VINYL LEAVES

Walt Disney World and America

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WESTVIEW PRESS
BOULDER • SAN FRANCISCO • OXFORD
Conclusion: Theses on Disney

They can be forgiven a certain amount of hubris because the laws of reality do not operate here.

—Jennifer Allen

This has been a long day in the Vacation Kingdom — from the rush in the morning through the lines and rides to the late-night fireworks and lasers. This is my last night here this trip. I’m exhausted, trying to see everything one more time. While waiting in Chip and Dale for the courtesy car to come and give me a jump start, I’ll take a brief look back.

Images float across my internal video screen. Sounds and smells slide through the soft Florida night in my head. As usual, I have been thoroughly entertained — amused and bemused by craft and whimsy. As usual, I have been thoroughly appalled by corporate ideology and the commodification of culture. As the Terminator says, “I’ll be back.”

The everyday life of an anthropologist is often weird. Whether or not one cares at all about the burning disciplinary issues and in-house arguments that purport to mark the institutionalized professional, the actual doing of anthropology — the being in the field part — is difficult to stop. Once you’ve turned yourself into a research tool, everything around you becomes culture, data, odd practice, magic, and example. Awash in curious movement and strange conversation, the normal world becomes mysterious and often ludicrous.
Having lived in rural Africa during various times of my life, I find have developed an informal diagnostic for capturing the strangeness of American culture. When confronted with a fake modular car phone, a microwavable “traditional Thanksgiving dinner in a pouch,” or the pink Energizer rabbit, I ask myself, “How would I explain this to Emmanuel (a rural Cameroonian friend, forever seventeen years old)?” I can rarely figure out an answer to that question, but I know that when it occurs to me, I have seen or heard something odd. Recently I have been asking myself that question a lot — increasingly in situations those around me have come to take completely for granted.

Walt Disney World is full of such odd things. And although its marinade of nostalgia and sentiment is meant ostensibly to bespeak a kinder, gentler world (the violence in the cartoons aside), the producers have put us into “films” with a bit of an edge. Disney’s forest, I think, is ultimately a dangerous one — both for its shape and for the seductions by which we are led to the gingerbread weenies at its core.

Let me try to summarize these woods with a short recap of the way in, through the surrounding valley, followed by a brief series of snapshots taken from above at different heights. Appropriately, this finale will be a little like the “speed rooms” at the end of Delta’s Dreamflight.

**Mickey, Meet Ludwig**

Walt Disney World is to Disneyland as the *Grundrisse* is to Theses on Feuerbach — a behemoth of an entirely different scale but with an unfocused genetic connection. It’s Mickey Mouse on steroids. Whereas Disneyland fills a couple of hundred acres and is surrounded by the tick-tack of hotels, motels, and other Orange County, California, effluvia — all out of Disney’s direct control — Walt Disney World contains 27,433 acres of central Florida swamp and scrub. This property is about the same size as San Francisco and is twice as big as Manhattan. Merely to reach Main Street USA — the entrance to the Magic Kingdom in the northern part of the property — customers who cross Walt Disney World boundaries must undertake a 4 1/2-mile automobile ride to the parking lot, a tram ride to the Ticket and Transportation Center, and a monorail or ferry boat ride to the Magic Kingdom entrance. Including walking and line times, this liminal transition from outside to inside may take an hour. A child’s question “Are we there yet?” cannot easily be answered.

Into this spot of nature, which was secretly purchased by dummy land companies in 1965 at an average price of less than $200 an acre, Disney has built four to seven theme parks (depending on how you count them), a bird sanctuary, ten resort hotels (as of mid-1991), a campground, a shopping village, and the attendant parking lots, roads, and waterways — the latter including a number of artificial lakes. Support buildings — office buildings, construction workshops, central storage facilities, waste treatment facilities, and the central energy plant — dot the scrub, hidden from visitors behind trees, camouflaged walls, and artificial berms and hillocks. Around 7,500 acres are set aside as a wilderness preserve, leaving at present over 16,000 acres for further development.

The flagship theme park at Walt Disney World is the Magic Kingdom, a larger version of Disneyland with essentially the same layout, rides, and theater shows; but those few who think of Disneyland and Walt Disney World as interchangeable are, as we’ve seen, quite wrong.

