraph*, 31 December 2001, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4727218/Fun-factory.html.
[26] Karen Paik, *To Infinity and Beyond: The Story of Pixar Animation Studios* (London: Virgin Books, 2007), 167-8.
[27] Ibid., 168. Also see Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 243-4.
[28] BCJ.com, 'Pixar studios and headquarters', http://www.bcj.com/public/projects/project/39.html.
[29] Paik, *To Infinity and Beyond*, 168.
[30] Urry, 152-6.
[31] Events such as these have been common fixtures of Pixar DVD bonus features in the past.
[32] Zahid Sardar, 'Pixar Unbound', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 February 2002, Magazine, 26.
[33] See for example, Veltman, 'Fun Factory'.
[34] Jeffrey S. Young and William L. Simon, *iCon: Steve Jobs – The greatest second act in the history of business* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 308.
[35] Lyman, 'A digital dream factory in Silicon Valley', E1.
[36] Beth Dunlop, *Building a Dream: The art of Disney architecture* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 13.
[37] 'Studio Stories: The Movie Vanishes', *Toy Story 2*, Special Edition, Blu-Ray/DVD, directed by John Lasseter (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2012).
[38] 'Studio Stories: Where's Gordon?', *Toy Story 3*, 2-Disc Double Play Edition, Blu-Ray/DVD, directed by Lee Unkrich (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2010).
[39] Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 2.
[40] Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 6.
[41] A. O. Scott, 'In a World Left Silent, One Heart Beeps', *The New York Times*, 27 June 2008, E1.

[42] A. O. Scott, 'Voyage to the Bottom of the Day Care Center', *The New York Times*, 17 June 2010, C1.
[43] Todd McCarthy, '"Up" Hits Rarefied Heights', *Variety*, 18-24 May 2009, 29.
[44] Todd McCarthy, 'Incredibles Indeed!', *Variety*, 1-7 November 2004, 27.
[45] Desson Thomson, '"Incredibles": One Super Family', *The Washington Post*, 5 November 2004, T35.
[46] Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (London, Routledge: 2004), 56-93.
[47] Joe Morgenstern, 'An Ode to "Toy"', *Wall Street Journal*, 16 July 2010, http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052748704289504575312602886439646
[48] Stephen Holden, 'Film Review: Vast Sea, Tiny Fish, Big Crisis', *The New York Times*, 30 May 2003, E1. Emphasis added.
[49] See, for example, Jonah Lehrer, 'Steve Jobs: "Technology Alone Is Not Enough"', *The New Yorker*, 7 October 2011, http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2011/10/steve-jobs-pixar.html.
[50] Colleen Montgomery, 'Woody's Roundup and Wall-E's Wunderkammer: Technophilia and Nostalgia in Pixar Animation', *Animation Studies* 6 (2011), 7-13.
[51] Paik, *To Infinity and Beyond*, 170-171.