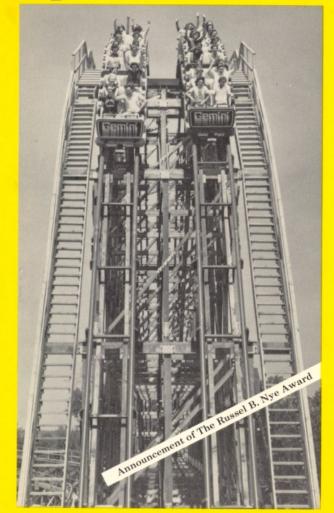
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Disneyland and Walt Disney World: Traditional Values in Futuristic Form

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The Disney parks – Disneyland in California and Walt Disney World in Florida – presented a radical refinement and departure from the traditions of the amusement park: the theme park. Designed for the values of long-distance travel, suburban lifestyle, family life, the major vacation excursion, and the new visual culture of telecommunications, these places have grown to attain the status of national popular culture capitals.

Because of their importance to American life, these institutions have suffered more than their share of attacks as key symbols of popular culture. Like all such targets of elitist ire (led by such accusations as "plastic" and mindless"), the Disney parks must be experienced carefully and studied closely to see beyond these simplistic slings and arrows.

Emerging from this study was a contention directly opposed to the common wisdom of the theme parks' futuristic and artificial nature: they may in fact serve as cultural preserves for the most nostalgic images and dreams of a nation. They are a very special kind of museum, of course – of past and future not as they were or will be but as popular taste has shaped and nurtured them in the collective imagination. The Disney "archive" of Americana is thus highly valuable as a display of popular thought on every featured theme.

Walt Disney has built a Versailles of the twentieth century – but it was a Versailles designed for the pleasure of the people.

Christopher Finch, The Art of Walt Disney¹

To all who come to this happy place: Welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past ... and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future. Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, the dreams, and the hard facts that have created America ... with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world.

Plaque in Disneyland's Town Square, July 17, 1955

Since its opening in July 1955, Disneyland in Anaheim, California, has been the largest single visitor attraction in the United States; it quickly became hugely successful and was almost instantly recognized as "one of the wonders of the modern world." By 1965, after a publicity unrivaled for an entertainment center, a quarter of the U.S. population and many foreign tourists and dignitaries had been there. Its attendance and income have

only recently been surpassed by its eastern counterpart, Walt Disney World near Orlando, Florida (opened in October 1971). Since the number of visitors to both parks together (16-18 million per year) exceeds the number going to Washington, D.C., the official capital, Disney Land and World can be said to be the popular culture capitals of America.

Since World War II an unprecedented increase in middle-class affluence and leisure time has combined with a booming automobile industry and a nationwide freeway system to make possible – even obligatory – for Americans, adults as well as children, at least one pilgrimage to Disney Land or World as a popular culture "mecca" of nearly religious importance. This journey is a focal event in childhood and adolescence; however, since many more adults than children make the pilgrimage (by a ratio of 4 to 1), one is led to question the popular assumption that the parks are designed primarily for children.

The huge popularity of the parks, particularly with Middle America, raised immediate protest – even rancor – from the literally-intellectual establishment. Condemnation was aimed at what was thought to be a reduction of "all Romance, Adventure, Fantasy, and Science" to a sickening blend of cheap formulas packaged to sell" (Julian Halevy in *The Nation*, 1968)³. This diatribe is typical of those which have continued into the present. Displeasure with the parks as "plastic" and "technocized" is now a familiar litany of reaction of most intellectuals to anything connected with the Disney name, beginning roughly with the end of his domination of the animation field and his entry into live-action filmmaking, about 1946. These epithets, ranging from mocking distaste to vitriolic hatred, were based largely on a comparison of the attractions in the parks, with the sources of their themes in "real life." Critics were unwilling to grant any symbolic and evocative function to these amusement park features as one would for works of art or literature.

The traditional – and ongoing – anti-Disney critical point of attack leaves unexamined the richest areas of interest of the parks: 1) their encapsulation of American myths and belief systems; 2) their experimental approaches to humanizing technology, with applications both within and outside entertainment centers to broader questions of modern life: leisure, sociability, environmentalism, filmmaking, transportation, communications, architecture, theater and set design, city planning and urban and institutional engineering. Disney's development of new concepts in all these areas through the design of the parks has produced what amounts to a new technological and sociological art form. These developments follow in the "tradition" set by humanists like Lewis Mumford and futurists like Alvin Toffler in their insistence that technology can be tamed to serve, instead of to dominate and determine man.

Billed by Walt Disney Productions as "The Happiest Place on Earth," "The Magic Kingdom" and "Vacation Kingdom of the World," the parks draw upon Disney's unique abilities in art, notably in animation (with its requirements for total control and planning) for their unique character. The attractions, settings, shops and hotels are based on Disney characters and films, as well as European and American fiction, American history and

118 Journal of Popular Culture



Fig. 1. Horsecars on Main Street, USA, Walt Disney World. Photo courtesy of Walt Disney Productions.

popular concepts of historical periods and widely diffuse world cultures. These parks are so different, both in degree and kind, from the traditional amusement park, that they can be considered a new type entirely, pioneered by the Disney Corporation – the theme park, or "atmospheric park" (Schickel)⁴. This new genre is derived but clearly departs from the Coney Island (in New York) and Riverside (in Chicago) amusement models.

Imitators of the Disney idea soon followed – Six Flags over Texas (Dallas), King's Island (Cincinnati), Opryland (Nashville), Santa's Village (Chicago) and Astroworld (Houston), Cedar Point (Sandusky, Ohio) – but none has been as enormously successful as Disney's creations, "probably the most successful amusement park[s] ever built anywhere." Only a few traditional features survive at the Disney lands: the flat rides, merry-go-round, roller coaster (the Matterhorn bobsleds at Disneyland are a modified version) and some short "dark rides" (Snow White's Adventure, Mr. Toad's Wild Ride).

The culmination of years of planning and investment by the WED (Walter Elias Disney) subsidiary of the Disney Corporation, the parks are middle-class and family-oriented as opposed to the lower-class "carney" atmosphere of traditional amusement parks, which Disney called "dirty, phony places, run by tough -looking people." He wanted to replace the risk-taking, sense of danger, commercialism, salaciousness, and morbidity associated with the amusement parks' standard "thrill rides," barkers, concession stands, games of chance played for prizes, and sex and freak shows, with safety, wholesomeness, patriotic and educational values.

