Disneyland, 1955

Just Take the Santa Ana Freeway to the American Dream

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The opening—or openings—of the new amusement park in Southern California did not go well. On 13 July, a Wednesday, the day of a private thirtieth anniversary party for Walt and Lil, Mrs. Disney herself was discovered sweeping the deck of the steamboat Mark Twain as the first guests arrived for a twilight shakedown cruise. On Thursday and Friday, during gala preopening tributes to Disney film music at the Hollywood Bowl, workmen back in Anaheim, some twenty-three miles away, struggled to finish paving the streets that would soon lead to Fantasyland, Adventureland, Frontierland, and Tomorrowland. Last-minute strikes had compelled the builders to haul in asphalt all the way from San Diego.

The invitation-only press preview and dedication, broadcast over a coast-to-coast TV hookup on 17 July, was a disaster from start to finish. At dawn, with carpenters and plumbers still working against the clock, traffic on the freeway was backed up for seven miles, and gridlock prevailed on the secondary roads surrounding the former orange grove along Harbor Boulevard. Studio publicists had issued twenty thousand tickets to reporters, local dignitaries, Disney employees, corporate investors, and Hollywood stars—including Eddie Fisher, Debbie Reynolds, Lana Turner, Danny Thomas, and Frank Sinatra. By mid-morning, however, more than thirty thousand people were already packed inside the earthen berm that was supposed to seal off Disney’s domain from the cares of the outside world. Some of the extra “invitees” flashed counterfeit passes. Others had simply climbed the fence, slipping into the park in behind-the-scene spots where dense vegetation formed the background for a boat ride through a make-believe Amazon jungle.

Afterwards, they called it “Black Sunday.” Anything that could go wrong did. The food ran out. There weren’t enough drinking fountains. A gas leak temporarily shut down Fantasyland, site of many of the twenty-two new Disney-designed rides the crowd had come to inspect. It was terribly hot, too. Main Street USA melted, and visitors’ high heels stuck fast in the fresh asphalt. The nervous proprietor (who had spent the night in the park) accidentally locked himself in his apartment above the turn-of-the-century firehouse near the front gate. As the moment approached for the boss to welcome a vast, stay-at-home audience to his California kingdom through the magic of television, Walt Disney (1901–1966) was nowhere to be found. And somehow, ABC’s twenty-four live cameras managed to cover all the glitches: the ladies walking out of their shoes; “Davy Crockett,” star of Disney’s new weekly series, drenched by a hyperactive sprinkler system as he thrashed about on horseback in Frontierland’s western scenery; the regal Irene Dunne showering announcer Art Linkletter with glass and soda water while attempting to christen the Mark Twain on televised cue.
Bob Cummings and Ronald Reagan shared the network hosting duties—and a whole range of maddening “technical difficulties”—with Linkletter. Sometimes the screen simply went blank. Audio and video transmissions winked on and off at will. When the voice-over described Cinderella’s coach at the head of a passing parade, the picture showed Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. Linkletter strolled blithely through the portcullis of Sleeping Beauty’s Castle and emerged from the other side, seconds later, without his microphone. Walt Disney accidentally appeared on camera ahead of schedule, chatting with the crew and wondering aloud how the show was going. “Dateline Disneyland,” concluded the New York Times, had “captured some fun and fantasy, the elements... that are supposed to make the place tick.” But despite such flashes of honest spontaneity, the tightly scripted ninety-minute program—like the whole Disneyland enterprise—had serious flaws. It was entirely too “Hollywood,” according to the Times: slick, commercial, star-studded, glitzy. And too reverential, too much like “the dedication of a national shrine.” Cummings, for instance, repeatedly assured viewers that cultural history was being made in Orange County before their very eyes: “I think that everyone here will one day be as proud to have been at this opening as the people who were there at the dedication of the Eiffel Tower.” And the commemorative plaque, which Disney read aloud during his segment of the broadcast, was both portentous and vaguely imperialistic in tone:

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

Park officials, of course, had no time to brood over iffy reviews: the real opening, for the general public, was less than twelve
Hosts of the televised opening, 17 July 1955: Ronald Reagan, Bob Cummings, and Art Linkletter. The presence of these small-screen stars of the period signaled the importance of television to the genesis, iconography, and formal design of Disneyland.

hours off, and, if Sunday's mobs were any portent of things to come, Monday was going to be wild. Dave McPherson, a senior at Long Beach State College, stationed himself at the ticket window at 2:00 A.M., just about the time the state police began to report abnormal traffic volumes building along the periphery of Anaheim. By 8:00 A.M., two hours before the posted start of business, eight thousand merrymakers had already queued up behind McPherson, and the hundred-acre parking lot was almost full. At 10:00 A.M., Walt Disney appeared and personally greeted the first two kids in line: little Christine Vess, age five, from North Hollywood, and her seven-year-old cousin, Michael Schwartner, of Bakersfield. Although the children got all the media attention, the clear majority of those who followed Disney inside were grown-ups, determined to experience for themselves what only the elite had been privileged to enjoy the day before. They swarmed over the park, eating everything in sight, dropping garbage everywhere, tossing their kids from hand to hand to get them a seat on the King Arthur Carousel, nearly swamping the Mark Twain in their eagerness to clamber aboard. But they came, they had a wonderful time, and, in defiance of
strong negative criticism from travel writers, influential columnists, glossy news magazines, and itinerant intellectuals, they kept on coming in enormous numbers, more than a million of them in the first seven weeks alone, exceeding all estimates and giving backers reason to believe their risky, $17 million investment might someday pay off.

Indeed, even before the previews began, speculation about costs and profits all but overshadowed discussion of the park’s entertainment value. And while the press did not fail to wax eloquent about the chronic traffic tie-ups around Disneyland, most of the first-year complaints came down to dollars and cents. “Walt’s dream is a nightmare,” wrote one particularly disillusioned member of the fourth estate.

To me [the park] felt like a giant cash register, clicking and clanging, as creatures of Disney magic came tumbling down from their lofty places in my daydreams to peddle their charms with the aggressiveness of so many curbside barkers. With this harsh stroke, he transforms a beautiful dream into a blatant nightmare.2

Other critics agreed. To them, Disneyland was just another tourist trap—a bigger, pricier version of the Santa Claus villages and the seedy Storylands cast up by the postwar baby boom and the blandishments of the automobile industry. It was “commercial,” a roadside money machine, cynically exploiting the innocent dreams of childhood. On his second visit to the complex, a wire service writer cornered Disney and asked him about his profit margin. Walt, whose stake in the success of the venture was as much emotional as it was financial, was furious:

We have to charge what we do because this Park cost a lot to build and maintain. I have no government subsidy. The public is my subsidy. I mortgaged everything I own and put it in jeopardy for this Park.

Commercial? . . . They’re crazy! We have lots of free things [here]. No other place has as high a quality. I stand here in the Park and talk to people. It’s a most gratifying thing. All I’ve got from the public is thank-yous.3

Middlebrows continued to carp about the potential profitability of Disneyland, as if capitalism were an unfamiliar concept or Disney’s park, by virtue of its use of characters that all Americans knew and loved from his cartoon features, ought to have been in the public domain—free, or almost free, like a national park or national shrine. With few exceptions, highbrow critics of the 1950s despised Disneyland for similar reasons. Writing for the Nation, the novelist Julian Halevy took exception to an enterprise that charged admission to visit ersatz environments tricked out as Never-Never Land, the Wild West, or the Amazon basin. At Disneyland, he argued, “the whole world . . . has been reduced to a sickening blend of cheap formulas packaged to sell.” The sin of commercialism, in other words, was compounded by the fact that Disney’s Amazon was not the real thing:

[The] overwhelming feeling that one carries away is sadness for the empty lives which accept such tawdry substitutes. On the river boat, I heard a woman exclaim glowingly to her husband, “What imagination they have!” He nodded, and the pathetic gladness that illuminated his face as a papier-maché crocodile sank beneath the muddy surface of the ditch was a grim indictment of the way of life for which this feeble sham represented escape and adventure.

Like Las Vegas, Halevy concluded, Disneyland was vulgar—American culture at its most corrupt, contemptible, dollar driven, and bogus.4
on the adventure described in that popular 1951 film and on its picturesque river craft. But, in the end, the matinee voyage and the Disneyland cruise were very different propositions. The movie, like all movies, was perfect: the actors, the director, and the editors reshotted and tinkered until they got everything right. When The African Queen played in the neighborhood theater, filmgoers saw a finished work of art up there on the screen, a moving picture, complete, remote, unreal—and detached from themselves, despite the implicit intimacy of the darkened room. What Disney’s “imagineers” added to the movie by transferring it in three dimensions to Anaheim was the missing quotient of “reality”: running water, gunshots, grinning crocodiles that swam and snapped their jaws to expose pointy, plastic teeth. If there were no mosquitoes, no “Montezuma’s Revenge,” no accidental distractions from the narrative unfolding along the river, there was an abundance of convincing atmosphere to smell and to feel dripping down one’s neck.

The once-passive viewer now became an actor, a real-life participant, “face up in the rain” as a rackety little boat plowed under Schweitzer Falls. During the 1950s, Walt Disney often said that movies were beginning to bore him, because when they were done, they were done. But because it was real, Disneyland could never be completed. It was always perfectible—and that was the challenge. That was the real fun.

