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Consuming the West

Main Street, USA

Disney is unavoidable in any discussion of the contemporary theme park or of the narrativisation of the tourist experience. The Disney parks are themselves a global phenomenon, with two sites in America, one outside Paris (and easily accessible from most of Europe), one in Tokyo, one in Hong Kong and another in Shanghai; Disney, as Simon During has put it, belongs to the 'global popular' (During 1993: 22). The success of the Disney Corporation is inescapable in the leisure industry.¹ The organisation of the theme park into generic 'lands' and the geography of a 'Main Street' as an entrance into the fantasylands may have borrowed from the structure of the World's Fairs, but this precise theming was a Disneyland innovation.

The success of the Disney Corporation has led to the borrowing of the formula for Disneyland by leisure companies and commercial pleasure grounds across the world. It is not just that the Disney parks are globally the most successful tourist attractions; they have also shaped the structure of attractions in theme parks and fairgrounds internationally. Disney himself may have claimed inspiration from the European pleasure garden and to have shaped his parks after the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, but the Disney parks are very much the product of an American imagination, and it is that American imagination that has shaped the global model of the theme park. Theme parks across the world may inflect their own cultural and geographical specificity, so the Astérix Parc in Paris celebrates a Gallic culture, and Gardaland in Italy reminds Egyptologists that the archaeologist Belzoni was originally an Italian. But the success of Disney is unavoidable; what the Disney Corporation takes up, so will other theme parks across the world. The division into 'lands', the management of visitors and the siting of attractions conforms globally to the same organising principles found in Disneyland.

Disney promises visitors 'Magic'; Tinkerbell is employed as a Disneyland logo, and it is she who closes the park at night as visitors are sent out of the gates of Main Street, USA. While the 'Magic of Disney' is much celebrated by fans, it also has been roundly denigrated by those who see the Mouse as responsible for a process of the 'Disneyfication' (see Schickel 1986) of the world's favourite stories. There is no doubt that the Disney parks are extremely good at what they do; as Christopher Finch's celebration of the *Art of Walt*

Figure 11.1 Chauncey L. Moore, opposite Court Square, on Main Street, c. 1884.
Engraving from *King's Handbook of Springfield, Massachusetts*

Disney (Finch 1978, 2004) demonstrates, the attention to detail in the theming of the parks' *mise en scènes* is remarkable. The fencing, the litter bins and the signage are decorated according to each land's theming, and the ambient music is appropriate to each. The 'imagineers' of the Disney Company are professional mythmakers, trained in the creation of fantasy environments. As Janet Wasko reminds us, Walt Disney Enterprises is a major global corporation, and the pleasures and fantasies that it offers are highly crafted:

It cannot simply be magic, as portrayed in the Disney Stories, or as the company would like us to believe. For even though Disney provides an important source of pleasure and entertainment for children and adults, it is also necessary to understand the process by which Disney's magic and fantasy are deliberately manufactured – they are produced by one of the largest media and entertainment corporations in the world. (Wasko 2001: 1)

This reconciliation of magic and corporate capital is the logic that structures Main Street, and it is a reconciliation that is achieved through an elision of tradition and modernity. Like the once-loved holiday destinations of Blackpool and Coney Island, visitors to the world of Disney expect that

their fantasy should be at once familiar and contemporary, that their holiday experience should recapture old memories and also be suitably up to date. This reconciliation of past and future is one that Disney personally promises in the bronze plaque that was dedicated at the first Disneyland park in 1955. It is still there, and reads (with no small ambition),

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 the hard facts that have created America – with the hope that it will be a joy and inspiration to all the world.

'Disneyization', in Bryman's (2004) term, is a process by which consumer experience is increasingly organised along the lines of the Disney theme parks, in much the same way as George Ritzer has argued that contemporary work has been shaped by the practices of the McDonalds organisation (Ritzer 1993). Ritzer and Allan Liska have pointed to the mid-1950s as the moment of both 'McDonaldization' and 'Disneyization':

[I]f McDonald's has been the paradigm of rationality for society as a whole, Disney has certainly been the model for the tourist industry ... the tourist industry in general, and virtually every theme and amusement park in particular, has been McDisneyized ... cruise ships, theme parks and casinos, shopping malls have been McDisneyized, coming to look more and more like amusement parks. (Ritzer and Liska 1997: 97–8)

The first Disney theme park in America is also a phenomenon of the 1950s, and the nostalgia that it offers is of that period. Disneyland appeared at this moment of post-war conformity, and the fantasies it offers are of escape into a lawless and unregulated world – the Wild West, outer space, the jungle or the fantastic worlds of fairy tale and the Gothic. Disneyland made it possible for the theme park tourist to become a pirate, an explorer, a cowboy or an astronaut.² The excitement of those uncharted worlds can be experienced in a safely contained environment; these fantasylands are framed by the relatively familiar space of Main Street, USA, a land in the park that is reassuringly and emphatically American.