Despite the commercial aspect of the parks as private enterprise par excellence, Disney attempted to set his parks apart from the frankly commercial carnival model by encouraging the exchange of cash for tickets (for rides) outside the gates, keeping the exchange of tickets for money to a minimum inside; most of what people spend at the Disney parks is at the shops which sell merchandise as well as Disney souvenirs. The epithet "commercial," which is often applied to the Disney parks as a disdainful criticism, is ironic in three respects: first, spending is not as vital to the enjoyment of the "Disneyland experience" as it is to the traditional amusement park; second, commercialism is only one intention, rather than the whole raison d'être, as it is for other amusement establishments, and is intended to serve other, non-commercial (in fact, humanistic) ends; third, "commercial" as a derisive accusation to discredit the Disney parks indicates that people actually think of them in terms apart from the usual amusement category (no one thinks of accusing an ordinary carnival of mercenary purposes) – as a national shrine, monument, and

living museum of American history and symbols.

Intended by Disney to be the highlight and culminating product of his interlocking and mutually-publicizing empire of films, merchandising, printing and television series on ABC-TV (called *Disneyland* and created expressly to serve as public-relations medium for the parks), Disneyland made full use of Disney's skills and innovations in "cross-breeding" various technological and artistic fields," featuring multi-media and special-effects

119 developments, notably audio-animatronics. This "animation in the round," the grand combination of all the arts" using sculpture, painting, drama, theater and film, combined with advanced electrical and engineering skills — made possible lifelike replicas of humans and animals capable of complex programmed motion and sound (the most famous examples are Disney's Hall of Presidents and the Haunted Mansion).

Since Disneyland was to be "an amusement park of a quality and dimension no one but Disney and a few associates could quite envision" and was to be, in Disney's words, "a new concept in family entertainment," the first difficulty in implementing the new concept was to convince prospective backers that the project differed from existing amusement parks which were, and have since been to a considerable extent, steadily becoming a cultural anachronism. Backing eventually came first not from banks but from 30 industries which bought concessions in the park, followed by ABC-Paramount, Western Printing and Lithographing, and Disney himself through WED.

The second problem was to equip the park with machinery other than the standard available types. To do this, Disney and his "imagineers'* finally designed their own novel forms. The originality of these custom-made rides has given the parks a reputation for technical expertise and progressiveness as much as for entertainment.

The von Roll skyrides, giving an extended aerial view as they transverse the entire park, were pioneered at Disneyland, and the Alweg patent monorail, perfected by Disney and associated with his name, made Disneyland the first "New Town" to have from its start a quiet rapid-transit system. ¹² Disney's "Circle-Vision" – film projected on a 360-degree screen in a special circular room – surrounds viewers with a total panorama especially effective for travelogues, giving the view and sensation of travel in an open conveyance.

A swivel car system in the interior of several attractions (e.g., the Haunted Mansion) carries riders through a progressive number of "events" and environments. Each car is wired for stereophonic sound and turns electronically so that the occupant sees only what the designer has intended him to see throughout the programmed "show" – exactly in the way the movie camera sees. ¹³ The cars behind are invisible and those ahead obscure, so that these rides have an intimate, private feeling closely connected to film-viewing.

As a "testing ground for urban technology," the parks serve as testimony to "Disney's faith in the ultimate rightness of technological progress;" they are the most technologically advanced entertainment centers in the world. Just as "The Gothic cathedral summed up the world view of the medieval town; Disneyland is the technological cathedral of Southern California, "15a comparison William Thompson uses as the basis for the discussion of Disneyland in *At the Edge of History*.

Technology includes two widely separated ethics – consumption and production. While Disneyland is in one sense a temple of consumption made possible by leisure, surplus value, technology and consumerism, it is even more solidly based on the (American/Protestant) values of production: the 120

work ethic, exploration, faith in progress, industrial expansion, technological inventiveness, pragmatism, efficiency.

In keeping with the "total environmental control" plan of the parks, Disneyland and Disney World are designed as enclosed environmental artworks; in Disney's words, "I don't want the public to see the real world they live in while they're in the park...I want them to feel they are in another world." Power and utility lines are buried and the world outside the parks is invisible from inside them (and each theme land invisible from the others), enforcing an automatic selective perception for those in any single area; only the medieval castle in the center serves as a focal point of reference from all points of the park, much like the central clock in a medieval town.

Although both are "meager parks,"" increased size and expense is the basic difference between Disneyland and Disney World. Disneyland's 185 acres contain just the core of theme lands and the Disneyland Hotel; the initial investment was about \$17 million. Consisting of 27,000 acres, Disney World is about the size of metropolitan San Francisco; twice the size of Manhattan Island: *Guinness Book of Records* calls it the largest amusement resort in the world (Guinness, 1973). The initial cost was \$400 million.

The self-contained resort (also called a "total destination resort") includes, in addition to the theme park (with wider streets and taller structures than Disneyland), two championship golf courses, three resort hotels, waterways, a man-made lake, an experimental tree farm, camping areas, a 7,500-acre wildlife preserve, an 8;acre infrastructure for all services and utilities, a satellite community (Lake Buena Vista), extensive transportation (including a Short Take-Off and Landing Airport), WED-way "moving sidewalk" and monorail, and "total network" communications. During the six years before Disney World's construction, Disneyland served as a proving ground for techniques and hardware, making Disney World an improved and extended version of the "pilot park." At Disney World, all utilities, building codes and zoning are operated on a semi-autonomous basis approaching a city-state like Vatican City; a self-contained community for a specific purpose.

In both Disneyland and Disney World, the individual theme lands radiating out from the central medieval castle are enclosed by a small-scale railroad, and keyed to a diversity of times and places to create a total world. Unlike the conflicting facilities at a World's Fair ¹⁹ or a movie lot (to which the design of the parks has often been compared), themes are interrelated and sequential – e.g., all art styles and color schemes are coordinated and harmonized. Like the Greek cities which were dedicated to and under the guardianship of a deity, Disney Land and World are directed and unified by the guiding spirit of Disney and his corporation; holy cities for the entire U.S., visited by pilgrims, in a constant festival state in which all participate; unlike "dead" shrines – religious and historical – which people now consider curiosities and subjects of sight-seeing, there are no spectators at the Disney rite, only participants.