The intellectuals who hated Disneyland did not reckon with all that fun. Nor, it would seem, did they share in the genuine pleasure of being only slightly terrified by a plastic (not papier-mâché) crocodile on a nice, clean (never, never muddy) Amazon less than three feet deep. Whatever else it aspired to be, Disneyland was an amusement park, a place for good times, for the willing suspension of disbelief. It was not a zoo or a scientific

Disneyland had its champions, too. The science fiction writer Ray Bradbury went to Disneyland in the company of the actor Charles Laughton and loved the place, as much for the fact that the robot crocodiles were made out of plastic as for any other reason. Unlike the genuine article—dangerous and often invisible to passing boatloads of tourists—the toothy Disney version was perfect: tireless, predictable, and benign, the very ideal of “croc-ness” on a sparkling clean Amazon in Anaheim, California. Disney’s land as a whole was a lot like that plastic crocodile. It was utopian, perfected—or perfectible.

What is most important about Laughton and Bradbury’s excursion to Disneyland is the ripping good time the pair had “laugh[ing] at the wild palaver of our riverboat steerman’s jokes, duck[ing] when pistols were fired dead-on at charging hippopotamuses, and bask[ing] face up in the rain, eyes shut, as we sailed under Schweitzer Falls.” The Jungle Cruise was a visceral, sensual experience, like stepping, somehow, into the Technicolor confines of The African Queen and becoming a member of the cast, bound for some exotic coast in the company of Bogart and Hepburn.

In fact, the ride had been loosely based

One rabid critic faulted Adventureland’s Jungle Cruise for its fake, “papier-mâché” crocodiles.
An expedition gone awry: it was a place where plastic crocodiles were better than live ones, since half the fun came from noticing that the beasts were almost real. The tension between perfection and reality, between the real and the more-or-less real, was a primary source of the visitor's delight. The critics, undelighted, saw only plastic and profits in a society hopelessly corrupted by TV, suburbia, tail fins, and too few distinctions of caste and class. "Ours is not so much an age of vulgarity as of vulgarization," wrote a bilious Louis Kronenberger on the declension of American culture in the 1950s: "Everything [is] tampered with or touched up, or adulterated or watered down, in an effort to make it palatable, in an effort to make it pay."

Disney among the Highbrows

Highbrow hysteria over Disneyland and the potential profits to be made there was symptomatic of a deeper problem that had plagued the Disney studio since the early 1940s and the release of Fantasia. An effort to bridge the gap between elite culture and mass entertainment, Fantasia combined cartoon imagery with classical music conducted by Leopold Stokowski of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Although, for a variety of reasons (including glitches in a new movie sound system), the film was a commercial failure, it typified an optimistic strain in prewar aesthetic thinking that admitted no hard-and-fast barriers between high and low art. Throughout the late 1940s, despite the scorn of the critics, Disney still clung gamely to his vision of creating a middle-brow, middle-class art. Salvador Dali took up residence at the studio to work on a domesticated version of Fantasia based on the music of the Americas. But on the weekends the Surrealist was sometimes found tootling around the Disney family's backyard in suburban Los Angeles on Walt's new steam locomotive in the company of movie stars and rail buffs. The train was a symbol of transformation, of movement, a sign that Disney was about to leave high art and its troublesome practitioners behind. When the New York Times critic Bosley Crowther came to visit in the early 1950s, he found his old friend uninterested in making movies, with or without Salvador Dali. Instead, noted the puzzled Crowther, Walt was "almost weirdly concerned with the building of a miniature railroad engine and a string of cars."

This new Walt accepted and even accentuated the distinction between art and the typical Disney product. In his authorized autobiography, outlined by the studio but presented in the guise of a series of 1956-57 Saturday Evening Post articles by his elder daughter, Diane Disney Miller wrote:

"The sophisticates and the eggheads . . . write off Dad's work as "Disney's picture post-card art," but Dad is unconcerned. He says, "If picture post-card art moves millions of people, then I like it. If I'm corny, then millions of people in this country must be corny too."

"We're not trying to entertain the critics. . . I'll take my chances with the public."

Togetherness and Automobility

The public liked Disneyland. On New Year’s Eve, 1957, attendance reached the ten million mark. Statistics further indicated that a hefty 40 percent of the guests had come from outside California, often driving long distances to reach their destination. If the highway and the habit of "automobility" were major factors in Disneyland's success, the outing in the family car was also a key element in the standardized creation story Disney used to explain how he had come to build America's first theme park. In the Diane
Disneyland's horse-drawn trolley represents one of many possible means of moving around the grounds. Like the suburban culture to which it appealed so strongly, the park is about mobility.

Disney series, it all begins with “Daddy's Days,” those spare afternoons when a busy father finds time to take his two little girls to the zoo or the merry-go-round in Griffith Park. Other anecdotes find the trio bound for an unspecified kiddieland or a ma-and-pa amusement park on La Cienega Boulevard. Despite all the variations in detail, the meaning of the narrative never varies. There are always two crucial lessons to be learned from the “Daddy's Days” tale: the importance of family entertainment and the baleful condition of the old Coney Island-style amusement park. “I would take them to the merry-go-round” or the Ferris wheel, Walt Disney remembered,

*and sit on a bench eating peanuts while they rode. And sitting there, alone, I felt that there should be something built, some kind of a family park where parents and children could have fun together.*

The so-called parks the Disneys haunted on Saturdays and Sundays were “dirty, phony places, run by tough-looking people.” There was a crying “need for something new,” he thought, “but I didn’t know what it was.”

The unspoken urge to build “some kind of a family park” brought the two divergent sides of Disney's personality together for the first time. The Walt Disney of the big, looping signature was a busy studio head, but he was family man too: a typical Los Angeles commuter, a suburbanite with a comfy, unpretentious house in Holmby Hills. The difference was in the backyard. In the Disney garden, everybody could play in a cunning replica of the dwarfs’ cottage from *Snow White*, complete with picket fence and gingerbread gables, built by the studio shop as a present for Diane and her sister Sharon. Here, in his own backyard, in the expanding leisure hours that had suddenly become a factor in the life of the nuclear family, the interests of the businessman and the father began to converge. Compared with the average, seedy kiddieland, the Snow White cottage suggested that the Walt Disney Company could probably do a vastly superior job of promoting weekend togetherness.
While Disney’s interest in family activities anticipated the concept by a decade or more, the actual smarmy word togetherness was coined by McCall’s in the 1954 Easter issue and became the rallying cry of a moral crusade endorsed by anxious editors, clergymen, and advertisers. Togetherness legitimized the new, postwar suburban family—afluent, isolated, reared on a bland diet of TV and TV dinners—by stressing the compensatory benefits of a greater paternal role in the household. Togetherness made fathers into full domestic partners with their wives and provided healthy male influences in the formation of young psyches. Togetherness meant, in effect, that Daddy occasionally changed diapers, helped with the shopping and the vacuuming, and took charge of the kids on Saturday or Sunday afternoons. And whatever its erotic burden of ornamental chrome, the bloated American automobile of the 1950s was as large as it was because it was a family car, perfect for jaunts and outings with Daddy at the wheel, Mommy right beside him, and Sis and Junior squealing with anticipation in the spacious backseat.

According to the ads, the car promised freedom—“freedom to come and go as we please in this big country of ours,” Ford rhapsodized. It also liberated the family from the conformity of the suburb, from rows of identical houses, rigid social rituals, unspoken codes of conduct, and written rules governing the proper trimming of lawns. The car allowed the family to escape the pressures of modern times: out there, on the freeway, it was still possible to play the part of the pioneer, headed bravely off into that unknown America of the presuburban past, in search of adventure and self-exploration. The automobile let the family outrun its fears of recession, of a sudden end to the prosperity of big cars and weekend fun—or its countervailing fears of prosperity and the soulless materialism of which Americans were so often accused.

Early visitors to Disneyland seem not to have noticed any correlation between driving to the park and what they did when they got there. Mainly they went for another long ride: on the old-fashioned steam train, circling the grounds; on the Model-T-era fire trucks and the horse-drawn trolleys along Main Street; on the Mark Twain, coursing through Frontierland; on the Jungle Cruise through Adventureland; on Tomorrowland’s rocket to the moon; on Mr. Toad’s wild putt-putt through Fantasyland. Eschewing conventional shows and walkthrough attractions, Disneyland was premised largely on vehicles, many of them designed to conjure up a faraway, long-ago world of adventure and restless freedom. In 1971 the late Reyner Banham became the first to posit that what happened inside Disneyland bore a direct relationship to what was going on outside the gates:

Set in the middle of a city obsessed with mobility, a city whose most characteristic festival is the Rose Parade in Pasadena, fantastically sculptured Pop inventions entirely surfaced with live flowers rolling slowly down Colorado Boulevard every New Year’s Day—in this city Disneyland offers illicit pleasures of mobility. Enconced in a sea of giant parking-lots in a city devoted to the automobile, it provides transportation that does not exist outside—steam trains, monorails, people-movers . . . not to mention pure transport fantasies such as simulated space-trips and submarine rides.11

For Walt Disney and his fellow commuters, Disneyland’s rides made a daily chore into a treat by isolating and emphasizing the pleasurable aspects of driving. What was a metaphoric escape on the freeway, for instance, became a real or an almost real escape aboard the E. P. Ripley, the first steam locomotive put into service on the Santa Fe and Disneyland Railroad that circled the park. In a society
Walt Disney’s obsession with trains began at the Santa Fe depot in Marceline, Missouri. The structure shown here replaced the original station, but this train would inspire Disneyland’s earliest Tomorrowland “future-liners.”

in which the ticket to adulthood was the driver’s license, the Disneyland transportation system permitted regression to childhood through the simple expedient of inviting grown-ups to become passengers. And the destinations were no longer the office, the shopping center, or some sleazy, little amusement park. Disney’s boats and trains went instead to the places of the heart, to a happy past, to memories or dreams of a perfect childhood.

