

## What's in a Theme Park? Exploring the frontiers of Euro Disney

Maria-Lydia Spinelli

De Paul University

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### ABSTRACT

1992 was the year of the European Community integration, sealing the completion of the Internal Market, the culmination of a project begun in 1985. Coincidentally, 1992 also marked the opening of Euro Disneyland, a replica of the Magic Kingdom, the well-known theme park in the U.S.A. This was the culmination of a joint venture between the French government and the Disney corporation, the negotiations over which had roughly taken the same time to achieve as the consolidation of the European internal market. The initial agreement provides for continuous development of some 4801 acres of agricultural land in Marne-la-Valle -- an area roughly 1/5th the size of Paris -- into a luxury resort compound to be completed in the year 2017.<sup>1</sup> The name, "Euro Disney," proclaimed it a supra-national entity suggesting a dedication not just to business but to the galvanization and consolidation of the European Union. Since its inception, however, the park has met with continuous resistance from various European constituencies and is yet to yield a profit. While the struggles have been cast as a case of "cultural imperialism," a review of the history of the Disney parks and an exploration of the lines of resistance to Euro Disney the paper argues that what is being resisted in France is not a cultural imperialism but the establishment of an autonomous complex within French boundaries. Instances of conflict over Euro Disney address issues of personal autonomy, public jurisdiction, the privatization of the public realm and the hardening of boundaries of exclusion and inclusion. These are tensions already present in Europe as a result of the globalization of the economy and internationalization. The battle over Euro Disney can be used as a microcosm of struggles yet to come.

### Introduction

1992 was the year of the European Community integration, sealing the completion of the Internal Market, the culmination of a project begun in 1985. Coincidentally, 1992 also marked the opening of Euro Disneyland, a replica of the Magic Kingdom, the well-known theme park in the U.S.A. This was the culmination of a joint venture between the French government and the Disney corporation, the negotiations over which had roughly taken the same time to achieve as the consolidation of the European internal market. The initial agreement provides for continuous development of some 4801 acres of agricultural land in Marne-la-Valle -- an area roughly 1/5th the size of Paris -- into a luxury resort compound to be completed in the year 2017. The name, "Euro Disney," proclaiming it as a supra-national entity suggested a dedication not just to business but to the galvanization and consolidation of the European Union.

From its very inception, however, the apparently momentous project has been fiddled with resistance and it is yet to yield a profit. The contract was wrought despite several serious concerns and over the persistent objections of the French intellectuals that this was a form of "cultural imperialism." The Walt Disney company's identity has always been fled to screening and management practices which have questionable implications and which were known to be in violation of French labor laws. There were moreover many unanswered questions about how to maintain the original appeal of the Disney park while catering to European tastes, preferences, and values. The Walt Disney company set conditions such as the establishment of a trade protection radius often kilometers, which is also foreign

to French law (Frischer 1990). Soon after opening, this traditionally popular park has seen a farmers' demonstration, visitors persistent complaints and insufficient attendance figures, culminating in grievances and successful lawsuits on the part of employees, serious sustained economic loss and a humiliating performance in the European stock market. In order to rescue the project a number of radical measures have been taken. Disney company officers have been replaced by French ones. Unprecedented major compromises in park operations and policies have been made and more are planned: employee contracts have been modified to comply with French labor laws; prices have been cut; the debt has been radically restructured reducing Disney holdings to 25%; and the name has been subtly replaced by "Disneyland Paris."

The unraveling of this drama has received a great deal of attention from the media. This attention, along with the scope of the economic and human investment that have been poured into Euro Disney indicate that much more than mere economics or the success of a theme park is at stake here. On the whole the story has been cast as a struggle between the Disney Company's aggressive "cultural imperialistic agenda," European "high taste" and French customs, polarizing the issues according to a United States-Europe dichotomy, and into a power struggle between an aggressor and its victim. This treatment has been very effective in drawing public attention and stimulating hostility toward the Disney company, but it distracts it from the real dynamics at work in Europe and the globalization of the economy. The public humiliation of the Disney company and the reduction of Disney holdings along with a number of cultural adjustments made to the park might seem to make it "safe" for European consumption. Yet, making the park "European" also legitimizes the profound restructuring which affects Europe through globalizing pressures which may nonetheless repeat United States patterns.

The influence of the Disney parks over their surroundings in both the United States and in Japan has been far reaching and amounts to much more than the consumption of Disney products. The most direct has been the explicit borrowing of Disneyland concepts in the design of urban and suburban spaces, such as malls, parks, resorts, hotels, city streets and even planned suburban communities. A second area of influence has been the spread of Disney like corporate management styles for employee and customer relations and for crowd management in both the private and the public realms. These are primarily based on the manipulation of perception, language and space. A third arena of influence has been in the socialization and training of an emerging managerial class (Spinelli 1992, 1995). Euro Disney, with its spatial and historical location and its planned expansions, can be expected to have similar effects.

As cultural performances theme parks have the potential for more than mere entertainment or limited economic revenue. Like festivals, celebrations, rituals and other symbolic practices, they play a role in the construction of self and cultural identity (Geertz 1973, MacCannell 1976, 1992, Myerhoff 1986 among others). They provide models and mirrors of social life becoming vehicles for reflexive thought and social symbolic action (Turner 1974). As participatory grand play they provide models of and for reality often creating "the sign conditions of desired outcomes" (Gell 1975, Munn 1986). Thus, they are vehicles for reflexive re-imagination (Myerhoff 1986) and for social and cultural engineering. In this sense, the Disney parks could act as a force popularizing its signs as signs of group identity, commitment or competition. Under the proper circumstances, cultural performances, can become training grounds for actual personal and social transformations (Kapferer 1979, Munn 1986, Moore 1985, Myerhoff 1986, Spinelli 1992), simultaneously carrying out the work of ideology (Bourdieu 1977, 1984) legitimating and embodying social practices. As sites of cultural and space production, they usually serve to maintain and promote social differences in terms of class and social identity (Bourdieu 1984, Lefebvre 1979). AS loci of contestation of signs and space, they provide microcosms of the larger society, public realms within which societal conflicts can be and are settled more subtly and through non violent means (Negt and Kluge 1991). Thus, by examining contestations over them it is possible to explore sensitive areas of social dispute which have not yet clearly emerged or which are more difficult to identify in the more diffuse contexts of everyday life.