Two-and-a-half miles southeast of the Magic Kingdom, hiding behind the great golf ball of Spaceship Earth, is EPCOT Center. If we think of EPCOT as a kind of permanent world’s fair, we can think of its hybrid structure as forming one theme park. Like a world’s fair, EPCOT has two very different constituents. Future World contains an industrial-technical-science display in pavilions sponsored by huge transnational corporations such as Exxon, AT&T, General Motors, and Kraft Foods. World Showcase, with ten national pavilions ranged around an artificial lake, presents iconic hints of various friendly nations. These presentations center around shops, architecture, and food, although most also have films, rides, or museums. When EPCOT Center was being built from 1979 to 1981, it was the largest construction project in the world.

River Country, a water park near the campground, and Discovery Island, a bird sanctuary administered in partnership with the state of Florida, have been in operation since the 1970s. In 1989 three more theme parks opened. The most extensive is the Disney-MGM Studios — a movie theme park in the art deco Hollywood style of the 1930s, which features a studio tour through Disney’s new production facilities. Typhoon Lagoon, another water park, and a nightclub area near the Disney Village Marketplace called Pleasure Island fill out the current fare. Each of these parks opened in direct competition with an existing tourist attraction in the metropolitan Orlando area. Between the theme parks and the resort hotels — which together offer a full complement of land and water sports, shows, and food — Disney is trying to keep tourists on its property for their entire visit to central Florida.

The parks have been enormously successful. In 1988 turnstiles clicked over 26 million times, making Walt Disney World the most visited tourist site in the world other than Spain.

Why is it here, and what does it do? It exists in part because for pure business reasons, Walt Disney wanted to tap into the tourist dollar of Americans living east of the Mississippi River. The California park draws mostly from its immediate surroundings, relying on repeat visits by southern Californians and their visiting kin. Walt Disney originally envisioned a park somewhat like Disneyland — one built in a large
metropolitan area that contained a large local constituency. He looked at St. Louis, Niagara Falls, and the Washington, D.C., area but soon realized that the major eastern population centers were in climates cold enough to make any park a seasonal operation.

Looking south for warmth, he was drawn to central Florida — first to Ocala and later to Orlando. The latter had three particular virtues. First, it was near the crossroads of a number of interstate highway trunk routes and the Florida Turnpike. The federal transportation system was already set up to funnel tourists from the Northeast on I-95, from the Midwest on I-75, and from the central-south on I-10. I-4 crossed Florida from Tampa Bay to Daytona Beach. The turnpike would bring patrons north from the West Palm Beach-Ft. Lauderdale-Miami megalopolis.

Second, there was a lot of scrub land southeast of Orlando that was used for little else besides hunting and the desultory pasturing of cattle. If it were done quickly and quietly, a large chunk of this land could be purchased at very low cost.

Third, in the mid-1960s Orlando was a city on the make — ready, like the rest of the state of Florida, to give away the farm in the interests of economic growth. Yet as many have since pointed out, Orlando and Orange and Osceola counties (in which Disney’s property would sit) were not politically organized in a sophisticated enough fashion to deal with Disney sharpies.

Unable to control development around Disneyland and despairing especially about the lost revenue garnered by hosteries and restaurants outside park borders from customers drawn to the area through Disney’s efforts, Walt Disney insisted on buying enough land to buffer his Florida project from a similar commercial claustrophobia. Such complete control was enhanced tremendously when the Florida state legislature designated the property as the Reedy Creek Improvement District with nearly full municipal powers.

The size of the property also required that Disney think big, because from a movie company with an ancillary amusement park, Disney had suddenly become a land development company as well. As acreage grew, so did Walt Disney’s conception of what he called EPCOT — the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow.

Walt had begun his career as a cartoonist. He had expanded into short animated films and had begun a movie company that, in spite of its share of difficulties, had become the most famous studio in the world. He had invented characters that had become U.S. icons. He had won Oscars and honorary degrees. In what would be the last few years of his life, Walt had come to think of himself as an educator, an urban planner, and a technological visionary. Images began to grow of a utopian city of thirty thousand people, perhaps covered by a retractable dome, in which the most modern experimental systems would be put to use to solve the problems of the cities.

