

Of Male Friendship and Spirals in *The Lion King*, *Vertigo* and the *American Pie* Saga

By Marc Démont, University of South Carolina, United States

Abstract:

In this article, I will argue that the real originality of 'The Lion King' is not to reproduce an umpteenth version of a somewhat dubious Freudian reading of the oedipal complex, but the fact that the threat depicted in the movie is not a Freudian regression or a Lacanian forclusion of the Name-of-the-Father, but the threat of male homosocial bonds. In the first part, it will be established that, if in the 'Lion King' and as we will see also in 'American Pie', male friendships can sometimes become a threat to the patriarchal organization, it is due to their particular temporality, defined here as the timeless jouissance of friendship, which jeopardizes the temporality of the Circle of Life. In a second part, I will carry on with the construction of a graphic model of the straight time (patriarchal and familialist) with the figure of the spiral. It will suggest that this model of the spiral of time allows regrouping under a single model, different (patriarchal) temporalities and their relations to particular narratives. Finally, in a last part I will apply this figure of the spiral to Hitchcock's 'Vertigo' in order to illustrate its work.

1 In a heavy Oedipal reading of *The Lion King* L. Dundes & A. Dundes argue that “it is precisely this basic Oedipal plot that accounts for the remarkable popularity of *The Lion King*” (483). Without denying the importance of previous readings focused on race, ethnicity or gender, the authors conclude that “critics who limit their analysis to such issues, in our opinion, are mistakenly overlooking the importance of this modern rendering of a classical Oedipal story” (484). Even if L. Dundes & A. Dundes generously expose Hollywood and Disney's producers' ready-made recipe for popular success, the familialism promoted by this oedipal reading also tends to ignore other psychosocial dynamics.

2 In my opinion one approach to the movie has been particularly ignored. Interestingly enough *The Lion King* (Roger Allers) released in America in June 1994 is, in terms of release date, caught between different movies released the very same month and soaked in testosterone: the revengeful *The Cowboy Way* (Brian Grazer), the Shakespeare-in-the-army *Renaissance Man* (Penny Marshall), the boosted *Speed* (Jan De Bont), the oedipal *Getting Even With Dad* (Howard Deutch), the furry and musky *Wolf* (Mike Nichols) and the gunfight-at-the-O.K.-Corral-ish *Wyatt Earp* (Lawrence Kasdan). Even if read as an accidental calendar effect, it shows without a doubt that masculinity as a theme has saturated the movie production of this period. The variety of male bonds pictured in these movies makes the theme of male friendships particularly obvious and popular. If *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986) and *Lethal Weapon* (Richard Donner, 1987) were arguably the archetypal productions of the

buddy movie of the 80's depicting the fortunes and misfortunes of hegemonic masculinities, the buddy movies of the 90's such as *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) exposed a masculinity that required sensitive relations between men.

3 I will argue that even if the themes of friendship and masculinity have been mentioned in passing, most analyses of *The Lion King* have fail to systematize these insights, especially in relation with gender and sexuality. Borrowing Michel Foucault's skilful expression, I will show that a "Friendship as a Way of Life" is represented in this movie not in opposition to an oedipal reading, but as the negative of an oedipal narrative marked by the seal of reproduction. Therefore the success of the movie, to use Dundes' expression, cannot be separated from what the movie accounts *for*, clearly the superiority of a patriarchal and familialist Circle of Life, but also from what the movie stands *against*, that is to say, non-reproductive modes of relations and organizations. More precisely, I will argue that the real originality of the movie is not due to the reproduction of an umpteenth version of a somewhat dubious Freudian reading of the oedipal complex, but to the fact that the threat depicted in the movie is not a Freudian regression or a Lacanian foreclosure of the Name-of-the-Father, but the threat of male homosocial bonds. In the first part of the essay, it will be established that, if in the *Lion King* and as we will see also in *American Pie*, male friendships can sometimes become a threat to the patriarchal organization, it is due to their particular temporality, defined here as the timeless *jouissance* of friendship, which jeopardizes the temporality of the Circle of Life. In a second part, I will suggest a graphic model of the straight time (patriarchal and familialist) through the figure of the spiral. It will suggest that the spiral model of time allows different (patriarchal) temporalities and their relations to particular narratives to be regrouped within a single model. Finally, in a last part I will apply this figure of the spiral to Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.