A brief review of the history of the Disney parks and the instances of public disputes over them, along with an examination of the various conflicts involving Euro Disney and several European constituencies reveals tensions surrounding such issues as personal autonomy inside and outside the workplace, the privatization of public realm and jurisdiction over privatized public spaces. Behind the acknowledged issues of cultural identity and international business are issues of sociopolitical structuration, of economic and spatial access, of resistance to social engineering, and particularly to the

emergence of new "harder" boundaries of exclusion and inclusion. Fundamental to the contestations over Euro Disney are the competition between traditional European urban cultures and emerging suburban multinational ones and the reorganization of the urban-industrial complex.

#### From theme parks to new social formations

In the modern world there is a proliferation of icons and themed spaces. This kind of cultural and space production has reached such proportions that it has become possible to talk about a political economy of signs and space (cf. Baudrillard 1991, Lasch and Urry 1994, MacCannell 1992). Under the pressure of competition for cultural visibility and acknowledgement, many intangibles become converted into artifacts for contemplation, use and exchange. This is most salient in the realm of tourism, in the spread of cultural parks, living museums and historical reenactments. In addition, it manifests itself in everyday life in self-defining consumption practices by individuals (Handler 1989) and in communities of commitment who rally around self-referential symbols (MacCannell 1992). The Disney parks are prime promoters of this process and have turned it into a full-blown industry. The tradition of the company calls this process "imagineering," the process of translating cultural concepts into concrete reality. This validates Disneyland's slogan and prime message that "dreams come true," in which "true" has an unmistakably material quality to it.

MacCannell (1992) and Lasch and Urry (1994) point out that this economy of signs and space leads to a decentralization of signs and social spaces that weakens traditional cultural perceptions of the nation states as individuals and groups redefine their identity by mixing signs and reconceptualizing their cultural history. But each of them perceives the outcomes from a different perspective. Lasch and Urry, whose focus of analysis is on three global urban centers (New York, Tokyo and London), and who argue that the major cities in Europe still are the vital centers of the economy, regard this process with optimism. It inverts Marx's dictum "all that is solid melts into air" allowing for individual freedom from cognitive ideological forces. The resulting disorganization of the space of power and tradition developed after the eighteenth century makes room for "reflexive subjects" to remake their "small worlds" and collective identities through imagination (1994: 209). But MacCannell, whose focus of analysis is on tourism and suburbanization, primarily in Southern California, reminds us that because in material form their accessibility is determined by power of acquisition, the political economic consequences still maintain hegemony of certain elites. The current value placed on ownership of private property is a major aggravating factor which leads to a hardening of boundaries and to a crisis of legitimation:

What is called "real" as in "real estate" is only what has been privatized; that which is closed to the person or what closes in around the person. As opposed to nomadic freedom, the privatized and the "real" set absolute limits on thought and behavior. For the nomad, the only reality is the imagination (1992: 4).

Instead of "reflexive subjects" reimagining their "small worlds," MacCannell sees communities which demand unquestioning commitment to selected symbols leading to a "soft fascism" and a resulting loss of the subject.

...When a subject is manipulated into acting against its own self-interest, it can pretend, even to itself, that it is 'disinterested' and 'neutral,' when in reality it is only neutralized; it can become a kind of simulacrum of humanity .... I do not attribute this, as Marcuse did, to an innate human weakness. Rather, it reflects the strength of social engineering: powerful new techniques for the manipulation of symbols, human consciousness, and political processes for the purpose of creating democracies within which the narrowest of interests can claim to have the broadest support by representing themselves to be the 'will of the people.' (1992: 8-9)

Thus, whereas, Lasch and Urry claim that in the context of deterritorialization and shifting boundaries, the power over social class structuration is transferred to the imagination of reflexive subjects, MacCannell argues that cognitive individual agency is only illusory. Rather very powerful forms of social engineering arise in the spaces provided and are simply re-presented as if they emanated from autonomous subjects. Instead of being an opportunity for choice and creative imagination, reflexivity is perceived as a result of being trapped or fenced in (1976).

These two theories delineate the scope of what is at risk in the context of post colonial and global economic conditions. Europe faces a major restructuration as a result of the globalization of the market and the emergence of a new class of power and economic brokers within the European Community. If the two social theoreticians are correct, then much will depend on the relative power or desire of the new social class(es) to maintain the major urban centers of Europe as vital centers of economic development. If Europe follows the U.S. pattern of suburbanization of the economy, it is likely to have some major consequences for the redrawing of social as well as geographical boundaries.

It is not uncommon for human groups in crisis to manage transformations through large scale public cultural performances and to do so through symbolic representations borrowed from other human groups with whom they happen to be in dramatic contact (Turner 1969). It has been argued that this is the case with Tokyo Disneyland, the Japanese replica which has become even more successful than its United States counterparts (Isozaki 1993). It should come as no surprise then that Europeans should avail themselves of a major icon borrowed from the country with which they have a love/hate relationship deriving from historical colonial relations overturned after World War II and deepened through the NATO alliance and the revitalizing of the economy. Despite all the resistance to "U.S. cultural imperialism," complaints have been heard that Euro Disney is as much a meeting place for Europeans as other sources of entertainment such as Arte TV, or the Franco-German channel that strive to nurture European roots.<sup>2</sup> Thus it is not surprising that the contestations over Euro Disney should highlight so well the rising tensions surrounding the dislocation of signs and space and the privatization of the public realm.

#### The Disney company and its parks

The Disney Company, formerly Walt Disney Productions, has been in the business of movie making and other entertainment and later real estate and mass communications. It was founded by the late Walt Disney, the well known animator whose career began with the Silly Symphonies and Mickey Mouse cartoons in the late 1920s and who later translated some of his concepts into a theme park medium called "Disneyland" or "The Magic Kingdom." Walt Disney died in 1968, but the parks have enjoyed growing popularity. Today there are four Disney park locations in the world: the original "Magic Kingdom" in Anaheim, California (1955), the "Walt Disney World" resort complex in Orlando, Florida (1972), "Tokyo Disneyland," in Japan and "Euro Disneyland," recently renamed "Disneyland Paris," in France Only The Magic Kingdom has been reproduced in all of them.