The Magic Kingdom would be the magnet to draw people to his city. Future World would evolve into a high-tech industrial park from which ever-changing technologies would emerge. World Showcase would be the shopping mall and urban entertainment area, complete with international food. There would be housing, green belts, a monorail and people-mover transportation system, and sophisticated waste disposal and energy systems. Walt presented his EPCOT plan to the public on his television show shortly before he died on December 15, 1966: “It will be a community of tomorrow that will never be completed, but will always be introducing and testing and demonstrating new materials and systems. And EPCOT will always be a showcase to the world for the ingenuity and imagination of American free enterprise.”

With Walt Disney’s death things changed. His brother Roy, along with the other corporate officers, decided to go ahead with EPCOT but not as Walt had envisioned it. Because of Florida state voting requirements, which would have given residents voting rights, the Company quickly decided to scrap the residential aspect of EPCOT. It would become a kind of permanent World’s Fair rather than a utopian live-in city. Although many think of the Magic Kingdom as Walt Disney’s World, EPCOT Center might more appropriately be called Roy Disney World. In the early 1990s, after a decade in which a series of greenmail episodes occurred that led to the firing of Michael Eisner as CEO of the Walt Disney Company — bringing a return to the corporation’s roots in the movies — we might think of the property as Michael Eisner World.

Let me now answer the general question, “What does Walt Disney World do?” I will do so by making a number of suggestions about what goes on there and how WDW articulates with the world outside its borders. These summary points are my “theses on Disney.”

Thesis I. Walt Disney World Is a Money-Maker.

The most obvious source of revenue at the parks is admissions. At the entrances to the Magic Kingdom, EPCOT Center, and the Disney-MGM Studios, visitors are offered a choice of one-, four-, or five-day ticket packages. Although the initial outlay for any group that plans to spend more than one day in the parks is substantial, a prorated price for adult customers who stay in the parks during full operating hours for four or five days is not much more than $2 an hour. River Country, Discovery Island, Typhoon Lagoon, and Pleasure Island have separate admissions. Although not unreasonable for many visitors, Disney admissions do form an effective screen against the poor and the not so poor. This is part of Disney’s utopian planning.
But the obvious is not the essence. Disney collects parking fees, fees for special programs, and royalties on sales of technological systems developed for Walt Disney World. Its major revenues at the parks, however, come from three other sources — hotels and restaurants, merchandising, and land development. Presently, the largest chunk of Walt Disney World revenues comes from its own on-site hotels and townhouses, payments from non-Disney hotels at the Hotel Plaza, and the numerous restaurants, clubs, and snack bars scattered throughout the property. Whatever else it is, Disney is a food and lodging company.

At its many shops and product stands, the Company sells everything from souvenirs and character merchandise to designer clothes and expensive specially crafted artifacts. From 1972 to 1983, merchandise sales rose from $29 million to $179 million. That’s a lot of mouse ears.

**Thesis II. Walt Disney World Generates Symbolic Capital for the Rest of Walt Disney Company’s Enterprises.**

As we know, Disney has interests other than Walt Disney World. In addition to its parks in California, Tokyo, and France, the company makes movies under its Walt Disney, Touchstone, and Hollywood labels; rereleases its animated classics (and has recently begun to sell them for home video systems); runs a cable television channel; leases its studios, equipment, and personnel for movie and television productions by others; and sells educational materials. As Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart note in their excoriation of Disney comic books, the Company has a global reach. Mickey Mouse is arguably the best-known character, human or otherwise, on earth.

Disney’s array of products is cross-referential on a massive scale. Character merchandise points to movies. The parks point to merchandise. The television shows point to the parks. The educational materials point to the parks. And so it goes. Each advertises the others in the guise of simply presenting its own products.

The Company has managed to insinuate its characters, stories, and image as a good, clean, fun enterprise into the consciousness of millions around the earth. In doing so, it has become a U.S. icon — enough so that critics of the attempted buyouts in 1984 often accused the perpetrators of being un-American.