4 In his successful and somewhat polemical *No Future* (2004) Lee Edelman forges the sharp-edged word *sinthomosexuality* in reference to Lacan's *sinthome* and to homosexuality. In his lacanian anthropology, Lee Edelman stresses the different literary and cinematographic avatars of the *sinthomosexual*¹ who embodies the forces that threaten the symbolic order constructed for and by futurity, the family and their metonymical figure, the Child. As stated by the author: "*Sinthomosexuality*, then, only means by figuring a threat to meaning, which depends on the promise of coming, in a future continuously deferred, into the presence that reconciles meaning with being in a fantasy of completion - a fantasy on which every subject's

¹ For example Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol*, Leonard from *North By Northwest*, The Birds from *The Birds*, Silas Marner from *Silas Marner: The weaver of Raveloe* but also Captain Hook from *Peter Pan*.

cathexis of the signifying system depends” (114). Therefore the *sinthomosexual* opposes the hopeful and lyrical naturalizing discourse of reproduction with “the lack or loss that relates to the Real” (115), the depersonalizing *jouissance* and death. The Child as a figure has a particular meaning in this heteronormative fantasmatic economy: “Because the Child of the hetero-reproductive Couple stands in, at least fantasmatically, for the redemption of that loss, the *sinthomosexual*, who affirms that loss, maintaining it as the empty space, the vacuole, at the heart of the Symbolic, effectively destroys that Child and, with it, the reality it means to sustain” (115). Therefore, the Child and the *sinthomosexual* are opposite figures that sustain the symbolic order by the promise of a future recovery from the rift into the Symbolic and simultaneously, by the affirmation of a death-bearing force curled up within the Symbolic explaining the perpetual deferring of the promise of the realization of meaning. It is with this theoretical background that I would like to offer a reading of *The Lion King* that would go beyond the classical Oedipus complex. This opening interpretation will allow drawing, literally, a first representation of a hetero-reproductive representation of time - the mythical *Circle of Life* - that I want to push toward a dynamic and three-dimensional model, in relation to the *American Pie*’s saga, in order to highlight the different narratives belonging to this hetero-reproductive temporality.

5 By its very construction *The Lion King* has a circular organization. The movie opens with the celebration of straight sexuality through the exposition of the new-born Simba, and closes with that very same celebration, with the exposition of Simba and Nala’s new-born offspring. The song *Circle of Life* is chanted during these liminal moments, opening and closing the circle of the narration. By its very own structure, *The Lion King* associates straight sexuality and the eternal return, through a circular and mythical representation of time. This eternal repetition of the same that the narration promises and that is sustained by the reproductive straight sexuality, is therefore threatened by any non-reproductive sexuality that would interrupt this symbolic ordering of time. And it is around the eternal return and the life-negating dark forces that lurk in the kingdom and threaten the circle of life that the plot of *The Lion King* is organized, transforming this charming and tender story into a battle for the preservation of life, that is to say for the preservation of reproduction and straight sex. These dark forces are first embodied in the very spaces of Mufasa’s kingdom. In a scene saturated by the figure of the King and the Father, Mufasa introduces to his son his realm, which will become, at his death, Simba’s kingdom. The kingdom is delimited by another cyclic phenomenon, the light of the sun. As Mufasa underlines: “Look Simba. Everything the light touches is our Kingdom”. However, this luxuriant and lively space is delimited by a

shadowy zone, the elephants' graveyard, mysteriously untouched by the light. The threat of something resisting light, of a rift into the Symbolic, of the Real, is represented as a space of death. It is therefore not surprising that it is literally in a rift that the king Mufasa, betrayed by its brother, Scar, will find death.

6 The spaces of the movie acknowledge the anxious presence of a threat within the symbolic order and it is in these spaces that these other embodiments of Edelman's death drive - the drive aiming at the destruction of the congealed organization of the ego as well as the Symbolic order that props up ego's fossilization - will appear. The hyenas, the foes of the Kingdom, countless but metonymically represented by three Hyenas, Shenzi, Banzai and Ed, appear for the first time in the graveyard, slowly emerging from the skull of the elephant traditionally depicted as a wise animal. We do not get to know much about the hyenas except that they tend to favor a kind of fascist organization², aptly depicted in their march mimicking the military parades of the Third Reich while Scar, Führer-like, sings in the darkness of the night, *Be prepared* (see 1). Scar, the *sinthomosexual* figure of the movie is associated with these hyenas. The well-mannered, delicate, dandy-like, back-stabbing, and physically weak figure of the movie, embodies different stereotypes of the unmanly man (and therefore queer)³, but he also is another vehicle of the death drive that threatens the hetero-normative order of the King's realm. After having successfully plotted the death of the king and almost successfully killed Simba, Scar will rule with the hyenas on Pride Rock, showing no interest in the Queen Sarabi or in producing any offspring, but suddenly turning the surrounding space into an unfertile wasteland. This transformation of the land into a place of death happens as soon as Scar becomes King (see 2), but nothing illustrates better the link between unfertile queerness and life producing straight sexuality than the last images of the movie. After the death of scar, the wasted land is seen for a last time in its full desolation (see 3). The following shot appears in a cross fade where the luxurious greenness of Pride Rock is finally restored (see 4), followed by the happiness of the straight couple and the birth of the child (see 5⁴). In short, we can read the movie *The Lion King* as a catastrophic scenario that depicts the danger of a queer, and therefore death-bearing, governance.