As is the case with The Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World, Disneyland Paris is only one small section of a larger planned resort complex. In addition to The Magic Kingdom, the Walt Disney World complex includes three other parks, EPCOT Center, The World Showcase and the Disney-MGM and a fourth one under construction. Of these, only the Disney-MGM is planned to be also replicated at the Euro-Disney complex. With the exception of Tokyo Disneyland, all other parks have been primarily owned by WED, a subsidiary of the Disney Company in Glendale, California. Recently, due to the debt restructuring in Europe, Disney holdings have been reduced and the owners of the park are known as the "Euro-Disney group."

The Disney parks have never been just businesses. They are not just about "capitalist propaganda" or "imperialistic" ideology which cultural critics have so often pointed out (Dorfman and Mattelart 1975, Wallace 1985, Myerhoff n.d., Fjellman 1991, Schickel 1968 and many others). They are designed to attract diverse audiences into a common ground. The Magic Kingdom, the paradigmatic park whose replica is now at Euro Disney, finds its *raison d'être*, in the context of the cold war, in the midst of social and historical fragmentation and discontinuity, after dubious recovery from the Great Depression, during post World War II years, in the context of rising domestic racial civil unrest. Through a promotion of mixed signals ranging from "pure fantasy" to "what the U.S. is all about," it ambiguously crystallizes both a kind of fantasy and a renewed utopian vision of the country's collective identity together with a reconstituted past, intention and future. The new reconstituted vision, promoted as "the American way" or "the American experience," is intended to serve as inspiration for the whole world.<sup>3</sup>

As a social or cultural park The Magic Kingdom is not unique. Walt Disney borrowed much from former amusement parks in the United States but also sought inspiration in such European social parks

such as Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen and Versailles in France. Alexander Moore (1980) has pointed out that the form of The Magic Kingdom is the form "of the Baroque capital" (Versailles), itself derived from another playground, the royal hunting park, a favorite of the absolutist monarchs in which the pervasive symbolic statement is that of "bounded space as world order" (p. 213).<sup>4</sup> Like Versailles, it combines in form, structure and experience elements of ideological, utopian and urban planning (Fjellman 1991, Gottdiener 1982, Harrington 1979, Isozaki 1993, King 1981, Marin 1977, Moore 1980) with those of religious ritual and pilgrimage (Moore 1980). As in the plans of Absolutist monarchs, the park replicates a clock and the city walls have been replaced by a berm (Moore 1980).

The paradigmatic design of The Magic Kingdom consists of five lands, typically called Main Street U.S.A., Frontierland, Adventureland, Fantasyland and Tomorrowland, arranged around a central plaza, usually recognized by visitors, and by some scholars, as spelling out "the American [U.S.] experience" (Real 1977, Spinelli 1992). This thematic and spatial organization has its analogies and repercussions in the social organization of the park as a corporation and as a public facility. Under the claims of show business, the corporation has adopted the vocabulary of performance for the corporate culture and management of the parks: The park grounds are divided into the 'stage' and 'backstage'; the employees are called 'actors' and 'actresses' and the employment office is referred to as 'casting'. This has allowed for much more rigid boundaries and regulations for both visitors and employees, than is customary in any other corporation in the U.S.

Originally, employees were cast according to the land and ride they were working in. Workers in Fantasyland from ride operations to food service were generally small, while ride operators in futuristic rides were tall, blonde and blue-eyed responding to the prevailing 1950s belief about the people of the future. Prestige rides, most often those involving transportation technologies, such as the Monorail, were manned exclusively by tall Caucasian males. Each land was internally organized with its own supervisors. Over time, this kind of organization proved too limiting and as the corporation grew new forms of flow between the lands and harder lines of vertical integration developed.

The Disney parks are known for their crowd management and their unobtrusive surveillance strategies which over the years have screened visitors at the door and monitored the park in a concrete version of Foucault's panopticon. All these strategies have been replicated and borrowed in numerous urban private and public spaces throughout the United States.

One of the less publicized, albeit publicly acknowledged,<sup>5</sup> aspects of the Disney enterprise is its aggressive pursuit of complete control and freedom from accountability. The Walt Disney World resort in Florida, for example, after which Euro Disney is planned, occupies an area located between two counties. Classified as a water-conservation district it has no other accountability except directly to the state of Florida (Fjellman 1991, Harrington '1979). Moreover, if one reads between the lines, many of the themes which the parks sponsor, upon examination, evince much wishful thinking in this direction: fun, "once a kid always a kid," Peter Pan, the eternal adolescent and the little town metaphor played out at the parks, with a "city hall," a fire department, its own Main Street, a castle with a drawbridge as the dominant structure and a berm as the outside boundary. The parks also have a "president;" an "ambassador" (appointed yearly from among the tour guides) who travels to different countries on good will visits. Visitors purchase "passports" rather than tickets for admission, and, during the last few years, in a purely playful fashion, an optional Disney dollar was issued (and sold) to be used as currency within the park.

There is no need for a detailed description of the parks. This is so not just because the sites are so rich that it is easy to succumb to 'information overload' (Fjellman 1991), but also because to do so is to attract attention to areas of only secondary importance. As critics we approach representations as texts to uncover hidden meanings and agendas. These are not necessarily accessible or relevant to the audience in the same way, particularly in the context of culturally diverse and diversifying audiences who no longer share frames of reference. Moreover, audiences today approach representations not as texts to be read but as contexts to be experienced. Many details of the stage sets at Disneyland, even when derived from historical and mythical narratives, serve the primary purpose of lending credibility to the atmosphere as otherworldly or as narrative or temporal space. For visitors from outside the United States, who do not share the meanings of many of the narratives, the frontier, Main Street, the star-spangled banner, or space technology, all serve the same general framing function, that of locating the experience as "here and now, in the U.S.A." Thus, enjoyment of the park does not necessarily indicate agreement with any of the values consciously or unconsciously promoted within or about the park, nor does it necessarily reveal a belief in the truthfulness of the connoted narratives. For the most

part, visitors are more powerfully moved by the schemas of success the themes represent, or by the "totality of the atmosphere" which sequesters their perception, by their own enthusiasm and alertness, by the joy of picking up an uninterrupted pace, or of sharing with selected company and engaging in a number of predictable peak experiences. In other words, the experience of the whole park is the paramount reason for visiting. Its primary appeal is in the redundancy and credibility of the stage sets and the vibration and rhythms of the atmosphere which can be sensed or picked up at an almost out of awareness level. What makes the experience possible, however, is the tight boundedness of the space and the thorough planning and control which leaves little to chance (Spinelli 1992).

