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FUTURE WORLD(S): A Critique of Disney's EPCOT and Creating a Futuristic Curriculum

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FUTURE WORLD(S): A Critique of Disney's EPCOT and Creating a Futuristic Curriculum

by

ALAN BOWERS

(Under the Direction of Daniel Chapman)

ABSTRACT

In my dissertation inquiry, I explore the need for utopian based curriculum which was inspired by Walt Disney's EPCOT Center. Theoretically building upon such works regarding utopian visons (Bregman, 2017, e.g., Claeys 2011;) and Disney studies (Garlen and Sandlin, 2016; Fjellman, 1992), this work combines historiography and speculative essays as its methodologies. In addition, this project explores how schools must do the hard work of working toward building a better future (Chomsky and Foucault, 1971).

Through tracing the evolution of EPCOT as an idea for a community that would "always be in the state of becoming" to EPCOT Center as an inspirational theme park, this work contends that those ideas contain possibilities for how to interject utopian thought in schooling.

INDEX WORDS: Utopian curriculum, EPCOT, Disney studies

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FUTURISTIC CURRICULUM

by

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FUTURE WORLD(S): A CRITIQUE OF DISNEY'S EPCOT AND CREATING A

FUTURISTIC CURRICULUM

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DEDICATION

To my wife Jennifer for putting up with me and loving me unconditionally.

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CHAPTER 1

PROJECT EPCOT

Welcome to the World of Tomorrow!

As an unapologetic EPCOT purist, I refuse to refer to it as the "giant golf ball" but, yes, that is what it looks like if you have never seen it. The enormous *Spaceship Earth* has served as the visual greeting to guests as they drive into the parking lot of EPCOT (formerly EPCOT Center) at Walt Disney World ever since 1982. In the promotional book, *EPCOT CENTER: Creating the World of Tomorrow*, Richard Beard (1982) informs us that this massive structure reaches 180 feet into the sky, weighs a million pounds, and has "…an outside 'skin' of an aluminum that is smoother than glass, the globe's facets reflect diffuse images…by night, it glints with the sparkle and illumination…of the galaxies, the stars, the planets it emulates" (p. 26). The structure's geodesic design and name are an ode to the work of architect and futurist Buckminster Fuller (p. 24). The combination of design elements used to create *Spaceship Earth* is meant to showcase EPCOT Center's spirit of achievement in engineering, scale, and utopian outlook. Beard added

> It is, among other things, the world's largest geodesic sphere…It started out, less
>
> ambitiously, as a dome…but, happily, the bolder vision prevailed. Now the
>
> sphere…rises some eighteen stories high…dominating the landscape for miles
>
> around, with little to rival its rotund majesty (p. 40).

As the gateway to the themed section of EPCOT known as *Future World*, *Spaceship Earth* serves several purposes: it supplies the theme park with an instantly recognizable structure,

houses a dark ride chronicling the evolution of human communication, and, most importantly, serves as a symbolic centerpiece of EPCOT's futuristic ambition. Stephen Fjellman (1992) in *Vinyl Leaves* pointed out that "whereas the Magic Kingdom beckons visitors into various lands…*Spaceship Earth*, EPCOT's signature structure, seems to block people's access to whatever lies beyond" (p. 213). This sentiment is echoed in the essay by Margaret King and J.G. Boyle's essay, *The Theme Park: the Art of Time and Space* (2011) when they wrote "there is no welcoming sense of 'arrival…the 'futuristic' architecture is designed to awe and impress" (p. 13). Rather than viewing the design as "blocking" or "unwelcoming", I contend that the obscured view it provides plays the role of permissive gatekeeper. Everyone who enters through the main entrance is obligated to pass under this metallic behemoth if they wish to enter the Future World portion of the park. In doing so, one cannot help but examine the large diamond/triangles protruding from *Spaceship Earth's* otherwise sleek exterior. Even though it is impossible to physically touch its surface at any point, an encompassing sense of texture is as engrossing as it is inescapable. All are welcome to pass by this silent sentinel but you must pay homage first. Seen through this lens, *Spaceship Earth* truly delivers on the promise of spectacle; no other Disney park icon forces itself on the viewer quite this boldly.

I was just six years old back in October 1985 when I first gazed up at the expressive structure. It would be dishonest of me to suggest that that first visit sparked a thousand aspirations in me including this considerable research project; real life does not usually work that cinematically even in the hyper-reality world of a Disney theme park. Nevertheless, I can say that my first trip and subsequent visits served as an entry into what has served as an ever-unfolding research interest into the roles of futurism, and ultimately, ontology with EPCOT

serving as a primary driver. For better or worse, Disney, its theme parks, and EPCOT (Center) in particular, have been a near-constant presence throughout my life.

EPCOT as a Research Topic

This project is an examination of how the various incarnations of the theme park loosely based on Walt Disney's Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT) concept intersects with the fields of curriculum studies, utopian thinking, and "possible futures" research. This project combines Disney historiography with placing EPCOT in its place within curriculum studies literature. Along the way, I will celebrate the spirit of EPCOT Center as a place dedicated to the advancement of technological and hopeful futurism. Conversely, this project does not ignore the reality of present-day Epcot which falls drastically short of its inspirational (and curricular) potential. My goal is to re-kindle that original spirit which, unbeknownst to me prior to my doctoral studies, put me on the path of educator. To accomplish these goals, this project calls for a separation of EPCOT from its historic and current existence *in exchange for its ideal*. In other words, rather than exist as a profit-driven theme park, this special space should be transformed into one where the public good is truly put at the forefront; a place where people are allowed to speculate, to innovate, to reflect upon the changes and innovations of technology, culture, and sustainable futurism.

The theme park known as EPCOT Center (1982-ca. 1994) that I visited as a child is the obvious inspiration for this dissertation. Who knows which of these thoughts, questions, or observations would have resonated with me had this bizarre theme park never been built. Admittedly, the park itself was admittedly a bit messy and definitely co-opted by corporate interests. The practical realities and obvious compromises that became present in its final incarnation which will be thoroughly examined in Chapter Three. Conflicting visions aside,

EPCOT is worthy of scholarly consideration *because of* its unique nature. Ideas and possibilities contained within its gates provided inspiration to myself and many others who visited in the early days. Its restoration is an opportunity for educators and curriculum theorists.