The Carolwood-Pacific Railroad

Mrs. Disney believed that Disneyland sprang directly from her husband’s lifelong obsession with the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. The main line ran through his boyhood hometown, Marceline, Missouri, on its way to Kansas City and distant California. During his teenage years Disney had worked (like Thomas Edison before him) as a weekend news- and candy-butcher on the run from Kansas City to Chicago, and he spent an exciting summer in 1917 plying his trade on the West Coast route. In 1923 Walt had taken that same train to Hollywood to seek his fortune in the cartoon business: corporate lore had it that Mickey Mouse was later invented in a westbound Pullman car out of Chicago, somewhere between Toluca, Illinois, and La Junta, Colorado, as a disappointed Disney returned from New York after learning that his first animated hero had been stolen by an unscrupulous distributor. Thereafter, in times of distress, a train trip became his antidote of choice. Plagued by financial worries, Disney had a full-blown nervous breakdown in 1931. “I simply went to pieces,” he told his daughter, and, on the advice of his doctors, he boarded the Santa Fe for a therapeutic trip. 12 In the late 1940s, the doctors suggested more time away from the office, in pursuit of a hobby, perhaps. And Walt Disney turned to trains again. He built a railroad on the canyon side of his own Holmby Hills backyard at 355 Carolwood Avenue, high above the UCLA campus, between Bel Air and Beverly Hills.

Direct inspiration for the one-eighth-scale home railroad came from the studio. One of the most engaging inventions in Dumbo, released in 1941, was Casey, Jr., the determined little engine. While Dumbo was still on the drawing boards, animator Ward Kimball bought a real, full-size 1881 mining engine and a passenger car and took the boss for a ride on his five-hundred-foot track. Soon Kimball had added a second working locomotive and an abandoned western station to his garden in the San Gabriel Valley. Fellow animator Ollie Johnston remembered what happened next:
Walt Disney’s railroading hobby gave him the illusion of control over an increasingly chaotic and ungovernable world.

Ward Kimball had his steam engine back in '40 or '41. He got this big steam engine from the Nevada Central. . . I think. Walt was always interested and then, along in 1946, I started building a miniature engine . . . and I think it was the next Christmas, Kimball came into the room and said, “Hey, let’s go up to Walt’s office. He’s got a Lionel train up there that he set up for his nephew.” So we went up to his office and while we were looking at the model, Walt turned to me and said, “I didn’t know you were interested in trains.” I told him I was building a steam engine. He said, “You are? I always wanted a backyard railroad myself.” So he came out to where we were building mine, in Santa Monica. He came out two or three times and he started to get ideas on how he was going to build his. They started building it here in the shop, several months later.13

Disney recouped part of the cost of the work done on his first engine by selling duplicate sets of the scale drawings to an eager public. Both Kimball and Johnston collected railroad memorabilia in addition to building models and restoring old trains. This widespread craze for railroading in the 1940s and 1950s was an aspect of the broader popular interest in “Americana.” Antiques gave mobile Americans a
The Disney farm outside Marceline, ca. 1925. Disney remembered every detail of the place. In the 1940s, he built with his own hands a small replica of the family barn, alongside his backyard train layout.

Walt and his sister Ruth, ages seven and five, respectively

sense of rootedness; hobbies and crafts attached leisure activity firmly to the den or basement workshop of the family home. With his daughters approaching the stage of roving adolescence, Disney frequently tried to justify his own train on the grounds that it would keep the girls and their friends close to home. Mainly, however, the distaff side of the family proved indifferent to his hobby, and the Carolwood-Pacific served instead to keep Walt Disney at home, where his social life revolved almost completely around his pastime. Ward Kimball attended gatherings at Disney's new Holmby Hills residence:

*It was here that he started throwing his own railroad-type parties, inviting a few close friends to ride on his miniature train. Sometimes he would ask me to come out and take care of running the train while he was busy making ice-cream sodas in his own full-sized soda fountain by the pool. I remember one party in particular because it had a rather bizarre guest list headed by actress Una Merkel, the agent Jules Stine (whom Walt kept calling "The Octopus") and Salvador Dali, the surrealist.14*

But the train was clearly much more than a conversation piece for movie-colony parties; it answered a deeply felt need on Disney's part, becoming an extension of his personality and a reflection of his autobiography. Only the most intimate of friends received cards making them honorary vice presidents of the line. And before the new house was built, its president and chief engineer had rejected several spectacular sites because they were too small for a workable layout. Never noted for his personal extravagance, Disney had nonetheless spent a small fortune to relocate power lines so they could not be seen by the passengers; he spent another huge sum on a concrete tunnel running under the garden so as not to disturb Mrs. Disney's flower beds. He also presented Lillian with a bona fide legal document giving him control of the right-of-way in exchange for such aesthetic considerations. With his own hands he built the little freight cars (one passenger to a car) and a caboose (fitted out with miniature bunks and newspapers printed to scale) in a trackside workshop that was a precise replica of the barn on his forty-eight-acre boyhood farm back in Linn County, Missouri.
Disney's ties with Marceline remained strong throughout his life. Walt, at right, and his brother, Roy, at far left, returned to the Linn County farmstead in 1956.

The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan maintains that the planned and planted garden—or backyard—is, by its very essence, a statement about the dominance of the human personality over nature. The garden imposes order over chaotic natural growth: in that one place, the householder tames and subdues the primal forces of growth, death, and regeneration—the forces of time itself. Via twenty-six hundred feet of railroad track circling his backyard, Walt Disney was likewise able to control his environment, to travel back into a rural childhood perfected by memory. He could make his cartoons come to hissing, chugging, three-dimensional life. Bedeviled by the vagaries of finance and artistic taste in his business life, here in his own backyard Disney was at last firmly in control. Perched atop the cab of a one-eighth-scale steam engine, modeled after the Southern Pacific's old number 173, Walt Disney was master of all that he surveyed, the engineer of his own destiny, in charge of his future and of his own miniaturized and idealized past.

The Chicago Railroad Fair

Ollie Johnston saw a direct connection between the Carolwood-Pacific and the genesis of the park in Anaheim. "The next thing you knew, Walt was thinking about putting a railroad around here, at the Studio," he insisted.

*There was a guy in Los Gatos who had some engines that were used in the 1915 [Panama-Pacific] Fair in San Francisco, and Walt was thinking of buying those. Then he got to thinking there wasn't enough room here and before long there was a Disneyland.*

But the Chicago Railroad Fair of 1948 was the crucial event that linked the model train to a new kind of themed amusement park in Walt Disney's own mind. The trip to Chicago was part of Disney's regimen of relaxation. Told to get away from the studio completely, he seized upon, as the ideal cure for the blues, a display of railroad rolling stock and memorabilia being mounted in Burnham Park. Ward Kimball was easily persuaded to come along. And when the two train fans boarded a passenger coach to start their adventure, they discovered that E. P. Ripley, president of the Santa Fe, had left an open invitation for them to join the engineer in the cab. "I had never, ever seen [Walt] look so happy," Kimball said.15

Sponsored by thirty-eight major American carriers, including the Santa Fe, the railroad fair ostensibly honored the centenary of the first steam locomotive to enter Chicago, the nation's greatest rail
Western was an engineer, displayed. Mrs. Casey Jones, the eighty-four-year-old widow of the legendary engineer, rode at the head of the opening day parade. But the Railroad Fair was not an idle exercise in retrospection. Despite the plethora of railroad relics, the fair was being held to drum up business and investment capital for modern-day lines, hard hit by the competition from cars and planes and burdened with an inventory of equipment all but worn out by hard use during World War II. "Few railroads could sell stock today," a trade journal confessed as the $2 million extravaganza geared up for the summer on the site of the old Century of Progress Exposition. The Railroad Fair took on something of the futuristic flavor of its predecessor, with displays of the rolling stock of the 1950s and 1960s, including various sleek, domed passenger cars and the Chesapeake and Ohio's mysterious "X" train, designed for speeds approaching 150 miles per hour. The crisp, uniformed attendants, the banners and flags, the orderliness, and the festive atmosphere also rekindled the utopian optimism that visitors to the 1933 Chicago Exposition and the 1939 New York World's Fair remembered so well. But for every train of tomorrow showcased in Chicago in 1948, there were dozens from yesterday. A retrospective mood prevailed by careful design. Experts had calculated the number of active railroad model makers at 100,000; most of them were steeped in the arcana of railroad lore, as were the many thousands more who collected "railroadiana," took pictures of rare and unusual sights at trackside, and went on trips under steam power. The total annual investment of these hobbyists was more than $10 million, and organizers of the Chicago Fair of 1948 were eager to tap their interest, enthusiasm, and goodwill.

Besides, as one rail executive put it, there were really 144 million train buffs in the United States: everybody who had ever dreamed of adventure when a whistle pierced the silence of the night, who had ever imagined standing in the crowd at Promontory Point when the golden spike joined the rails, who had ever thought of heading out to L.A. for a fresh start aboard the Santa Fe's California Limited. So, with a perfunctory nod to tomorrow, the Railroad Fair set about indulging the American appetite for piston, steam, smokestacks, cowcatchers, and the fabled historical romance of the rails.

The fairgrounds gave pride of place to the old steam engines. Strung out along the shore of Lake Michigan, the fair was separated from the city and the rest of Burnham Park by a narrow-gauge railroad called the Deadwood Central. A ticket to ride cost ten cents. Serving two stations (copies of historic depots in the Wild West), one at either end of the tract, the six-car train was the first thing a visitor encountered and the actual means of transit from one attraction to another. Between the right-of-way and the water, the exhibits were deployed along the tracks in no particular order: a carousel, equipped with coach seats instead of wooden horses, cheek by jowl with the "Florida in Chicago" venue, which contained a full-size southern mansion, a sandy Gulf Coast beach with an orange juice bar, and a motorized diorama showing scenes evoked by Stephen Foster tunes. Most of the exhibits, in fact, recreated in convincing atmospheric detail some exotic vacation spot best reached by train.