#### Of frontiers and social reengineering

Although symbols at Disneyland appear to be less important for the audience than the experience itself, they are not irrelevant. Yet, they sometimes seem to tell more about the nature of the enterprise and the interests of the producers, than they do about the visitors' (Spinelli 1992). One of the paradigmatic themes replicated in France is the Frontier and before proceeding, it is instructive to take a look at its peculiar place in the popular imagination and more specifically within Disney productions. The concept of frontier in the United States is not that of an agreed upon boundary separating two different political units, as it might be in Europe or other European cultures. The term frontier in the United States puts forth the image of a moving front both in time and in space. It is a boundary perceived from the inside to be forever pushed outward into the unknown and/or somebody else's territory, a distinction which very often goes unrecognized. Immortalized and legitimated by the historian F.J. Turner's 1893 theory, the frontier usually refers to a space, at the outward edge of society, associated with continuous boundary redefinition and social reengineering. In the frontier United States mythology and history are often difficult to separate and together they provide a paradigmatic story of national origins and autochthonous traits. This involves the abandonment of European cultural and social traditions and the emergence of an indigenous national character and of new doctrines such as Manifest Destiny, free enterprise, and liberal institutions. In response to the struggle for survival against the elements and due the constant displacement, this character had developed "rugged individualism" and native frontier "ingenuity" along with a new social structure, "the anti-social family" (1893: 209). While the attributes of this national character are not completely agreed upon, the frontier is primarily associated in the popular mind with an eternal search for new beginnings or novel experiences. More poignantly, since the theory was first presented at a conference of the American Historical Association which opened at the same time as the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893, the frontier is also forever associated with United States technological ingenuity and modernization.<sup>6</sup> The Disney tradition is known for its habit of appropriating a subject and providing its own version to suit and further its own political and economic agendas. The frontier is no exception. The Disney frontier, unlike that of other traditional Hollywood productions, is more 'civilized' (King 1976). In it the rugged individual dies an honored hero and is replaced by a suspiciously 1950s suburban-looking family, with similar manners and morals.<sup>7</sup> The Disney parks are an embodiment of the Western frontier turned around; a frontier which having gone as far West as it can go, it becomes civilized and more bourgeois, and it moves Eastward instead; from California to Florida, to Europe and Japan. In this light, and in light of the European antecedents of Disneyland, the choice of France as the site of the new replica appears less of a historical accident than a historical imperative. The frontier has finally made its way back home, the home of absolutist monarchs and of liberal institutions, and is poised at the divide between the two, at the edge of history.

The dramas being played out over the survival of Euro Disney have cultural, historical, social and political/economic implications beyond those of mere economic success. While the future of Europe does not depend on the success of Euro Disney, the commitment of the Europeans to the success or Euro Disney is itself an index of the forces at work in Europe concurrent with and possibly facilitated by the consolidation of the European Union and the globalization of the market. Euro Disney is itself and embodiment of them.

#### Disney parks, social engineering and suburbanization

Isozaki, Japanese architect in charge of the design of the Team Disney building, claims that what theme parks have promoted is the very idea of planning (1991). But it would be extreme and erroneous to attribute so much to two theme parks. The utopian tradition and the idea of a replicable paradigmatic bounded community, as well as the use of bounded spaces for sociopolitical differentiation can be traced to Medieval Europe (Adams 1882, Cohn 1961, Mannheim 1939, Moore 1980) or to early United States history (see for example, Roemet 1976, Westbrook 1982). What Disney parks have done is to use the traditional model of a social park, to create separate private domains for experimentation in social engineering as free as possible from public accountability. The main thrust of the experimentation has been explicitly on new technologies in general, but less explicitly on behavioral technologies and strategies for the management of people through both obtrusive and unobtrusive means. Contemporary architects, planners and designers make routine visits, pilgrimages, to the parks to examine the extensive innovations in technology and space design. The city of Orlando and its surroundings, in Florida, have been deeply and directly affected as a result. So have many people and places without knowing it.

The influence of the parks and the company is direct not only in the form of promotion through deliberate demonstration but also works through impression management. Visitors are usually taken by the success and power of the Disney park environmental design and many young people become intrigued about how it works. Moved by the boundaries of exclusion and the reputation for high selectivity in screening, many desperately seek self-validation through being accepted there, assuming that "exclusive" also means "superior." The Disney files in the public library of the city of Anaheim are routinely visited by what one librarian called "Disney freaks," young people in their late teens who desperately want to become a part of corporation. The Disney parks are responsible for the direct training of large numbers of young adults in learning the hierarchical structure of U.S. corporations and accepting unquestioning obedience to arbitrary constraints. Despite its own vertical integration, the Disney company has developed an image of excellence in management and offers seminars and internships in management, planning and customer service to personnel from both the public and private sector. These seminars are usually held at Walt Disney World.

A less advertised aspect of the Disney enterprise, only explicitly acknowledged since the 1980s, is its Real Estate orientation. In fact, during the administrative reorganization of 1984 the company hired two major leaders: Michael Eisner for the entertainment industry and Frank Wells for the Real Estate one (Taylor 1987). Although with the death of Frank Wells in 1993, Eisner seems to focus more on entertainment and communications, his forte, for quite some time now the company has been involved in various aspects of community planning and all evidence indicates that it will do so in Europe as well. In October 1994, the Euro Disney group signed a contract with the George V group to build 630 dwellings in Bailly-Romainvilliers.<sup>8</sup>

Even in Southern California, where the Disney Company does not own as much land as it does in Europe or Florida, the influence of Disneyland can be felt in its surrounding social space in nearby communities. The connection is so easily made that suburban developments which are highly planned architecturally are sometimes facetiously referred to as "theme park living," despite that none of them displays any creativity or playfulness in design. In fact, many of the corporate executives who today work for real estate corporations in California, spent part of their college years as ride operators at Disneyland. One of these executives pointed out the similarities between Disneyland and some planned communities in the area to me; one even has a berm. Although he was not comfortable with the derogatory label "theme park living," he pointed my attention to a different phenomenon, "the drawbridge mentality." This refers to a disposition on the part of many residents of these exclusive communities, who, having achieved a comfortable economic status, have no further interest in the outside world, in social change or liberal causes, and do not even want to be reminded of anything disturbing in their surroundings. For this, Disneyland with the castle and the drawbridge provided a perfect metaphor. "There are some people," he said, "who would like to build a drawbridge on the Pacific Coast Highway." But," he continued reassuringly, "we cannot build a drawbridge on the PCH." Nevertheless most of the planned communities do not have any low income housing for service personnel and many of them are enclosed and patrolled by private police.