EPCOT as a research subject is ideal for academic inquiry because of its own very purposeful reason for existence. Since opening in 1982, EPCOT Center stood apart (and in some aspects continues to do so even in its reduced state) from other theme parks because it was built on the hopeful promise futurism while retaining intellectual accessibility to the average guest. Like other theme/amusement parks, it offered escapism, which is a common desire when one is vacationing. But what made EPCOT different was that it delivered a message of utopian futurism to those who were willing to receive the messages. In all honesty, the vibes were not for everyone and even the most hardline purist will probably admit that it was sometimes an acquired taste. Nevertheless, the overall theming was what makes this quirky topic worthy of exploration and research.

One remnant of that original, inspirational vision is still present near the park entrance today. Before entering the main gate, guests still pass by a bronze plaque which reads

> EPCOT is inspired by Walt Disney's creative vision. Here, human
> achievements are celebrated through imagination, wonders of enterprise
> and concepts of a future that promises new and exciting benefits for all.
> May EPCOT Center entertain, inform and inspire and above all, may it
> instill a new sense of belief and pride in man's ability to shape a world
> that offers hope to people everywhere in the world.

"Entertain, inform, and inspire." Perhaps critics and naysayers will point out that the word "entertain" came before the more substantive goals of "informing" and "inspiring", but clearly,

EPCOT Center **aimed to offer more** to its visitors than a Six Flags, Universal Studios, or even Disney's own Magic Kingdom park. EPCOT Center was designed to be something different, purposeful, meaningful, and hopeful.

For example, one of EPCOT Center's opening day attractions, *The World of Motion* (since replaced by the thrill-ride *Test Track*) provided a comical look into the history of human transportation. *The World of Motion* took guests from bipedal transportation of early sapiens, to the invention of the wheel, through sea-faring voyages, the age of the automobile and air travel, etc. The climax of the ride depicted a show scene of a futuristic city displayed in full dark-light glory. Those tiny cars and trains that zipped around that imaginary metropolis were definitely the highlight of the attraction which remains burned in my memory. *The World of Motion* attraction provides a strong example of how EPCOT Center lived up to its goal of entertaining (humorous), informing (progress of innovation) and inspiring (the futuristic city of transportation). *The World of Motion* has been closed for over twenty years but the imagery and overall message continues to provide inspiration for a better tomorrow.

It is only now through my doctoral studies that I have the "vocabulary" to examine EPCOT with this lens. My ultimate goal is that EPCOT takes its rightful place in curriculum studies by my making the case for a re-conceptualized space which serves as a living, experimental model; a technological and cultural center focused on serving the public good. In that sense, this project tries to spur EPCOT to a sort of cultural awakening instead of being a dead model. In *Envisioning Eden,* Noel Salazar (2010) explained that "…culture does not circulate in a closed system, an endlessly repetitious loop, for there is change and innovation" (p. xiii). So, how do we make an EPCOT that is open to new possibilities while maintaining its core message?

Regrettably, the owners and managers of EPCOT Center gave up and proceeded to flood the park with more Disney-esque properties rather than keep an eye on the future. The balance between "art" and "commerce" is one of ceaseless debate and this project will not be able to fully settle this conflict. Nevertheless, I am arguing in favor of an EPCOT that is not be caught in a closed loop of having to appeal to the whims of corporate sponsors or Disney management. Rather it should be seen as an adaptive space which is informed by new discoveries and breakthrough technologies working toward the public good because this **imaginary version** is open to that "change" and "innovation" that is required of futurism. This is why the later chapters will be grounded in the theoretical framework of the cultural imaginaries so as to dislodge Epcot from *where it is* to *where it should be*.

I will draw upon the work of curriculum theorists and utopian scholarship to address this portion of the project. The guiding questions surrounding this project are: "What were Walt Disney's original plans for EPCOT?", "How did a compromised version of the original vision become the EPCOT Center theme park?" and "How can Epcot be shaken out of its current malaise and revitalized as a place where we investigate our 'possible futures' through the lens of cultural imaginaries?" This was no easy task but fortunately, I chose a project that allows for numerous avenues of exploration. Ultimately, EPCOT makes this particular examination possible because it can be viewed as both a physical place *and a concept*; both the realized and the imagined.

Personal Position

My interest in EPCOT Center as a research topic stems from my trips to Disney theme parks in my formative years. I grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, which is roughly two hours

away from Walt Disney World. Our family would visit either the Magic Kingdom or EPCOT Center once every three years or so due to our relative proximity. While this is more than most American families, the frequency of visits did not feel that way as a child. I can remember asking to go quite a bit and there are some of my childhood Christmas and birthday wish lists that have survived to attest to this eagerness. To put it plainly, it was *always a big deal* when we vacationed there ("vacationed" is a bit generous; my father was a devotee of the "drive-in-early and drive-home-late" school). Because of this, the Disney parks in Florida continue to hold a near "mythical" status in my imagination that carries over to this day.

Most importantly, from the privilege of having these trips, I was able to experience these fantastical environments at different stages of my life in many social contexts. Whether it was with my immediate or extended family, church groups, school trips (*Grad Nite '97*…I was there), Walt Disney World has often served the dual purpose of been a familiar presence and as a marker on the passage of time. When I take my own children on the pilgrimage to central Florida, the drive is a little further and my appreciation for what my parents undoubtedly put up with increases with every visit. There is a feeling of nostalgia but also an awareness of the present moment that only comes with a place that is both well-known and always a little foreign. This is in part because it is not the same Walt Disney World that I visited in the early 1980s; it has changed similar to the ways I have changed. The parks have grown, aged, been destroyed, added to, expanded, etc. Some changes were for the better while others were, as any old-timer will tell you, colossal mistakes. As it were, nothing about either of Walt Disney World or myself is static.

It should be noted that those trips with my parents and youth groups never took me to the more recent Disney parks of MGM/Hollywood Studios or Animal Kingdom. Even now those

two parks, while highly enjoyable, seem new and do not hold the same connection since I did not

visit them until my adult years. The Magic Kingdom and EPCOT (Center) will always be the

true Florida parks to me. One way to contextualize the impact of these theme park experiences

and its evolution on my identity and pedagogy comes from William Pinar and Madeline

Grumet's (1976/2015) foundational Curriculum Studies work, *Toward a Poor Curriculum*,

which begins with a bit of Pinar's own autobiography into his 'reconceptualization' of

curriculum.   In the second essay, he quotes Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman to express

how our experience grows with age. "Growing older? It is like climbing a mountain. As the

climb continues, one grows more and more winded. But the view-it becomes more and more

immense" (p. 29). Such has been the case with my personal journey into the relationship

between Disney and curriculum. Like Bergman, my experiences with all things Disney and their

theme parks, has shifted and become more expansive as I continue to climb the metaphorical

mountain of age and life.