Entry to the parks is through Main Street, U.S.A. (turn-of-the-century, small-town Midwestern America), then any of the other lands may be 121

entered: Adventureland (Jungle Cruise, Enchanted Tiki Room); New Orleans Square (Pirates of the Caribbean, the Haunted Mansion – "the most imaginative tour de force" of all attractions ²⁰ – in Disney World, Liberty Square – Colonial America); Frontierland (stern wheelers, Tom Sawyer Island Rafts); Bear Country (part of Frontierland in Disney World); Fantasyland (medieval castle, It's a Small World); Tomorrowland (monorail, "Science rides," submarine voyage – part of Fantasyland in Disney World). The theme lands together contain some 55 separate attractions, with continuous additions and changes.

City planner Robert Hart calls the parks, "Probably the best example of an urban environment where people are treated in a humane way." Disney's desire for efficient and humane handling of large numbers of people – not as pressured, frenzied masses but as guests (never called "customers") to be treated with courtesy and made to feel relaxed, led the Disney research staff into a whole new field of "public engineering," drawing on social psychology, urban technology and the new study of proxemics, "areas of research and development on which surprisingly little intelligent thought has been expended in this country." This research allowed Disney to create a mood totally new in the amusement park context.

Both parks are "Hollywood's answer to Detroit" in the sense that everything is scaled and designed for the pedestrian. Cars are banned; instead, diversified smog-free (using electricity or non-polluting fuels) "people-movers" are provided: electric carts and trains, aerial tramways, monorail, boats and submarines. The routes of these "mass transit" systems are designed more for sight-seeing pleasure than for speed and efficiency, resurrecting the nearly defunct concept of the pleasure drive.

The parks encourage quiet observation as much as active participation, making them ideally suited to a wide range of ages and tastes, both child and adult. Finch notes, "Disney never consciously played down to the public, treating it, instead, as deserving of lavish attention. The people repaid him by crowding through the gates...."²⁴

Spacious walkways are paved with resilient asphalt, dotted with frequent rest areas – benches and outdoor cafes and restaurants – where leisurely eating patterns are encouraged in addition to the usual amusement park snack bars and vendors' wagons. These features encourage walking and relaxing in public places – behavior largely impossible in most city centers today. In fact Americans go to Europe largely for the charming cities – for public spaces like the Italian piazza which is human and pedestrian in scale, encouraging the outdoor stroll and public relaxation, something most Americans associate with private places, the semi-privacy of city institutions like bars and clubs, or the country-side; and the sidewalk cafes which encourage "people-watching." These activities take place less and less in American cities where the streets and even parks are considered dangerous and unsavory, noisy, crowded and polluted (simply an unavoidable route to get from building to building) and as office buildings become less and less public because they are windowless or are part of an interior space without sensory access to the outdoors.

Attracted by its social aspects, Millard Jones, an 83-year-old widower, has made Disney World his "residence," visiting the park three times a week since his wife died in 1971. He has been appointed an official "Citizen of Disney World," and with a "Very Special Visitor" pass, is allowed into the park as often as he likes. "After my wife died, I was lonely and decided to come here for a visit. After that it became a habit. Now I think of this place as my home — there's always something to see, someone to talk to, a new friend to make." ²⁵

Additional encouragement for use of public spaces is Disney's almost obsessive concern with order and cleanliness; the parks are models of landscaping and sanitation skills; the Swedish AVAC trash disposal system at Disney World uses pneumonic tubes to whisk trash underground, out of sight, to compacting stations.

The large number of waterways and man-made lakes, water rides and landscaping with many trees and plantings (including topiary and a floral design in the image of Mickey Mouse at the entrance) provide a true park atmosphere, having a cooling effect (important in the warm climates of Anaheim and Orlando) and help separate crowds into smaller, less conspicuous groups. The heavy emphasis on waterways and water rides is probably the responsibility of one of the head planners, Joseph Fowler, a retired Navy Admiral.

Waiting lines for the attractions are broken up into a series of smaller ones by a maze of parallel railings, giving the illusion of several short, fast-moving lines instead of a single long one. This way of organizing standing crowds helps alleviate the ordinary mood of tension and irritation. In Schickel's words: "Disneyland is, on this basic level, one of the most intelligently conceived pieces of architecture in America, and one well worth the study of anybody faced with the problem of creating structures to serve large numbers of people comfortably but with no loss of efficient revenue production."

Architects and urban planners were the first to see the larger possibilities – beyond the literati's outrage – of the parks, notably in Peter Blake's June, 1972, article in *Architectural Forum*, and Paul Goldberger's October, 1972, article in *The New York Times*, calling the parks "serious and creative experiments in urban design... two incredible New Towns,"²⁷ and "a symbolic American Utopia ... perhaps the most important city planning laboratory in the U.S."²⁸

Disney's interest in urban planning stemmed from his direct experience of – and despair with – Los Angeles urban sprawl and the attendant problems of transportation, pollution, overcrowding and the transience and alienation of city dwellers in a huge metropolis formed mainly of suburbs without cohesive community atmosphere. These problems became a focal point in research for the technologies of the parks, resulting in solutions for persistent problems in city planning and ecology. In this way Disney was led into what he called the "next great frontier of technology after aerospace research," and in fact made extensive use of aerospace techniques in the parks' design, especially in audioanimatronics and in the more progressive rides.

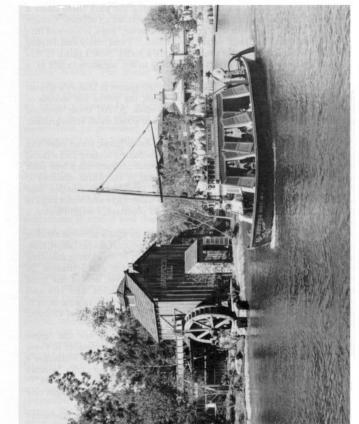


Fig. 2. Mike Fink Keel Boat cruising by Harper's Mill on Tom Sawyer Island at Walt Diss World. Photo courtesy of Walt Disney Productions.