This is what I refer to as a "hardening" of social boundaries. Not only because exclusion is a dominant aspect of community identity but because such exclusion is determined on the basis of

physical criteria, imposed through force and various strategies of social and spatial engineering. The new communities, just as Disneyland does, select for such "hard" markers as physical appearance -- color and physiognomy, grooming, dress, material aesthetics and recruit those who are willing to flaunt these distinguishing markers and abide by tangible standards. Resistance to the Disney parks in Europe as has been in the United States addresses this kind of social engineering and the hardening of boundaries of exclusion.

#### Resistance to the Disney parks: United States incidents

Public resistance to Disney parks is not unknown in the United States but it has typically received very little attention.<sup>9</sup> For the youth of the 1960s Disneyland was the symbol of "the establishment" with its encroaching authoritarianism and hypocrisy. On August 7, 1970, the 'Yippies', one of the most vocal and politically active groups of the times, paid a visit to Disneyland, the only Disney park in existence at the time. The visit was motivated by a decision from the Disneyland administration to drop the ban on long hair for male visitors. Some 700 young people from different places in the United States first demanded free admission and finally settled for a 50\$ discount. After entering, they remained quite isolated in Tom Sawyer's Island but later in the afternoon, back on Main Street, in front of "City Hall," they began to chant antigovernment slogans and other critical statements about United States foreign policies. Concerned over possible violence Disney officials, who had prepared for the visit weeks in advance, gave the signal to the riot police to evacuate the park. The disturbance was so well managed that some visitors never even found out why they had been evacuated until much later. Local newspapers treated the incident as a Disney feature and little was said about the students. Only a reporter from the Los Angeles Times made the effort to inquire and report about the student's side of the story.<sup>10</sup> Their complaints were about metaphoric exclusion, economic exclusion and racial exclusion, exclusion from those values and rights the country promised to everybody (Spinelli 1992).<sup>11</sup> Like the park, they claimed, the country waved at them with commodities and experiences which lay out of the reach of most citizens. They resented both the exclusion and the dishonesty of pretending the opposite as "equality has been one of the values explicitly promoted by slogans such as: "At Disneyland everybody is a VIP."

A second incident occurred in the Summer of 1987, when homelessness in the city of Los Angeles had reached crisis proportions. Again Disneyland became the symbol of larger exclusion and the target of protest. Due to sudden layoffs and mortgage defaults the streets of the inner city became filled with homeless people. Whole families found themselves for the first time on the street. A make shift emergency shelter had been instituted in Los Angeles referred to as "tent city" and much attention had been given to it by the media. Yet, shelters were full and there was nowhere to go since those on the street were arrested by the police for loitering. People were not only "homeless" but spaceless and the result was outrage. It was in this context that during a journalist's visit to one of the shelters a child was overheard expressing a wish to go to Disneyland. The comment was printed in the newspaper the next day and, as a result, callers to a popular radio talk show began demanding that Disneyland admit the children of the homeless for free. After a two hour debate, during which the spokesman for Disney reminded the audience that the park was a business, somebody donated the money to take some 150 children of homeless people to Disneyland which seemed to settle the matter (Spinelli 1992).

What these two dramas indicate is the degree to which under stress from the larger society the park is taken as a symbol of it and consequently the target of rage. They also indicate the degree to which the park's exclusion becomes representative of more fundamental exclusions by the society, although it only gains power under extreme pressure. In both cases, what was opposed was not the symbolism within the park or the park's existence. On the contrary, it is the exclusion from access to the use of those symbols and what they stand for that is resented at a very deep level. While the demand that something so extravagant as a theme park devoted to child fantasy should be considered a basic right might seem absurd, the two instances of protest occurred in the context of acute racial and economic strife, and revolved around spatial exclusion and dramatic denial of basic resources -- hence legitimation -- to large groups of people. The two conditions stipulated for exclusion: insufficient consuming power and failure to adhere to specific cultural constraints, the bases for the redrawing of social boundaries proposed by MacCannell.



The instances of resistance to Euro Disney in France respond also to concerns over access and exclusion. Along with these, are concerns such as individual autonomy and dignity and those of legal jurisdiction over privately owned public arenas. What has made the case of Euro Disney different is that it did not have the commitment and support of community, government and business institutions as Disneyland has had in the United States. At least not until the changes instituted after December 1994.

### Resistance to Euro Disneyland

Resistance in France has come from various constituencies. French intellectuals declared themselves against the very idea of a Disney park which is openly propagandistic in content and practice. The French government made specific requirements to ensure a degree of Europeanization of the park and the employees and the public have done the rest. Two years into park's operations, it consistently failed to meet operating costs. It is not clear that the failure had to do with the public's specific dislike of the park's attractions, but what is clear is that neither the government nor the people were ready to tolerate an exclusive enclave, with its own rules and social customs. But whereas the Government put its emphasis on political symbols and the economic revenues, the employees and the public worried about accessibility and exclusion, autonomy, hierarchy and jurisdiction over the public realm.