² For a more in depth analysis of the references to fascism see Giddings (1999); Kramer (2000); Roth (1996).

³ Scar's queerness is even highlighted by an inside joke. In a conversation between Scar and Simba, the latter let out a "You're so weird" to what Scar answers "You have no idea". Jeremy Irons, Scar's voice, embodying the mysterious and accused of murder Claus Von Bülow, knew perfectly how to play this dramatic answer, since in *Reversal of Fortune* (Barbet Schroeder, 1990), his lawyer not convinced by his innocence, describes him with a "You're a very strange man" to what he answers the same "You have no idea".

⁴ All images are taken from *The Lion King*. Dir. Roger Allers & Rob Minkoff. Walt Disney Pictures, 1994. Film.



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.



Figure 4.



Figure 5.

7 It is in this particularly h  teronormativit   child-like fantasy, that the theme of male friendships developed in the movie is particularly eloquent. After escaping from the deadly claws of the hyenas following the death of his father, the child Simba, meets the meerkat, *Timon* and the warthog, *Pumbaa*. These two male friends will adopt him and show him a somewhat *contra naturam* way of living for a lion, feeding on juicy worms and crunchy beetles, as well as enjoying leisure time by singing what has since become the international anthem of indolence *Hakuna Matata*, meaning “There are no worries” in Swahili. And time passes quickly with these two new friends since we see Simba beginning to sing the song still a cub, and finishing it as a young adult. This problem of the passing of time, also apparent in *American Pie*, seems a particular feature of masculine friendship, and I should add, of foregrounding anxieties of masculine friendship. The friendship with the Meerkat and the

Warthog evades the duty of reproduction that the circle of life demands, rather turning the mythical time of the eternal return into a timeless *jouissance*. This contraction of future and past in a perpetual *now* threatens to definitively ravish Simba from the hetero-reproductive circularity of time⁵. In that sense this friendship is organized by a queer temporality (“queer temporalities [...] are points of resistance to [a] temporal order [seen as seamless, unified, and forward moving] that, in turn, propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others” Freeman, xxii). It is clearly Simba’s moral and reproductive duty that is at stake when the little cub gets caught in this web of friendships, and the film insists enough on this to make it clear. When the grown up Simba meet Nala by chance, who is destined to be his wife, she invokes his duty as a king to reestablish order. But Simba hesitates and thanks to the shaman-like figure, Rafiki, Simba will contact his father who demands that Simba take back his place in the circle of life. Even in particularly humoristic moments, male friendship in the *The Lion King* is depicted as potentially threatening, as timeless *jouissance* defies the circular and repetitive duty of reproduction.

8 Keeping in mind this reading of a potential *queer* dimension in male friendships, it is no wonder that in *American Pie II*, even if the movie was released 7 years after *The Lion King*, the old-fashioned but wise advisor, Jim’s father, in an off-screen conversation, recommends *The Lion King* to Nadia. This otherwise anecdotal advice is far from being insignificant in a movie saturated by male-to-male friendships. Nadia, being the archetypal figure of the eastern European woman that is the object of Jim’s clumsy desires, embodies the otherness toward which the compass of straight desires has to point. However, Jim, being plagued by bad luck, always postpones his *jouissance*, while the only gratification that he receives, comes from his close friends. Confronted to an always-postponed access to straight sexuality, Jim faces a danger, the one of being eternally caught in the web of male friendships. Therefore Nadia, whose name and function are close enough to the female savior figure of Nala in *The Lion King*, is the recipient of a message coming from Jim’s father - once again as in *The Lion King* - that Jim has to take his place in the Circle of Life. Throughout the *American Pie* saga there is this anxiety about participating in a straight sex-life. If *American Pie* focuses mainly on Jim’s misfortunes, *American Pie II* focuses on Kevin’s existential struggles with time and friendship. Having been deeply in love with

⁵ It is therefore not surprising if in his Shakespearian analysis of *The Lion King* and Disney’s *The Little Mermaid*, Richard Finkelstein draws a comparison between Timon and Falstaff following the axis of time : “Timon is also like Falstaff because he has no memory or knowledge of time”. (188)

Vicky in the first movie, Kevin has some difficulty coping with their separation. Without other sexual relations in college his life is depicted as been stuck in the past. When all the whole crew of friends gathers for summer break, they experience a kind of temporal displacement. But the burden of the past always weighs on the flourishing of their sexual life. Jim's video from the first movie and the exposure of his pre-ejaculations with Nadia, another problem of timing, still haunt Jim's life when he discovers that his freshman's aura has no impact on High school girls since the video has become an intergenerational moment of ridicule.

