

Domesticity, Nostalgia, and the Post-Industrial Spaces of Disney Dogs

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In the whole history of the world there is but one thing
money can not buy... to wit – the wag of a dog's tail.

--Josh Billings

Thus begins the 1955 Disney animated feature, *Lady and the Tramp*. The Billings quotation is useful in underscoring not only the sentimental position occupied by dogs in Disney films, but the degree to which Disney dogs are defined by structures of capitalism. Though the quotation indicates that dogs fall outside of the capitalist system – their affection cannot be bought – in the Disney universe dogs are in fact inextricably linked to the use of commodities and to the patriarchal structures that replicate and reinforce capitalist logic. As central figures in mid-twentieth century Disney live action features (*Old Yeller*, *Big Red*) and the mid-century animated features that are the focus of this essay (*Lady and the Tramp*, *101 Dalmatians*), and as both commodities themselves and users of commodities, Disney's mid-twentieth canine characters remain extremely popular, harking back to an imaginary post-war idyll. In fact they also remain interesting as subjects of analysis because they inhabit a transient position in relation to dominant ideological formations, and on the fuzzy border between modernity and postmodernity. They relatively easily transgress boundaries between the urban, suburban, and rural, boundaries created by industrial processes – invisible, but still present – and the modern city, and at which humans prove less adept at navigating. Because the Disney studio itself, as a successful, diversifying and highly identifiable capitalist venture, was clearly invested in maintaining its own processes of production (processes that were notoriously exploitative of the Disney labor force), it is not surprising that Disney products like *Lady*

and the Tramp and *101 Dalmatians* diverted attention from relations of production and toward the suburban idyll.

Accounting in part for the transgressive nature of these particular canine characters is the fact that of all the animals in Disney's menagerie, the dog perhaps the least "other" (excluding, of course, more fully anthropomorphized characters like Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.) Dogs in Disney animated features like *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) and *101 Dalmatians* (1961) on the whole share human homes and concerns. While cats may seek to upset the social order – as do the Siamese cats in *Lady and the Tramp* – dogs loyally uphold it. The Disney dog is firmly ensconced in the world of humans, and its own well being is usually tied to the well being of its "owner". In our cultural mythology and reflected in the post-war Disney universe, the dog is like a member of the family and is thus part of the everyday.

The Production of Disney Dogs

In looking specifically at Disney dogs, it is important to note that like most Disney characters, these animals find themselves embedded in capitalist systems. Dorfman and Mattelart claim that all relationships in the Disney universe are compulsively consumerist (86), and they specifically argue that animals are particularly effective in Disney narratives, which generally seek to erase production from an object's history, because viewers tend to see little connection between animals (even domestic animals) and the forces of capitalist production and consumption. Because animals are "exempt from the vicissitudes of history and politics, they are convenient symbols of a world beyond socio-economic realities" (28). When the production process threatens to

become visible in Disney stories, radical action is necessary to keep it, and the socio-economic realities that create and accompany it, hidden. Such visibility might not only bring attention to an inequitable system of production from which Disney benefited and continues to benefit, but it might illustrate in another context the particular exploitive conditions under which Disney animators of the era toiled. In *101 Dalmatians*, production in an intensely unsavory form is present when Cruella De Vil converts "Hell Hall" into a Dalmatian fur farm. Demonstrating the link between Cruella's elaborate furs and the process by which furs are obtained would be an aberration in a Disney world that attempts to erase the paternity of objects. This is, however, the exception that proves the rule. Precisely because production can be as ghastly as the Dalmatians discover it to be, its presence must be covered over (the fur farm is closed before any Dalmatian puppies are killed) in order for the necessary system of consumption – within the narratives of Disney films, within the hierarchy of production at Disney studios, and within the structures of film distribution and consumption – to unproblematically continue.