The Great Northern, the Northern Pacific, and the Burlington, for instance, collaborated on a massive display that aimed to replicate famous points of interest in the Rocky Mountain and Pacific Coast regions. These included a real working dude ranch, transported to
things to see. Many were bound for the Santa Fe exhibit, which consisted of a southwestern Indian village, with a trading post, a curio shop, a crafts building, an Apache wickiup, a Navajo medicine lodge, a full-scale pueblo, and more than 150 natives in residence, performing their dances and selling their wares to fairgoers. “You’ll think you really are on an Indian reservation . . . when you visit the Santa Fe Village,” read the ads in the nation’s newspapers. Nearby, the scene changed abruptly to the French Quarter in New Orleans, courtesy of the Illinois Central. Here, by some miracle of showmanship, were the iron balconies, “the quaint narrow streets, the tiny shops, and the hidden courtyards that have [always] captivated travelers.”

“Villages” were not new to big expositions, of course. Since the nineteenth century, communities of Philippine tribesmen, Native Americans, and other picturesque peoples had been a regular feature of world’s fairs, along with reproductions of historic buildings, dioramas, models, and the like. Walt Disney had seen such sights at New York’s 1939 “World of Tomorrow,” and Chicagoans were quick to compare the environmental displays of 1948 with the popular Belgian Village built for the Century of Progress Exposition fifteen years earlier. Indeed, the Railroad Fair occupied the portion of the old exposition grounds once devoted to the Alpine Village, the Hawaiian Village, the Spanish Village, a Mayan temple, and a replica of Fort Dearborn. What was different about the Railroad Fair was the coherence and concentration of the experience—the sensation of having dropped in on most of the nation’s beauty spots in a single day via a magical train.

Reality rarely intruded. Even dining was apt to be a part of the illusion of being in Yellowstone or the Southwest. Thus it was possible to have lunch served by a cowhand from the business end of a
The Golden Spike scene from the daily pageant at the Chicago Railroad Fair. Disney visited this fair during the 1948 season, donned period costume, and took part in the show.

chuck wagon and dinner in the dining car of a Rock Island streamliner fitted out as a Mexican hacienda staffed by grandees in appropriate costume. "By dramatizing . . . , by making every exhibit a novelty in entertainment as well as education," the New York Times remarked, "the railroads have graphically driven home a realization of how much they mean in our national economy." Although their success in conveying economic realities remains arguable, the railroads succeeded in vivifying the sense of being there by making the American scene come alive to the senses. All that was missing was a narrative, a story that tied together, somehow, all the stops on the itinerary of the Deadwood Central: the Old West and the Wild West, the Vieux Carre, a tropical beach, and the transportation technology of the future.

The story line was supplied by a four-times-a-day play—"Wheels A-Rolling"—enacted by moving locomotives. The lakefront "stage" was a pair of tracks, framed by huge concrete wings. Spectators sat in a grandstand facing the water and watched as each engine puffed into view. A narrator described its significance over a loudspeaker, and in the open space between the two sets of tracks, actors mimed famous scenes from railroad history. During the course of the hour's presentation, 220 actors, by virtue of swift costume changes, played 800 roles in a saga that stretched from 1673, when the canoe was the most up-to-date means of transportation, to the present day, represented by the last word in passenger coaches and diesel locomotives.

Of the pageant's twelve acts, those that got the biggest hand depicted the passage of Lincoln's funeral train, the driving of the Golden Spike, the famous race between the B & O's Tom Thumb and a horse, and "a Harvey House scene." Fred Harvey's turn-of-the-century hotels on the Santa Fe route were also an important precedent for the Railroad Fair itself. Designed to encourage tourism by providing intriguing destinations for passengers, Harvey Houses used pseudo-southwestern architecture, menus, and gift shops to create an all-encompassing atmosphere of authenticity, like that of the 1948 Indian village. In both cases,
“Villages” at the Chicago Railroad Fair, like this pueblo re-creation, inspired Disney’s later simulated environments, replete with period restaurants, souvenir shops, and employees in old-fashioned costume.

unlike the genuine article, the replica offered predictable quality, safety, and every civilized amenity. The experience became an unscripted play, with the touring tenderfoot in a starring role.

Walt Disney, as the fair organizers were well aware, knew all about the Harvey Houses. Because of his interest in railroading, he was no doubt familiar, too, with Edward Hungerford’s other railroad pageants, the best known of which, “Railroads on Parade,” had been mounted at the New York World’s Fair in 1939. But Disney’s fame alone was probably sufficient reason for his temporary inclusion in the cast of “Wheels A-Rolling” as an engineer and dramatic performer. According to Ward Kimball, during their stay in Chicago,

sometimes Walt would be invited to don period costume and take part in some of the historical episodes. I remember one in particular where he was part of the Santa Fe’s Harvey House bit. Walt would watch the other actors and play it accordingly, all in pantomime. In the meantime, I was busy filming the whole show and Walt’s cameo appearance from the orchestra pit. We were both acting like a couple of kids.

All the way home, Disney talked to Kimball about building an amusement
park. “Disneyland was already forming in his mind. Of course, he thought [it] should have an almost full-sized steam train . . . that he could have fun operating himself on days when the park was closed.”

Los Angeles vs. Disneyland

As it was finally built, some six years later, Disneyland owed a great deal to the 1948 Chicago Railroad Fair. First and foremost, of course, was the Santa Fe and Disneyland line that defined the boundaries of the park, served as the chief artery of internal transportation, and even determined the scale of the buildings adjacent to the tracks. The park’s separate “lands,” each with a historic or geographic theme reiterated by every aspect of the environment, down to the very shops and restaurants and the costumed employees in charge of them, recalled the “village” layout in Chicago with its period eateries and trading posts. Even the kinds of places and concepts singled out for special treatment by the fair’s planners—the Old West, the technological future of railroad-ing, tropical Florida, the age of steam—bore more than a passing resemblance to Disneyland’s ultimate constituent parts, from Main Street USA to Tomorrowland. Only Fantasyland was not taken from the prototype because, in Disney’s scheme of things, a good measure of the fantasy would be supplied by the visitor who became a cowboy or an astronaut for an afternoon, much as Disney had once lost himself in the role of a Santa Fe engineer making a whistle stop at a Harvey House.

Finally, although Disney included a Tomorrowland corresponding to the Chicago railroad pageant’s conclusion, when the trains of the future were introduced, the real emphasis in both cases fell on the past—on the culture of railroading that the automobile had all but eradicated. Disneyland presented wilderness (albeit artificial) too remote for the ruinous embrace of the highway. Preserved there, somehow, were places out of time, bypassed by the interstates. Disneyland had bustling towns, each one with a depot, but no suburbs, no carports. And there were only two ways to reach these little Disneyland cities: on foot, or the more dramatic way preferred by the founder—aboard an obsolete, steam-belching, doomed-to-destruction railroad train. In that sense, Disneyland was a tacit protest against modern America, on the wrong side of the tracks, to which Walt Disney consigned the cars and the parking lots. Disneyland was old-fashioned and urban. It was everything that L.A. was not.

In Disney’s considered opinion, Los Angeles was a very dull place. “You know,” he told Kimball in the late 1940s, it’s a shame people come to Hollywood and find there’s nothing to see. They expect to see glamour and movie stars and they go away disappointed. Even the people who come to this studio. What can they see? A bunch of guys bending over drawings. Wouldn’t it be nice if people could come to Hollywood and see something?”

Clearly, however, Disney exaggerated the nullity of Southern California to prove a need for the kind of park he was determined to build. It seems obvious, in retrospect, that such tourist attractions as Los Angeles did possess before the advent of Disneyland exerted an important influence on it.

One seminal tourist mecca was Olvera Street, a permanent sort of world’s fair “village” constructed in the old, historic heart of downtown Los Angeles in 1929 as a Mission-period pedestrian mall lined with more than seventy shops, cantinas, and stalls full of souvenirs. From the 1920s through the Depression era, the Spanish colonial style adorned buildings that dramatized tourist fantasies associ-
ated with the good life in California. Union Station, where nubile starlets posed atop their steamer trunks; the amusement piers near Naples and Santa Monica, where the silent movies had come for background settings; and movie palaces like the famous Carthay Circle, where Snow White premiered—all were lushly Spanish in flavor. They denied humdrum reality by recontextualizing life as it was lived in California in fabulous, make-believe settings. The pleasures of consumption, shopping, and dining were particularly susceptible to enhancement by architectural means. The Farmers' Market of 1934, one of Disney's favorite haunts, was a "let's-pretend" midwestern farmscape identified by a trademark windmill. Sunset Boulevard's Crossroads of the World, completed in 1936, invited shoppers to browse through boutiques matrixed in a half-timbered European village, a lighthouse, and a ship, in addition to the usual early California presidio. Restaurant Row, on La Cienega, ran the gamut from a hot-dog stand operating out of a giant plaster-over-chicken-wire frankfurter to sit-down establishments that looked like grass shacks, Spanish castles, and colonial inns.

The Chicago Railroad Fair's "Gold Gulch" would one day become Anaheim's Frontierland.
Olvera Street, another Disney favorite, combined history, exoticism, and shopping—the key ingredients of Disneyland’s Main Street USA.