All of this good feeling generates revenues, and these revenues in turn become crucially dependent on this good feeling. Millions of visitors personally confront the Company each year at Walt Disney World. Depending on their experience at the property, each of those visitors may become further enmeshed in the web as a lifelong customer of Disney products or may be driven away. The show at Walt Disney World — the rides, the films, the hotel rooms, the food, and especially the cleanliness, orderliness, safety, and the comportment of the park’s workers — all forms part of the ambience that generates real income. These elements make and re-create Disney’s reputation — a reputation that in turn becomes symbolic capital in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense. Disney’s reputation for good, clean fun — what it calls family entertainment — brings people to the products from which real capital is generated. Walt Disney World is on the front lines of this campaign.

**Thesis III. Walt Disney World Presents a Distillation of One Version of the United States and Its View of the World, a Version Both Mythical and Real.**

The parks are constructed like sets of Chinese boxes. Each has an overriding theme but is subdivided into subsidiary parts, each with its own subtheme: Main Street USA, Adventureland, Frontierland, Liberty Square, Fantasyland, Tomorrowland, and Mickey’s Starland in the Magic Kingdom; Future World and World Showcase in EPCOT; Hollywood Boulevard, the Backlot Annex, Lakeside Circle, the Backstage Studio Tour, and the Animation Tour at the Disney-MGM Studios. Each of these divisions is "themed" — presented in a consistent architectural, decorative, horticultural, musical, even olfactory tone with rides, shows, restaurants, scenery, and costumed characters coordinated to tell a consistent set of stories.

The structure is cinematic. Visitors are placed in the middle of scenes that unfold in a carefully choreographed manner as they move through them on foot or strapped into Disney’s various ride vehicles. The stories within stories are both different and the same. Each tells its own tale; but together they tell narratives about the United States and the world, history and the future, nature, fantasy, and dreams. They are the tales of a secular Sun Belt culture that has appropriated and defanged Franklin, Lincoln, Twain, even Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, and Chief Joseph; that considers the earth to exist only for human — read American — purposes; and that understands the world as a set of theme parks. Culture is construed as spirit, colonialism and entrepreneurial violence as exotic zaniness, and the Other as child.

**Thesis IV. Disney Is the Muse of Corporate America.**

The Walt Disney Company speaks for itself at Walt Disney World, marketing its own products and protecting its symbolic capital by encapsulating its customers in seamlessly themed, safe entertainment. But Disney also speaks for the transnational corporations that have joined it — for a substantial fee — to sponsor pavilions, restaurants, and exhibits at the parks. From Toll House cookies and Kikkoman soy sauce to Exxon, AT&T, General Motors, Kraft Foods, and United Technologies, corporations join Disney in telling stories that are entertainingly consistent with their public
relations purposes. As Mike Wallace puts it, Disney tells histories the corporations can live with. 4

Culture and fantasy are timeless. History — in which Cro-Magnon man, Michelangelo, Da Vinci, and Lincoln play considerable parts — was pretty goofy. There were some problems, but they have been fixed by creative spirit. The present is not the result of the past but is the first step toward a future that will be wonderful and exciting if we dare to use our imaginations. The future is another “new frontier,” to be lived in space or under the sea eating hydroponic food and surrounded by neon and black light — the Future as Graphics. It will present many “challenges,” which we will meet if we entrust ourselves to the corporate scientists, engineers, technologists, and planners. After all, are we not having a good time in the technological utopia of Walt Disney World?

**Thesis V. Walt Disney World Is an Epicenter of Decontextualization.**

Disney tells its stories by inventing new cultural symbols and appropriating existing ones, decontextualizing them, and reinserting them into its own mythology. Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain robots talk to each other about the American adventure, in which barely related iconic images are surrounded by the silences of untold historical stories. Geography is mixed up. The Jungle Cruise in Adventureland connects the Amazon River to the Congo, the Nile, and the Irrawaddy without a break. In World Showcase, the Norway pavilion sits between China and Mexico. Minnie Mouse wanders the Japanese pavilion in her kimono. Leonardo da Vinci is invoked as AT&T’s favorite Renaissance man. At the Kitchen Kabaret, Mae West becomes Kraft’s Miss Cheese.