The economic framework that supported the Disney empire was of special concern in the mid-twentieth century, a time usually characterized by prosperity in the United States. Animated features were the mainstay of Disney's success, but in the postwar years they generated profits so meager that they did not justify the financial risk they entailed. *Lady and the Tramp* was one of the few Disney animated features to make a profit during the 1950s, and unlike 1959's *Sleeping Beauty*, it was well received by critics (Maltin 74). In fact, as Leonard Maltin observes, *Lady and the Tramp* marked a departure for the studio by presenting a modern story, albeit one set earlier in the twentieth century (74). As an animated feature set in contemporary England, *101*

Dalmatians continued in this tradition. Both films are inseparable from the post-World War II context in which they were produced, initially read, and in which at least *101 Dalmatians* seems to be set. The ethic of consumption that particularly characterized the post-war flight of young middle-class couples to new suburbias is hyper-realized in *Lady and the Tramp* and *101 Dalmatians*. As subjects and objects, Disney dogs in these films find themselves occupying both urban and suburban settings and attempting to negotiate their positions inside and outside the twentieth-century metropolis.

Canine Subjectivities

Dorfman and Mattelart claim that animals in the Disney menagerie are ahistorical entities, objects on which capitalism readily inscribes itself. At times these dogs are regarded as mere objects. Lady, for example, comes to her female owner (known only as "Darling" in the film) from her male owner (known only as "Jim dear") as a Christmas gift, wrapped so that "Darling" initially mistakes the dog for a hat. Because she is a gift, however, it is rather easy for Lady to transcend object status. Gifts are inalienable objects: the identity of the gift is inseparable from the identities of both its giver and receiver. Therefore Lady, even if she were not a full-fledged subject in her own right, derives meaning as a gift from her relationship to the human couple (see Gregory 1982). Commodities, on the other hand, are alienable objects transacted by aliens. Unlike gifts, in transactions commodities are treated as private property, as things that can be owned (Gregory 43-5). In the Disney universe then, it may be more acceptable to exchange dogs as gifts than to buy or sell them as commodities, thus covering over the relations of

production. Was Lady sold to "Jim dear" as a commodity in a pet store? Raised for profit in a puppy mill? Lady's status as a gift obscures these problematic questions.

Similarly, production as depicted in *101 Dalmatians* is part of a consumption process that in some ways refuses to objectify dogs as mere commodities. For instance, the origins of the mature dogs in the film are never revealed. We are not sure how Pongo came to Mr. Dearly and Missis to Mrs. Dearly: we only know that the dogs are responsible for bringing the couple together. Pongo and Missis' puppies also resist commodification, most notably when the Dearlys declare that the twelve puppies are not for sale. Cruella De Vil, on the other hand, sees the dogs' only value in their commodity status. She prizes Missis and Pongo because they would go so well with her car, and with her black and white hair. During a visit to the Dearlys' house she picks up one of the puppies and holds him against her, as if he were something to be worn. Cruella demonstrates what it means to view animals solely as commodities, as mere pelts to be worn for the sake of fashion. Clearly this is an unacceptable point of view in the Disney universe.

Disney dogs do not successfully exist either as mere commodities or mere gifts. Beyond their object status, canine protagonists must demonstrate developed human subjectivities in order to serve as points of identification for the film audience. The combination of canine and human characteristics inherent in these examples of Disney dogs does not necessarily indicate a process of evolution for the dogs, but it points to their multiplicity. To use a Deleuzian term, a Disney dog acts as a "becoming-animal" or a "becoming-human" at various moments. "Becoming" in this sense does not imply a progression or regression, but it is still a real sort of transformation:

The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being is becoming is not; and the becoming-other of the animal is real, even if that something other is not.

(Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 238)

Deleuze and Guattari describe the "becoming" entity as a rhizome, an assemblage, an anti-genealogy. For both human and canine characters, becoming is not a question of "playing" a human (in the case of the dogs) or an animal (in the case of the humans). It is not an imitation:

Becomings-animal [or other] are basically of another power, since their reality resides not in an animal [or other] one imitates or to which one corresponds but in themselves, in that which sweeps us up and makes us become—a proximity, an indiscernibility that extracts a shared element from the animal [or other] far more effectively than any domestication, utilization, or imitation could:

"The Beast." (*A Thousand Plateaus* 279)

Certainly dogs are not the only "becoming" subjects in the Disney scheme. Cruella De Vil, for instance, is a quintessential "becoming animal" because she embodies cruel, "primitive" traits in a more or less human form. Pongo and Missis are able to justify their desire to tear her to bits, even though for them it is strictly taboo to bite humans, by defining Cruella as not human.