9 If the past and people living in the past are depicted as opposing the straight flow of time especially in relation to girls, *American Pie I* and *II* also coined a very particular relation to time, and I would say a straight relation to time. Kevin, in *American Pie I* inherits a book, called "The Bible", hidden secretly in the Library's high school and containing the secrets of female orgasm. The text of "The Bible", which is passed from one generation of straight male to another, is not a mere retelling of the past, but it is also augmented by the sexual discoveries of each generation. If the *American Pie* saga is based, like *The Lion King*, on the celebration of cyclic time of reproduction, the movie also depicts another temporality based on homosocial organization. Thanks to his older brother, Kevin becomes the heir of the knowledge of previous generational cycles about female orgasm as a symbolic attempt to continuously reduce the Real of its otherness. The circle, figure of straight sex, turns into a cumulative spiral in the world of male-to-male friendships. To the closure of the circle, being both closed and opened by the birth of the Child, denying death and *jouissance*, that is to say denying the existence of something undoing its ordering, straight male friendship opposes the acknowledgement of the presence of a threat, here symbolized in the anxiety of not being able to satisfy the female partners. Therefore it is no surprise that Kevin will, once again, turn to his older brother at the beginning of *American Pie II*, when he will again have to face his nostalgia for a passed time.

10 Although throughout the *American Pie* saga each character has his own problematic relation to time throughout the saga, it is probably with Stifler that the scope of the danger of time is most obvious. Among the five friends, Stifler is the one who thoroughly resists the ordering of time and the hetero-reproductive figure of the circle. No need to say that Stifler is also the one who is constantly marginalized in the group of friends, and also the figure most connected to homosexual jokes in the movies. In other words, Stifler is the dark (ass)hole who, bending time by the density of its developmental inertia, attracts the glittering of Uranus jokes but who also threatens to swallow the whole Milky Way of the symbolic order. By

literally swallowing Kevin's sperm in a hilarious moment of confusion, Stifler enacts the particular threat that circulates around him, namely, the swallowing of these children-to-be because of his fixation to the timeless *jouissance* of friendships. It would probably be excessive to see in Stifler a reenactment of Uranus' devoration of its own children, but it is true that his refusal of the Circle of Life and his praise of immediate *jouissance* evokes the specter of *sinthomosexuality* and the fantasy of an Uranian castration.⁶

11 I would like to develop the idea of the spiral of time with the sequel *The Lion King 1 ½* (Bradley Raymond, 2004), and the spin off movies of the American Pie saga, especially *American Pie presents: The book of Love* (John Putch, 2009), the last production under the title *American Pie*. Recalling the plot of *American Pie I*, a group of three seniors studying females' geometry of forms and shapes at the very same East Great Falls High try painfully to get rid of their virginity. Accidentally, after having burnt down part of the library, Rob (Bug Hall) discovers "The Bible" while cleaning the mess produced by his incontrollable ardent desires. Unfortunately, the water coming from the sprinklers during the fire has destroyed most of the book. Trying to use the remaining sexual wisdom of the past generations of unknown straight buddies, the three friends are shortly disappointed and recognize soon enough that the Bible can only be efficient as a whole. Using the library stamp card to keep trace of the previous owners of "The Bible", the three stooges decide to reconstruct the knowledge of the book getting in contact with them in order to share their love secrets. Interestingly enough we discover that the creator of "The Bible" is no one other than Jim's dad, who jokingly is metaphorically associated with God himself. Therefore, time is associated here with the linear transmission of a particular knowledge that his creator will define in one sentence recalling *The Lion King's* Circle of Life, "The Bible is not about sex, it is about Life",. Therefore, it is important to challenge Sharyn Pearce's happy-go-lucky reading of "The Bible", a narrative device already introduced in *American Pie I*:

American Pie is in part, a tongue-in-cheek parody of man-to-man sex talks, of "secret men's business" generally. For instance, Kevin's older brother tells him of the whereabouts of a book, an instructional bible of sex techniques handed down from one generation of high

⁶ Stifler, as a *sinthomosexual* figure, can be however associated with the redeemed figures like Scrooge and described by Edelman. If Stifler is the fifth element that resists the heteronormative narrative of the organization of life, he eventually gets integrated in the group of the four friends. At the end of Stifler's unexpected wild party, the four friends reproach him for always ruining things. Stifler's destructive aspects echo his resistance to the mermaid's voices of the *Circle of Life*. But in the following scene, the group decides to make up with Stifler. Stifler acknowledges that he is a "dick", but the group finally integrates him by saying "yes, but you are our dick". The constitution and integration of Stifler as a phallic figure, signs its entrance in the Symbolic order. From that point in the movie Stifler supports the values of Love and Compassion to the point where he will organize the gay wedding of his two friends of his High School's lacrosse team.