The 8-acre infrastructure at Disney World is "of the sort all urban designers dream about, but few have ever been able to build."³⁰ This elaborate service basement, linking all parts of the park by tunnels, contains the computer center for all operations, and allows power and utility lines to remain easily accessible!e for repair in their underground terminals. The inner workings, entirely inaudible and invisible from the surface, add to the parks' Utopian atmosphere. While not a "New Town" in the strict sense of a fixed population center (although a total destination resort which accommodates guests for two weeks or more). Disney World is looked to as a model for avant-garde engineering which can be applied to actual towns. Without the real problems of city life – work, school, politics, welfare, drugs – and with its huge material resources, the task of the parks can be narrowed to concentrate on more finite "closed system" problems. Both parks, however, have caused building and business booms, followed by very real economic and political problems, in their surrounding California and Florida communities. The Iranian government has commissioned Disney World planners W.E. Potter and Joseph Fowler to design "the most advanced city in the world" on the Persian Gulf Coast, an example of the wider application of solutions to the problems of the parks to international development.31

Charles Morris, Charles Eames, Mel Kaufman and Robert Venturi are avant -garde architects who see in the parks primary examples of vernacular architecture; designed by artists, set designers and engineers rather than by architects and city planners – as a model for a new appraisal of what architecture is and what its function should be, with the public rather than academically-trained professionals as the final judges. They propose that architects study the Disney parks along with the great European monuments as sources of important ideas. "[The parks are] becoming the sort o f obligatory pilgrimage for young architects that visits to the great monuments of Europe were for earlier generations."

In this quest to abstract from Disneyland and Disney World an essential American architecture, Robert Venturi of the vernacular school says, "Disney World is nearer to what people really want than anything architects have ever given them": 33

In [Venturi's] writings... he has made it clear that architectural vision does not lie with Soleri or Fuller (or even with Boston's Government Center) but with the fantopia of Las Vegas and Disneyland or with such standardized, universally distributed, miniature versions of these special places in the form of highway franchise design; for example, the twin yellow arches of McDonald's, a form known to, and representing the fulfillable aspirations of anyone.... Venturi has at last helped us to... settle for a conglomeration of the small-scaled, fragile, impermanent structures that has been, throughout history, among the most characteristic examples of native American building.... Totally excluded from Venturi's repertory is any (but for an ironic) reference to the once sacrosanct forms of the International Style and its American progeny... it is a matter of perceiving popular taste and then using it for benevolent ends, producing a market-tested product with hidden virtues instead of an architecturally virtuous (read: Avant-garde, progressive, utopian, etc.) design that will likely encounter consumer resistance and ultimately rejection.3 125

The vision of vernacular architects is to replace the American elitist

tradition of arcane academic design like the Jefferson Arch and Washington Monument, "undecipherable in ... meaning or association" with "the ordinary and the overlooked 136 at sources such as the Disney parks as an index to what people really want from structures and public environments. This question touches John Kouwenhoven's The Arts in Modern American Civilization³⁷, which traces the origins and significance of American arts to vernacular, rather than elite, sources, (Ironically, the one "modern" structure – the Contemporary Hotel at Disney World – looks like a parody ("a comic-book artist's vision"³⁸) of modern architecture; could its name be at all intended as a mocking commentary?)

From artists' and architects' first appraisal of the parks as the "personification of lower and mid-cult America, a kind of national monument to vulgarity ... everything the Art of Architecture was against,"³⁹ serious and appreciative studies began to produce accolades: "The greatest piece of urban design in the United States today is Disneyland. Think of its performance in relation to its purpose." (James Rouse, planner of Columbia, Maryland.)⁴⁰ As Joseph Morgenstern asks, "Who else but Disney has been able to build an American City that works?" 41

Calling Disneyland the "Town Square of Los Angeles," Paul Goldberger suggests that the parks provide suburbanites with "a chance to respond to a public environment," and provide definite "identity o f spaces," self-contained and with an unmistakable purpose, ⁴² something small towns used to provide but which is missing from suburban tracts and freeways. Disneyland and Disney World supply these values along with convenience and the ability to handle huge crowds of transient people, but without the stagnation of small-town life.

In an unchartable sea of suburbia, Disney has created a place, indeed a whole public world, full of sequential occurrences of big and little drama, of hierarchies of importance and excitement, with opportunities to respond at the speed of rocketing bobsleds or of horsedrawn street cars... no raw edges spoil the picture at Disneyland... everything is as immaculate as in the musical-comedy villages that Hollywood has provided for our viewing pleasure for the last three generations.

The domination of the parks' planning by artists, filmmakers and set designers in what Goldberger calls "symbolic architecture" is a sharp break with the usual approaches to "professional" building. The Disney artists' feel for detail, diversified style, for artifice and trompe d'oeil, and for drama (all skills based on cartooning and animation), are not only "more interesting than that of conventional city planners 45, but produced an amazingly different set of assumptions about what architecture could do.

New York architect Mel Kaufman, whose search for a new philosophy of public design has made him a leading exponent of the Disney style, remarks: "There's no 'architecture' [the American abstract architectural tradition] at Disney World, and I think it's great. Why do we care so much for architectural validity in a shopping center, when the real point should simply be to make the place fun?"46 Kaufman's design for the 1890s-style candy store in a New York plaza to replace the drab "functional" newsstand was, according to Goldberger, definitely influenced by Disney. 47

An example of these new assumptions in architecture is the arrangement of the theme lands as a series of "street scapes," each with a "visual magnet" at their ends to draw the visitor on to the next scene. The scale of Main Street buildings (in Disneyland) is theatrical – a distorted 5/8-life size at their top stories, producing an illusion of exaggerated height. Fantasyland uses a smaller-than-life scale and pastel color scheme to encourage the imagination even more strongly than the rest of the park does; the same encouragement which is produced by the miniaturization of real objects in the form of toys. Schickel calls this "a masterful matching of scales and proportions to the psychological content of the fantasy environments" in every part of the park.