Deleuze and Guattari might well classify Pongo, Missis, Lady, Tramp, and most other Disney dogs as "Oedipal animals," each a family pet "with its own petty history, [as in] 'my' cat, 'my' dog"; and all are animals that "invite us to regress, draw us into

narcissistic contemplation, and they are the only kind of animal that psychoanalysis understands" (*A Thousand Plateaus*, 240). The dogs' owners in *101 Dalmatians* and *Lady and the Tramp* indeed display regressive and narcissistic tendencies in the presence of their pets, but Oedipal identification also works the other way. The pets act as mirrors for human psyches, yet the Disney dogs themselves conform to psychoanalytic notions of human subject formation by experiencing significant moments of self-recognition.

During Lady's first night with the Dearlys she, still a young puppy, discovers her abilities to both open the door to the kitchen in which she has been locked and to persuade the Dearlys through mournful howling to free her from further confinement. A more Lacanian moment of subject formation occurs in *101 Dalmatians*. The thugs hired by Cruella De Vil to stay at Hell Hall with the dognapped puppies are television addicts, so the Dalmatian pups spend much of their time watching TV. Though they do not completely follow the narratives of television shows, the puppies like the little moving figures, and they watch in perpetual hope of seeing figures like themselves – dogs – on the screen.

Because Disney dogs experience pseudo-human moments of subject formation, it is not surprising that they are able to enter into language. Still, in keeping with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome, Disney dog language is neither distinctly canine nor human but is instead an assemblage. *Lady and Tramp* are unable to communicate with humans through a recognizable language, but they are able to converse with particular dogs and zoo animals (specifically, an alligator and a bear.) Moreover, they possess the ability to read English. Pongo and Missis are somewhat more successful as human language users: they are able to bark the word "Wuffolk" to indicate to the Dearlys that

the puppies are being held in Suffolk – even though the Dearlys disregard this information. The most complex and efficacious use of language occurs in *101 Dalmatians* between a sheepdog and a five-year-old boy who have devised a half-dog, half-human language.

Whatever its relationship to human language, the language of Disney dogs is selectively employed to maintain territorial and ideological boundaries. In situations where real dogs would be expected to make aggressive noises (snarls, barks) and employ dominance postures to defend what is theirs, Disney dogs talk. Jock, a Scottish terrier, keeps Lady away from his stash of bones by distracting her with gossip. Jock thus not only establishes himself as a commodity owner, but the thick Scottish brogue he uses throughout the film, including in the scene in which he hordes bones, identifies him with the stereotype of Scottish people as stingy. Tramp gains Lady's attention in a group of dogs by describing how human family circumstances change when a baby arrives. Language is further used to position the dogs as gendered subjects. The generically feminine names "Lady" and "Missis," conferred by humans and circulated by dogs, interpellate canines into the same patriarchal system that structures human social relations.

"Becoming human" therefore seems largely to do with creating and observing certain boundaries and upholding an ordered system. Disney dogs, constructed as "becomings human," are significantly less "other" than most Disney animals. The Siamese cats in *Lady and the Tramp*, for instance, delight in upsetting the domestic balance instituted by humans, and Lady desperately tries to re-establish it. Moreover, the Siamese cats are distinctly coded as "other" by the exaggerated Asian accents in which

they speak and sing and their stereotypically slanted eyes. They are exotic in comparison to the round-eyed, family-oriented, human-identified dogs, and they are depicted as inscrutable “Orientals” who are unfathomable to the dogs. They are also, like so many cinematic others, troublemakers. Perhaps they are not troublemakers on the scale of traditional stock film characters like Arab terrorists or African-American criminals (see Sturken and Cartwright), but as they threaten to wreak havoc with treasured emblems of suburban domestic life – upsetting vases, clawing furnishing – they create a kind of terror for the dogs.

These examples indicate that what Disney dogs and other animals express through their words and actions is as important as the fact that they understand and use language. Of particular significance is the emphasis placed on commodity ownership. The dogs of "Snob Hill" in *Lady and the Tramp* don't count bones as their only possessions: they also take great pride in owning tags and collars that mark their assimilation into suburban society. Tramp is initially declared by Lady and her friends to be outside of the system, and therefore a threat, because he owns nothing. The threat intensifies as Lady and Tramp grow increasingly attracted to each other and verbally express the human-like "love" that they feel. Language is a means by which these canines are able articulate their integration into capitalism and the familial, patriarchal order.