Until entering the curriculum studies doctoral program, I had never fully examined how

much impact the EPCOT Center narrative had on my intellectual development and worldview. I

was aware that I had a nostalgic connection to the central Florida parks and the time with family

was always enjoyable, but that was as far as the analysis went. Admittedly, I now see myself as

a bit of an unsuspecting "victim" of a plastic environment where dollars fuel Disney-

manufactured "dreams" and "wishes" but such realities were not known to me back in those

early encounters. Instead, when I examine it all now, I can see how the hopeful futurism

presented at EPCOT Center's pavilions shaped my thinking and have been a subliminal

backdrop for my career as a public school educator. Ultimately, I am compelled to write about

EPCOT because its messaging has shaped my understanding of the world but especially in the

classroom where the link between the Future and the profession are directly linked. As Frederic

Gros (2015) wrote in *A Philosophy of Walking*, we should "write only what has been lived,

intensely. Make experience your only solid foundation" (p. 96). All true examinations have to

come from lived experience, otherwise, they will lack authenticity. Marla Morris' *Curriculum*

Studies Guidebooks Volume 1 (2015) reminds us that "…thoughts do come from somewhere.

They arrive out of our own subjectivities. Who you are, how you've lived, what experiences

you've had all go into the arrival of thoughts" (p. 11). Therefore, this project will examine how

EPCOT's particular lens of hopeful futurism, through its distinctive pavilions (which are

outlined in detail in Chapter Three) gave me an orientation in both my personal life and

classroom instruction.

Curriculum Studies

Positioning EPCOT as a scholarly pursuit is entirely applicable to a curriculum studies

project because it is a field that embraces the totality of human knowledge and experience. To

engage with curriculum studies is to understand that no topic is off limits; everything is subject

to both scrutiny and possibility. William Pinar's *What is Curriculum Theory?* (2012) explained

the field by explaining that curriculum theory is "informed by theory in the humanities, arts and

other interpretative social sciences, curriculum theory is the scholarly effort to understand the

curriculum, conceived here as 'complicated conversation'" (p. 1). In *Educational Experience as*

Lived: Knowledge, History, and Alterity (2015) Pinar wrote "how might we teach to restore

students' sense of temporality—a sharp sense of the past, enabling discernment of the present

and foreshadowing the future—to the complicated conversation that is the school curriculum?

My answer is allegory, a concept enabling us to understand, and engage in, subjectively situated,

historically attuned curriculum development and design (p. 27). Curriculum studies' roots are less about developing the dreaded standards for education and more about what the purpose of curriculum is. It is a field that seeks to dismantle the dominant model of school as a social replication apparatus by the status quo by dislodging the current perceptions of what school is (i.e. a place where students are encouraged to join the workforce and eventually become part of the consumer economy) and change it to a place where life meaning is formed by interacting with various texts.

Curriculum studies as a field was started by scholars such as James Macdonald, William Schubert, Dwayne Huebner, Michael Apple, and William Pinar back in the 1970s. It came at a time when old "formulas" had become stale and needed to be challenged and reformed. This led to what was called the "Reconceptualization" movement in curriculum. In *Understanding Curriculum*, Pinar, William Reynolds, Patrick Slattery, and Peter M. Tabuman (1995) wrote "the movement to reconceptualize the field was sometimes incorrectly termed "reconceptualism" a term indicating greater thematic cohesion among participants than was accurate" (p. 211). Pinar et al go on to write that the history of curriculum studies was more about "understanding curriculum" as rooted in the social sciences would be the "primary modes of scholarship and pedagogy" as opposed to traditional methods of "curriculum development." While there may be specific areas of concentration for individual curriculum theorists, curriculum studies is generally interested in everything. Marla Morris' *Curriculum Studies Guidebooks* (2015) stated that, "curriculum studies is an interdisciplinary field. The notion of interdisciplinarity evokes travel between one's home discipline and fields outside of curriculum. *Curriculum scholars are generalists, not specialists* [emphasis added] (p. 3). Morris writes extensively about curriculum studies being a journey which is a highly apt analogy of the experience.

Connecting EPCOT to curriculum studies was a natural fit for this project due to my coursework studies and engagement in the writing process. The necessary preparation that grew out of those experiences have primed me for this moment. As stated earlier, I want to take the meaningful elements of hopeful futurism, play, experimentation, and wonderment that I encountered on that first visit and move them to the second half of my life. Furthermore, the field of curriculum studies is connected to EPCOT in that they are take on multiple issues and never fully resolve them. And that's okay. What matters is the exploration of meaning that both curriculum studies and EPCOT have provided to me throughout my life through their interdisciplinary approaches.

Methodologies

This project will utilize a mixture of methodologies to convey this complex story and to bridge the past (iterations of EPCOT) with the cultural imaginaries (possible futures). To accomplish this, first I will use historiographical methodology to outline the transition is from EPCOT's origins as an experimental community to eventually a distinctive theme park called EPCOT Center. A detailed history of how the EPCOT project came into existence is required so as to trace Walt Disney's transition from animator to city-planner. This methodology appears in the early portions of this project to map the winding road that both Walt Disney and his experimental community traveled. In addition, this will allow me to voice criticism over the decision-making process that surrounded and continues to influence this potentially transformative space has.

Historiography as a methodology makes this all of this possible because it provides a lens that only the passage of time allows. The field of the Social Sciences, and History in particular,

has always been something I have been personally drawn to. One need look no further than my undergraduate degree in the subject and my chosen career as a Social Studies teacher to see how it has impacted me. The likely reason for this is that I am drawn to connective storytelling which history is based on. Jules R. Benjamin (2007) wrote "since the invention of writing, people have left records of their understanding of the world and of the events in their lives and how they felt about them" (p. 3) and that "a historian's choice…is determined by personal values…by the nature of time in which the historian lives" (p. 5). Such is the case with my relationship of my interest in the historical aspects of the Florida theme parks and my academic pursuits. My own personal history as a native Floridian is informed by Walt Disney World as a massive shaper of all things economic, cultural, and social.

Specifically, for this project, the use of historical analysis as a methodology serves well because of the various stages of development EPCOT (and the Walt Disney Company) went through. Only looking back through the lens of history can this perspective be achieved. As a history and government teacher, I am reminded of the long view required with every lesson. But how to do keep one eye on the history and the other on the unknown?   Joseph J. Ellis (2000) summed up this particular problem when he wrote

> Hindsight then is a tricky tool. Too much of it and we obscure the all-pervasive sense of contingency…On the other hand, without some measure of hindsight, some panoramic perspective on the past from our perch in the present, we lose the chief advantage—perhaps the only advantage—that the discipline of history provides and we are thrown without resources into the patternless swirl of events…We need, in effect, to be nearsighted and farsighted at the same time (pp. 6-7).