In its upscale manifestations, the architecture of illusion generally parted car and driver. The buildings of the past stood for preautomotive behavior, associated with the luxury, ease, and sensuality of premodern times. To shop at Crossroads of the World was to purchase the joy of free, unhurried time, the bliss of walking through unfamiliar townscapes, pausing to savor the sensual delights of touch, sight, and smell—or precisely what Disney would offer to the masses in 1955 in Anaheim. But the downscale version of such fantasy architecture—drive-in restaurants shaped like giant, fairy-tale shoes or derby hats, gas stations in the form of mosques (complete with lady pump-jockeys in Moorish veils), Hansel and Gretel cottages housing real estate offices or eccentric studio executives—could be seen on virtually any street corner during the years when Disney was beginning to dream of an alternative to amusement park and city alike. "If, when you went shopping, you found you could buy cakes in a windmill, ices in a giant cream-can, [and] flowers in a huge flower-pot," wrote a bemused British tourist in 1938, "you might begin to wonder whether you had not stepped through a looking glass or taken a toss down a rabbit burrow and could expect the Mad Hatter . . . to appear round the next corner." In 1939 Aldous Huxley, who would soon write the first draft of the script for Disney’s Alice in Wonderland, described a typical Los Angeles suburb as a succession of implausible villas in which “Gloucester followed Andalusia and gave place to Touraine and Oaxaca, Dusseldorf and Massachusetts.”

History had no dominion over such a world. Instead, time was contingent and malleable. Without a past firmly situated in relationship to the future, there were no beginnings or endings, no death. Storybook architecture rewrote the story of the human condition in California, the Golden State of perpetual youth. Although some critics have attributed the imaginative vernacular of Los Angeles to sheer hedonism or to a liberating awareness of the distance between the West Coast and the old eastern rules of decorum, most commentators have posited a tenuous linkage between make-believe buildings and the movie industry. "Motion pictures have undoubtedly confused
Los Angeles's Union Station, where starlets (and Walt Disney) boarded the Santa Fe. The Mission style, popular from the 1920s, made the whole of Southern California into a kind of historical theme park.

architectural tastes,” the California architect Richard Neutra concluded in 1941:

They may be blamed for many phenomena in this landscape such as: Half-timber English peasant cottages, French provincial and “mission-bell” type adobes, Arabian minarets, Georgian mansions on 50 x 120 foot lots with “Mexican Ranchos” adjoining them on sites of the same size. A Cape Cod fisherman’s hut (far from the beach and fish) appears side by side with a realtor’s office seemingly built by Hopi Indians.24

Neutra’s target was the suburbs of Los Angeles, but he could just as well have been describing Walt Disney’s plans for a little park adjacent to his own backlot property.

Disney’s Park and the Backlot Tour

Public interest in the backlots of the major studios was intense throughout the 1930s and early 1940s. Where did the magic come from? Was this the place? The Disney studio, which moved into new quarters in Burbank in 1940 during the last stages of the work on Fantasia, had been besieged for years with requests for tours and had answered these, in part, with a sequence in The Reluctant Dragon of 1941 dramatizing how animators took a cartoon from idea to finished product. But Disney thought that actually watching the process in the flesh would bore most tourists silly. They wanted movie magic, not the tedious reality of work. They wanted a taste of Hollywood’s razzle-dazzle, whereby faraway times and places came to life on the silver screen. They wanted to be there as part of the illusion. “Walt’s original idea, back in the ’40s,” says Disney Company president Michael Eisner, “was that Disneyland should be a tour of our studio.”25 The ultimate backlot, a film set on a titanic scale, Disneyland was the by-product of Walt Disney’s unrealized plans for the greatest studio tour of all.

People who knew Walt Disney claim to have heard him talking about his future amusement park as early as 1920. Corporate records from the early 1930s document discussion of a two-acre park (never built) at the old studio; the files also contain actual sketches for rides prepared at the end of the decade. But the move to Burbank accelerated things. The Buena Vista Street facility was a personal triumph for Disney, a mark of his status in
A view of the first “magical little park” Disney planned to build on a lot adjacent to his Burbank studio: Disneyland would be a glorified, self-guided studio tour.

the industry and an expression of his ideals as a artist/Hollywood mogul/businessman. Thus the architect Kem Weber gave Disney a sleek, Moderne design, in keeping with the latter’s utopian vision of a workplace in which employees called the boss “Walt,” attended free classes at a company art school, formed corporate orchestras, and jitterbugged happily during their lunch hour. With their banded chrome decorations and campuslike setting, the studio buildings were a model factory of tomorrow, suggestive of a benevolent and enlightened management. The appended park was a further sign of executive goodwill. The first detailed plans for Disneyland coincide, in fact, with the move to Burbank and mandate that a “magical little park” of eight acres be set aside for tourists and, on the weekends, for studio employees and their families.

The proposed contents of Mickey Mouse Park were sparse and simple, a nicer version of what a parent might take his child to see in nearby Griffith Park: a “singing” waterfall, statues of the Disney characters to pose with for snapshots, pony rides, and a working steam locomotive. The war, financial pressures, and a bitter strike in 1941 all dampened enthusiasm for the project. But with his postwar shift from filmmaking to railroading, it became clear that Disney had designs on sixteen undeveloped acres on Riverside Drive, along the banks of the Los Angeles River. The land was across the street from his plant, from which his hypothetical train could run straight into Griffith Park. Renderings of this enlarged plan introduce the concept of theming for the first time. Gone are the waterfalls and statues. In their place was to be Old Town, a false-front western set organized around the depot and a right-of-way that skirted an Indian encampment and a midwestern farmstead. A stern-wheeler was to circumnavigate the tract inside the railroad tracks on a man-made waterway, and a Pony Express stage was to link the wilderness with the Old Town station.

An in-house memo of 31 August 1948 also lists a general store, pack mules—all appurtenances of the future Frontierland—a carnival section with the “typical Midway stuff” (lampooned in the 1940 Disney feature *Pinocchio*), and an old-fashioned townscape that sounds a lot like Anaheim’s Main Street USA:

*The Main Village, which includes the Railroad Station, is built around a village*
green or informal park. In the park will be benches, a bandstand . . . trees and shrubs. It will be a place for people to sit and rest; mothers and grandmothers can watch over small children at play . . . .

Around the park will be built the town. At one end will be the Railroad Station; at the other the Town Hall. The Hall will be built to represent a Town Hall, but actually we will use it as our administration building. It will be the headquarters of the entire project.

Adjoining the Town Hall will be the Fire and Police Stations. . . . In [the police station] we could have a little jail where the kids could look in.

And there was more: a quaint commercial district with an ice cream parlor, a bookshop, a hobby shop, an art gallery, a post office, a doll hospital, stores for candy and toys and play clothes, and “a restaurant for birthday parties.”26 Linked to the more active attractions of the western and the carnival sections by a variety of buckboards, surreys, and horse-drawn trolleys, Main Village was meant for leisurely strolling and sitting in the shade. It was Olvera Street with an Americana veneer, the pedestrian shopping mall with a touch of fantasy, a whole streetful of backlot—cum—Los Angeles eccentricities of architecture, a model railroad layout enlarged to usable scale.

None of it, however, impressed the Burbank City Council. Ignoring Walt’s emphasis on the family, council members persisted in thinking of any amusement park as a potential liability. “We don’t want the carny atmosphere in Burbank,” cried one lawmaker. “We don’t want people falling in the river, or merry-go-rounds squawking all day long.” The acreage was swallowed up by the Ventura Freeway, and Disney went back to tinkering with trains and models. His brother Roy wondered if the dreaming and experimenting did not fascinate him more than the doing anyway. “Walt does a lot of talking about an amusement park but . . . I don’t know how deep his interest really is,” Roy Disney wrote to an associate in 1951. “I think he’s more interested in ideas that would be good in an amusement park than in actually running one himself.”27

Yet it was becoming increasingly difficult to separate Walt Disney’s interests, ideas, and pastimes from the park scheme. One of the most compelling ingredients in the evolving Disneyland of the late 1940s and early 1950s, for example, was also one of the most personal: a walk-through museum of automata—moving, miniature scenes from his own films and from American history—made by Walt Disney himself. On his 1931 sabbatical, Disney had purchased a mechanical bird from a New Orleans antique shop. Fascinated by the technology that made the creature move its tail and chirp, he brought the 100-year-old automaton back to the studio and had it taken apart. To Disney, the bird was a three-dimensional cartoon, one of his own animal characters come to life, and so he collected for further study other toys operated by springs and gears. When he began to build miniature furniture and appointments for the cars in his railroad train, the connections between the singing bird and the train chugging through his garden suddenly jelled.

Disneyland

In 1951, in a model train shop in London, Disney ran into Harper Goff, an illustrator whose renderings of American historical scenes for Esquire and other magazines were well known. Goff had also worked in Hollywood, most recently doing storyboards for live-action films at Warner Brothers. “I’ve got a little thing up my sleeve that I really want to do,” Disney told the illustrator by way of inducement to join the enterprise. “It’s
The automata and working miniatures that made up “Disneylandia” translated model railroading into a new, robotic dimension essential to the eventual success of Disneyland. This technology made Granny Kincaid’s cabin, a scene from a Disney movie, into a three-dimensional reality. sort of a ‘Kiddieland,’ and I want it to be called ‘Walt Disney’s America.’ I don’t want to just entertain kids with pony rides and slides and swings. I want them to learn something about their heritage.” It soon became known that, with the help of studio artist Ken Anderson, Disney was engaged in a secret project, code named “Disneylandia.” A touring attraction that could reach children in their own hometowns, Disneylandia was to consist of twenty-four peep-show views of salient moments in the American past, enlivened by little figures that could actually talk and gesticulate. Plans called for Anderson and Goff to paint the scenes in great detail, à la Norman Rockwell. Then Disney would go home and build them to scale in his workshop, with some help from company mechanics. “I’m tired of having everyone else around here do the drawing and painting,” Disney admitted to Anderson.

