

The asymmetries of power so evident in real landscapes are hidden behind a facade that reproduces a unidimensional nature and history. This is corporate, not alternative, global culture, created in California and replicated in turnkey “plants” in Florida, Japan, and France. We participate in this narrative as consumers. The products we consume are imported from other places. Because they are sold in a coherent visual scheme, they appear to perpetuate or reconstruct a place with its own identity. Main Street and EPCOT make obvious fictions for yesterday and tomorrow. But the experience of going to Disney World, and waiting to consume the various attractions, locates us in an endless present, when we are concerned only with getting somewhere and waiting to get back.

The big question is how we have come to use these public spaces to satisfy private needs. The need to be together, to be entertained, has created a mass market for high-quality consumer goods in high-status consumption spaces. The need to “connect,” to form social communities, creates a market for many kinds of associations and convention centers for them to meet. Private corporations’ desire to project a benevolent public spirit – helped along by zoning laws – creates large plazas, atria, or lobbies devoted to “public use,” either through art exhibits or facilities for eating and shopping. People “experience” these spaces by seeing each other experiencing them. Disney World has become such a monumental phenomenon because it visualizes a public that comes together only in transitory, market situations.

At the same time, Disney products have become the logos of a public culture. Naturally, there have been some changes over the years. Mickey Mouse started out in 1928 as a cartoon character. The Great Depression was Mickey’s formative childhood experience. In a Christmas tale published in 1934 (*Mickey Mouse Movie Stories* repr. 1988), Mickey and his dog Pluto walk hungrily through the snow on Christmas Eve. They pass a rich household, where the spoiled child amuses himself by teasing the butler, a dog dressed in a morning coat. The butler asks Mickey if he will sell his dog, which Mickey refuses to do. Mickey and Pluto then pass another house, where a poor family of kittens is asleep. Mickey rushes back to the first house, sells Pluto to the butler, and buys gifts for the kittens, which he leaves in their home. Warmed by his good deed, Mickey sits in the snow – where Pluto finds him, for he has run away from the rich child, dragging the rich family’s Christmas turkey with him. How does this lean and hungry Disney symbol

relate to the sleek, self-satisfied mouse who is the mascot of a major transnational corporation?

During the 1980s, Mickey Mouse’s ears were unashamedly stolen from popular culture by high-status arts, beginning with architecture. The architect Arata Isozaki designed part of the Team Disney Building at Lake Buena Vista, Florida (1987–90) in the shape of a giant pair of mouse ears – pop art fed back to a corporate sponsor. This design has been defended aesthetically as a pure geometric abstraction, in contrast to the anthropomorphic dolphins, swans, and mice used by the architect Michael Graves on other Disney corporate buildings (Asada 1991, p. 91). Once they are abstracted from the mass culture of Disney cartoons, however, mouse ears become symbols of a shared public culture. They even appear in a political cartoon on the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times* (June 5, 1992), worn by both a Republican elephant and Democratic donkey.

As Disney symbols are introduced into high culture, artists shake off the ironic detachment with which they might once have regarded them. When a modern dance company, Feld Ballets/New York, set two recent ballets to Mozart symphonies, they dressed the soloist in mouse ears and had the dancers sing “M-I-C-K-E-Y M-O-U-S-E” along with the 31st symphony (*New York Times*, February 29, 1992). While they do not offend in cultural performances, Disney symbols may be too suggestive for political affairs. A British painter, John Keane, caused an uproar in London in 1992 by exhibiting *Mickey Mouse at the Front*, a painting critical of the United States for mounting the Persian Gulf War (Porter 1992). The artist Bill Shiffer showed an assemblage, *New World Order*, in New York in 1993 that featured Mickey Mouse on top of a hammer and sickle, stars and stripes, cross, and Jewish star. Professional culture critics may even see Disney forms where none are intended. When the Sugar Cubes, a far-out rock group from Iceland performed recently in New York, the *New York Times* (April 20, 1992) described the lead singer’s hair as pinned up in Mickey Mouse ears on each side of her head – or maybe they were just Viking braids.

Mickey Mouse infiltrated standard American English a long time ago. Yet the meaning is ambiguous because it joins irony and simulation. The adjective *Mickey Mouse* means both outlandish and false, “a caricature of normal practice . . . [and, as in the military, a] mindless obedience to regulations” (Rosenthal 1992). Despite this ambiguity, and his changing form, Mickey Mouse has become a criterion of authenticity in cultural production. He is