The playful, romanticized tone of false-front buildings and props create an atmosphere of total theater "which exceeds the wildest dreams of avant-garde dramatists." Guests walk around and "act" against a number of created locales from every continent and historical period setting, each person creating his own "story" as he goes. This arrangement of sequential settings and symbols, in the parks at large and also in the form of "plots" within many of the rides, touches off a free-association process and gives visitors a dramatic sense of being in an epic tale or a number of film sequences.

To create selective perception, as in the design of the interiors of rides, the sequestering of each separate theme land from the others and from the world outside the park (for example, the Contemporary Hotel is visible only from Tomorrowland so that it "can't shatter the turn-of-the-century view from Main Street" has a filmic intention: "Main Street is like scene one and then the castle is designed to pull you down Main Street toward what is next, just like a motion picture unfolding" (designer John Hench). Architecture at the parks is not the design of space but the organization of procession" (architect Phillip Johnson).

The Disney town is a kind of stage based on architectural symbols for romanticized, stylized human interaction (even the hiring of attendants – "people specialists" – is called "casting"); extended outside the parks it is a way of conceiving of urban environments not as settings for serious and businesslike (humorless) attitudes but as a source of pleasure (even irony), wit, drama and fun: an idealized town based on mental foreshortening and exaggeration, drawing on nostalgia and popular, rather than academic, concepts of history (c.f. the Williamsburg and Knott's Berry Farm concepts). The example of the parks may provide an alternative vision of what people seek in urban environments: everyday life as an art form, with entertainment, fantasy, play-acting, role-playing and the reinstatement of some of the values which have been lost in the megalopolis.

Culturally, Disneyland and Disney World signify something far more than entertainment centers. Having to appeal to the broadest possible audience, they are helped by universal concepts of American myths – a panoramic, jumbled concentration – a dramatic shorthand – of American history and popular beliefs, as well as a wide spectrum of human experience presented in theatrical stereotypes and symbols, or "archetypal experiences,":⁵⁴ a recapitulation and pastiche of collective memory for

America, which includes non-American references as well.

This series of free-association ideas about other cultures, collected in one place in an "inner fantasy landscape"⁵⁵ is a favorite device not only of Disney but of mass media and commerce in general: Hidetoshi Kato calls these "instant worlds."⁵⁶ Los Angeles' "Restaurant Row" on La Cienega Boulevard gives one a choice of many kinds of national cuisine; Honolulu's Rainbow Bazaar is a compendium of Asian cultures; International Kitchens at Hawaii's Pearl Ridge shopping center offers food from ten or twelve different places (from a gallery of specialized kitchens), and the International Marketplace in Waikiki offers imports from Asia and the Pacific. While the "bazaar" notion of diverse cultures collected in one place is an old and venerable one, the modern technological adaptation of this idea is viewed with distrust and suspicion.

Disneyland can be compared to the ontological organization of Los Angeles:

Disneyland itself is a kind of television set, for one flips from medieval castles to submarines and rockets as easily as one can move, in down-town Los Angeles, from the plaza of the Mexican Olivera Street, to Little Tokyo, to the modern Civic Center with its new pavilion for the performing arts.⁵⁷ (Thompson)

City planner Constantinos Doxiadis calls the Disneyland idea of "scrambling" cultures and history the "Ecumenopolis" – all cities, with their historical settings, become one. ⁵⁸ "It's a Small World," a water-ride surrounded by mobile displays in Fantasyland, is probably the most detailed, concentrated and comprehensive amalgamation of symbols of the world's cultures anywhere.

People have long "understood" other cultures not through actual contact but through mediated experience and imagination. Even modern people – perhaps especially so – are influenced by these media versions andl earn from them much more than we are consciously aware. Hidetoshi Kato has pointed out the power that certain films have had in overwhelming our sensations with "gilded images" of particular places (and cultures): *Roman Holiday* (Rome), *The World of Suzie Wong* (Hong Kong), and *Blue Hawaii*. ⁵⁹

My own investigation of the impact of *Blue Hawaii* has convinced me that this film presents the single most influential image of Hawaii around the world, an image which **is** very much a tourist's version of the islands and which is ironically connected with the persona of singing star Elvis Presley because of his starring role in the film (Presley is otherwise always associated with the South). As a "musical travelogue," made just as Hawaii became a state, the film seems to have been intended to attract tourists; how much of Hawaii's huge tourist industry is a result of the "Blue Hawaii effect?"

The popular culture aspect of international relations – the popular, rather than the official images held by nations of one another (Edward Hall's subject in *The Silent Language* and *The Hidden Dimension* ⁶⁰) is an important basis for development theory: Daniel Lerner points this out in reference to Leo Lowenthal's comparison of production and consumption heroes, and the importance of these types for popular attitudes toward

development.61

Disney's Mickey Mouse has been the ambassador of American popular culture since the 1930s, even in the most inaccessible corners of the world, and foreign visitors – including many official dignitaries – make a visit to the Disney parks a high point of their visits. What is the meaning of Mickey Mouse in the context of non-American cultures? And, if the Disney parks are designed around an American collective memory – what is the meaning of that memory for non-Americans? These questions are part of my effort to describe the international "Disney effect": does Disney act as a cultural lens through which the world sees the United States? What differences in perception occur through Disney products in widely diverse cultures?

Disney's ability to gauge common American values was largely a result of his Middle American upbringing and a close identification with the common (middle-class) man, rather than an elitist's approach to the "masses" as an objective reality apart from himself, to be analyzed and then manipulated, as in the application of the behavioral sciences to business. Disney's success is a clear refutation of the manipulation model of communications which is usually assumed in mass media studies.