I’m going to do something creative myself. . . . I want you to draw . . . scenes of life in an old Western town. . . . I’ll carve the figures and make the scenes in miniature. When we get enough of them made, we’ll send them out as a traveling exhibit.”28
By the time the model making began, the iconography of Disneylandia had expanded from the Old West to include a broader swath of history and, under the rubric of Americana, the history of Walt Disney’s own career as a filmmaker. If movies and cartoons gave ideas a visible form, Disneylandia would make those flat, cinematic images real and palpable. The first tableau actually completed, for instance, was based on a set from the 1948 live-action–cartoon feature So Dear to My Heart, a Disney period piece dealing with small-town life in 1903, complete with county fair, locomotive, and genial Main Street merchants. The scene chosen for miniaturization was the interior of Granny Kincaid’s cabin, crammed with lilliputian models of a spinning wheel, a family Bible, and a flintlock rifle mounted on the wall. Thanks to a system of cams and cables, Granny herself rocked by the fireside and spoke with the recorded voice of actress Beulah Bondi. And tantalizing slices of an old-fashioned kitchen and a bedroom with a four-poster were visible behind her. These half-seen fragments—a view out a window in one scene would hint at the milieu of the next—were to interconnect a coherent reconstruction of small-town America.

The second tableau was a music hall, with a dancing man doing his routine. Buddy Ebsen was hired to perform an old-time dance on camera, the film was rotoscoped to break fluid action down into its constituent parts, and a nine-inch entertainer (operated by a console larger than the scene itself) strutted his stuff before a velvet curtain. The third and final scene combined the elaborate movements of the dancer with the vocal capacity of Granny Kincaid in a barbershop quartet that sang “Sweet Adeline” for almost ninety seconds, with dramatic arm waving and head tilting.

From the first, Disneylandia was plagued with problems. The model making went slowly. Although the miniatures worked, the operating equipment was cumbersome: studio technicians admitted they had duplicated the eighteenth-century technology of mechanical toys without improving it much and argued unsuccessfully for full-size figures that could be crammed full of more sensitive hydraulic and pneumatic controls. To Disney, the magic of the scenes derived from their tiny size, but miniaturization, according to the accountants, also meant that few viewers could see a given segment of the show at once, and those who deposited their quarters in the slot to start the machinery were liable to spend a lot of time ooohing and aahing over each little room. At twenty-five cents a head, the chances of breaking even, given the enormous costs of the project, were slim indeed. So Disneylandia was folded into the master plan for an amusement park. Along with life-size versions of the Old West and Granny’s Cabin, the layout sketches for the Anaheim site captured the essence of the small town, of American history and heritage, basic to the unfinished miniature exhibit.

Main Street USA

Disneylandia ultimately spawned the slithering plastic crocodiles of Adventureland and the flying witches and fairies of Fantasyland. But its most important legacy was Main Street USA, the grand ceremonial entrance to Disneyland. Like the train track and the depot defining the margins of the park, Main Street was another Disney hobby given larger, national significance in the fluid landscape of Anaheim in 1955.

In The Lonely Crowd, a study of the changing American character published in 1950, David Riesman took up the subject of hobbies. The intensity with which the average, middle-class American pursued after-hours woodcarving or outdoor cooking or model making initially puzzled
Main Street architecture: a shopping mall in movie-set disguise.

the sociologist because such private interests seemed at odds with the "outer-directed" personality typical of the period. The "outer-directed" corporate man took his social cues from those around him and, Riesman concluded, "remains a lonely member of the crowd because he never comes really close to . . . himself." But the use of leisure for craftsmanlike activities by these same nine-to-five conformists struck him as anomalous, an expression of autonomy and individual competence that ran counter to the workday norm. In such moments of basement tinkering, Riesman posited, the hobbyist "can often rediscover both his childhood and his inner-directed residues by serious craftsmanship." To make a model—to recreate, in Disneyland's case, the Marceline, Missouri, of a turn-of-the-century boyhood—was to return to those happy, bygone times as a competent adult. To make a model was to construct, or reconstruct, one's own biography. To make a model of an ideal past was to reject an imperfect present.

In Disneyland, the present—suburban reality, 1955-style—was abandoned in the parking lot, along with the family car. Although ticket buyers would ultimately face a choice between Fantasyland, Frontierland, Adventureland, and Tomorrowland, they were first forced to negotiate a common entranceway defined by the architectural and technological symbolism of an American past that coincided with Walt Disney's own. Here, too, his hobbies displaced the realities of the workplace on a scale that demanded the same "inner-directed" ethos of others. Everybody walked under the railroad tracks and past the station where the old steam locomotive chuffed to a halt. Everybody walked down Main Street USA, under its gingerbread cornices, past windows bearing the names of Disney's father and his friends inscribed in gilded letters. That kind of experience, writes the landscape historian John Stilgoe, is a primal one, a rebirth, a common affirmation of American identity:
wisdom, thanks to imbedded lessons about the space program and the conquest of the frontier taught in the adjacent “lands.” But its liminal markers set off a world in which everybody—and the nation itself—is young again and therefore perfect: spanking clean, freshly painted, orderly, peaceful, happy, and never “run-down.”

Main Street is Kansas Street in Marceline, Missouri, as Walt Disney remembered it from a distance of half a century. Diane Disney called it “his dreamlike re-creation of Marceline’s main stem,” and her father confirmed her insight when he explained the meaning of Main Street USA in terms of the collective memory of his generation. “Many of us fondly remember our small hometown and its friendly way of life at the turn of the century,” Disney remarked. “To me, this era represents an important part of our nation’s heritage.” The Missouri town first encountered by the four-year-old Walt Disney was far from perfect, however. Richard Francaviglia’s historical reconstruction of Marceline circa 1905 reveals a raw, treeless, unlovely place, a visually incoherent mosaic of signboards, telegraph poles, and bulky, vaguely classicized buildings all competing for attention along the rutted, unpaved length of Kansas Street. The Disneyland version of hometown America, as one of the staff members described it, “is what Main Street should have been like.”

Main Street, Disneyland, has none of the vile features observed by Sinclair Lewis’s heroine when she made her famous thirty-two-minute tour of Gopher Prairie’s Main Street back in “19-aught-something”: no saloons, no malodorous pool halls, no sidewalk loafers casting bold glances at the passersby. Instead of jostling one another for the shopper’s favor, the buildings are all of a piece, roughly equal in height, complementary in color, and ebulliently overdecorated with Andy Hardy Victorianisms. There
are too many awnings, too much fretwork and gilt, creating an intensity, a concentration of sensation that is almost urban, despite itself. But the wealth of decoration, in the end, reads as wealth or material well-being, and the overall effect, thanks to clever manipulations of scale, is intimate, even comforting.

Disney’s one-eighth scale locomotive ultimately determined the dimensions of his park. When measured drawings for the train were enlarged to adapt it to Disneyland, it was determined that a six-foot doorway was adequate for a passenger car. Everything else was proportioned to that module, by eighths, like the little freight stations and villages on a railroad layout beneath a Christmas tree. “It’s not apparent to a casual glance that this street is only a scale model,” Disney stated, pointing at the Italianate storefronts that stretched away toward Sleeping Beauty’s Castle. “We had every brick and shingle and gas lamp made 7/8 of true size.”32 Actually, it was more complicated than that. Like Baroque masters of illusionism, or the clever set decorators they were, Disney’s “imagineers” built Main Street in forced perspective, with the upper stories much smaller than the lower ones, giving the impression of diminution by distance while keeping the overall height of the cornice lines suburan, unthreatening, and low. The ground floor, in each case, is seven-eighths the size of a “real” turn-of-the-century commercial structure; the second story is in five-eighths scale (also used for the Mark Twain and the Santa Fe and Disneyland line); but the top story is only one-half as large as its generic prototypes.

Along with Levittown and places like it, Main Street USA’s size answered Lewis Mumford’s call for a postwar “return to the human scale” that made neighborliness and intimacy possible.33 Its size domesticated, its atmosphere comfy and benign, Main Street evokes the mood of Disney’s own small-town movies and the front-porch television tradition that began with Father Knows Best in 1954. On Main Street, the grown-up suddenly becomes a kid again—a Bud or a Betty from television’s fictional Springfield, USA. Main Street’s scale captures the sense most adults experience when they return to their hometowns and notice how small, how toylke their cherished places of childhood have become. Built from the blueprint of memory, Main Street was capable of shrinking the past and stripping away the nasty facts of yesterday, exalting instead the positive values that recollection has burnished to a golden luster. Main Street is thus a plaything, a dream at nap time, a TV sitcom, better than reality has ever been.

The sense of well-being Main Street imparts is also related to scale, for, paradoxically, if reduced size summons up childhood memories and emotions, it also makes the adult feel ten feet tall, larger than life, and therefore immune from harm. With its dollhouse ice cream parlors and toy-town candy shops, Main Street is just unreal enough to be unthreatening. In 1928 the novelist Glenway Wescott, taking the reader back to the luminous nighttimes of his own Wisconsin youth, remembered such a Main Street scene:

As the sun hurried west... everywhere men and women and children were made eager by the thought of the night... for the night was Saturday night and they were going to town... And in Middle America, in the numberless small towns that serve the people of the farms, there is no more magical time. It is the sweet reward of the long week’s labor; it is their opera, drama, their trip to Zanzibar.34

The Main Street of old was Zanzibar, Rome, and Paris, the Fourth of July and Christmas, rolled into one. So is Main Street USA, a memory first softened by the blur of nostalgia and then coaxed into
The Santa Fe and Disneyland depot at the head of Main Street USA—the liminal border between fantasy and reality, the suburban present and small-town past

a three-dimensional existence, just that way—pristine and eternally lovely—in the architecture of Disneyland.