Canines in Post-Industrial Spaces

The positions into which Disney dogs are interpellated always exist within late capitalism. Tramp's lack of material possessions makes him unacceptable to the upper middle-class dogs of Lady's circle, because this lack points to his refusal to be tied down

to one home. His slangy way of speaking evokes at the very least a working class identity, and some might identify it as an African-American vernacular. Tramp therefore exists in the economic, social, and geographical margins. His vindication occurs when he risks his life to defend suburban America's most sacred institution – the family – by killing a rat that invades "Jim dear" and "Darling's" home and tries to attack their baby. Tramp's happy domestication at the end of the film is a welcome into the world of consumerism in which dogs are in fact, if not in the film, both commodities and commodity users. This final scene takes place, as does the first scene of the movie, at Christmas, which by the mid-twentieth century in the United States had largely become a festival of consumerism.

The invasion of the rat, an irretrievably feral creature from the urban forbidden zone, into suburban domestic space is an especially telling episode. Its placement in the suburban home underscores the degree to which, as Roger Silverstone explains, “The suburban household has struggled hard to contain the anxieties generated by its increasing dependence on, and vulnerability to, the events... which take place beyond its front door: anxieties generated by fears... of threats of physical and symbolic violence” (6); in this case, the violence represented by an unsavory form of urban nature suburban dwellers sought to escape in suburbia’s manicured idyll. It also interestingly points to how, as both "becomings human" and "becomings animal", Disney dogs are able to at the same time identify with the values of their human companions and understand the ways of non-domesticated animals. Lady and Tramp are attuned enough to their predatory animal faculties to sense the rodent's presence, yet emotionally they are human, placing the protection of the human baby above all else. This combination of qualities

necessarily creates a tension, for while to become human has mainly to do with placing limits,

To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out a path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone.

(Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 13).

In becoming animal then, a line of flight is found that enables one to transverse spaces, and the animal-human assemblage is able to occupy the borders. In *101 Dalmatians*, although Pongo and Missis are products of a sort of suburb in the city, they find themselves able to make do in the untamed frontiers outside: the wilds of the English countryside. What is "outside" in *Lady and the Tramp* is the urban jungle, Tramp's milieu, but Tramp is able to cross into suburban space, at first uncomfortably, as an outsider. Similarly, Lady finds herself spending a frightening night without Tramp in the city pound, yet she is able to adapt to, though not embrace, the lifestyle of the dogs in this ghetto. All four dogs are thus able to cross into other terrains; and for Lady and Tramp, this ability to transverse middle class suburbia and the inner city urban forces them to live, through their relationship, the tension that underscores the divisions of the modern city. (Tensions that development of parklands in the 19th and 20th centuries sought to in part alleviate, and which continue to underlie attempts to recreate miniature pastoral spaces in urban environments; see for instance, Kruse 2003). Suburbs, so idyllically represented in these Disney films, in fact often arose as capitalist ventures underwritten by streetcar and utility companies, and suburbia's continued existence depends on

commodity consumption as in index of social status and a vehicle for family togetherness.

The connection between industrialization's nasty side effects and suburban life is, however, ignored in Disney products, which make actual production virtually invisible, and therefore indices of industrialization suffice to metonymize the process. *Lady and the Tramp's* invading rat carries with it the threat posed to the suburban nuclear family by urban industrialization: the threat of the ugly, disease-ridden, feral struggle for survival depicted by so many representations of city life during and after the Industrial Revolution. Like the rat, Tramp comes from outside the secure domestic surroundings of "Snob Hill" suburbia. Yet as Marjorie Garber points out, he is a mongrel, a cross-bred, a mutt. A cross-bred dog was culturally acceptable in the 1950s: indeed, Garber argues that in American mythology the mutt represents "resilience, ingenuity, energy in overcoming obstacles" like other traditional American (and I would add, almost exclusively male) heroes, the cowboy and the self-made man (199). A cross-bred human character of the 1950s might be equally able to occupy marginal spaces, but undoubtedly in a less heroic way. For Tramp though, the hybrid composition of his subjectivity allows him, unlike the rat, to move successfully across the threshold that divides alien exteriority and the enclosed space of the suburban home (see Bourdieu, de Certeau). In de Certeau's sense of the term, Tramp represents a bridge, a transgression of a limit.