Disney had the uncanny ability of providing people with the kinds of things which set them at ease. "Walt never wanted to change anybody," says John Hench. "He always figured that people were great just the way they were. We were always attempting things that would force people to move around somewhere or other, and he would say, "Look, if they have to walk through there, you pay them for it somehow." He never developed the kind of contempt you sometimes find in people in the advertising and publicity business. The concept of giving people what they want is often held up to ridicule, but the truth of the matter is that we rarely get an opportunity to see this kind of philosophy in action. More often we are confronted with the notion of giving the people what someone *thinks* they want. Disney never consciously played down to the public, treating it, instead, as deserving of lavish attention.⁶² (Finch)

As Disney drew on his own predispositions and middle-class, Midwestern personality, obviously a large part of the understanding of the public temperament was based on his own intuitive knowledge of deeply-entrenched American beliefs: the mechanistic, deterministic view of the doctrine of progress; pragmatism, applied science, the Protestant Ethic, materialism (the parks are, of course, monuments to both consumption and production); collectivism (the parks, and the entire Disney enterprise, are operated on a close-knit "family/team" basis); the Social Ethic, specialization and centralization. In an American Studies sense, the parks are perfect museums for the study of each of these features of the system of American popular beliefs, as well as American beliefs about other cultures. The historical settings of the parks, particularly Main Street, are examples of what cultural geographers call a "field of care": a place, like the neighborhood drugstore, or corner bar in a community, loaded with associations of familiarity and affection for the people who live there. But the Disney version of turn-of-the-century Main Street, with its barber shop, apothecary, moviehouse, haberdashery, tobacconist, emporium, candy store, ice cream parlor and city hall, is an idealized, caricatured setting - one which doesn't exist outside the Disney parks (although the Disney parks themselves are "fields of care"): not an imitation of a Main Street

anywhere in the U.S., but "a kind of universally-true Main Street – it's better than the real Main Street of the turn of the century ever could be."⁶³

The medieval castle is another example of the power of a nearly fictional (literary-historical) symbol which Disney has renovated and stylized to overcome the historical "weaknesses" of real castles: chill, draughts, hard, uncomfortable furnishings, inconvenience and filth. The castle at Disney World with its air-conditioning, all-electric kitchen, elevators and large restaurant, presents a "glamorized, sanitized history" more appealing to Americans, with their taste for efficiency, comfort and cleanliness (also for technological progress and know-how) than Europe's finest medieval castle. For most Americans, of course, the reality of a castle's interior doesn't enter into the romantic concept of a castle at all: Disney's ideal simply reinforces this unconsciousness.

These ideals touch off a "return to the familiar" which the nostalgia in collective memory tries to achieve, but rather than a return to the old neighborhood (or to the fantasized past) Disney adds improvements to the trigger of collective memory, so that the "return" is even better at Disneyland than it could ever be in reality.

Actually returning home is an ambivalent experience, since, as cultural geographers suggest, we feel the reality of places most strikingly when we aren't there. Going back to them has a way of diffusing our concept of a place into many sub-concepts: the weather, the people, our own state of mind and health. "You can't go home again": everything is different, people change (not always for the better); unhappy as well as happy experiences and relationships re-emerge; slowly we lose hold of the "rose-colored" ideal which can't exist simultaneously with the real thing. When adults return to their childhood homes, they remark how much smaller and shabbier things appear than they did in memory. At Disneyland, no such disappointment is possible; the perfect symbolism of Main Street evokes the pleasure of memory without the pain and disillusionment of actual return.

This return to childhood is the basic appeal of the Disney parks – in fact, of all Disney productions; considering the number of adult visitors to Disneyland (far more than the number of children), the notion of a return to childhood for adults seems to be more important to Disney's popularity than the appeal to children of the present. (An ABC-Television advertisement for Disneyland calls it "the happiest part of growing up.")

In his brief history of nostalgia, Jean Starobinski points out that in Western Europe in the late 17th century (at the birth of the Industrial Revolution), nostalgia (based on the Greek for "return" plus "sorrow") was thought of as an actual disease to be treated medically. The cause of this disease was said to be *desiderium patriae*, or desire (to return) to one's native land (an important aspect of Romanticism); the psychological rupture caused by geographical dislocation, primarily of rural to urban migration resulting from the growth of cities and their industries.⁶⁵

In modern America, a "nation of movers," this breaking of ties with places is so common – the average length of stay in one place in the U.S. is less than three years, and one American in five moves every year – that with the acceleration of changes everywhere, even in the smallest towns, it

130

becomes more and more difficult to return to places as they were or even to recognize them in their altered state.

Because of the shift in man's relationship to places, nostalgia has now assumed a different role in response. As Kant, in his *Anthropologia*, suggested, it is really another *time*, not another *place*, that we want to re-experience; we want to recapture childhood. (Freud would say we want to escape "maternal deprivation.") So nostalgia, with the modern loss of roots, become, as a yearning for the protection and security of the family rather than a yearning for place; the family replaces the village in our affections, By the association of ideas, the geographical setting of growing up and the process of growing up are confused: longing for place is an unconscious cryptogram for a desire to return to a simpler way of life (childhood):

When the term nostalgia points to a given place, a concrete landscape, modern theories designate individuals or their likenesses, and symbolic substitutes which imitate childhood. Today, we are under the sway of the theory of social adaptation: nostalgia no longer designates the love of one's native land, but the return toward stages in which desire did not have to take account of external obstacles and was not condemned to defer its realization. In the case of civilized man, who is no longer rooted to a particular place, it is not the uprooting which causes trouble; it is rather the conflict between the exigencies of integration into the adult world and the temptation to conserve the unique status of the child. The literature of exile, more abundant than ever, is, for the most part, a literature concerned with the **loss** of childhood. ⁶⁶ (Starobinski)

Advertisers use the same appeal to a sense of roots to reach people's feelings for their childhood. Bell Telephone recommends a long-distance call to one's parents and friends "back home" as a way of returning, psychologically, to the security of the childhood state, and also plays on the guilt which people feel for "abandoning" their parents; forsaking the traditional codes of thinking and behavior – the basis of conflict between adult and child worlds today.

So the Disney parks touch on two sources of the modern desire to return through time to an earlier state of mind: the childhood of the individual (Main Street; Fantasyland, based on children's literary classics; and the play-orientation of the parks' activities) – and the childhood of the nation (early twentieth century settings and back through the frontier and colonial periods). Disney's consciousness of the nation's past was rooted in the outlook of the 1950s: "America's last happy time," so that America's childhood is seen at the parks from a specialized historiographical perspective, one which now (nostalgically) is a cosmology of sensibility (ideas, images and attitudes) in itself. In this way the parks contain a "double vision" of history: mythopoeic history seen through an additional mythopoeic lens.

It is interesting that Disneyland and Disney World contain all time modalities *except* the present: just the past and the future. Fantasyland contains a rarefied dimension – art – which is a variation of present (but also past and future) consciousness, concerning itself with realms of reality other than the present moment. But most of the features of this fantasy dimension have an antiquated character based on literature of the 19th century and earlier: King Arthur, the tales of Grimm and Anderson, *Alice in Wonderland*.

