

of public culture. Its exhibits make social memory visible, and its means of establishing collective identity are based strictly on the market. Moreover, its size and functional interdependence make Disney World a viable representation of a real city, built for people from the middle classes that have escaped from cities to the suburbs and exurbs. It is an aestheticization of an urban landscape built without the city's fear or sex – and with its own, Disney money. Moreover, the insular theme park complex suggests very strongly that a separate, smaller city can be walled off within a larger city. While Disney World is an autonomous place with its own price of admission, a walled-off real city – like a gated residential community – promises to control the menace of strangers.

Nevertheless, the vision has its critics. Mike Wallace (1985) accuses the narrative behind the attractions of bleaching the conflicts out of American history. Steven Fjellman (1992) describes the paid amusements as a bazaar of commodity fetishism. While Alex Wilson (1992) calls the architecture and physical layout a supersuburb that eliminates the city, Michael Sorkin (1992, 208) thinks Disney World is an elaborate modernist utopia that reshapes the city into “an entirely new, antigeographical space.” Like television, which provided the original Disneyland with a national audience of wannabe Mouseketeers, visual communication at Disney World “erode[s] traditional strategies of coherence.”

The fascinating point is that Disney World idealizes urban public space. For city managers seeking economic development strategies and public philosophers despairing of the decline of civility, Disney World provides a consensual, competitive strategy. Take a common thread of belief, a passion that people share – without coming to violence over it – and develop it into a visual image. Market this image as the city's symbol. Pick an area of the city that reflects the image: a shimmering waterfront commercial complex to symbolize the new, a stately, Beaux Arts train station to symbolize renewal, a street of small-scale, red-brick shops to symbolize historical memory. Then put the area under private management, whose desire to clean up public space has helped to make private security guards one of the fastest-growing occupations.

Visual culture, spatial control, and private management make Disney World an ideal type of new public space. From the 1950s to the 1970s, this space was usually found in suburban shopping malls. From the 1970s, however, as conservative national governments reduced urban renewal funds and competition for private-sector investment

discouraged local governments from urban planning, this new public space has increasingly occupied the centers of cities. It has been shaped by both the expansionary strategies of real estate developers and the withdrawal from planning on the part of local governments. In this sense it is an emblem of the reshaping of the Welfare State.

But cities have never been able to control space so effectively as does corporate culture. Disney World admits the public on a paying basis. After getting local governments to pay for the infrastructure, the administration of the theme park secures the right to govern its territory autonomously. Disney World has its own rules, its own vocabulary, and even its own scrip or currency. Not only do these norms emphasize a surrender of consumers' identity to the corporate giant, they also establish a public culture of consumership. This is the model of urban space driving the public-private business improvement districts. Since Disney World provides its own security force and sanitation workers, the area they control is safer and cleaner than real city streets. Disney World has a mass transportation system, outdoor lighting, and street furniture; again, not surprisingly, all this works better than public facilities. Has Disney World been, all along, a not-so-subtle argument for privatizing public space?

“The Disney Company is America's urban laboratory,” a journalist writes in the *Village Voice* (Ball 1991). So parts of Disney World have been used in many different places. There are visual and spatial elements of Disney World in urban festival market-places and shopping malls, museum displays, ski resorts, and planned residential communities. Moreover, Disney World's control over its labor force and their interaction with consumers have been taken as models for other service firms. The synergies between Disney's various corporate investments are a model for the symbolic economy based on media, real estate, and artistic display. And Disney World is a way of making the whole symbolic economy real, no matter what levels of unreality are explored. When you see Disney World, you have to believe in the viability of the symbolic economy. So learning from Disney World relates to a number of separate agendas: in theme parks, urban planning, service industries, and the symbolic economy as a whole.

A shared public culture

The production of space at Disneyland and Disney World creates a fictive narrative of social identity.