Postwar Spaces

The culturally inscribed tension between inside and outside, between the home and the exterior world, though always present in some form, seems especially significant

during the postwar years during which both *Lady and the Tramp* and *101 Dalmatians* were created. While popular memory tends to represent the 1950s and early 1960s in the U.S. as a period of domestic stability, this time was also a time of upheaval. With the end of World War II society had to readjust in order to accommodate returning soldiers. Ex-GI's saddled with memories of war had to find ways to fit back into society, and women who had been encouraged to enter the workforce during the war were now urged in the popular media to return home and perfect their skills as housewives. Buying a comfortable suburban home specifically designed to facilitate family "togetherness" was a popular way for young couples to negotiate the tensions of the postwar era (Spigel, "Television in the Family Circle" 78).

Migrating to the suburbs allowed Americans to remove themselves from the evils and uncertainties of urban life without giving up the advantages cities could offer. Postwar urban renewal efforts, which sought to provide "a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family" proved unsuccessful and have in fact worsened living conditions in inner cities (Boorstin, 285). Rather than trying to improve their urban living environments, middle-class couples and families fled to the suburbs. The move took place on a massive scale: between 1950 and 1960 the suburban population in the United States grew by 17 million (287). According to Margaret Morse, "suburbia is itself an attempt via serial production to give everyman and everywife the advantages of the city at the edge of the natural world" (196). Suburban utopias seemed to offer safe, predictable havens from cities: in the suburbs children could be raised in wholesome environments. Unlike the urban centers that supported cultural hodgepodes, the suburbs were sold to the public by virtue of their separateness. They promised young

white families "homogenous islands" where families were separated according to class, ethnicity, and religion (Boorstin, 267).

Postwar isolationist discourses articulated the desirability of both nation and community as "homogenous islands," and itself this isolationist structure of feeling was also played out within the family. Suburban families closed in on themselves. Instead of celebrating the extended family characteristic of cosmopolitan population centers, suburban existence emphasized the nuclear family as the primary social unit. In her analysis of popular discourses surrounding television during the 1950s, Lynn Spigel argues that there was an overwhelming concern with the distinction between public and private, or outside and inside, space. Spectator amusements, traditionally viewed only in the public realm, were transported into domestic space; and discursive strategies employed to negotiate the introduction of television into the home often intersected with discourses seeking to reassert the insularity of the domestic sphere (Spigel 1988). In part, the 1950s witnessed a return to the Victorian ideal of the home as the family's spiritual center. However, in the mid-twentieth century the seemingly self-sufficient family home extolled by the "cult of domesticity" was, paradoxically, dependent on mass-mediated information and community institutions to define what properly constituted the public and private spheres:

The ideology of privacy was not experienced simply as a retreat from the public sphere; instead, it gave people a sense of belonging to the community. By purchasing their detached suburban homes, the young couples of the middle class were given and new, and flattering, definition of themselves; in newspapers, magazines,

advertisements and on the airwaves, these young couples came to be the cultural representations of the "good life".... In paradoxical terms, then, privacy was something which could be enjoyed only in the company of others. (Spigel, "Installing the Television Set" 14)

In addition, the communities of which these young middle-class couples felt a part were not always defined by geographical boundaries. One suburb was remarkably like the next. As Daniel Boorstin observes:

.... to move from almost any suburb to almost any other of comparable class anywhere else in the United States was like moving from one part of a neighborhood to another. With few exceptions, the products and services available, and the residence itself were only slightly different. (291)

With the widespread use of central air conditioning as well as central heat, even the climate remained fairly constant across suburbs in different parts of the country.

Furthermore, from within privatized, climate-controlled dwellings, suburbanites were able to feel connected to nationwide "communities" through the introduction of new communication technologies like television into the home (see Morse).