The official Disney biographies (see Greene and Greene 1991) and guidebooks regularly claim that Disney's hometown of Marceline is the model for Main Street, USA. There is a consistent emphasis in such Disney promotional publications of the authenticity of Main Street as based in a real place; it is repeatedly stated that Main Street, USA, is based upon Walt Disney's boyhood memories of his hometown Marceline, at the turn of the twentieth century (as most of the biographies put it, rather vaguely). Christopher Finch, one of the official chroniclers of Disney, has said,

The symbolic values of Main Street are at the centre of the Disney aesthetic. He had an imagination which could stretch itself to cover much of the world and many periods of history, but Marceline, circa 1909, always remained home base. (Finch 1978: 49)

This 'circa' 1909 is an improbably precise dating; the Walt Disney World guidebook places Main Street between '1890 and 1910', a vague designation between two centuries. Main Street is itself a 1950s reinvention of American small-town life, and its 'aesthetic' is shared and filtered through Hollywood recreations of late nineteenth-century Americana.

The intertextuality of Main Street does reference mid-nineteenth-century news images of the American Western town, but it also draws upon post-war cinematic representations of small-town life, such as *Meet Me in St Louis* (MGM, prod. Arthur Freed, 1944), *On Moonlight Bay* (Warner, prod. William Jacobs, 1951) and *By the Light of the Silvery Moon* (Warner, prod. William Jacobs, 1953). Such films, popular just before the building of Disneyland, were to establish a set of conventions for the imagining of American small-town life (see Francaviglia 1996). Like Main Street, USA, these Judy Garland and Doris Day films are located in a mythical 'turn of the century', at the point of expanding urbanisation and corporate capitalism. If Main Street is frozen in nostalgic mode, it is nostalgia for a very particular moment; the guidebook asserts that this is a world of nostalgia and progress. Main Street celebrates the coming of new technologies and simultaneously cherishes vintage artefacts. Early Ford motor cars and horse-drawn carriages cruise together along Main Street, the transports of the past and the future magically reconciled.³

The architecture, iconography and technology all situate Main Street as on the cusp between the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, at a point of historical transition:

Main Street U.S.A. is a nostalgic tour of an enduring symbol of American life – a turn-of-the-century small town. Main Street gives us a tantalizing look at the best of the 'good old days' ... when a burgeoning technology was replacing real horsepower with mechanical horsepower, and the telephone, telegraph, phonograph, radio and cheap, available hydroelectric power were revolutionizing daily life. (Walt Disney Company 1998: 16)

This 'enduring symbol' of American life is structured into all the Disney parks as the dominant and anchoring narrative. Main Street, USA, is the access point to all the Disneyland sites, the first area in the park that the visitor encounters. It is also the space that is most dedicated to consumption; in its idealised construction of a 'turn-of-the-century' American street, it is lined with consumer outlets for food and souvenirs. Although these outlets are present in every land of the park, it is at Main Street that they are at their most concentrated.

In his structuralist account of the 'utopic' spaces of Disneyland, Louis Marin explains that Main Street represents the hub of Disneyland, and is the point that marks the transition from the familiar world of the everyday into the 'magical' worlds of the theme park:

Disneyland is a centered space. Main Street, USA leads the visitor to the center. But this route toward the center plaza is also the way toward Fantasyland, one of

the four districts of Disneyland. So the most obvious axis of Disney's utopia leads the visitor not only from the circular limit or perimeter to the core of the closed space, but also from reality to fantasy. (Marin 1990: 245)

Main Street, USA, originally designed for the first Disneyland park in Los Angeles, has become the paradigm for the organisation of space at the theme park entrance. All contemporary theme parks now have a similar walkway, which leads the visitor from the entrance into the attractions of the theme park, and which is lined with consumer outlets and customer services; in the United Kingdom, Alton Towers has 'Towers Street', Chessington World of Adventures has 'Market Square' and Drayton Manor has its 'Entrance Plaza'. At all the Disney sites, Main Street is the space that channels visitors from the ordinary spaces of their car and the company car park (invisible from inside the site) to the fantasylands of the theme park. It is Main Street that marks the beginning and end of all visits; it is the space where people gather for the daily and evening parades, and is the optimum point from which to watch the fireworks that bring the visitor's experience of the park to a close. Main Street, USA, may be a focal point that gathers people together, but it is also the space in the park from which people can most easily be led to the exit.

Main Street is a place that promises both the ordinary and the extraordinary; it is simultaneously the space that offers the visitor picturesque vistas to exciting other worlds and a reference point that marks the exit from which to return to the familiar. The landscape combines the fantastical with the reassuring; at one end of the street are the gates that mark the site off from the outside world and the car park, while the view from the entrance at the end of the street is of the centrepiece fairy tale castle. The paths from Main Street lead to the spaces of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fairy tales in Fantasyland and to the futuristic fantasy of Tomorrowland; framed glimpses of these worlds can be seen from Main Street. In the words of one Disney souvenir book, 'the view down a gingerbread Victorian city street toward an 18 storey fairy-tale castle seems as natural as if the castle were a magnificent town library or civic hall' (Kurtti 1996: 45).