132 Journal of Popular Culture

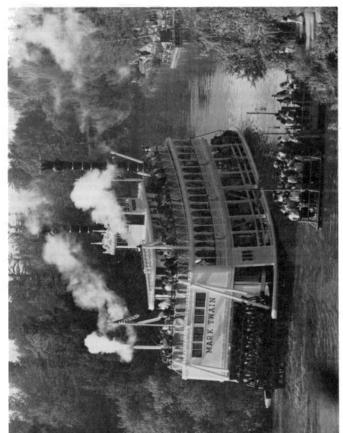


Fig. 3. Disneyland's Mark Twain journeying down "Rivers of America" in Frontierland, Disneyland. Photo courtesy of Walt Disney Productions.

In addition to its concern with history and nostalgia, one of the most impressive points of Disney's concept of the parks is an open-minded, future orientation. Besides the exhibitions at Tomorrowland, the entire park is designed for indefinite expansion within the guiding spirit of the original core park. Disney's oft-quoted remark on this subject is "Disneyland will never be completed as long as there is imagination left in the world."

Part of the plan for the future is EPCOT, Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (planned for the 1980s at Disney World), a residential community of 20,000 where "people can actually live a life they can't find anywhere else in the world today''' (Disney). This community is designed as an experimental proving-ground for urban technology and lifestyles 25 years ahead of their time. Blake remarks, "Not even Corbusier at his brashest ever proposed anything so daring."" EPCOT may very well become the first "enclave of the future" called for by Alvin Toffler as an absolute necessity in combating the effects of "future shock":

Astronauts, pilots, and other specialists are often trained by placing them in carefully assembled emulations of the environments they will occupy at some date in the future when they actually participate in a mission. By duplicating the interior of a cockpit or a capsule, we allow them to become accustomed, by degrees, to their future environment.... There is no reason why the same principle cannot be extended.... Tomorrow, as the technology of experiential simulation advances, we shall be able to go much further. The pre-adapting individual will be able not merely to see and hear, but to touch, taste and smell the environment he is about to enter. He will be able to interact vicariously with the people in his future, and to undergo carefully contrived experiences designed to improve his coping abilities."

EPCOT, together with Disney's innovations within the parks, provide not only popular culture capitals but centers for ideas and prototypes whose impact extends far beyond entertainment. This insight can lead to a new evaluation and respect for "entertainment" as a source of ideas more serious and far-reaching than has been realized or admitted.

The example of the Disney parks shows how even American popular culture, considered the most advanced and futuristic, contains a strong interaction of "pure" popular culture and traditional functions, breaking down the detailed distinctions (separations) which have been attempted between folk, popular, traditional and mass.

An entire set of meanings which extends far outside the arena usually assigned popular culture emerges in a study of Disneyland and Walt Disney World. Not only are these "electronic" and "plastic" amusement parks important as the opular culture capitals of America, but, with all their technological innovations and expertise, they are restoring many "traditional" features to American life; features we usually think of in traditional, not popular, culture: the small town; the leisure drive; pedestrianism; the town square; integrated architectural styles based on common materials; vernacular design which reinstates detail and artifice to public buildings, and allows "set design" conventions to touch off strong associations from collective memory; the division of huge transient crowds into smaller, intimate groups, and other "innovations." This couching of traditional values in futuristic form is a good lesson in perception and broad-mindedness. We have to be careful not to allow the

form and historical setting of something to disguise its function as a modern counterpart of a traditional function; it may be a new version of an old idea, or an old version of a "modern" one.

Neotraditionalists (as described in *The Lonely Crowd*⁷¹) fall into the trap of advocating the traditional (especially in non-Western form) – yearning for the quaintness and beauty of an insular, rural tradition (greatly romanticized), while enjoying – and preferring – a jet-age lifestyle. Especially now, many people, like the neotraditionalists, are drawn to older ideas in old forms (nostalgia) and wish these ideas were still active in reaction to the future shock produced by rapid cultural change in the wake of technological innovation. The truth may be better than they think; perhaps these older impulses are still in operation, but in new forms which mask them. New and old may be on one continuum of evolving variants rather than as a model of polarities. Part of the problem with the definition of popular culture is that it is so often restricted to mean "mass media," rather than as a new dimension of all time-honored studies of human life (folklore, history, philosophy, art, etc.), extended backwards through time and outward to include all cultures, even the most traditional.

This inclusive definition of popular culture – that of" mass culture of developed societies today as simply a new variation of popular culture as it has existed throughout the history of mankind," can allow us to see popular culture within traditional forms and vice-versa, providing a new perceptual framework for looking at all cultures from a more inclusive standpoint, with the added ability to see change as an historical constant and not just as a unique mechanism of modernization.

Most people, however, consider popular forms to be limited to the category of entertainment or to be debased forms of high culture. What happens when traditional values and ideas emerge in modern Western popular form? A curious re-evaluation takes place. Somehow we are blinded to their continuing roles and meanings by their newly-acquired styles, and can hardly ever accept any new (popular) form of a tradition we think of as elevated and antiquated (much as avant-garde art forms have always been repudiated when they first appear.) As a result of this failure of new popular forms to register as part of something more respectable (old, pre-industrial), the current stages of the tradition seem to branch off either into arcane forms, which only a few educated people appreciate, or into low-brow media, from their original neutral places in traditional culture:

(contemporary) elite form

(old) traditional

(contemporary) popular form

For example, vestiges of live theater still flourish, either in avant-garde form in New York playhouses, or as big-time wrestling and roller-derby; folk music, which is neutral in traditional settings, becomes high-brow as a collector's item or low as Country and Western music. And like the role of traditional religion, television is now providing behavior and moral guides and a common national "shared experience" – the largest in human history; but intellectuals hold that all but educational channels and

programming are debased and "corrupting," since commercial programming is aimed largely at the lower-middle and lower classes. However, the same intellectuals approve the *idea* of "shared experience" in genral (particularly in traditional form), but the manifestation has to be the "right" (i.e., literal) kind, or recognition doesn't occur. In the same way, the ancient Greek mythic structure is extremely elitist now; its modern approximation (as Gore Vidal proposed in *Myra Breckenridge*) is the Hollywood star system.