Ellis captures both the spirit of historical inquiry but, unintentionally, much of what gives the Disney parks their staying power: the power of nearsightedness and farsightedness. As I will expand up later in this introductory chapter, memory and nostalgia are the true drivers of Disney "magic" which can be interpreted as a means of possessing the power of being both nearsighted and farsighted.

Speculative essays, as a contrasting methodology, become necessary as the project moves into the realm of the imaginary in the final chapters. By then, I will have established how EPCOT/EPCOT Center grew, developed, changed, evolved, devolved, and ultimately, what it has to say about "possible futures" and curriculum. Specifically, the reconceptualized EPCOT concept which serves as the climax is a work of imagined speculation. This is due to the fact that the speculative essay allows for experimentation and creative expression. In *Forms of Curriculum Inquiry*, William Schubert (1991) explains that in speculative essays

> the writer often makes a personal statement, asserts some knowledge with conviction, treats a variety of topics, develops an argument shorter than a thesis, and frequently writes in an informal style. The curriculum scholar often strives to convert the reader or at least to persuade (p. 61).

My writing about EPCOT fits into all of these categories. As an emerging curriculum scholar, I have learned that all acts are political and subjective to one's own worldview ("personal statement"). If it were not for my experiences of visiting EPCOT Center from such a young age, I would not feel the connection that I do. In addition, my moving away from my Florida roots at age eighteen removed me from my "Florida self" in ways that I did foresee twenty years ago when that impactful decision was made. Part of my affection for EPCOT, both then and now,

stems from my life experience and spending time with my family as a child and now as an adult. Although not the main driver of this project, the personal story cannot help but seep in.

To Schubert's second point about asserting "some knowledge with conviction" (p. 61), again, I feel like most of my life has been building to this moment. The informal and formal investigations I have done into EPCOT, my interest in futurism, and my chosen career of educating the next generations have all been instrumental in shaping this research project. In *Toward a Poor Curriculum* (1975), William Pinar and Madeline Grumet advocated for a curriculum less consumed with the dazzle of technology and more focused on the reading of texts. It was in this work where Pinar first introduced his concept of *currere.* The etymology of the word 'curriculum' is from the Latin meaning "to run" or a "course to be run." Pinar's *currere* focuses on the active part of the proposition. The life experiences we all encounter are what constitute one's *currere.* Pinar wrote that "experience is what one senses, one feels, one thinks: it is, in a word, one's living through one's life. It includes physical sensations…emotional in that you may have a feeling about me, about him/her seated next to you" (pp. 23-24). There is a thirty-year gap between *Toward a Poor Curriculum* (1975) and *What is Curriculum Theory?* (2004) yet Pinar never lost sight of his idea. The concept was never dogmatic since it was based in fluidity (the "what" more than the "how") from its origin but it was kept alive. "We [curriculum theorists] have reconceived the curriculum; no longer is it only a noun. It is as well a verb: *currere*" (Pinar 2012, p. 30). Indeed this concept is very important for understanding the nature of this project. Case in point, Pinar pointed out, "Like the past, the future inhabits the present. Contemplatively, the student of *currere* imagines possible futures, including fears as well as fantasies of fulfillment" (Pinar 2012, p. 46). This sentiment aligns closely with my own teaching philosophy and the spirit of this project in that we cannot know

the future but we should encourage our students to imagine.

In a very profound way, that is the appeal of a theme-park that always casts an eye toward the Future. Acknowledging that all life is finite, armed with the courage to make one's community better than it was before, and knowing that if you spend your time on something meaningful, it can live on after one has passed on. William James once wrote "the great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it." Our countless interactions with family, friends, and even strangers, are the events that constitute a life. Really, that is all there is but through the methodology of speculative essays we can express the knowledge gained across the span of a lifetime and, more importantly, share it with others.

The speculative essay as an inquiry methodology also allows me process all of my life experience with EPCOT and curriculum. I have been a high school educator for fifteen years which places me around the mid-point of my career. There is so much that I have accomplished and I have been recognized for my efforts but I am never truly satisfied in my work. Rather than view this as a negative, I have recently put even more pressure on myself to think about what it is I want my students to know and be able to do. This entire project is a chance to expand on that work; a chance to move toward action. Schubert (1991) wrote that "giving free reign to the insightful imagination is the best way to advance knowledge" (pp. 64-65). The freedom of curriculum studies to do a theoretical piece such as this project is nothing short of enlightening. In the final product, the speculative essays contained in this work have been written over a span of several years now and will never truly capture the amount of work, time, and reflection given to the material. However, they have given me a chance during that time to release my imagination and analyze curriculum in ways that would not have been possible had I not chosen this project.

Finally, Schubert (1991) wrote that the speculative essay is "a portrayal of the author's way of reflecting. It is, thus, a form of philosophical inquiry put into writing" (p. 66). Essays, such as the ones you will see in the final chapters, will outline an imagined reconceptualization for EPCOT. In doing so, my goal is that any insights found here will be incorporated into the larger body of curriculum studies. My essays will draw upon the work of a diverse group of scholars and writers because, as Schubert pointed out, "The essayist, among all inquirers, is eclectic" (1991, p. 69). When writing about such wide-ranging topics such as curriculum, "possible futures", cultural imaginaries, and theme park history, yes, the word 'eclectic' does come to mind. And this project would not have it any other way.

Chapter Overview

Following the introduction, methodology, and literature review of Chapter One, the aforementioned detailed overview of how Walt Disney moved from cartoonist to futurist city-planner is the focus of Chapter Two. In part, Chapter Two will explain how Walt's relationship with animation technology became the impetus to create Disneyland (1952-1955) and, eventually, arouse his original plans for a planned community (1964-1966). Specifically, I will outline the "what is" versus the "what-if" of EPCOT's ontology because there is a considerable difference in what was **supposed to be** and **what actually came into being** in central Florida. Chapter Three picks up with the death of Walt Disney and the subsequent end of the original experimental city concept. The chapter will also detail the somewhat-convoluted but still inspirational theme park known as EPCOT Center (1982-1994). This chapter will include the promises, compromises, and necessary revisions that abandoned Walt's original vision but ultimately to a sense of acceptance in order to create this very unique theme-park. An

explanation and deconstruction of the pavilions of EPCOT's past and present, is also included since they serve as the primary drivers of messaging and curriculum-experience deliverers of EPCOT.