Visitors are thus positioned from their first entrance into the park in a world that integrates and celebrates modernity and tradition in the same space, as one guidebook puts it: 'The America of Yesteryear comes to life' (Walt Disney Company 1998: 10). Main Street Station is one of the few spaces in the park at which the generically themed lands of the park coincide; both the Disneyland Express (a nostalgic reconstruction of the nineteenth-century railway) and the futuristic monorail stop at and are clearly visible from Main Street; the past is unproblematically reconciled with the present. This reconciliation of opposites is central to Marin's designation of Disneyland as a 'utopic space':

Disney's utopian operation can be found in the name 'Main Street USA' itself ... through America's self-contained potential the reconciliation of opposites is

performed, but within representation, of course. The past and future, time and space, the playfulness and serious determination to be found on the market, the real and imaginary – all are brought together. (Marin 1990: 248)

The architecture of the Main Street buildings is relatively familiar, eschewing the modernist fantasies of Tomorrowland and the Gothic extremes of Fantasyland, although it is no less idealised. The styling draws heavily on a particularly American popular nostalgia, as Richard Francaviglia and Sharon Zukin (Francaviglia 1996; Zukin 1991) have noted, which relies on Hollywood film and television representations of an imaginary urban community. A Disney-sponsored book celebrates ‘Walt Disney’s America’ in these terms:

Disneyland and Walt Disney World bring ... us face-to-face with Disney’s essentially American character. (The symbolism is quite clear. In both theme parks an exquisite reproduction of an American small town Main Street leads to Disney’s romanticized versions of the past and the future.) (Finch 1978: 46)

While Christopher Finch acknowledges that other spaces in the site are ‘romanticised’, Main Street is nonetheless claimed here as a ‘reproduction’, rather than another romanticised construction of Americana. Finch’s book is one of those officially sanctioned accounts that has promoted the Disney-authorised myth of Main Street as a ‘representation’ of small-town America, and attaches that to a mythologising of Walt Disney himself:

In the theme parks, the Main Street areas are virtually a statement of Walt Disney’s cultural credo ... he evidently grew up with an enduring passion for the street life of Middle America. As a small boy, in the years that his parents operated the farm in Linn County, Missouri, we can be sure that he often visited the nearby town of Marceline. Such early experiences have a way of staying with a man and of taking on a mellow glow with the passage of time. (Finch 1978: 47)

The ‘mellow glow’ of Main Street, however, is rather more than Walt’s nostalgic memories of Marceline, its *mise en scène* being a version of community that was already well established in the popular American memory, and which also extends beyond Walt’s personal history. As Zukin notes, the version of America that Main Street draws upon is a very selective nostalgia:

Disney’s peculiar vision was based on a highly selective consumption of the American landscape. Anchored by a castle and a railroad station, Disneyland evoked the fantasies of domesticity and implicit mobility that were found in the vernacular architecture of Southern California. The castle and station were joined on an axis by ‘Main Street USA’, an ensemble of archaic commercial facades. This mock-up in fact idealized the vernacular architecture Disney remembered from his childhood in Marceline, Missouri, before World War I. ... Disney designed Disneyland by abstracting a promise of security from the vernacular. Disney’s fantasy both restored and invented collective memory. (Zukin 1991: 222)

Main Street, USA, is neither a reproduction nor a representation of a memory; it is a simulacrum. Main Streets may have existed across America,

and the architecture of Main Street, USA, clearly derives from nineteenth-century engravings and news images of the building of town high streets, but the America of Disney's Main Street is entirely one of nostalgic fantasy. Its naming evokes Sinclair Lewis's 1921 novel, and with that, a paradigm of American small-town life, as Lewis put it:

Main Street is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere. The story would be the same in Ohio or Montana, in Kansas or Kentucky or Illinois, and not very differently would it be told Up York State or in the Carolina Hills. (Lewis 1921: 6)

The Disney Main Street, however, is not 'the continuation' of any recognisable geography or history, but rather an idealised construction of a small-town America that never was. It has no roots in any particular locale, nor any relationship to the geography outside the gates of the park, but can be endlessly replicated beyond Los Angeles, in Florida, Paris, Hong Kong or Tokyo. Sinclair's introduction to the novel that challenged the American dream cites brand names, shopping and rail travel as central to the concept of the Main Street:

Main Street is the climax of civilization. That this Ford car might stand in front of the Bon Ton Store. ... Our railway station is the final aspiration of architecture. ... Such is our comfortable tradition and sure faith. Would he not betray himself an alien cynic who should otherwise portray Main Street, or distress the citizens by speculating whether there may not be other faiths? (Lewis 1921: 6)

While representing itself as a quintessentially American mode of consumption, the outlets of Main Street stock all the commodities of the global markets; it is a Main Street that could never have existed at the 'turn of the century'. It is a site that mythologically resolves contradictions and contemporary anxieties about modernity: while the architecture simulates antique American styles, the buildings have the cleanliness and shine of the brand new. The outlets for consumption are presented as 'traditional', a tradition invariably connoted as Victorian and Edwardian; Main Street restaurants in Disneyland Paris offer 'The Gibson Girl Ice-Cream Parlour'⁴ and 'Victoria's Home-Style Restaurant'. Both restaurants are poised at the moment of transition from small-town restaurants to the beginnings of mass catering.