Walt Disney World is a bricolage writ large, charming but insidious. By pulling meanings out of their contexts and repackaging them in bounded informational packets, decontextualization makes it difficult for people to maintain a coherent understanding about what is going on. Meanings get all jumbled together — separate in that all are abstracted from their different environments and equal in that their packaging destroys any sense of scale by which they could be measured against each other. Differences are glossed over, and “differences that make a difference,” as Gregory Bateson puts it, are neutralized. 9 Disconnected information passes in front of us at high speed. It seems, as the apocryphal phrase about bad history has it, “like one damn thing after another.”

**Thesis VI. Walt Disney World Is Postmodern.**

Whatever Walt Disney’s intent, Walt Disney World is a postmodern place — a locus of what Hal Foster has called a “postmodernism of reaction.” 4 It is a seemingly endless mélange of discreet, bounded informational packets plopped down next to each other willy-nilly — Liberty next to Fantasy, Japan next to Morocco. It is so rife with differences and strange borders that the very concept of difference is obliterated. Buildings in the Magic Kingdom contain multiple façades, creating a pastiche of vernacular evocations. EPCOT Center has the massive architecture of Future World and the touristic international iconography of World Showcase. The Disney-MGM Studios is exaggerated art deco Hollywood.

Joel Achenbach writes of “creeping surrealism,” 7 the general fear brought about by the manipulation of narrative and public discourse that nothing is real anymore. The tenor of postmodern times is such, he argues, that even when people can tell the difference between the real and the fake, increasingly they do not care. As long as we are amused, Neil Postman might say, it is enough. 8

Frederic Jameson claims postmodern culture is characterized by a breakdown of the signifying chain — the relation that exists between the signifier and the signified. 9 This is a cognitive result brought on by the rapid and ubiquitous de- and recontextualization of symbols in mass-mediated culture. Cognitive overload sets in, and the referential function of normal language becomes shattered. We respond with what Jameson calls “a strange compensatory decorative exhilaration,” which he likens to schizophrenia but which I think is more like a form of meditative bliss. Earlier I called it the bliss of commodity Zen.

Jameson uses Plato’s idea of the simulacrum — the identical copy for which no original has ever existed — to describe the “pseudoevents” and spectacles of our time — a time “with a whole historically original consumer’s appetite for a world transformed into sheer images of itself.” 10 Jean Baudrillard chases the disappearance of referential reason through the “orders of simulacra” into what he calls the “hyperreal” — a world in which “illusion is no longer possible because the real is no longer possible.” 13 For Baudrillard, reality has been effaced by the substitution of signs of the real for the real itself. A day spent looking at the fake oysters attached to the torii at the Japan Showcase, counting the vinyl leaves at the Swiss Family Island Treehouse, talking to people at Pleasure Island’s Adventurers Club who turn out to be Disney characters, and wondering whether the bird sounds throughout are real or Memorex brings a “strange compensatory decorative exhilaration” indeed.

**Thesis VII. Walt Disney World Presents a “Scholastic Program” for the Naturalization of the Commodity Form.**

The world we live in is a world of commodities. Not only our physical survival but our relations with other people and with ourselves are mediated increasingly by the commodity form. Whatever particular items or experiences we gather to build our daily lives, they all come to us more and more through the same process: They are available in, and only in, the
market. We can't even do the simple rituals that bind us together without purchasing paraphernalia. The commodity form, assumed and unremarkable, is the taken-for-granted hegemonic truth of our times.

Antonio Gramsci describes hegemony as the permeation throughout civil society ... of an entire system of values, attitudes, beliefs, morality, etc., that is in one way or another supportive of the established order and the class interests that dominate it ... to the extent that this prevailing consciousness is internalized by the broad mass, it becomes part of "common sense." ... For hegemony to assert itself successfully in any society, therefore, it must operate in a dualistic manner: as a "general conception of life" for the masses and as a "scholastic programme." 12 That is, we must be taught that it is good, reasonable, just, and natural that the means necessary for life are available only through the market. We must be taught the myth of commodity fetishism — that relations among people are to be seen as relations among things. And most important, we must be emmeshed in the field of commodities — a world of discrete packages and disconnected cultural forms, presented in swirls of cross-reference, timeless and fantastic, wherein we are to dwell and seek our salvation.

Walt Disney World sells itself. It sells other Disney products. It sells the messages of its corporate affiliates. But it also teaches us that dreams and experiences are for sale: We need merely give our proxies to the world of commodities and commercial cross-reference.