schools boys to the next. But Kevin is worthy of this only when he proves to his brother that he is concerned to make the sexual experience happy for his girlfriend as well, that he wants “to return the favor”, as he puts it. His credential having been verified, his visit to the secret place to find the book is cued in with the portentous music associated with the pursuit of a noble quest, and this music continues later as Kevin reads the dusty tome and notes in particular pages dealing with the “tongue tornado” (77).

12 If I cannot completely acknowledge Pearce’s reading of *American Pie* as a “manual for self-formation, as a means whereby young men can progress relatively smoothly toward adulthood with particular reference to the management of sexual conduct” (70), it is because for her omission of what “The Bible” does not account for, namely, queer sex, but more generally *sinthomosexuality*. Caught in the hetero-reproductive imaginary narrative of a sexual *relation*, her interpretation forgets the impossibility of a sexual *relation*, forgets the presence of the death drive within this enchanting narrative of straight sexuality and therefore subscribes to the fantasy of a meaningful sexuality supported by the unity of a regained symbolic order. The very necessity of transmitting a sexual knowledge from one generation to another implicitly exposes the meaninglessness of sexuality. That is to say that it not only reveals that sexuality is ultimately better defined and sustained by cultural and social than by “natural” (biological) variables, but also that, for the same reason, sexuality lacks any stable ground on which its meaning could stand. In other words, the necessity of a transmission of a sexual knowledge underlines the necessity of a policing of desire. Therefore the spatial representation of time that would embody at the same “time” the linear transmission of knowledge *and* the mythical Circle of Life based on the fantasy of a unity of the Symbolic order and the foreclosure of the Real, is the figure of the spiral.

13 This figure will usefully summarize the previous interpretations of these movies and will give a visual representation of different straight temporalities of the Circle of Life and the discreet line of male-to-male transmission. In other words I suggest that chronobiopolitics⁷ as defined by Freeman has is structured as a spiral since it “harnesses not only sequence but also cycle, the dialectical companion to sequence, for the idea of time as cyclical stabilizes its forward movement, promising renewal rather than rupture” (5). As

⁷ Concept Initially defined by Luciano as “The sexual arrangement of the time of life” (9), Freeman borrows the idea of life as being normatively organized through time and states that “Chrononormativity is a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts. Schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches inculcate what the sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel calls “hidden rhythms”, forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege. Manipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time.” (3)

stated earlier, *The Lion King* offers a cyclic mythical representation of time threatened by the queerness of Scar and by the timeless *jouissance* of friendship as well. In *American Pie*, time is ordered by the linear transmission of hetero-normative knowledge about sex and love. The threatening figure of the *American Pie* saga is Stifler, as he refuses to participate in the narrative of reproductive sex. Interestingly enough, throughout the eight *American Pie* movies (including the spin-offs), Stifler (nicknamed Stifmeister) is the only character other than Jim's Dad who is present in all the films. Opposed to the patriarchal figure, symbolically associated to God as he is the creator of "The Bible", the Stifmeister as *sinthomosexual* of the movie, refuses - in the same gesture - not only the circularity of hetero-normativity but also the linear organization of sexual knowledge transmission. For example, in *American Pie presents: Band Camp* (Steve Rash, 2005), Stifler's brother, Matt Stifler (Tad Hilgenbrink) is a wannabe a Stifmeister and devotes a strong admiration to his older brother. But the movie stresses that Stifler ignores his brother's calls. This brotherly relationship stands in sharp contrast with that of Kevin's as depicted in *American Pie I* and *II* where his older brother recognizes Kevin as a truthful heir and bearer of "The Bible".

14 Hence if we consider that each loop of the spiral, as a hetero-reproductive representation of time, symbolizes a generation, the queer figures are situated in the intervals between two loops. Stifler, refusing the heteronormative ordering of time, situates himself out of time. The movies affirm the timelessness of this figure and its exclusion from the spiral. Similarly, the couple Timon/Pumba in *The Lion King* is represented as out of time enjoying a timeless *jouissance* blind to the imperative of the *Circle of Life*. When Disney producers chose the title *The Lion King 1½* they recognized, even if unwillingly, the "in-betweenness" of queerness in the movie. If *The Lion King* tells the story of Simba from his birth to his realization as a father, *The Lion King II* follows Kiara, Simba's daughter, from a young cub, to her consecration as a Queen. *The Lion King 1½* decides to retell the story of the first *The Lion King* from the point of view of this queer/friendly couple of the movie Timon and Pumba. If nothing in the Disney movie is explicitly outing the couple as gay, allowing for the prude spectator to ignore this dimension, the accumulation of signs of their queerness (sharing bed, raising a child, etc...) demands another reading. Jeffery Dennis best illustrates this logic of avoidance, to talk about the relation without specifying it, logic sometimes adopted by queers in relation with their parents or friends, in his analysis of the signs of queerness in cartoons:

Where no characters are specifically identified as gay or lesbian, we can locate same-sex desire in an interaction between two characters of the same sex, which is

elsewhere coded as romantic but is not an obvious parody of heterosexual desire : for instance, sharing a living space or a bed; participating in social activities as a couple; being accepted as a couple by others; failing to pursue other substantive relationships, especially those with the opposite sex; rejecting romantic overtures from others; or overtly expressing desire through flirting and sexual talk. (133)

15 What is particularly interesting here is that both movies, *The Lion King* and *The Lion King 1 1/2* depict and associate the “bromantic” couple with the queer couple, playing with the porous borders between homosociality and homosexuality. This in-betweenness however does not belong to the spiral, or to be more precise, is an effect and a condition of its own structure itself. Stifler and our gay/friendly couple are the condition for a particular narration of time. This narration, demanding a specific organization of time and knowledge, can be named a *narratime* as defined by James Winders as “yok[ing] together three concepts central to history: Knowledge (the Latin *narrare* meaning to know), time and history” (27). The narratime of the spiral is one possibility of the organization and representation of time, it is one particular *syuzhet*, and allows thinking about other orderings of time that would escape chronobiopolitics and reprofuturity⁸. At the very beginning of *The Lion King 1 1/2*, Pumba and Timon are sitting in front of a movie screen and they have an argument, rewinding and forwarding the movie, about where to begin the story in order to make sense of the *whole* story of *The Lion King*. They finally decide to tell their story since they, as Simba’s parents, who have supported the whole circle of life.

16 The narratime of the spiral also allows accounting for the notion of Derrida’s *difference* and is present in its temporal version in Edelman’s work with its critique of futurity. When a spiral is set in a rotational movement, it creates a kind of optical illusion. The end of the spiral seems to continually move forward, and seems to dig endlessly in the surrounding void, when in fact the spiral stands still, promising nothing else than its incessant repetition of the same. The spiral therefore defers the promise of a future where the unity of meaning will take its organization as a whole, which is in fact mere illusion, and is only due to the fact that the spiral is whirling around a hole, a lack. This hermeneutics of the spiral can be illustrated with Josh Chavetz’s commentary on Gadamer hermeneutics when he states that

⁸ Who can better sum up Edelman’s concept of repro-futurity than Freeman? : “His *No Future* declares that queers should, to paraphrase, just say no to the future. This is because even the idea of a queerly intergenerational relationality is based on what he calls repro-futurity: ultimately, it stakes its hopes on those not yet born or grown up. Repro-futurity is a political orientation that depends on the sacrifice of adult needs, the desexualization of children, and the disavowal of the negating potential of queerness itself. Edelman writes that queer politics and theory must refuse the expectation or promise of a better society, even one formulated in the negative or abstract. In his view, queers must embrace the death drive, exploit their status as avatars of the antifutural, “fuck... the Child.” (2007, 178)

“Gadamer’s hermeneutics circle is thus a *spiral* process: it moves in circle, but they are directed circles. They ultimately aim at a point—the *Gedanke* of the text” (26). Although it is not Chavertz argument, but this isomorphism of the spiral of reproduction, and the spiral of access to truth are merged in reprofuturist discourse. The access to truth hangs on a future depending on reproduction, as much as, the access to reproduction depends on an access to truth⁹. This conflation of reproduction with a hermeneutics leads to the second aspect of the process of *differentiation*. The spiral, and its narrative device of exclusion, the elipsis¹⁰, differs, in the sense that the illusion of its movement creates a space between each loops of the spiral as to exclude what does not belongs to its organization, that it is to say anything that does not belong to its repetition. The narratime of the spiral appears therefore to define any particular narrative centered on reproduction and acknowledging a certain positivity of knowledge. However, this spiral is also a tool of exclusion, denying access to the *sinthomosexuals* and to a specific understanding of friendship.