These titles confirm that Main Street is the space of the domestic and the feminine; Main Street is conceived as the space in which women wait and shop while children and men return from their adventures as pirates, spacemen, explorers or cowboys. Main Street is one of the few sites in the park that sells trinkets for adults and caters explicitly for the home beyond the park. Main Street Motors sells not cars but a range of adult clothing, Market House sells tea, Main Street Confectionery offers old-style sweets and biscuits. The goods on sale, despite the recurrent insistence on their qualities as 'traditional' and 'home-made', are unequivocally modern and supplied by global corporations.

The ice cream is by Nestlé, the soda at Casey's corner is 'hosted by' Coca-Cola. Main Street celebrates the moment of the brand, of mass consumption and transport, before these were to become sources of social anxiety. The classic vintage cars seem far removed from any concern about pollution and global warming, and remote from the concrete car parks and motorways that lie outside the boundaries of the park. The forms of transport in Main Street are those that deny the dominance of the private car: double-decker buses and trolley cars. Private transport is horse-drawn, and the guidebook offers a fantasy of a Main Street as attached to a farming community: 'The ... horses who pull the trolleys ... work two or three hours a day, three or four days a week, and when they're not working, they doze and munch sweet green hay at their barn in Fort Wilderness' (Walt Disney Company 1998: 17).

While the shopping parade of Main Street suggests a street of competing traders, that competition is itself illusory. It is not the boardwalk hucksterism of World's Fairs or of the freeway outside the original Los Angeles Disneyland, but a carefully managed retail environment. There is an apparent diversity of small businesses, which are in fact rigorously controlled by the single agent, Disney. Consumers can be seen to be comparing prices in different outlets, but prices are controlled across the site and different parks. 'On property' (as Disney salespeople put it), all the businesses are either owned or licensed by the Disney Corporation. The branded goods are those of Disney's corporate partners.⁵ While the shopfronts present a façade of individual small shops, the street is in fact built as a warehouse that can be walked through the length of Main Street. As one of the official Disney publications explains,

[The architecture of] Main Street USA is actually constructed as four individual buildings of 'blocks' (Northwest, Northeast, Southwest and Southeast) bisected in the center by a crossroads (Center Street, appropriately). Each of these four main buildings is cleverly designed to appear as a grouping of individual and distinctive structures. Inside, each shop or attraction is treated with different decor, ornament and materials as appropriate to the function and story being told. Disney Imagineers are ever vigilant in avoiding visual contradictions and intrusions that might interfere with the basic story telling in each project. (Kurti 1996: 45)

The 'basic storytelling' of Main Street, USA, is that this is a high street located in a community, but this is an 'imagined community', in Benedict Anderson's phrase (Anderson 1983). The Disney theme park, wherever it may be located, is a privatised space, but Main Street, in each site, masquerades as a public space. At one end of Main Street are the booths at the entrance to the park where visitors are charged a fee, but the architecture and its naming borrow from the language of civil society and the public sphere. The spaces of Main Street, USA, are titled as though they were communal – 'Town Square', 'City Hall' (apparently inaugurated in 1879), 'The Plaza' – as though the warehouses, shops and offices that lie behind the façades are actually sites for

public use. A publicity book for Walt Disney World describes Main Street as the centre of a community:

At the South End of Main Street is Town Square, the civic center, with Main Street Railroad Station, City Hall and a municipal park complete with flagpole. At the north end of Main Street is the Plaza, known colloquially as the 'hub'. It is from this point that most of the other realms of the Magic Kingdom may be entered. (Kurtti 1996: 45)

The 'colloquialism' of the 'hub' is, however, one that can only be shared by Disney employees; for visitors, the 'community' of Disneyland is one that exists only for the space of a day. The 'civic centre' has no civilians, and operates only as an information centre.⁶ The City Hall, the park and the civic centre may appear 'municipal', but all are empty, while the Railroad Station transports people only across the site of the park and, in Florida, to the Disney hotels. As Michael Sorkin puts it,

Disney invokes an urbanism without producing a city. Rather, it produces a kind of aura-stripped hypercity, a city with billions of citizens (all who would consume) but no residents. Physicalized yet conceptual, it's the utopia of transience, a place where everyone is just passing through. (Sorkin 1992: 231)