Thesis VIII. Postmodernism Is Isomorphic to the World of Commodities in Late Capitalism and Walt Disney World Exhibits This Connection.

Following Ernest Mandel, Frederic Jameson has argued that late — or postindustrial — capitalism is the most complete form of capitalism. 13 Under its regime, market relations have spread everywhere — colonizing every available niche in human life, including nature and the unconscious. The model is one of metastasis.

Postmodern cultural forms — in their endless proliferation, their ironic self-reference, their evanescence, and their intimate connection with commercial mass media — have an elective affinity with the field of commodities. They are reflections of each other, collectively sharing the same form.

Examples of this connection are rife at Walt Disney World. When Disney buys tons of sterilized dust from a California supplier to spread around the air-conditioned Haunted Mansion at night to give it the correct dinge, and when Mickey Mouse wears a Michael Eisner watch in the movie preview theater at the Disney-MGM Studios Backstage Tour, the world of commodities and the cultural form of postmodernism have meshed.

Conclusion: Theses on Disney

Thesis IX. Walt Disney World, Postmodernism, and the World of Commodities Are Chaotic.

With its themes within themes within themes, Walt Disney World represents the replication of similar patterns at different scales that is characteristic of fractals. 14 Lakes and plazas act as Lorenz attractors. I merely suggest here that the world of commodities, postmodernism, and Walt Disney World can be represented as Mandelbrot sets.

Thesis X. Walt Disney World Is Beguiling, Infinitely Interesting, and Utopian.

The Disney parks are enormously entertaining. As Alexander Moore has suggested, they have become "playful pilgrimage sites" for people from all over the world. 15 The planning, craftwork, art and architecture, staging, and technological engineering are extraordinary. There is something at Walt Disney World to draw out the knowledge and experience of all but its youngest visitors.

But millions of visitors come there for other reasons as well. It is a pedestrian's world. We can walk the crooked streets, past the sculpted plants, into the shops and the various hidden, peaceful spaces without vehicular fear. And we can do so at night. It is clean. The staff is friendly, and, as if by osmosis, the other customers are civil.

The technology usually works — the computers, the air-conditioning, the communication and transportation systems, and the light and sound technology of the rides and shows. There are day-care centers, kennels, and extensive provisions for the disabled.

Walt Disney World acts as an antidote to the normal, everyday experiences of many of its middle-class guests. They need only submit to Disney's total control of the operation and to the commodification of their own experience. It's very seductive. Huxley would have recognized it.

Thesis XI. The Critics Have Only Interpreted Walt Disney World, in Various Ways; the Point, However, Is to Make It into a Museum.
36. Keith Keogh, executive chef of Future World’s Coral Reef Restaurant, has twice been named Florida’s seafood chef of the year. See “It’s a Small World After All: International Dining Is a Highlight of Visit to EPCOT,” Baltimore Sun, May 18, 1986. Many of the hotel restaurants have been highly praised, as has the Empress Room at Pleasure Island.


38. Here are two representative statements from foreign workers in the showcases. They are found in Jim Sullivan, “Around the World in a Day: At EPCOT, if It’s a 1 p.m., It Must Be France,” Boston Globe, August 3, 1986, pp. 15, 38. “We asked her [Scottish saleswoman Lorraine McCorrie] whether EPCOT’s United Kingdom felt like home to her. ‘It’s very, very well made. . . . It’s an American conception of what they expect countries to be like . . . and it’s what Disney gives them. It’s very detailed,’” “This is just a small section of Germany, of Bavaria,” said Monica Schoiich, 20, a hostess from Heidelberg. ‘I just talked to a couple of Germans today, and they said, ‘All these tourists come here and think that’s Germany, what a bad thing.’ It’s artificial. It isn’t created to educate people. It was created to entertain. But I get the impression that most people think they’re being educated.’ . . . ‘It’s a part of Germany,’ explained her friend and co-worker Joachim Luke, ‘like Indian tents are a part of America.’” These quotes are on p. 38.


43. Cited in Sheila Friedeck, “Food Plays Role in Disney Fun, Fantasy,” Beaumont (Texas) Enterprise, March 5, 1986. Friedeck continues, “The grocery list includes imported cheeses from New York for the Italy Showcase; wafer-thin crepes flown in from Paris for the Morocco Showcase; cactus strips for the Mexico Showcase; and seafood flown in the same day it comes off the boat for several Disney restaurants.”