As previously stated, the early chapters focus on the historiography of Walt Disney, the Disney Company, and the Experimental Prototype of Community of Tomorrow. The remaining chapters will provide a discussion of EPCOT's role in the larger literature of utopianism via the methodology of the speculative essay. Chapter Four will begin after EPCOT Center's devolution from a theme-park with a purposeful mission statement (EPCOT Center). Once established, I will begin the work of placing EPCOT in its proper place in the field of utopian thought as a scholarly pursuit. I will also make the case of why EPCOT could be a way forward into the 21st century by liberating Epcot from its current malaise using the framework of cultural imaginaries. This chapter will include a comprehensive section on utopianism as a construct, the need for utopian thought, and "possible futures" research. Finally, in Chapter Five, we journey through the revitalized EPCOT by combining curriculum, futurism, and sustainable utopianism.

Theoretical Framework of Imaginaries

In order to accomplish the reconceptualization and revitalization of EPCOT present in the final chapters, I will be using the theoretical framework of cultural imaginaries with considerable emphasis on the role of utopian thinking. As an intellectual concept, cultural imaginaries can be partially traced back to the work of Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983). Anderson's work specifically dealt with the rise of the nation-state model following the Age of Enlightenment. He theorized that the nation is "an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the

smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members…yet in the minds of each lives the image of each other's communion" (p. 6). Since that time, the potential for imaginaries has been expanded into other mediums beyond nation-states. For example, in *The Cultural Imaginary of the Internet* (2014), Majid Yar wrote that "the term 'cultural imaginary' refers to the ways in which the social imaginary is given a concrete form in the sphere of cultural production and communication, manifest, for example, in the discourses of the arts, literature, film, journalism and so on" (pp. 2-3). Therefore, the imagined becomes physically real which in turn feeds the cycle back around to inspire the imaginary. In *Imaginary Communities* (2002)*,* Phillip Wegner wrote that the implications of the imaginary has "material, pedagogical, and ultimately political effects…narrative utopias serve as a way both of telling and of making modern history…" (p. xvi). Wegner draws upon the work of Ernst Bloch who theorized that there are "abstract" and "concrete" utopias that exist in our cultural imaginary. "Bloch maintains that abstract utopias are more real than many expressions of literary realism, precisely because they mark the place of history and becoming in the present that these realisms deny" (p. 20). EPCOT fits well into the imaginary framework in that it possesses both "abstract" and "concrete" approaches to thematic representation. The Disney Imagineers served as architects, artists, designers, etc. who wanted the park to "entertain, inform, and inspire" knowing that such an endeavor would extend beyond the realm of the practical and into the fantastical.

Imaginary world construction has much to do with how the world is represented and what is deemed meaningful by societies. "We live in imagined (but not imaginary) worlds," wrote Noel Salazar in *Envisioning Eden* (2010)*,* "using our personal imagination as well as collective imaginaries to represent our lifeworld and attribute meaning to it" (p. 5). In this regard, theoretical imaginaries aligns with educational experience and curriculum construction in

that both are designed for both collective and individual possibilities for growth. "The…unofficial imaginations people rely on, from the most spectacular fantasies to the most mundane reveries, are usually not expressed in theoretical terms but in images, stories, and legends" (pp. 5-6). Barring the unexpected tragedy, most days can be assumed to be like any other day, however, this does not stop us from thinking or planning out our lives in micro or macro fashions. Through imagination, we are able to traverse time virtually. As Salazar mentioned, sapiens of every tribe, creed, and ethnicity have always done so via stories, mythologies, religion, art, and later through photographs, video, film, etc. Douglas Brode (2005) expanded on this idea when he wrote "there are, as Joseph Campbell noted, myths that are regional and/or national in origin, others that are universal, found among virtually every race inhabiting the planet. These basic and essential myths…reveal what it means to be human, even as more limited myths expose the uniqueness of any one people or place" (p.17). Through these myths, we understand that imagined existence is just as much a part of the human experience as the real.

One of the key drivers of imaginaries, as I will later connect to the entire EPCOT/Florida Project, is how and what is represented in the world. The main driver of representation is 'culture' through which societies form and replicate rituals. Various scholars and authors have all tried to explain the important role of culture and here are few examples. Douglas Kellner (1995) wrote

> Culture in the broadest sense is a form of highly participatory activity, in which people create their societies and identities. Culture shapes individuals, drawing out and cultivating their potentialities and capacities for speech, action, and creativity (p. 2).

Stephen Fjellman (1992) stated that culture is "political in a deep sense. It is a lived-in thing, a seemingly transparent environment of symbols in which we live our normal lives. The meanings of things is obvious and unremarkable" (p. 8). James Carey (1992) explained culture as a communicative experience in that

> Culture…is the meaning and significance particular people discover in their experience through art, religion, and so forth. To study culture is to seek order within these forms…But what is called the study of culture also can be called the study of communications… (p. 44).

In *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Neil Postman (1985) defined culture as a conversation (an idea that is expounded on in Chapter Three) when he explained that "I use the word 'conversation' metaphorically to refer no only to speech but to all techniques and technologies that permit people of a particular culture to exchange messages. In this sense, all culture is a conversation or, more precisely, a corporation of conversations, conducted in a variety of symbolic modes" (p. 6). Experimental British musician and producer Brian Eno may have the most direct definition of all when he defined culture as "all the things we don't *have* to do" (quoted in Johnson 2016, p. 13).

But perhaps the most instructive definition of culture is from Stuart Hall (1997) who explained it as "shared meanings" (p. 1). These shared meanings are created by what Hall's explained was his "encoding-decoding" model. Hall first introduced this model in 1980 as means to explain how information is processed through a "meaningful" filter which is the "encoding process". Once received and processed, information can then be repurposed via "decoding" as a means of creating new ways of understanding. Input encoded, output decoded. The encoding-decoding model aligns with cultural imaginaries research in that the mythology (representation) comes first and new information is added or rejected into the "new" schema (meaning).

Thereby, we see culture as means of a way of interacting with the world and making understandings. Stimuli and experience are going to vary case by case but the general framework is applicable across the board. Michael Real's *Exploring Media Culture* (1996) explains Hall's encoding-decoding model this way, "Everyone today has lived with media all of her or his life and has a gut-level sense of meanings produced by oneself (meaning structure 2) and others (meaning structure 1). There is also a sense that these meanings develop with a larger social context…" (p. xxi). Understanding of the symbols, texts, etc. are created within our minds and through the interaction with other minds. Everything can be understood as "input" and/or "output" by first going through the senses, and if it is deemed as such, classified by the brain as "meaningful." The daily practice of "input" and/or "output" becomes increasingly complex as our media/image/sensory levels get increasingly amped up by omnipresent media saturation in our modern lives.