17 Chris Marker, in his famous essay on *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), a movie which itself is structured as a spiral, notices that “The vertigo the film deals with isn’t to do with space and falling; it is a clear, understandable and spectacular metaphor for yet another kind of vertigo, much more difficult to represent – the vertigo of time” (184). This reading associated with the presence of a “spiral of time” (191) will be used here as an interpretation of the second part of the movie as a dream or a fantasy. The spiral, from the very beginning of the movie, is understood as the visual correspondence of sensation of vertigo, but also as a metaphor of time, which is associated with the female characters of the movie. At the end of the opening credits, Kim Novak’s face appears and the camera focuses slowly on her right eyes. Slowly a spiral is formed from her iris and spins like the famous black and white cardboard device belonging to this other queer figure, the hypnotizer. The spiral is associated with desire throughout the movie, an attraction/repulsion dynamic close enough to Lacan’s *hainamoration*, which seems to appear with the pursuit of straight desire. However, interestingly enough, the cause of the activation of John Ferguson’s latent acrophobia, begins when, pursuing an unknown character, the object *a*, the detective slips from a roof and holds to a gutter while feeling the vertiginous call of the void. A policeman, a common symbol of order, attempts to rescue him but instead slips, and ends his deadly fall a few stores lower.

⁹ It would be interesting here to see how sciences, especially psychoanalysis has thought non-reproductive sexualities as stubbornly stuck in a denial of reality.

¹⁰ Not surprisingly the ellipsis is both the favorite tool of censorship, as well as the main narrative device of the *Hakuna Matata* scene. We learn thanks to *The Lion King 11/2* that what the ellipsis was concealing is a particularly flamboyant moment of queerness: the narrative of Simba’s education by his two adoptive fathers.

John Ferguson's Freudian unconscious resistance to order is stressed when having a discussion with his old buddy from college, Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore), during which we learn that Ferguson has never been married, but spends most of his time with his ex-girlfriend (Barbara Bel Geddes). These details allow us to understand the latent text of the film's acrophobia. The vertigo that Ferguson suffers from is the vertigo that appears in front of the spiral of time and that anyone who wants to commit to the spiral of reprofuturity can feel. From that point in the movie onwards every feeling of vertigo will be associated with the time ordering of straight sex life. For example, the spiral in Madeleine/Carlotta's (Kim Novak) hairdo signals the female character as belonging to the circle of reproduction. Therefore Madeleine/Carlotta embodies different conflicting desires for Ferguson. On one hand, his desire for participating in straight sex life, on the other hand, his refusal of death as a condition for the reproduction of generations. The scene of the church bell tower is another example of this subconscious text, which runs through the movie. When Ferguson and Madeleine/Carlotta fall in love, he unexpectedly lets her go into the bell tower even though it is clear that she will attempt to commit suicide once again. His actions are incomprehensible without taking into account his anxiety about the spiral of reproduction. This anxiety is signified by the few seconds that he takes before deciding to run finally after her in a desperate attempt to save her from the spirit pushing her toward death. In his pursuit for the participation in straight sex life, he is once again victim of his vertigo causing the stairs to take the shape of a fascinating, yet deadly spiral. Unable to overcome his vertigo, he fails to prevent Madeleine/Carlotta's fatal jump from the tower. His vertigo functions as a symptom, hiding his refusal of the spiral of reproduction and allowing him to not save his love without facing its responsibility in her death.

18 Following Chris Marker's argument, it is possible to read the second part of the movie as Ferguson's attempt to queer time in a fantasy of recovery, that is, a recovery from is vertigo but also recovery from death. This refusal is already present in Carlotta spirit, coming back from death in order to haunt Madeleine's body. But to this refusal of the structure of the spiral necessarily invoking death Ferguson adds the denial of Madeleine's suicide, when he obsessively tries to recreate Madeleine's presence from Judy's body (Kim Novak). Read as a fantasy as in Chris Marker's interpretation, it is no wonder why Ferguson, will finally get rid of its acrophobia, since death can be overcome that way. From this point of view, the trick he has been victim of is a paranoid attempt to deny the traumatic death of his love. Therefore, when he asks Judy to repeat the scene in the tower bell, his denial of death allows him to overcome his acrophobia and to access to truth without paying the price of his own death that

the spiral of reprofuturity demands. However this hermeneutical ecstasy falls short since the movie ends in a very puzzling way. While Jefferson and Judy kiss each other after Jefferson has stated, “there’s no bringing her back”, a shadow slowly emerges from the stairs, and Judy jumps from the tower out of fear and dies. However, the explanation of Judy’s death being caused by the fear of a killer (or Gavin, or the ghost of Madeleine) reducing them to silence seems to be a particularly artificial *deus ex machina*, especially when the killer (or whatever else it may be) turns out to be the inoffensive yet unexpected figure of a nun. However, we can make sense of this surprising final, if we understand the sudden entrance of the nun as a figure of death. The nun is the return of the repressed - the reality of death - expressed in Jefferson’s last sentence of the movie “There is no bringing her back”. Indeed, the figure of the nun can be read as a figure of death, since she does not participate in the spiral of time. Therefore, the uncontrollable fear that invades Judy and pushes her into the void can be read as another trick of Jefferson’s mind, or more precisely of the Real coiling inside the death drive.