### Political Symbolism

Despite much early discussion about cultural adjustments demanded by the French government during the drawing of the agreement, a map of Euro-Disneyland shows that little of the original Magic Kingdom has been compromised in so far as themes are concerned. However, whereas at Tokyo Disneyland, several alterations were made to ensure its "otherness" (Brannen 1989), at Euro Disney all changes attempt to establish a continuity with this "otherness." "Tomorrowland," the land associated with technology and the future, has been renamed "Discoveryland" and a new attraction "the visionarium" pays tribute to Jules Verne among other European visionaries such as Leonardo Da Vinci. The issue addressed by this attraction has to do with who is to be given credit for technological innovation. As already discussed, in the United States, technology is strongly associated with frontier "ingenuity" and the "American national character." While foreign visitors have no reason to make a connection between frontier and the particular traits of an autochthonous "American" national character, or between the frontier and technology or the future the Disney parks promote the connection between the United States, technology and the future (Spinelli 1992).<sup>12</sup> Much has been made of Tomorrowland's failure to keep ahead of the times; at best, it remains contemporary if not simply obsolete. This situation reinforces the old evolutionary metaphor that 'our present' is 'other people's future.' When applied to Europe that would constitute an offensive inversion of history. Thus, the visionarium repossesses both technology and the symbols of "future" and makes them truly European. Other European or French touches were sought in the opening of more restaurants with table service and the introduction of more souvenirs to cater to presumably more sophisticated tastes. Many of these cultural touches, however, have not made the park more popular and are claimed to have had a negative economic effect, since visitors have shown a preference for cheaper souvenirs and fast foods and since they interfere with the integrity and the totality of the experience. As will be seen below the public's concerns point to other areas of need which were originally overlooked.

### The farmers' demonstration: exclusion

The first major act of organized public resistance occurred in September 1993. Approximately 300 farmers marched outside the entrance to Euro Disneyland to protest a United States-Europe farm trade

accord that cut farm subsidies.<sup>13</sup> Just as had been the case with the Yippies and the homeless in the United States, the park clearly became the symbol of exclusion by the larger system, this time the European Community. As in the United States cases, the connection between the park and the experience of the demonstrators was indirect yet sufficiently close to be offensive. As an exclusive suburban land development with projected expansion, Euro Disney also stands for the displacement of farmers as land for cultivation is systematically reduced. Like the homeless in the U.S., with suburbanization, the farmers are becoming progressively socially and physically spaceless.

The case of the employees dress code and other issues of personal autonomy and hierarchy

Under the rubric of "casting," the Disney company has always had very rigid requirements of the employees, many of which, despite company's claims, have little job relevance. Of particular note has been the dress code, which includes precise prescriptions for grooming such as hair length, sideburns length, nail length, color and type of make up, skirt length and jewelry restrictions. In addition, there have been less explicit height and weight considerations in both hiring and allocation of responsibility. Employees who dare question or refuse to follow rules precisely can be fired on the spot. Many of the constraints have always been considered, among other things, racially discriminatory in effect if not in intent and have, indeed, traditionally resulted in the disproportionate hiring of light-skinned, light-eyed, light-haired individuals. Contracts traditionally include dress code clauses, an unusual measure in other companies where dress codes and discriminatory practices are more subtle. At Euro Disney, "the Disney look" threatened to discriminate against the French, themselves. Moreover the inclusion of a dress code clause in the contract was in flagrant violation of French labor laws. French employees who were fired for violation of the dress code, challenged it in court and won. French courts declared the dress code unfair and fined three Euro Disney officials. The dress-code clauses have been removed from the contracts at Euro Disney.<sup>14</sup> But apparently employee discontent did not end there.

Early on, mounting complaints from both visitors and employees and poor attendance figures, led to a change in leadership and the American chairman was replaced by a French one. Since September 1992, Mr. Bourguignon has been in charge of making modifications to reduce discontent and improve attendance.<sup>15</sup> After the suit over the dress-code was settled, several changes in managerial strategies were announced. Among these are a decentralization of power, the allocation of greater autonomy to operating units, a decrease in the layers of hierarchy within the company and more responsibility bestowed on employees. According to newspaper reports the president of Euro Disney claimed that in France people prefer things "less formal" and that too much loyalty and involvement was expected of employees and of their families. "The idea is to make the park a more fun place to work" said a Euro Disney spokesman to journalists.<sup>16</sup> The proposed reorganization is considered to be at odds with the rest of the Disney operation in the United States and is expected to cause problems.<sup>17</sup> While the explicit purpose of the changes is to improve motivation, morale and quality of service, they were announced after the company laid off some 1000 employees, thus it is most likely that they are more related to the need to function with fewer employees, rather than to specific employee needs. Disney parks have traditionally been overstaffed, thus, flexibility at Euro Disney may also indicate greater loads for the employees in France than has existed for their U.S. counterparts. Moreover, despite the best intentions to make Euro Disney a "more fun" place to work, the bulk of the jobs at the park are typically unchallenging and repetitious. Thus, for those who are resistant to the "magic" of the kingdom and bent on "reality" the challenge might be ultimately insurmountable.

Disneyland was built to increase and maintain both high employment, high employee satisfaction and high consumption in the post war era and to do away with as much employee power as possible while maintaining its anti-communist stance (Spinelli 1992). It is not so much that employees, in the United States, have been happier with Disney regulations. It is in part that unions in the United States have little power when compared to European and particularly the French Confederation. It is also that workers are less protected by laws in the United States than they are elsewhere. But as pointed out above, the Disney parks have experimented with new management styles, much as the sponsoring of a peer youthful culture which was highly successful among some and which transcends the boundaries of the park.<sup>18</sup> Much of the reputation Disney management styles have has depended on Disneyland being for many years the only source of employment in the service industries. Disneyland also

introduced benefits and salaries for parttime employees that were for some time quite satisfactory. As economic conditions declined, so did employee satisfaction, leading to a strike, major employee defections, shifts in administration, and the forced retirement of old loyal employees who were even by personal admission no longer productive. Under these conditions, the Disney explicitly authoritarian management style has served to curb employee and union power. As former employees say, "the pixie dust wears off after one week."

The management changes introduced at Disneyland Paris address issue of jurisdiction over labor relations, and issues of individual autonomy, responsibility and hierarchy in the workplace. The success of the employees has upheld French labor laws bringing Euro Disney, despite its private status, under public jurisdiction. European newspapers, however, praise United States management styles as more effective, which raises some questions about possible changes elsewhere in Europe where labor laws are not as resistant.