In regards to all things Disney, culture based on representation and input/output is of paramount importance because of their massive media footprint in the past and the present. They are both producers various forms of texts but also have to keep an eye on what the audience-consumer is interested in to maximize both profit and competitive relevancy. Disney parks excel at perpetuating mental imaginary constructs of the past and projections of "the future." In *Prosthetic Memory*, Allison Landsberg (2004) explains this phenomenon as a "public cultural memory" that "emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theater or museum" (p. 2). Theme parks run by the Walt Disney Company foster "prosthetic memory" since they serve their architecture is designed to immerse us in an identifiable space albeit historically false and completely synthetic. Consider how *Liberty Square* in the Magic Kingdom reduces Colonial America to a space

occupied by a couple of restaurants, shops, and themed attractions. The replica takes on a dual function of being what we actually experience (reinforcement presented) and what we *expect* to see (reinforcement via previous imagined constructs).

Another example occurred during the funeral service of former First Lady Barbara Bush, when I experienced Hall's model first hand. The fact that I could be a "witness" to the funeral in real time even though it took place in Houston which is hundreds of miles from my Georgia home ("input") led to my reaction of getting emotional seeing the Bush family enter the service along with the Clintons, Obamas, and current First Lady Melania Trump; etc. ("output"). Moreover, this experience reminded me of the very real power of the imaginary. This emotional attachment and physical response to this real event and imagined loss extended to the cable commentators who perpetuated the mythology of her being "our" First Lady.   In reality, I have never met any of the Bushes so I do not know them personally. Any knowledge that I could possibly claim to have of Barbara Bush comes through a television or computer screen. Connection is thereby created but does not register falsely. The example of Barbara Bush's funeral is interchangeable with most experiences found in the age of mass media. I am sure that there will be numerous examples of similar events that will transpire over the remainder of my life. Nevertheless, the power of the imaginary means that the illusion of a connective thread that binds me to her and me to a nation mourning its loss does not have to be real to be meaningful.

Turning my attention back to the matter at hand, the theoretical framework of cultural imaginaries is my chosen methodology because it allows for this project to draw upon the necessary elements to give a thoughtful examination. Futurism, by its nature, requires a large capacity to use imaginaries especially when considering building a more sustainable existence than we currently find ourselves in. Events such as the proposed Sixth Extinction and the recent

moving closer to midnight on the Doomsday Clock are proof that humanity may be the author of its own destruction. However, this does not led me to nihilism and despair because dystopian thinking can spur utopian action. If we are interested in reaching Tomorrow (and we may not be but I remain hopeful), then we will have to work together to imagine what could be.

The imaginary EPCOT I am proposing in the final chapter can be a tool in shaping that Future by combining: utopian thinking, futurism, curriculum studies, and imaginaries. Theme parks allow for an almost endless stream of examples of cultural representation, imaginary thinking, and in the case of Chapter Five, utopian idealism. That is what EPCOT (Center) almost is/was and what it should always aspire to be: a future-focused cultural center where innovation is heralded and the goals of creating a better tomorrow for all are explored. We just need that "one little spark" to get us to dream big and this project seeks to be on the forefront of that movement.

The Hornet's Nest of Disney Literature

In order to synthesize Disney Studies with Curriculum Studies, it is important to note that through his animation shorts, long form films, television programs, and theme parks, Walt Disney and his studio provided *numerous* texts for curriculum scholars to wrestle with. In so doing, it is clear that the Disney Version sometimes engaged in Pinar's "complicated conversation" model with many of its media subjects while other times it falls flat and immediately becomes the easy target of critics. In the case of the latter, it can be extremely frustrating in those instances when the Disney texts want to have it both ways: sometimes they want to address (whether consciously or not) important issues of race, class, sex, etc. but other times the line is that all of this is "just for kids" and should not be taken too seriously. So, which

one is it? My studies have pointed out that the answer is that it varies because it is not an

"either-or" proposition. To untangle this, I will engage with both the critical and the defenders

of the Disney texts and try to offer a guiding path for this positionality of this project. I will

begin with the scholarship that is less than favorable to Walt Disney and his creations with

emphasis on: hegemony, spectacle, synthetic realities (i.e. charges of inauthenticity),

consumerism, and hyper-nostalgia. Once that is established, I will create a path forward with

other interpretations and viewpoints that are more favorable to the Disney texts and parks which

can be used as a starting point for curriculum theorists.

To start, I will address the rather thorny issue of Disney and its sometimes problematic

relationship to pedagogy. I am acutely aware, and will include through numerous citations, that

much of the academic literature surrounding Disney focuses on the destructive narratives that

Disney creates and perpetuates. To be sure, the very suggestion that anything related to Disney

could/would/should be involved in any aspect of public school is, admittedly, a well-deserved

concern for those weary of Disney's media influence (this is why this project will have to

divorce the democratic potential and idealism of EPCOT from reality). One of the more critical

scholars who has done substantial research into the influence of Disney and its impact on young

children is Henry Giroux. Giroux "is known for his ability to combine a stinging criticism of the

corporate influence on popular culture tastes" all while he "fosters …democratic ideals in

schools" (Weaver 2009, p. 110). In his works, *Disturbing Pleasures* (1994) and *The Mouse that

Roared* (1999), Giroux hammers Disney for perpetuating racial, gender, sexual and class

hegemony. "The strategies of entertaining escapism, historical forgetting, and repressive

pedagogy found in Disney's books…theme parks…produce a series of identifications that

relentlessly define the United States as white, middle class, and heterosexual" (1994, p. 31).

Through the years, the Disney machine has positioned itself as the premier memory maker and hegemonic reproducer. The arsenal of cross-generational characters and film have created embedded nostalgia in us all that asks us to forget, not only the drudgeries of modern existence, but cultural and moral identity. Disney is allowed to omit, overlook and "whitewash" history to create unexamined hegemonic narratives (Giroux, 1994) all the while they rifle through our pockets. As an educator and student of curriculum studies, I must concur that the canon of Disney does contain narratives that are both disturbing and destructive.

The problem of any corporate narrative and "Disneyfied" history comes into greater focus when considering the vast reach that Disney has. In *Teaching With Disney* (2016), Julie Garlen and Jennifer Sandlin wrote "…the ubiquitous culture of Disney has profound potential to shape how we think, learn, and live" and that Disney

> is a major cultural force that shapes everyday life practices and identity
> formations through its representations of family values, gender, sexuality, race,
> class, ethnicity, "Americanness", childhood, pleasure, entertainment, education,
> and community. Thus Disney operates as pedagogy—both inside and outside of
> schools—that helps teach us into particular ways of understanding the world, our
> selves, and others (pp. 2-3).