Amateurism, or the non-professional practice of arts and crafts throughout the culture, is highly prized by neotraditionalists in its foreign settings, and continues in America as "The Ted Mack Amateur Hour," a program considered very low-brow in its own cultural setting because the style is wrong. Similarly, the open-air market is now the "swap-meet," often held during the daytime at drive-in theaters (as a way of making maximum use of these places), considered a lower-class activity, not classed with the elitist flea market, crafts market, charity bazaar, antique show, or the revival of the Renaissance Faire (in Southern California). The basic concept for all of these, however, is shared.

Can these historical forms avoid the "destructive dilemma," a forced choice between seclusion or "debased" popularity? (It seems that our most valued forms of human creativity and interaction – per anthropology – are forced to flow completely around respectable middle-class taste.) (See Appendix I.)

The study of the blending – and conflict – of traditional and modern is vital for the future cultural development of all cultures, not only in order to have a simple grasp of what is happening to older forms in the face of "future shock," but of course to consciously chart whatever cultural development can be designed and molded through public policy. Studies of the unique blend of modern and traditional styles in Japan show how each culture is a special case; there is no single description or prognosis of "modernized nation" which can be applied to all countries – especially to predict what will happen when a nation modernizes: notice the great variation among the developed nations of England, Germany, the U.S., Japan and the Soviet Union.

For the most part, the "eternal values" of human life posed by the literary-intellectual community continue to exist all around us, but hidden from sight by our own selective perception of "good taste," which responds only to the *literal form* without seeing the *spirit* – the inherent functions – which can exist in the most despised mass culture forms. An ironic instance of "reverse perception," to show how confused standards of judging popular culture become when applied cross-culturally, is the world's first art for the masses; not a product of Western technology at all but an earlier product of a traditional country – the Japanese wood-block print of the early 1600s. Perhaps what is needed now is a new kind of "neotraditionalist"; not one torn between the world he admires (but can't live in), and the world he really likes (but can't see as admirable): but one who can see the synthesis and interplay between both worlds as a rich texture of reality. Lerner's

transitional man can not only accept and appreciate the new but can also go back to and appreciate the old (like Gandhi, who wanted to unite the modern and the traditional).

Disneyland, with its many historical settings, has a great number of traditional "worlds" for re-living by Americans, the same people who have such a reputation for their addiction to change. Seeing each person as composed of several layers of consciousness – rather than as a "type" (modern or traditional) with tunnel vision, refines the "polarity" and "conflict" models of tradition/modernity (either/or) to appreciate a complex, sophisticated interaction between new and old.

According to Joseph Gusfield in "Tradition and Modernization: Misplaced Polarities in the Study of Social Change," 14 "the view that tradition and innovation are necessarily in conflict has begun to seem overly abstract and unreal." 15 Traditional societies are themselves products of change, and aren't displaced by, nor do they disappear, with changes: "New forms may only increase the range of alternatives. Both magic and medicine can exist side by side, used alternatively by the same people." 16

In a syncretism of unlike elements, a unique new form evolves: "accretism in a transmutational form without replacement or rationalization of the accumulated and transformed" (McKim Marriott, *Village India*).⁷⁷ For example, in the synthesis of Paganism and Catholicism to produce "traditional" Catholicism, tradition and modernity aren't mutually exclusive but "frequently mutually rein forcing, rather than systems in conflict" (Gusfield).⁷⁸ "The great tradition of the urban world in India has by no means pushed aside the 'little tradition' of the village as they made contact. Interaction has led to a fusion and mutual penetration."

And, like the sharp awareness of "place" which occurs only when we're away from it, we often become aware of a tradition only when we are outside it, or beyond it in time, like the keen observation of American culture by alienated subgroups or outsiders. As in the work of Jewish-American writers, and the work of foreigners and immigrants, it often takes an outsider to see and analyze the culture they live in; everyone else is too close to it, too much under its control, and too unconscious of it to see it for what it is.

Contemporary popular forms, because they are so close and therefore "invisible," need the passing of time to produce awareness, like the relatively recent discovery of film as an art form (at first only the very early films were allowed "classic" status); this is the same impulse behind the discovery of the dime novel, comic books, and the early era of television. It takes someone outside a particular expression of a tradition to recognize and label it; as McLuhan remarked, we see history through a rear-view mirror; things are only real to us after they have gone by for quite a while and no longer make up our immediate cultural environment. Nationalism requires a common culture, based on traditional values in addition to modern ideas and methods." The modernizing process itself can spread tradition to more social levels – for example, by facilitating religious pilgrimages (or the Disneyland pilgrimage). Can countries other than the

United States, particularly those caught between tradition and moderity as they develop, make use of the Disney concept to experiment with the interaction of old and new, to facilitate the capacity for blending opposites in transitional culture, and to show the world this interaction, using a panorama of dramatic imagery which can express the many mythic levels of a culture – from collective memory to future vision?

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Appendix I

Flow Chart: Transformation of traditional forms into contemporary elite and popular forms*

Traditional media (diverges (pre-industrial) (diverges (into)) Modern elite form (or) Modern popular form

national capitals relig. shrines symbolic capital

Disney Land & World Space Needle, Astrodome 138

Disneyland and Walt Disney World theatre: avant-garde & traditional live theatre drama, ritual "dramatic" sports events: ➤ Big-time wrestling roller derby folk music (arcane & ancient) Jazz (Progressive) Country & Western rock & roll antique shop open-air marketflea market swap-meet Salvation Army, Goodwill traditional cuisine of foreign countries franchise "fast food" ➤McDonald's, Burger Chef, Dairy Queen pantheon of gods (Greek) Great Literature pantheon of gods: the classics Hollywood: film stars, mythology celebrities, popular heroes literature shared experiences in trad. cultures: shared experience Greek, European ritual, religion television ➤ film sports Renaissance Man educated diletantism trad, amateurism amateurism: nonprofessional practice of arts & crafts throughout a culture TV amateur shows →do-it-vourselfism hobbies high literature psychiatry science folkways: oral trad. specialists of value-instruction: ethics & etiquette television soap opera popular psychiatry self-improvement guides evangelism

139



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