Visitors: access to and jurisdiction over the enclave

Euro Disney, like its counterparts in the United States, depends largely on repeat and local visitors. While European visitors like the park, they have different habits and expectations. This is where the Disney company had to make a major concession and lift its traditional ban on alcohol. As expected, European and French visitors found the ban quite intolerable.<sup>19</sup> Other complaints from Euro Disney visitors have involved the quality and price of food, hotels and souvenirs. Visitors to Euro Disney stay in cheaper hotels outside the compound. They prefer day trips rather than lengthy stays, eat fast foods rather than costly sit down dinners, and buy cheaper and simpler souvenirs than was expected. What the pattern suggests is that what is rejected is not the Disney attractions, the cheap souvenirs or the fast foods -- those things identified as "American." Rather, it is the total experience which turns Euro Disney into a separate realm, with its own rules, its own definition of "family entertainment" and "happiness." Most salient is the treatment of Disneyland as a day trip, an activity like other urban activities which do not require long-term commitments. In order to increase local attendance prices have been cut almost in half.

Toward a new Euro Disney

Despite resistance and clear economic difficulties, too much had been invested at Euro Disney to accept defeat. Some further adjustments to rescue the project have been made which are subtle yet important politically symbolic gestures. One of the most persistent popular themes in U.S. public discourse of international relations is that of the nation's redemptive mission in the world (Tuveson 1968). Disney productions have traditionally paid homage to this theme juxtaposing it with that of "the child as redeemer" (Spinelli 1992). A good example of this are the Disney comics where the theme is played out in a paradigmatic manner and in such a way that the "smart" children from "Ducksburg," (U.S.A.) routinely save adult nations from their own inability to see beyond the silliness of their own traditions (Dorfman and Mattelart 1971). A discourse of the United States as a "young nation" is also quite widespread and through it many major United States foreign policy abuses and mistakes are dismissed with the excuse that "it is such a young nation." During World War II, the child nation came to the rescue of the parent, Europe, "saving the world" (Tuveson 1968). Thus, the discourse of the frontier, social engineering and Disney "imagineering" can be seen as imbued with a certain promise of salvation as well.

In the case of Euro Disney, however, it is the embattled Disney company that had to be rescued.<sup>20</sup> This was a very important politically symbolic event. When economic losses were so great that Euro Disney stock was dropped from the list of prime shares in the European stock exchange, Michael Eisner responded with a threat to close and dismantle the park altogether, not even considering the possibility of selling the franchise. As the French government threatened to sue in international courts, the Banks came to the rescue and restructured the debt. A Saudi Arabian prince bought up to 24% of the shares, "saving" the park but diminishing Disney holdings. This at least ensures that the profits do

not become exclusive to the U.S. Just as the restructuring was taking place, large French companies and government bodies held a number of Christmas parties at Euro Disney boosting attendance considerably, driving Euro Disney to almost reach its attendance goals for 1994.<sup>21</sup> Even former president Mitterrand, who had claimed that Euro Disney was "not his cup of tea" was seen there with former U.S. president Bush, visiting with grandchildren.

#### Redefining the space as suburban Paris

Another subtle change has similar political implications. As already stated, the park opened in Europe as "Euro Disney" a name which proclaimed it as a somewhat autonomous supra national entity. In October 1994 as the debt restructure was under debate, the name was changed with much less publicity than usual to "Disneyland Paris."<sup>22</sup> Under the rationale that the association with a major city and tourist destination in Europe might improve attendance, the gesture symbolically incorporates the development not just into national but also into city borders. It reduces the original supranational entity in a political and cultural manner bringing it clearly under the jurisdiction of French and urban cultures. It transforms it from the initial ambitious status of quasi city-state to that of a suburban development. At the same time it also indicates the overall acceptance to having the name Disney associated with that of Paris, signalling a further cultural commitment to the park on the part of the French.

#### Conclusions

Perhaps the most accurate assessment of the Disney parks is that although they make certain concepts "real," meaning material and privatized, they are not completely what they seem. That is they are not just about childrens play or just tourism or just capitalist propaganda. Even as ideological agents, the work of ideology is carried out in the more subtle aspects of the enterprise. While the claim that Euro Disney is a "cultural Chernobyl" as the French critics put it, might be true, the danger does not lie in what is sold, but rather in that the Europeans are interested in buying it. Ultimately it might not matter what it is, but what it is not, and what it has displaced, which would probably be displaced by some other equally as damaging entity. The influence spreads through the spaces created by the ongoing reorganization of economic resources and centers. It has been the purpose of this paper to point out that Euro Disney is not itself the cause of changes, but that its presence in Europe is an indication of a European commitment or inclination toward certain changes. In revealing some of the complexities surrounding the opening and success of Euro Disney I have tried to expose the tensions which already exist in Europe and which will probably play no small part in the reshaping of the European Community and in the redrawing of boundaries.

In spite of the conflicts, all evidence indicates that Euro Disney is in Europe to stay and that the adjustments made to it do not make it any "safer" than the original "culturally imperialistic" one, only make the changes run more smoothly. Ultimately, the role that Disney parks epitomize. Several victories have been won over the Disney company setting some limits to Disney's "frontier" and its peculiar style of direct and overt social engineering. There should be no mistake as to who needs to be rescued from his own mistakes, or as to who is to take credit for Western modernization. The record has been set right, and Disney has been put in its place. Moreover, there should be no mistake as to where in Europe Euro Disney is located, what city is to be the signpost for international travelers and visitors and whose laws will prevail within this space, regardless of how international its patrons might be. The employees, protected by French labor laws, will not have to tolerate a dress code which at times has outdone the U.S. military (Spinelli 1992); neither will "family entertainment," or the culture of consumption in Europe exclude alcoholic beverages. These outcomes are indeed reassuring signs of the strength of French law and French custom in the construction of consumption and in the context of post colonial, globalizing political and economic pressures. Moreover, in the context of the Disney tradition, these responses send strong signs of commitment to adult autonomy, employee protection and above all public accountability, all of which have been deliberately and conspicuously violated in

the Disney tradition. But does that mean therefore that patterns of European social and spatial restructuring are safely different from either United States or from globalizing forces?