44. For information on purchasing patterns, see Amy Clark, “Disney Magic Keeps Cooking for 14 Million,” Coca (Florida) Today, August 17, 1980.

45. William J. Primavera, “The Techniques and Technology of Walt Disney World,” Restaurant Hospitality (February 1982), pp. 31-34. This quote is found on p. 32.

46. For a good general description of the center, see Peter Berlinski and Joan Marie Lang, “EPCOT’s Upscale World of Foodservice,” Restaurant Business, June 1, 1983, pp. 104-118.

47. Friedeck, “Food Plays Role in Disney Fun”; see also Linda Cicero, “Magical Mealtime: Food Preparation at Walt Disney World is Awe-Inspiring,” Austin American Statesman, August 7, 1986, pp. E1-back page.

48. In “Food Plays Role in Disney Fun,” Friedeck reports, “Alcohol is monitored with stickers. For example, a bottle of Scotch is signed out for the Rose and Crown, the English pub, then tagged with that bar’s sticker. When empty the stickered bottle is exchanged for a stickered new one.”


51. Friedeck, “Food Plays Role in Disney Fun.”

52. The bulk of the following is taken from Paul King, “The Marketing Challenge — ‘Backstage’ at Walt Disney World,” Food Management, July 1, 1986, pp. 74-78, 142-148.

53. The following guidelines were published in “Muttonchops Need Not Apply,” Harper’s Magazine (June 1990), p. 40. “Each individual’s appearance should add to the show and not detract from it. For this reason, anything that would be considered offensive, distracting, or not in the best interest of our Disney show will not be permitted.” People are hired as “cast members,” but they cannot be told that it is reasonable for the company to dictate the dos and don’ts of their costume and appearance. See Shirley Corbett, “It Takes Reality to Put ‘Magic’ into Magic Kingdom,” Portland (Maine) Sunday Telegram, August 10, 1980. The continuing joke is that with his moustache, Walt Disney would never have been hired at his parks.

54. For some of these, see Norwood Pope, “At Walt Disney, Mickey Mouse Markets Inside, Too,” American Banker, July 29, 1981.

Chapter 19


5. Bateson uses this phrase to characterize an “elementary unit of information.” See Forms, Substance, and Difference,” in Gregory Bateson, Steps to an Ecology of Mind (New York: Ballantine, 1972), pp. 448-465. This quote is found on p. 453.


10. Ibid., p. 66.


13. Mandel’s most thorough discussion of contemporary political economy is found in Ernest Mandel, Late Capitalism (London: Verso, 1978 [1972]).
Notes


About the Book and Author

Walt Disney World is a pilgrimage site filled with utopian elements, craft, and whimsy. It’s a pedestrian’s world, where the streets are clean, the employees are friendly, and the trains run on time. All of its elements are themed, presented in a consistent architectural, decorative, horticultural, musical, even olfactory tone, with rides, shows, restaurants, scenery, and costumed characters coordinated to tell a consistent set of stories. It is beguiling and exasperating, a place of ambivalence and ambiguity. In *Vinyl Leaves* Professor Fjellman analyzes each ride and theater show of Walt Disney World and discusses the history, political economy, technical infrastructure, and urban planning of the park as well as its relationship with Metropolitan Orlando and the state of Florida.

*Vinyl Leaves* argues that Disney, in pursuit of its own economic interests, acts as the muse for the allied transnational corporations that sponsor it as well as for the world of late capitalism, where the commodity form has colonized much of human life. With brilliant technological legerdemain, Disney puts visitors into cinematically structured stories in which pieces of American and world culture become ideological tokens in arguments in favor of commodification and techno-corporate control. Culture is construed as spirit, colonialism and entrepreneurial violence as exotic zaniness, and the Other as child.

Exhaustion and cognitive overload lead visitors into the bliss of Commodity Zen — the characteristic state of postmodern life. While we were watching for Orwell, Huxley rode into town, bringing soma, cable television, and charge cards — and wearing mouse ears. This book is the story of our commodity fairyland.

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