The utopia invoked in Main Street is a particularly American dream, but it is important to recognise that it is the point of transition into the 'lands' of adventure and fantasy, and that it also marks the anchoring logic of the fantasylands. An American 'townscape' constructed from nostalgia (whether personal or cultural) becomes the dominant narrative of the park, with the majority of its 'lands' devoted to telling the stories of American history. At Walt Disney World Florida, this is extended further, with the celebration of American democracy at 'Liberty Square' ('Colonial History and Frontier Fun', the guidebook explains) providing a transitional space between Frontierland and Main Street. Marin does not develop the correspondence between the two sites further, but Main Street's architecture can be read as the 'town' of the Hollywood Western *mise en scène*, while Frontierland represents the 'Wild West'. Frontierland references the American West of Fenimore Cooper, of Bret Harte and of Remington and Russell, while Main Street represents the civilising effects of femininity and commerce. The design of another Main Street catering outlet, 'The Home-Style Restaurant', suggests Judy Garland in the 1945 *The Harvey Girls* (dir. George Sidney, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer), serving at the railway restaurant and taming the rugged frontiersmen to proper civility.

The death of the Western as a contemporary genre has been a regular cry of film historians; Phil Hardy's introduction to his encyclopedia of the genre was claiming in 1985: 'The Western ... has been dethroned; it is no longer the all powerful genre that it was. Hollywood and audiences no longer seem interested in the last days of the frontier' (Hardy 1985: xv). It is important, however, to

remember that the Western has always been a nostalgic form, and was so long before cinema. The archaism that Orwell noted of the 'dime novel Western' (Orwell 1961a) has always been a feature of the form: 'The Western Frontier' has been a mythological landscape since Fenimore Cooper's novels. Cooper's construction of the American West was already nostalgic for the wilderness of the plainsman and suspicious of the taming power of femininity. Bret Harte was looking back to a time when the whisky and the good-time girls were fresh off the newly built railways, before they had become institutionalised as Harvey or Gibson girls. Remington and Russell were celebrating a rugged masculinity away from the incursion of commerce, in which women could only be marginal. The nostalgia for an old-fashioned Americana and American masculinity survives into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In the 1995 children's cartoon film, *Toy Story* (dir. John Lasseter, Pixar),⁷ the cowboy hero, once a favourite toy, is seen as old-fashioned in contrast with the novelty and new technology represented by a space man. The film ends by reasserting the rugged and independent spirit of the American pioneer, still seen as necessary in a postmodern and technological world. The Western continues to hold its place as the American genre, a form that contemporary children will recognise and for which they still feel an affection.

Main Street is a version of the Western adapted for women and for children. It represents the end of the frontier – literally so, as the space from which the fantasies of the Disneylands must be left behind, the last view of the Magic Kingdom. It is also the site where representatives of the social movements that would eradicate Fenimore Cooper's wild frontier are to be found. Commerce in the form of shops, early modes of transport and the invasion of femininity are seen in Bret Harte as threats to the wildness of the West. Main Street represents the form of the genre that would be most successful in the domestic environment: the television Western. *Little House on the Prairie* based on the autobiography of the daughter of a settler family,⁸ would successfully run on television for years from 1974 across Europe and America; it features a local store that is close to the 'emporia' of Main Street. The structural opposition between the domestic and the wild frontier is a structuring narrative of the Western genre, in fiction and in film. Jim Kites' 1969 study of Western film directors offers a neat structuralist analysis in which he identifies the genre as defined through a 'series of antinomies' headed by the opposition between 'THE WILDERNESS' and 'CIVILIZATION' (Kites 1969: 11–12). If this neat binary opposition has been challenged by more recent Western films and by contemporary film critics, it is nonetheless one that continues to be sustained in the Disney parks, and which is physically inscribed into the landscape. This grid can be used to directly map the distinction between Main Street and Frontierland; while both employ the stories and the iconography of the Western in film and literature, Main Street is the site of the community, of institutions (City Hall and Town Square are located there), whereas Frontierland promises individual adventure and the experience of the American cowboy.

Main Street thus becomes a gendered site, the place that the aspirant male cowboy leaves and will return to, a feminised space of domesticity. Frontierland addresses a male adventurer, while the site of consumption and refreshment represented in Main Street has been traditionally associated with femininity (Bowlby 1985). The everyday experience of shopping is framed at Main Street as a nostalgic fantasy of American consumption. As Marin explains,

Main Street, USA is the place where the visitor can buy, in a nineteenth century American decor, actual and real commodities with his real actual money. Locus of exchange of meanings and symbols in the imaginary land of Disney, Main Street USA is also the real place of exchange, money and commodity. It is the locus of the societal truth – consumption – that is the truth for all Disneyland. (Marin 1990: 247)