Despite the victories, much of the ideological work of Euro Disney has only just begun and the terms of definition may not make a great deal of difference in the end. The park will still promote cultural production and consumption, social differentiation and suburbanization; it will still target and define the emerging classes resulting of the establishment of new multinational and supra national bureaucracies, through the conspicuous deployment of resources for leisure lifestyles, within which "international" will mean ironically "privatized" and will serve as a sign of class identification. Only now, however, the ideological work will be carried out under a different more legitimate aegis. Having gained the trust of the public, it will not be cultural imperialism but mere "fun." It is in this respect that Lasch and Urry's vision of "reflexive subjects" reimagining their "small worlds" may come true. But for whom and at what price?

While the Euro Disney group does not have either the affective link to the Disney tradition nor the explicit authoritarian stance of the company, they are no less motivated by profit and economic considerations and no less subject to global economic pressures. For example, the management styles of United States corporations are still considered "superior" and more effective than European ones and Euro Disney could become, like its predecessors, the site of much experimentation in this respect. This has already been discussed as a possible resource to increase revenue. In this same vein, just as the dress-code clauses were being removed from employee contracts, 1000 workers were being laid off in order to cut costs and increase efficiency. This measure was so radical that there have been concerns as to whether the scope of the operation can take the needed reorganization. The changes in management to be instituted as a result, however, were disclosed not in terms of the resulting labor shortage, but in terms of employee desires for "more responsibility" for individuals and "more flexibility" in roles. "People here prefer things which are less formal" explained Euro Disney president Bourguignon to reporters. It is an effort to make Disneyland Paris "a more fun place to work."<sup>23</sup> Informality and fun are indeed cornerstone of the Disney company, and certainly one of the major weapons for defense of their policies in the United States. Yet, employees in the United States today would recognize that simply as "sizing down," the new myth of reorganization in today's corporations which usually results in greater job commitment from the employees as well as in greater instability. With increasing privatization, the transfer of management styles and values, one can expect to see at least more employee unrest, and possible changes in legislation, not necessarily in France but in other places in Europe.

Most disturbing are the issues concerning exclusion. First and foremost we need to ask who is actually included in the "European Community?" Who will benefit from the European Union and the consolidation of the internal market? As we have seen, Euro Disney is not only a justification for but also an agent of suburbanization and its potential destabilization. Not only do the plans include actual real estate development, but the luxury resort will function as an enclaved realm to promote and legitimate particular suburban and international lifestyles as social practices no doubt associated with those involved with European Community business and administration. The income derived from travel associated with the elite of power and economic brokers could work to invigorate local urban economies. Yet, the emergence of suburban enclaves especially designed to accommodate the inter- or supra national traffic as well as mobility, can divert growth to the suburbs which in turn can displace the vital centers of the economy, along with industrial growth and employment from the urban centers. This process is facilitated by the electronic and entertainment industries. In the U.S. such economic displacement has resulted in the near collapse of urban infrastructures, neighborhoods and services in some major cities. If Europeans follow the same pattern, the resulting social formations may begin to resemble MacCannell's model more than Lasch and Urry's.

Europe itself, however, is not homogeneous and it is most likely that different countries will respond to pressures differently depending on the strength of their labor movements and laws, the strength of values on privatization, and the forces which govern interethnic and ruralurban relations. Above I devoted some time to the discussion of exclusion and the hardening of boundaries. Suburbanization in the United States as well as in Europe appears to result in systematic exclusion of groups from services, economic opportunity and even space. Moreover it can aggravate ethnic and economic cleavages concentrating crime and poverty in urban ethnic neighborhoods, insulating others. So far, suburbs attract primarily white populations, because of preference or accessibility or both. Beliefs in white supremacy still abound, thus, one can expect further racial polarization and

stratification in the context of the "browning" of several countries in Europe and rising conservative sentiment. Even when spatial segregation is not intentional, it may be perceived as a desirable option to manage or to escape from racial violence and confrontation in the cities. Insulated from the adversary conditions created by new stratification, economic exclusion and destabilization, what is to prevent suburbanites in Europe from succumbing to the same "drawbridge mentality" which has set in the suburbs of the United States?

Another by product of this political economy of signs and space is the privatization of the public realm. One of the trends observed in the United States and in South America is the creation of private social spaces such as malls and country clubs, homeowners associations and other exclusive areas of service, entertainment or residency increasingly inaccessible to large sectors of local populations. As public spaces become privatized, traditional civil freedoms can be curtailed through internal rules of access (MacCannell's communities of commitment). Areas of social interaction which are not as carefully protected as employer-employee relations might be particularly vulnerable to abuse. The major consequences of this will be social and economic displacement in which primarily the poor and minority ethnic populations will be affected, resulting in a sharp stratification by color and ethnic background. Segregation and a flourishing service industry tend to exacerbate the difference between those who serve and those who are served. The more exclusive the communities within which the services flourish, the greater the gap and usually the pressure on the servants. Privatization leads to narrower controls over symbols of group identity. As decentralization occurs in response to globalization, privatized public interests can move in, protecting the interests of a few in the name of "the good of the people," when in fact, "the people's" needs and interests have been systematically disregarded all along.

As Europe faces major restructuring, Euro Disney has served as a catalyst to expose some very sensitive areas. Pressures arising from the globalization of the economy threaten to destabilize and redefine not only the symbols of cultural identity within and outside the meeting grounds of international classes, but also to weaken the current order of the urban-industrial complex. The tensions revealed by the Euro Disney case are not mere dramas over trivial attractions. They are the reflection of conflicts at play between the urban and rural concerns in some places, and over the compromise between the two in suburbia in others. They show the competition between the urban and the suburban cultures over symbols of cultural identity and over identity itself. They evince emerging conflicts over jurisdictions, and over boundaries of inclusion and exclusion acting upon the redefinition of suburban lifestyles. While it is not possible to forecast the outcomes of these confrontations with certainty, it is possible to hypothesize at this point that many of them will take place within or around the frontiers of restructuring of public meeting grounds such as Disneyland Paris, and that they will typically involve those who are most vulnerable to exclusion as a result of restructuring: farmers, workers, the homeless, ethnic minorities, and so on. It may prove critical at this juncture to ensure that land acquisitions by private interest parties do not play as major a part in the restructuring of Europe. That would mean less promotion of suburbanization in general and more specifically an avoidance of extensive, private, luxury, planned, physically bounded complexes which include permanent residential units such as "City 2017" at Euro Disney.

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