A more blunt expansion of Garlen and Sandlin's list could include Disney (through their films, theme parks, and corporate actions) examples of: racism, sexism, classism, historical distortion, control, unbridled capitalistic monopolistic tendencies, environmental degradation, whitewashing, litigiousness, cultural saccharization, hetero-normativity, corporate ruthlessness, and overall plans for world domination. Regrettably, this expanded list of Disney's sins was not particularly difficult to assemble.

The Problem of History

Moreover, on the larger scale, there is perhaps there is no greater burden to any historical or curricular project than that of trying to find the balance between milieu and current interpretations. How does one speak to what was commonplace and expected in one period and completely unacceptable in another? How does a historian best explain without judging? How does one reconcile the Hegelian world shaper with the reality that most people are unable to or interested in challenging the status quo? It is easy to say, "Well, I would have done x in this instance" but would you really have done so? How could one ever really be sure of what actions they would have taken? Is it possible that the most likely scenario is that you would have done what you needed to do to save your career, life, family? In its most generic forms, "history" celebrates the rebels that stood up for the moral choice and did the right thing (Rosa Parks, Oskar Schindler, Mohandas Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, Martin Luther King Jr., etc.). These are the examples that are lifted up in the average school curriculums as those who said "no" and pushed back to oppressive forces.

But was Lincoln, for example, really a progressive on racial issues? Frederick Douglass, a contemporary and activist, did not fully believe so based on his eulogy remarks.

> It must be admitted, truth compels me to admit, even here in the presence of the monument we have erected to his memory, Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man. He was preeminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the

colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country….

(Douglass, 1876 Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln)

The following examples is not to diminish Lincoln's accomplishments but to point out this "problem of history." As a high school teacher, I have encountered the Hegelian model of the Great Movers in history enough to see how limiting it can be for people. Few of us can reach the benchmark set by the world-shaking "rebels," and students can recognize that fairly early on. As such, it has the unintended effect of promoting the status quo that does not challenge authority. This is an entirely separate issue from this project but the point is that History is rarely used to show students that they can be better, less toxic individuals who can shape their communities. It is possible to teach our children that they may not be as impactful as the "rebels" but does not mean that they cannot make positive social change in their daily lives.

But then my curriculum studies worldview creeps in and, while I am not opposed to actions of the rebels, I am weary of how instructive it is in schools which do everything in their power to silence students by having them march in line, assigns them silent lunch, assigns homework after an already full day of learning. Rebels are taught but rebellion is not. I will keep the anecdotes to a minimum but I would be remiss if I did not mention how the Advanced Placement U.S. Government and Politics course requires the teaching of "safe" Supreme Court decisions. Its curriculum wants to portray the America we want to be but not always who we are. Therefore, the *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954) and *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963) decisions are required but *Buck v. Bell (*1927) and *Korematsu v. U.S.* (1944) are not. Is this not sanitation or "Disneyfying" the curriculum?

To bring the focus back to this project, I have to situate Walt Disney and the EPCOT project in the proper contexts. Square one: Walt has been dead for over fifty years; it would

unfair to hold him to today's standards. He was a product of his times just like everyone else. It is important to note that Walt lived his final years around the transformative events of the Civil Rights Movement. Consider the fact that Walt died just over two years after Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. looked on. The Black Panther Party was formed in October of 1966, just two months before Walt's passing. The amount of social change that surrounded the years closely before and after his death is staggering. Here is a brief list of events that happened not too long after his death that *probably would have* had an impact the EPCOT/Florida Project had he survived: the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., the assassination of Robert Kennedy, the Tet Offensive, the moon landing, Stonewall, Woodstock, Earth Day, the Energy Crisis, Watergate, etc. All of this is not offered as apology but a reality of the "problem of History" where it is difficult to separate art from artist and past values from current attitudes.

Was Walt Disney one of these rebels that we push in curriculum? In areas such as art, technology, and mass media the answer is an emphatic yes. When it comes to progressive attitudes of sex, gender, race, and whiteness…the picture is fuzzier. Again, this project is not designed to be the final word on any of these topics but a genuine discussion cannot be avoided when discussing Walt Disney and EPCOT. Please know that this project has struggled on how much to include this topic (and not just because I am the straight, white guy) because it can be a dissertation on to itself. This project acknowledges that the main focus is on how to create a sustainable future for all of humanity but that how to get there is a complicated proposition.

Spectacle!

Another charge often leveled at Disney and its theme parks is that it is the spectacle overtakes the viewer and only gives back the fleeting moment of pleasure. At the beginning, I

recounted the story of the effect that *Spaceship Earth* had on my six-year-old-self. Its design,

structure, and location were all purposeful in its desire to evoke certain feelings of awe to the

observer. In Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), (a pamphlet that purposely

states that it has neither copyright nor rights reserved) he argued that the real, social human life

has been replaced by representations. Debord wrote

> The spectacle which inverts the real is in fact produced. Lived reality is materially
>
> invaded by the contemplation of the spectacle while simultaneously absorbing the
>
> spectacular order, giving it positive cohesiveness. Objective reality is present on
>
> both sides. Every notion fixed this way has no other basis than its passage into the
>
> opposite: reality rises up within the spectacle, and the spectacle is real (8).

EPCOT in all three of its incarnations evoked this phenomenon of spectacle. Walt's original

planned community concept (1964-1966) was rolled out via a promotional film meant to dazzle

investors so that he could fund the immense project. After his death, EPCOT Center (1982-1994)

was constructed in central Florida and opened to the public but the element of spectacle was no

less diminished. Walt's planned, futuristic city was not present when EPCOT Center opened in

1982 so even the promised spectacle was less than spectacular. Finally, we find ourselves in the

present day when even the name itself has been reduced to the lower case since 1994. Welcome

to "Epcot": an acronym with no meaning. In all three incarnations, the spectacle has existed

mostly for itself without adding much of tangible note to the public good. No version has lived

up to its own utopian ideals whether it be with residents, industrial parks, vast transportation

systems, and there are no corporate giants working for the betterment of tomorrow as Walt

originally had originally envisioned (or promised to the state of Florida).