Main Street is the space where the familiar experience of exchanging money for goods is most foregrounded; the use of paper money is largely absent elsewhere; the entrance gates encourage the use of credit cards, rides are not paid for, and for those staying in a Disney hotel, most restaurants and accommodation bills will be settled with a final credit card payment. But if the commodities, exchange and money of Main Street are real, the context in which they take place is an imaginary one, which offers itself as a version of American small-town life as a 'knowable community' (Williams 1973). Within the structure of Disneyland, Main Street is positioned as the other of 'Fantasyland', 'Adventureland', 'Frontierland' and 'Discoveryland'; it is presented as a 'reality'⁹ from which the dreams of the rest of the park are perceived, the commercial centre from which all other possibilities open up. Main Street, however, is no less of a fantasy than Fantasyland. As Wayne Franklin has put it,

Disney's genius lay in his ability to tap (and shape) the fantasies of his audiences; in developing the Main Street area of Disneyland, he likewise gave concrete expression to the longing of his fellow citizens for a simpler, more cohesive sense of community than their malls and shopping strips, attenuated by the libertarian automobile, could provide. That his Main Street is the epitome of commercialism – one has to pay, after all, even to walk down it, and it is full of sites for further spending and consumption – makes it the ideal, supersaturated archetype of the cultural landscape it seeks at the same time to cast as a good-old-days antidote to modern alienation. Ironically, Disney has it both ways, preaching against the present and charging the audience for the sermon. (Franklin 1996: xii–xiii)

Disney relocates the global map of consumption in a less alienating and threatening 'good old days', and while Main Street employs all the techniques of contemporary consumer outlets, it presents its shopping experience as one in which local and familiar shopkeepers are plying their trade.

Central to the conceit of Main Street as the centre of a traditional community is the sustained illusion that the shopkeepers are personally known to the consumers. In a world of global commerce, the names on the shop frontages might be familiar because they are those of multinational corporations, but

they are here personalised and located in a time before their global reach was established. The Main Street shops present branded goods as marketed by traders before these suppliers have become faceless corporations. The proprietor of the old-fashioned soda fountain becomes Mr Nestlé, the camera shop is 'Mr Kodak's Emporium',¹⁰ the 'Main Street Vehicles' garage that displays vintage cars is, at Disneyland Paris, presented by Mr Hertz, who promises 'personal service'. There is an uneasy mythical resolution here of the local and the global, of standardisation and individuality, in which Main Street presents itself as in a position to offer simultaneously the assurance of traditional personal service with the familiarity of contemporary and global brand names.

If Main Street claims itself as a nostalgic experience, it nonetheless manifests all the characteristics of contemporary sites of consumption, identified here by Rob Shields:

[There exists an] interdependence of the private spaces of subjectivity, media and commodity consumption, and the changing spatial contexts of everyday public life. This includes shopping malls which have developed as privately owned 'public' spaces for retailing, traditional public spaces such as markets, public buildings ... as well as the ephemeral 'public' space of the mass media. (Shields 1992: 1)

Disneyland is a site that can cohere all these demands to a remarkable degree: the theme park is a space that deploys fantasy to enter into the private spaces of subjectivity; Disneyland is part of a media corporation that can mobilise the cinemagoing and childhood television experiences of its consumers. If Main Street is not a shopping mall as such, it is certainly a privately owned space that makes reference to the public sphere, and if it is not a heritage site, Main Street is the space in the park that most explicitly expresses a nostalgia for a past America. It is also the space where Disney most visibly celebrates its own history; among the attractions of Main Street is the 'Walt Disney Story', which 'follows Walt Disney from his boyhood through the creation of the Walt Disney World Resort' (Walt Disney Company 1998).

Fredric Jameson has described 'the insensible colonization of the present by the nostalgia mode' in the Hollywood film, and his points hold for the reconstruction of a mythical past in Main Street:

[T]he nostalgia film was never a matter of some old-fashioned 'representation' of historical content, but instead approached the 'past' through stylistic connotation, conveying 'pastments' by the glossy qualities of the image ... we are now ... in 'intertextuality' as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect and as the operator of a new connotation of 'pastness'; and pseudohistorical depth, in which the history of aesthetic styles displaces 'real' history. (Jameson 1991: 19–20)

Main Street takes its aesthetic styles from two distinct historical periods – the 1950s (the decade of the first Disneyland) and, most prominently, the late nineteenth century (the period of the major American World's Fairs and

supposedly of Walt Disney's own childhood memories). 'History' is thus largely coded as Victoriana and 'pastness' connoted through reference to quaint and old-fashioned technologies, such as vintage cars or early silent film, which serve to confirm the 'progress' of contemporary life. Like the Epcot Center, Main Street references the Great Exhibition¹¹ and the late nineteenth-century World's Fairs; it also emulates their celebration and belief in commerce, culture and technology. Main Street is thus positioned as if poised on the brink of modernity; it refers to a period before the mass production of a global economy, while simultaneously looking forward to and embracing the possibilities of contemporary technology. Disney is reported to have said of his vision of Main Street:

Here is America from 1890 to 1910, at the crossroads of an era ... the gas lamp is giving way to the electric lamp, and a newcomer, the sputtering 'horseless carriage' has challenged Old Dobbin for the streetcar right of way. ... America was in transition. (Walt Disney, quoted in Francaviglia 1996: 153)

The significance of this transitional moment – the 'crossroads of an era' – to the Disney ideology is evident from the extent to which the same phrases are repeated verbatim in a Disney World guidebook, sponsored by the Disney Corporation:

Main Street lives up to its description as the 'crossroads of an era'. The gas lamp giving way to electric light, the sputtering 'horseless carriage' challenging Old Dobbin for the streetcar right of way. Throughout the day it is alive with vehicles. A quaint horse-drawn streetcar plods along its leisurely rail-track route from north to south and back again, while more modern, motorized jitneys (with special mufflers to create the appropriate sputtering sound) and even a fire engine add to the bustle. (Kurtti 1996: 47)

Main Street is thus presented in the discourse of Disney as a site that celebrates the development of urbanisation and the moment of the beginnings of the mass production and circulation of goods. These historical shifts are firmly located in a nostalgic frame, and denied as a transition into modernity. Franklin has suggested that Main Street, USA, and the notion of 'Main Street' that it draws upon are themselves products of modernity, and mark the moment of the beginnings of consumer capitalism:

What we now think of as Main Street itself was ... the creature of the commercial culture of the nineteenth century. Although it has been loaded with all kinds of ... antique meanings, the Main Street shopping district is structured around not only the imperatives of material systems (things such as proximity, concentration, the movement of goods across the counter and across town) but also, and one might say more importantly, the commercial assumptions of modern consumer culture. It is an apparatus of the modern cash/credit economy and presumes fairly high income levels, intensive levels of exchange, and a spatially focused population indoctrinated in the virtues of consumption. (Franklin 1996: xii)

The visitor to a Disney theme park is more spatially focused than any other kind of consumer; in a bounded space, the 'virtues of consumption' and

consumer choice are limited to and embodied in commodities produced or licensed by the Disney Corporation.

The department stores and arcades of the late nineteenth century (which are emulated in the arcades of the Main Street shops) were the precursors of the shopping mall. Main Street directly references the designs of the new metropolitan arcades of the late nineteenth century in its construction of late Victorian architectural styles and in the naming of the outlets. Shops at Main Street include 'Uptown Jewellers', 'The Chapeau' and 'The Emporium', names that suggest urban department stores that can offer luxury commodities from across the world. The late nineteenth-century growth of Main Streets across America and the social impacts of the shopping arcade and mall are condensed at the Disneyland sites into a mythological construct of progress, commerce and community, in which the local shopping street remains unaffected by the emergence of a corporate capitalist culture.

Shields has also argued that the development of the consumer arcade in the late nineteenth century is a consequence of new technologies and of new forms of consumption:

The genealogy of the mall has two roots, the luxurious arcades built for the European bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century ... and the emporia or department stores in which mass produced household commodities and clothing became available in settings designed as palaces of consumption. Cast-iron engineering allowed new architectural effects such as multi-storey atria which amplified the effect of a spectacular, simultaneous display of a vast quantity of goods on offer. ... To this background one might add a darker touch of the Foucauldian panopticon prison where visibility and surveillance reigned supreme. (Shields 1992: 3)

Main Street explicitly echoes these palaces of consumption, with architectural flourishes, imitation cast-iron atria and bountiful displays of commodities. The emphasis is on luxury, with Main Street offering shops selling crystal, jewellery and 'Disneyana Collectibles'; goods are piled high in a carnivalesque display of conspicuous consumption. And there is no question that it is Main Street that is one of the few sites at Disneyland at which a Foucauldian discipline is made apparent; the guards at the entrance gates may be dressed as fairy tale soldiers but are nonetheless there to police and marshal visitors (see Philips 1998). It is Main Street that is rumoured to have been the site of Walt Disney's own personal panopticon. As Francaviglia reports, in terms that disconcertingly evoke an image of Walt Disney as God,

It has been said that Disney's favourite place in the theme park was an apartment above the firehouse which looked right down into the public square to observe the activity. Using this commanding location, Disney could observe the public interacting with the environment that he had created, and by all accounts, Disney was reassured by what he saw. (Francaviglia 1996: 154)

The 'Main Street shopping district' blurs its relationships with commodities and material systems, to provide the consumer with a magical resolution of

many of the perceived crises of late capitalism and of postmodern globalisation. Jameson has cited the impact of colonialism on consumption as one of the determinants of modernity:

[C]olonialism means that a significant structural segment of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside of the daily life and existential experience of the home country, in colonies over the water whose own life experience and life world – very different from that of the imperial power – remains unknown and unimaginable for the subjects of the imperial power. (Jameson 1988: 11)