Disney’s make-believe Main Street shares much common ground with 1950s suburbia: the sense of uniformity, order, community, and safety, a sort of smiling “I Like Ike” friendliness conveyed by each perky awning. But as a model community, Main Street also stands in obvious contrast to the American city from which the suburbanite had fled. People-sized, organized around the meanderings of pedestrians, its deepest meaning is revealed by its opposition to Los Angeles and to the creeping steel-and-concrete urbanism outside the park. Perhaps, then, Main Street is the real national Fantasyland, since Los Angeles and its environs in 1955 constituted the future that had already come to pass for small-town America. Or perhaps, secure from bulldozers and the ravages of urbanization, it is a compensatory monument to Anaheim and all the other vanished Main Streets of the postwar era. Southern Californians, according to one trenchant social commentator struggling to make sense of Disneyland’s popularity, habitually “imagine ivy-covered, leaf-strewn squares, and villages clustered around white frame New England churches, and, lacking them in reality, create them in plastic towns to which they go to find themselves.” The architect Charles Moore calls Main Street the town square of Los Angeles, a public environment otherwise missing from a city of freeways and housing tracts:

In an uncharted sea of suburbia, Disney has created a place, indeed, a whole public world, full of sequential occurrences, of big and little drama, of hierarchies of importance and excitement. . . . No raw edges spoil the picture. . . . everything is as immaculate as in the musical-comedy villages that Hollywood has provided for our viewing pleasure for the last three generations.35

Within his own mythological system, the small town Disney fetishized was a part of a larger Hollywood drama. Called upon to explain the village huddled at the foot of Bald Mountain in the spectacular
Inscriptions on the windows refer to the founder’s own relatives and associates. Elias Disney, for example, was Walt’s father. The signs are a clear admission of Disney’s personal stake in his latest, greatest project.

(overleaf) Kansas Street, Marceline, Missouri—the prototype for Main Street USA

finale of Fantasia, he said that “it sort of symbolizes something. The forces of good.” At Disneyland, the same archetypal set introduces the whole show. As the visitor strolls past the storefronts, the townscape itself unwinds a narrative describing in a welter of props what it was like to be in America in the early 1900s, when the movies shown in the Main Street Cinema were new, when the horseless carriage was still an oddity, when life was very, very good. “Here is a period in America... when progress was a good word and... there was an intense optimism about what we were doing with our lives,” says a park official, “reading” the cinematic story being told in the passage from turnstile to castle.36 Disney placed great stock in what he called the “weinie” theory of crowd movement whereby an eye-catching object—a “weinie,” like the castle at the end of Main Street—pulls the guest in that direction, past the prompts and cues that make up the visual script along the way. Each Disneyland visitor thus becomes an actor in a drama arranged, like a movie, in an edited sequence of sights and sounds.

Likewise, the person who takes a seat on any one of the park’s many rides immediately becomes a cast member in the Disney feature to which the attraction alludes. “Snow White’s Adventure,” one of the original Fantasyland rides, is a case in point. Tucked behind the safety bar of a moving, “dwarf-carved” vehicle of simulated wood, the visitor experiences exactly what Snow White did in the 1937 movie. The Wicked Witch offers a poisoned apple. The dwarfs mine their diamonds and tramp homeward. To maintain the illusion, Snow White herself is nowhere to be seen in representational form: the passenger–turned–movie-star fills in for her, living out her adventures for as long as it takes the simulated–wooden car to negotiate the darkened tunnel. And so it is the visitor who is menaced, attacked, and scared half to death by things that go bump in the night, in a clash of good and evil that ends only when the car shoots back into the blessed sunlight.

The flat, unnuanced contrasts between good and evil, light and dark, so evident in the cold war politics of the 1950s, underlie the filmic narratives of Fantasyland. Along Main Street, however, evil exists only in terms of its absence, as the banished antonym of civic virtues like cleanliness or picturesque charm, and the storytelling proceeds by subtler means. Since the visitor revises the script by making choices—to enter one store and not another, to dawdle, to rush through—mood becomes almost as important to the perception of meaning as any particular storyline that is spelled out in gilded signage and period costume. As act 1, scene 1 for Disneyland, Main Street is appropriately pleasant, reassuring, and undemanding. At world’s fairs and other public amusements studied by the Disney team, each structure competed with all the rest for the audience’s attention. But Main Street architecture, from its shared roofline to its limited decorative vocabulary, functions in noncompetitive aesthetic harmony “because there’s an attempt to relate one idea to the next,” declared a studio animator who helped Disney build his park.

This comes from the motion picture background... Colors are harmonized very carefully. It may not have an impact at a logical level, but I’m sure people respond to it, whether they’re trained in this or not.37

Because Main Street USA was built by filmmakers, not by architects, its appearance was calibrated to achieving a desired emotional effect. Form follows function—or script—unashamedly, as it does more often than not in commercial, roadside architecture. “What is Main Street?” asked the Manhattan developer Mel Kaufman after a pilgrimage to Disneyland.
Disney visits the Zurcher Building in Marceline, 1960. It is said to have been the inspiration for one of the storefronts on Main Street USA.

It is an ordinary shopping center where they sell souvenirs, film . . . ice cream, have a movie house—all functioning as would any ordinary shopping center. Except for one thing. It's a stage set of Main Street circa 1900.38

It is no ordinary shopping center, of course, this evocative blend of history, autobiography, mythmaking, and Hollywood set. But Main Street USA is a functioning commercial district, which, at its inception, looked backward to Los Angeles's Olvera Street and forward to Victor Gruen's Southdale, the first fully enclosed suburban mall, which opened in Minneapolis in 1956. Indeed, Main Street is a mall in its own right, since the disposition of interior space permits free movement from one shop to another along the entire length of the block. And by virtue of Main Street's controlling position in the layout of the park, shopping becomes a key motif in the iconographic structure of Disneyland. On the one hand, the psychology of the place makes for low sales resistance. "Unlike in society's modern cities," a Disney planner boasted, "they drop their defenses [here]. . . Actually, what we're selling is reassurance."39 On the other hand, while the ambience makes for enormous profits, it also exalts the central act of street corner capitalism—the buying and selling of merchandise, which goes on at a frantic pace behind the pretty, filigreed facades of what amount to antique shops in reverse: old-fashioned stores stocked with the latest in Mickey Mouse memorabilia. Period decor legitimates consumption by equating the business of Main Street USA with the very historical fiber of the nation. At the gateway to the cold war moralism of Walt Disney's reconstructed America, Main Street USA celebrates the real-life pleasures of exuberant postwar consumerism.

A Williamsburg or a Greenfield Village adapted to the social climate of the 1950s, Main Street USA affirms that the good life—utopia—is American, middle-class, and midwestern. The rest of Disneyland, to which the thoroughfare leads, represents a world view grounded in Main Street's values. Frontierland sets forth the story of how the West was made safe for homesteaders—and suburbanites. Adventureland appropriates the Third World and untamed nature to serve as the
frontiers (and boutiques) of today, while a corporate Tomorrowland, intent on the conquest of space, is the profitable frontier of the future. As for Fantasyland, its flirtations with the dark and irrational only serve to affirm the ideological clarity with which the progress of the American adventure, from cowboy to astronaut, is described in nuances of architecture, cuisine, and gift shop souvenirs. But Main Street USA remains the allegorical touchstone for this “Disneyized” history of the nation: “It is what America was,” writes a cultural geographer, “and provides the bedrock security for what it is to be.” And so a powerful dramatization of history and destiny arises directly from Walt Disney’s own childhood memories. In an act of almost stupifying self-assurance, he made himself—his life, his imagination, his movies—the objective correlative for American culture, past, present, and future. In the words of a promotional brochure for the park, “Disneyland reflects Walt’s personal experiences, his dreams, his ambitions and special interest which are universal interests.”

The Aesthetic of Television

If not universal, these interests were well known to most Americans through the medium of film. Main Street USA pushed to the foreground scenic backgrounds of So Dear to My Heart and Lady and the Tramp (released when Disneyland opened in July 1955). Fantasyland brought back Tinker Bell, Snow White, Pinocchio, and Alice, stars of the animated fairy-tale features. Adventureland alluded to Disney’s True-Life Adventure series of nature documentaries. Tomorrowland, the least developed of the quadrants in 1955, was based on 1954’s 20,000 Leagues under the Sea, a live-action, sci-fi thriller, loaded with special effects. Hence the characters and themes of Disneyland were familiar to adults who had grown up with Disney cartoons and who were now, as parents, taking their own children to see the latest from the same studio.

Everybody knew Walt Disney, if not from his movies, then from the products related to them: the books, watches, lamps, toys, clothing, and novelty items—even a line of canned foods marketed under the Donald Duck label. In a pluralistic society, where experiences of church, school, and ethnicity were not universally shared, Disney motifs constituted a common culture, a kind of civil religion of happy endings, worry-free consumption, technological optimism, and nostalgia for the good old days.

In sheer size, Disneyland’s sets invited comparison with those created for the inflated “spectaculars” through which Hollywood in the 1950s hoped to recoup profits lost to television. There was only one difference, Reyner Banham argued: “Disneyland was a set for a film that was never going to be made, except in the mind of the visitor.” In turned loose on an ersatz set, the visitor became a temporary Hollywood insider, privy to the secrets of the giant screen. But the intimacy of the backlot also made it the perfect setting for TV and its small-screen revelations of what really went on behind the scenes. Walt Disney’s first television show, a 1950 “special” broadcast on Christmas afternoon by NBC, made a vast family audience familiar with the doings in his studio during the making of Alice in Wonderland. “One Hour in Wonderland” also gave viewers a look at the Disney family: Diane and Sharon, then high schoolers, appeared with their father. The formula proved so successful that Disney offered another insider’s peek at moviemaking in 1951.