In both *Lady and the Tramp* and *101 Dalmatians*, twentieth century suburban islands are sites of contestation between the cult of domesticity and the undomesticated remnants of the old metropolis. As has already been noted, Tramp embodies elements of both worlds. The pivotal moment in the narrative takes place when Tramp openly sides with suburban (the baby) against the urban (the rat). Significantly, both movies end with the reclamation of domestic space from invasive forces: in *Lady and the Tramp*, the dogs

kill the rat – a marker of urbanization's dark underbelly – that threatens the human family (and thus they win the right to begin their own family.) In *101 Dalmatians*, the Dearlys decide to move their large family of dogs out of the city, so they purchase and renovate Hell Hall, the former de Vil estate. The Dearlys are in effect reclaiming space tainted by the overt production of turning Dalmatian puppies into fur coats and turning it into a domestic haven, a site dedicated to consumption, not production. The fact that dogs in both cases are keys to the reclamation of a domestic idyll should not be surprising. As Christena Nipper-Eng notes in her book Home and Work, pets tend to be regarded as "home-related significant others," and for this reason their photos may often be found as markers of the absent domestic sphere in workers' offices (72).

Lady, Tramp, Pongo, and Missis, domestically identified but occupying and transversing capitalism's spatial frontiers in attempts to negotiate the tensions within industrial and post-industrial society, at the ends of their stories find themselves inhabiting homogenous suburban islands. The trajectory followed in the films constitutes a utopian retelling of the struggle during the 1950s to maintain order in the face of post-World War II social change, and in the Cold War. Positing a domestic idyll was part of the process, and the domesticated dog became an ideological site in this struggle. In *Dog Love*, author Marjorie Garber observes that in a 1993 television special about 1950s canine icon Lassie, family values were frequently mentioned as an important quality associated with Lassie. Lassie was described in the documentary as representing "a time when things were a little more peaceful, and little more decent—and safer for all of us" (Garber 59).

The domestic idyll of Lassie and the Disney dogs was a myth, and suburbs were not refuges from societal and familial upheaval, but representations like those in *101 Dalmatians* and *Lady and the Tramp* are part of a discourse that imagines the 1950s as a utopian and that therefore evokes an always-absent past. By celebrating the everyday and contributing to nostalgia for the centrality of private domestic experience, these Disney narratives implicitly reinforce what Henri Lefebvre refers to as the "over-repressive society," a society that entrusts repressive duties to the primary institutions of domestic suburban life: the family, the home, the father (145-146).

Nostalgia for naturalized, and therefore apparently innocent, forms of compulsion is founded on absence and loss. *Lady and the Tramp* and *101 Dalmatians* are allusions to a text which, as Susan Stewart notes in her discussion of the miniature, "is no longer available to us, or which, because of its fictiveness, never was available to us except through a second-order fictive world (60). Nostalgic narratives deny the authenticity of the present by privileging and idealized past. We desire "the way things used to be" even though they were in fact never that way. Popular representations operate to make any difference between the actual past and the imagined past irrelevant:

The nostalgic's utopia is prelapsarian, a genesis where lived and mediated experience are one, where authenticity and transcendence are both present and everywhere. The crisis of the sign, emerging between the material nature of the former and the abstract and historical nature of the latter...is denied by the nostalgic's utopia, a utopia where authenticity suffuses both word and world. (Stewart 23)

The need to hold onto an ideal which is also in some way tangible fuels utopian reconstructions that declare the mythic past to be more real than the material present. Narratives like *Lady and the Tramp* and *101 Dalmatians* attempt to resolve the tension between the historical present and an imagined past by representing suburbia as both a limit, a place where urban invaders and industrial production are not allowed, and a fluid space where dogs at least have some freedom in a “between” place to explore and expand subjective awareness. Roger Silverstone sees suburbia as emerging from the “search for the perfect marriage of nature and culture” (5). In his ethnography of an elite Pennsylvania suburb, John Dorst argues the suburb is a privileged site of postmodernity, enabling the sort of multiplicity experienced by canine characters in Disney's fictional suburbs, because of:

...the way it foregrounds in everyday life the pervasiveness of the commodity form, of the simulacrum, of spectacle and an economy of sign exchange, to borrow some of the designations that have been assigned to late consumer capitalism. The suburb is the emblem in social life not of some cultural core with an identifiable content, but of the de-centered condition of postmodernity in general. (3)

Perhaps Disney dogs of the post-war era, by crossing, collapsing, and sometimes erasing the spaces between suburban and urban, nature and culture, inside and outside, commodity and subject, animal and human, are the quintessential postmodern subjects, inhabiting idealized positions from which they negotiate the conflicts and contradictions of post-industrial society's material realities and imagined past.