Main Street, USA, domesticates and naturalises the moment at which the economics of consumption shifted into a global market. In bringing together the fruits of world commerce in a nostalgic urban setting, it reassures that global markets and production can be domesticated, and simultaneously asserts that a corporate American economy can be relied upon to provide consumers with the best that the world can offer. Main Street offers the visitor a quaint and antique setting, but all the commodities of the new technologies; it is (apparently) a localised place, but reaps all the advantages of a global market. The market of Main Street has all the assurances of multinational brand names, while presenting itself as individual and humanised. Main Street is about consuming it all. While the Disney aesthetic might in itself seem insubstantial, its impact has stretched beyond the confines of the cinema and the theme park to exist as a recognised and much-imitated architectural style that has become a part of the urban and suburban landscape. As Ritzer has noted, '[t]he line between the mall and the amusement park has almost been obliterated' (Ritzer 1999: 135).

Mike Davis (1990) and Sharon Zukin (1991) are among those who have charted the extent to which public spaces of late modernity have become increasingly subject to private and corporate interests, while Michael Sorkin (1992) has pointed to the impact of the theme park on the American urban landscape. An award-winning casino and hotel at Las Vegas is named Main Street; themed in the style of the Disneyland Express, it is built on the site of what was once Las Vegas's railway station. This is an image found in shopping malls and leisure zones across America and Europe – a commercial and privatised leisure space that has taken over what was once a publicly owned and used site. Shopping malls across America and Europe require the narratives of nostalgia and community and reference the civic language, the Victorian flourishes and architecture of Main Street, USA, in an attempt to render an alienated environment familiar and attractive to consumers. Foucault describes the heterotopia in terms that articulate the reassurance and orderliness of Main Street, USA. For Foucault,

[Heterotopias] have the function of forming another space, another real space, as perfect, meticulous and well-arranged as ours is disordered, ill-conceived and in a sketchy state. This heterotopia is not one of illusion, but of compensation. (Foucault 1986: 17)

The discourses of Main Street, USA, extend beyond the shopping mall and themed environments of leisure and consumption, and have now become an urban landscape in their own right. Disney's own development, Celebration, in Florida, is a logical extension of Main Street, a walled inhabited suburb designed by the Disney imagineers. It may be owned and designed by the Disney Corporation, but it is only one among thousands of gated communities and housing estates in Europe and America that invoke the nostalgia for the local and for community that is embodied in Main Street, USA. The Main Streets of suburbia are designed as a 'new urbanism', but are simulations of the simulacrum that is Disney's Main Street, USA.

Baudrillard has famously claimed that Disneyland is no more real than its Los Angeles context:

Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the 'real country', all of 'real' America, which *is* Disneyland. ... Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. (Baudrillard 1988: 172)

It is less, as Baudrillard suggests, that it is Disneyland that makes America feel real about itself, than America and other consumer market sites want to recreate themselves as Main Street. The Disneyland stores and merchandise that fill the frontages of Main Street are to be found in Main Streets and shopping centres all over the world. The aesthetics, the nostalgia and the organisation of space promoted in Disney's Main Street, USA, now inform shopping malls and town centres, spaces of consumption, across the globe.

The theme park promises the visitor the experience of the lawlessness of piracy and frontier cowboys, the vertigo of space travel and the romance and horror of the fantastic, but it is to the commercial and embryonic corporate world of Main Street that they must always return. Marin has argued that

Disneyland is the representation realized in a geographical space of the imaginary relationship that the dominant groups of American society maintain with their real conditions of existence, with the real history of the United States, and with the space outside of its borders. Disneyland is a fantasmatic projection of the history of the American nation, of the way in which this history was conceived with regard to other peoples and to the natural world. Disneyland is an immense and displaced metaphor of the system of representations and values unique to American society. (Marin 1990: 240)

In his Althusserian analysis, Marin suggests that the ideology of Disney is one of imperialist exploitation. Disneyland is a 'fantasmatic' projection, but it is one that is integrally tied to the global market and to an unproblematic celebration of industrial technologies. There is some ambiguity throughout the Disney parks, expressed in the recurrent nostalgia that is true of all the lands, but it is at its most evident in Main Street. Main Street is an ideological narrative in that it allows for a magical resolution of the contradictions of commerce and

Figure 11.2 Town Hall, Disneyland, Paris, 2009

progress with nostalgia and tradition. In its nostalgia Main Street erases the threat that modernity presented to imagined traditions and communities. It is the space in which Americans are encouraged to celebrate the American versions of tradition and innovation, and they are invited to do so daily (on the hour) at Liberty Square. The stories of the Disney park may draw on European art and culture in other spaces, Fantasyland, Tomorrowland and Adventureland, but in Main Street, the story is one entirely of an American imagination, and it is Main Street, USA, that structures the landscape of the theme park.

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