Television was the family entertainment medium of choice in the new, isolated, gadget-happy ranch houses of suburbia, and the commercial benefits of luring those families back to the movie
The castle eventually built at Disneyland gave a deceptive air of fantasy to the park. In fact, the concept was grounded in technology and history.

Walt Disney and that Disney, as part of the package, was going to build some sort of “film production center” patterned after the villages in his movies. The TV show and the “center” were both to be called Disneyland.

“Disneyland” the TV show premiered in October 1954. It played on Wednesday nights at 7:30, the children’s hour, and within three months it had hit the top ten. “Disneyland” became a family institution: homework was deferred, sales of frozen TV dinners soared. In Walt Disney’s own mind and in its televised format, the program was not easily distinguishable from the project then under construction in Anaheim. “I saw that if I was ever going to have my park,” he stated, “here . . . was a way to tell millions of people about it—with TV.”

And so, every week, the format introduced the audience to the principal themes of the park. One Wednesday the topic would be Fantasyland, with the content made up of clips from animated films. Adventuredland evenings recycled unused footage shot for the nature documentaries. But the Tomorrowland segment was perhaps the most revealing of the lot in terms of Disney’s own intentions.

Under the heading of Tomorrowland, the studio prepared a behind-the-scenes preview of 20,000 Leagues under the Sea, with an emphasis on special-effects technology. The program won an Emmy, but it was also dubbed “the first 60-minute commercial in the history of TV” and “the longest trailer ever made.”

Nor did critics fail to notice that three additional Wednesdays were given over to progress reports from the park site urging members of the audience to plan a vacation trip to Southern California, much as other telecasts had sent viewers to the drive-in to see a new movie with which they were already familiar before the credits ever rolled. Nonetheless, while “Disneyland” served blatantly commercial

houses with free previews of forthcoming films were enormous. “That telecast should be worth $1 million at the box-office to Alice in Wonderland,” wrote one TV columnist after the first Christmas program aired. But, despite its appeal to the swelling postwar middle class, old-line Hollywood moguls and highbrows alike considered television an enterprise of dubious artistic and intellectual merit. The first major producer to join forces with the networks, Disney incurred the wrath of other studio heads bent on ignoring the competition or fighting a losing battle against “the idiot box.” His espousal of TV—his intuitive grasp of the potential for profit—gave Disney’s critics another reason to consign him to the ranks of the philistines. His sheepish defenders, on the other hand, put forth the curious argument that Disney “demonstrated . . . his inherent contempt for the medium” by using television to create a market for his films—and for Disneyland.

In the early 1950s, Disneyland was in trouble. Within the company, Disney had found little support for what many believed to be an excursion into “honky-tonk.” The planning process continued only because he paid for the work out of his own pocket. And when he approached would-be backers with his idea for a form of participatory entertainment at the furthest possible remove from television, the business community was inclined to believe rumors that Disney was not quite himself. But TV was the last hope. Walt Disney Productions would crank out the weekly series the networks had been angling for in return for heavy cash investments and loan guarantees to see the park through to completion. A written prospectus and a portfolio of patented Disney drawings were prepared in a single frantic weekend, and in the late September of 1953, Roy Disney went to New York to strike a deal. On 2 April 1954, it was formally announced that ABC—the struggling “third” network—had landed...
Walt Disney introduces his park and the “Disneyland” television hour to the public, 1954. From the beginning, the two propositions were inextricably linked. The show was also crucial to the creation of the mood or underlying scenario basic to its geographic counterpart in Anaheim. Through the medium of “Disneyland,” the American family became part of the process of building the park and thus acquired an emotional stake in its success. It was Walt’s American Versailles, but it was a part of the Wednesday night home lives of countless viewers, too. And by rehearsing the proposed features of the park, the TV show eliminated all grounds for apprehension: Disneyland—the theme park—was just as safe, wholesome, and predictable as the living room setting in which the family gathered to watch. Walt talk all about it. Going to Disneyland was just like watching that other “Disneyland” on TV.

Bob Chandler, a television reporter for Variety, admired the way in which the show relentlessly plugged the park and the park, in turn, gave permanent form to transient aspects of Disney’s entertainment empire. But the systematic integration of the two arms of the business went further than that. Disneyland’s Frontierland and Tomorrowland, Chandler noted, were “tele-creations,” concepts generated for the home screen without
much precedent in the existing Disney film archive.\(^5\) Indeed, most of the brand-new material produced for the show, including a popular series on space exploration, fell into one of those two categories. Both were important television motifs of the 1950s.

The futuristic hardware explained by rocket scientists and animated by the Disney artists was not dissimilar in appearance, for instance, to the products of American industry on display during commercial breaks: a new, befitting Ford Fairlane or a push-button kitchen range heralded a future of magical ease as surely as did any lunar vehicle. Television suburbanized a future that remained, until Sputnik suggested otherwise, a strictly American phenomenon, a technological wonderland available for purchase on easy credit terms. The Autopia in Disney’s park is a reminder of that consumerist vision of the world to come. Funds ran out before the Tomorrowland precinct was fully realized, but Walt insisted that this one attraction—a replica of the new freeway system that linked America’s past with its suburban future—be completed in time for the opening ceremonies. The shiny new cars vrooming past the camera would make for great TV, he thought.

Frontierland represented the national past, and it was also the most popular recurring theme of the “Disneyland” program, thanks to the Davy Crockett mania of the 1954–55 season. And like Tomorrowland, Frontierland resonated to powerful themes in the suburban imagination. The ranch house, the knotty-pine den, the outdoor barbecue, the search for acres of crabgrass beyond the boundaries of urban civilization—these facts of American life in the 1950s help to explain why the western genre accounted for more than a quarter of the movies produced in Hollywood and why the cowboy film of the period was so often domestic in flavor, with the hero longing for the stability of home and hearth. Television had a voracious appetite for old Westerns in its early years and soon demanded more, made to order for the medium. Disney’s Davy Crockett episodes—the first one-hour Westerns on ABC—garnered the highest ratings of the decade (and produced a bonanza of product spin-offs) by validating suburban mobility in the person of the restless frontiersman who waxes nostalgic about home and family as he dies in the wilds of Texas. Those who wondered, in a recession year, about the wisdom of acquiring the streamlined appurtenances of Tomorrowland found imaginative comfort in Frontierland’s simple, log-cabin past.

Armchair frontiersmen uneasy about the nation’s postwar transformation into a military-industrial power found solace in the vision of an earlier day, commemorated in their own wagon-wheel coffee tables. The eye of the camera let the living room viewer travel freely in time and space, backward to the Alamo, forward to the moon. Television was a magical picture window on the world beyond one’s own front lawn, and Disneyland was conceived in its perceptual image.

The cultural historian George Lipsitz insists that the spatial sensibility of Disneyland comes from television, too, specifically from the latter’s “managed gaze”: just as the various segments of the televised “Disneyland” were discrete, self-contained entities, so the “viewer” touring the park could not see Frontierland from Tomorrowland or vice versa.\(^6\) Disney’s theme park planners always used an older cinematic analogy to describe the way in which the tourist was to be gently nudged from scene to scene in a narrative sequence of edited takes. But Disney planners made a major departure from this analogy: in the movies, the experience is continuous and unbroken, but in Disneyland, it is discontinuous and episodic, like watching television in the privacy of one’s own home—each ride a
four- or five-minute segment, slotted in among snacks, trips to the rest room, and "commercials" in the form of souvenir emporia. And it is always possible to change the channel. "Disneyland . . . is a kind of TV set," writes William Irwin Thompson, "for one flips from medieval castles to submarines and rockets as easily as one can move, in . . . Los Angeles, from the plaza of the Mexican Olvera Street . . . to the modern Civic Center."47

Disneyland is pure L.A., TV, high-tech, shop-'til-you-drop 1950s glitz. It is also a sober critique of that culture, couched in the visual language and the myths of the American film. It is an alternative to the city, an affirmation of the suburb, neither, and both. Mobile yet curiously inert. A glorification of technological progress, or an indictment of the shift in values accelerated by the machine. Naggingly familiar; profoundly alien. Tomorrow. Yesterday. The antithesis of art. The most complex, baffling, and beloved work of art produced in postwar America.

Notes


3 Disney, quoted in ibid., pp. 108–9.


15 Johnston, quoted in Finch, p. 387; Kimball, quoted in Mosley, p. 217.


21 Kimball, quoted in Mosley, p. 218.


23 Quotation in Jim Heimann and Rip Georges, California Crazy: Roadside Vernacular Architecture (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1980), p. 11; Aldous Huxley, After Many a Summer Dies the


26 Memorandum, quoted in Thomas, pp. 218–19.


28 Disney, quoted in Bright, p. 39, and in Thomas, p. 224.


31 Miller, "My Dad," Saturday Evening Post 229 (24 November 1956): 74; Disney, quoted in Disneyland: The First Thirty-Five Years, p. 16; Richard V.


37 Hench, quoted in Finch, p. 414.

38 Mel Kaufman, quoted in ibid., p. 447.

39 Hench, quoted in Bright, p. 237.


41 Banham, p. 127.

42 Television columnist, quoted in Hollis and Sibley, p. 60; defenders' argument, quoted in Mosley, p. 244.

43 Disney, quoted in Schickel, p. 313.


47 Thompson, pp. 13–14.