Canine Practices

Although they are fictional characters, Disney dogs, like all of us, are constrained by the social, economic, and political structures of the capitalist setting in which they were created and continue to be read. Canine characters are therefore both implicated in capitalism as commodities, commodity owners and users, and inhabitants of urban and suburban spaces and allowed because of their hybrid subjectivities a degree of flexibility unimaginable for human characters. In fact, Disney dogs go beyond the accepted human avenues of operation and construct their own systems that mirror, and often prove more effective than, human techniques. The twilight barking in *101 Dalmatians* is a prime example. At twilight dogs across England send gossip through the twilight barking network. From central London Pongo and Missis are able to bark the message that their puppies are missing, and the location of the Dalmatian puppies is relayed back to Missis and Pongo from dogs in faraway Suffolk. The twilight barking and the network of canine hosts to feed and house Pongo and Missis established along the route to Suffolk works far better to locate and rescue the pups than the traditional human methods – offering rewards, placing advertisements in newspapers – employed by the Dearlys.

When it comes to truly efficacious activity, whether it is rescuing pups from Cruella or protecting a human baby from a rat attack, methods used by Disney dogs prove superior to human initiatives. Like their human counterparts, however, the dogs are channeled into particular modes of action by the limits and possibilities of their environments. In Bourdieu's terms, the dogs inhabit a specific habitus constituted by systems of durable, transposable dispositions that exist within a particular conjuncture

(1977, 72-3). Within this habitus, the dogs are constrained to act in certain ways and utilize certain tools. Their struggles therefore largely take place on the terrain of de Certeau's "tactics," which Meaghan Morris describes as

localized ways of using what is made available – materials, opportunities, time and space for action – by the strategy of the other, and in "his" place. They depend on the arts of timing, a seizing of propitious moments, rather than on arts of colonizing space. (29)

Pongo and Missis' tactic of seizing the moment in their walk when they visit Primrose Hill in Regent Park, a human-colonized space, to enter into an information network is truly successful. The Dearlys never suspect that their dogs' insistence on barking at that particular time and in that place is a way of using structuring structures like the park and the walk for their own purposes.

Many of the tactics used by Disney dogs involve appropriating human-produced objects. Numerous examples in *101 Dalmatians* and *Lady and the Tramp* include: Pongo and Missis train large Dalmatian puppies to pull a toy wagon in order to transport weak puppies back to London; Missis abandons her dog bed and insists on whelping her litter in a storage closet; Tramp convinces a beaver to gnaw a muzzle off of Lady's head by telling him that the muzzle is a handy log-puller; and Lady tears the headlines out of the newspaper before presenting it to Jim Dear, presumably because he will then spend less directing his attention toward the outside world and more time concentrating on domestic life by paying attention to the "Lady" of the house.

In *101 Dalmatians* and *Lady and the Tramp*, the humans cannot hope to understand the intricacies of their dogs' social lives (and to some extent, the reverse is true), both human and canine systems co-exist on a plane that points their activities in similar directions. Even when canine tactics appear subversive, ultimately they are part of a struggle to preserve the interior, domestic spaces occupied by both human and canine families. Missis and Pongo call the Dearlys their "pets," but they never seek to subvert the structures that reinforce the belief that people own dogs. The Dalmatians rip to pieces Cruella's collection of assorted furs, but Missis is quite proud of her own blue winter coat. Cruella is permanently put out of the fur business by an army of dogs, but these dogs merely overthrow the evil capitalist, not the system itself. To say then that the wag of a dog's tail cannot be bought is rather misleading. The tail is not an autonomous entity, and the Disney dog to which it is attached most likely wags it harder when he or she knows that struggle taking place on the symbolic terrain of suburbia is being won by the domestic values of the post-war, post-industrial, and increasingly postmodern, world of Disney.

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