19 I would like to return to my initial critique of Dundes & Dundes’ reading of *The Lion King*, which, focusing on the traditional psychoanalytical interpretation, fails to account for what really makes *The Lion King* so successful. Beyond the reactivation of a somewhat eroded Oedipal presence on the movie, there is also a body of different network of fantasies that the movie successful ties together through a particular representation of time and its association with the celebration of traditional straight sex life. Any straight audiences subscribing to its imperatives can easily fall into the complaisant self-celebration of straight sexuality that the film calls for.

20 As I have shown in my discussion of these different movies, there are always different temporalities that sustain different organization of gender and sexualities at play. Whether it is in the circle illustrated in *The Lion King*, or in the line of transmission of male knowledge in *Americam Pie*, or in the *sinthomosexual* friendships, or finally in the temporality opened by the denial of death in *Vertigo*, I have shown that time, understood as a narratime, is subjected to a diversity of different narratives sweeping along knowledge and legitimizing certain social practices (among them sex) and excluding others. I have suggested that Freeman’s chronobiopolitics can be understood as a spiral that creates its own process of legitimization and exclusion. Moreover, connections must be drawn between this notion of narratime and Carolyn Dinshaw’s arguments developed in *Getting Medieval*. The *othering* process of the spiral sustains the construction of a modern (or post-modern) subject, but also prevents critiques from looking at texts with present eyes. The co-relations between narrative,

temporality and knowledge defined as narratime allow excavating “potentially productive site of new times; cultural locations, and identifications” (19) by denaturalizing dominant representations of time and its associated narratives and knowledge. By reducing modernity to one of these possible narratimes (or a cluster of different narratimes) possible bridges can be built between texts that belong to different time periods opening “temporal dimension of the self and of community” (21).

Works Cited

American Pie. Dir. Chris & Paul Weitz. Universal Pictures, 1999.

American Pie 2. Dir. J. B. Rogers. Universal Pictures, 2001.

American Pie Presents: The Book of Love. Dir. Jon Putsch. Universal Pictures, 2009.

Chafetz, Josh. "Rushdie and Me: The Possibility of Interpretative Pluralism in Gadamerian Hermeneutics." *The Dualist Undergraduate Journal* 8 (n.d.): 21-33.

Dennis, Jeffery P. "Perspectives: 'The Same Thing We Do Every Night': Signifying Same-Sex Desire in Television Cartoons." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 31.3 (2010): 132-40.

Dinshaw, Carolyn. *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999.

Dundes, Lauren and Allan Dundes. "Young Hero Simba Defeats Old Villain Scar: Oedipus Wrecks the Lyin' King." *The Social Science Journal* 43 (2006): 478-85.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2004.

Finkelstein, Richard. "Disney Cites Shakespeare: The Limits of Appropriation." Ed. Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer. *Shakespeare and Appropriation*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Freeman, Elizabeth. "Introduction." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*.13: 2-3 (159-76).

---. *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2010.

Giddings, Seth. "The Circle of Life: Nature and Representation in Disney's *The Lion King*." *Third Text* 13.49 (1998): 83-92.

Kramer, Peter. "Entering the Magic Kingdom: The Wall Disney Company. *The Lion King* and the Limitations of Criticism." *Film Studies* 2 (2000): 44-50.

- Luciano, Dana. *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-century America*. New York: New York UP, 2007.
- Marker, Chris. "A Free Replay: Notizen zu *Vertigo*." *Chris Marker: Filmessayist*. Ed. Birgit Kämper and Alain Resnais. München: Inst. Français De Munich, CICIM, 1997. 182-92.
- Pearce, Sharyn. "'As Wholesome As...': *American Pie* As a New Millenium Sex Manual." *Youth Cultures. Texts, Images, and Identities*. Ed. Kerry Mallan and Sharyn Pearce. Westport: Praeger, 2003. 69-80.
- Roth, Matt. "*The Lion King*: A Short History of Disney-fascism." *Jump Cut* 40 (1996): 15-20.
- The Lion King*. Dir. Roger Allers & Rob Minkoff. Walt Disney Pictures, 1994.
- The Lion King 1 1/2* Dir. Bradley Raymond. Walt Disney Pictures, 2004.
- Vertigo*. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Universal Pictures, 1958.
- Winders, James A. "'Narratime': Postmodern Temporality and Narrative." *Issues in Integrative Studies* 11 (1993): 27-43.