Today's version, Epcot (1994-present), is the worst offender because it has turned

spectacle on the subject itself and the park has little vestiges of any attempt at futuristic thinking. Attractions at Epcot are based on intellectual properties (derisively making the park referred to IPcot by purists). These IP attractions have replaced all semblance of the original vision of community building and futurism. Today's version does not even have much of the educational angle of EPCOT Center; the EPCOT of my youth. In omitting the limited second incarnation, Debord's observation that "the spectacle wants to get to nothing other than itself" (Debord 14) is fulfilled. All the while park guests playing our vital role in the charade as if the name "Epcot" means something anymore. The mission statement plaque can only now serve as a reminder of the non-existence of a bold vision. But hey, we still got a fireworks show to end the night, right?

Synthetic Realities

Of course, the existence of any theme park does raise the question: why seek out synthetic environments and realities? Like most theme parks, EPCOT Center/Epcot has its fair share of representational environments to tell various stories. Facades, show scenes, animatronics, sculpted plants, and projections on screens all provide the illusion of reality to the willing park guest. Few competitors come close to Disney's skill level when it comes to synthetic showpieces designed to tell a story or stimulate one of our senses. In *The Mouse Machine*, J.P. Telotte (2008) theorized that Disney has made its own ichnography by creating an "inhabitable text" for guests to transverse through. Telotte expanded on this idea in his essay "Theme Parks and Films-Plays and Players" (2011) when he wrote about the role of cinema has played in shaping the experience. "For the Disney parks—as it seems Walt Disney early on realized—ultimately provide their guests with far more than a site of play or a 'magic kingdom'…they are more too than just movie-like mechanisms of control…they also help us

negotiate our own difficulties with a reality that has become somewhat less reliable real as our world itself becomes ever more cinematized or mediatized" (p. 181). In other words, it is our alleged collective (cinematic) memory of "The Old West" is used to build the plaster red rocks of *Frontierland*. The desire to return to a time when things were supposedly less complicated provides the framework of *Main Street U.S.A*. This combined with ever-growing nostalgia is one reason why the Disney parks are highly successful tourist destinations. More importantly, these "inhabitable texts" are why scholars of all backgrounds and viewpoints are drawn to these parks.

What is it about these cinematic playgrounds that make them so effective in stirring emotional reactions? The answer may lie in the how they are set up. A source of pride for the Disney Company is the intense focus on park layout, organization, and overall maintenance. "In the Disney parks, appearance is everything…the parks are also notoriously clean' (Telotte, 2008, p. 1). Specifically, the importance of maintaining illusion and "magic" is paramount. Employees disappear into vast systems of underground tunnels called Utilidoors. Guests are made to feel that they are not in the "real" world, they are *somewhere* else. This is easily summed up by the signs posted in both the California and Florida parks: "Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow, and fantasy." It should be noted that "today" is not one of the locations you will find yourself; only yesterday and/or tomorrow. Today serves only a perfunctory purpose as being in service toward the past and future. In other words, the present is the vessel, not the destination.

At the theme parks, guests are both audiences and performer; each playing his/her role in the collective experience of prosthetic memory through synthetic realities. And the reason why the illusion connects is because it comes from familiar or collective narratives. Dahmen-

Ingenhovan (2004) wrote "Disneyland is full of horror visions, artificially re-created natural catastrophes, witches and pirates. All of this is overlaid with an optimism, which, as in fairy tales or Bible stories, leaves no doubt that good will win in the end" (p. 58). Disney is able to create its specific brand of simulacra through a variety of mediums including nostalgia, cultural imaginaries, and artificial reproduction. One of the more effective tools in the Disney arsenal is its sophisticated used of robotic figures to re-create/simulate reality. In the promotional *EPCOT Center: Creating the World of Tomorrow*, Beard (1982) wrote "enhancing the shows and rides are the startlingly life-like Audio-Animatronics figures…they are sometimes mistaken for the human beings or animals they represent…and [their inclusion] stamps the shows with the unmistakable Disney hallmark" (p. 23). The animatronics living in the synthetic environments are the culmination of decades of experience Disney has in creating immersive environments. Dahmen-Ingenhovan (2004) wrote "in collaboration with landscape designers…Walt Disney creates the perfect vegetation. With his audio-animatronics, he ensures that wild, computer-controlled beats attack the boats day after day, but never devour them" (p. 60). We feel the sensation of danger which transcends across the species but also know that it is all scripted fun designed to evoke emotional responses.

An example of this fusion of alleged familiarity, synthetic reality, and storytelling can be seen at Epcot today where guests can take a boat ride on the "*Living with the Land*" attraction inside *The Land* pavilion. The slow-moving boat passes through show scenes including: a rain forest, a desert, a grassland of the Great Plains, a jungle, and a farmhouse all within the span of two minutes. Each environment is completely synthetic but the simulation works for several reasons. First, is the high level of artistry that goes into these attractions. One of the highlights of this project was getting to interview George and Piper Head, two former Imagineers who

worked on the EPCOT Center pavilions such as *The Land* (which receives a larger write-up in Chapter Three). In the course of interview, I learned that Mr. Head worked with the Creative and Design team while Mrs. Head worked in the Production department. The couple even revealed to me that they actually met during the park's set design phase and construction in 1980! One story that Piper recounted to me was one in which the company sent her to Kansas to meet with a professor who specialized in the environment of the Great Plains and specifically the grasslands. While not particularly of interest to her work with Imagineering, Mrs. Head did remark "but every blade of grass in there [the Land] they wanted it to look like the natural prairie of that time…because they are going to tell the story about how that affects the earth [and] the soil…" and that "each one of those stalks of grass was hand-made." (P. Head, personal communication, February 2, 2019). Such dedication to storytelling ("good show" in Disneyspeak) is why EPCOT Center made such an impression on me and continues to inspire.

The second reason owes less to the artistry and more to the harsh realities of themed entertainment. Since *Living with the Land* is a boat ride with numerous guests wishing to experience it, it does not allow for an interactive curriculum. Any chance to have a dialogue are sacrificed for the harsh reality of keeping the crowds moving from attraction to attraction. If by chance a guest were curious and had questions, they have to be kept to an audience of one since this boat does not have a Q and A element built in. No time, have to keep the boat moving to the next show scene. Such limitations are understandable but regrettable nonetheless. Examples such as these are why the climax of this project is an imaginary EPCOT that is freed from such constraints.

If we shift our focus to EPCOT Center/Epcot's *World Showcase*, one finds cultural markers such as a mock Eiffel Tower or several Japanese pagodas which continue the synthetic

realities theme in they serve as signifiers to remind the park guests of where they "are." Similar

to the Magic Kingdom's themed lands (*Adventureland, Fantasyland*, *Frontierland*, etc.), each

"country" in the *World Showcase* is carefully recreated to transport park guests to the simulated

location. The collective authors of *Inside the Mouse* (1995) had this to say when they

encountered an Epcot guest who was exploring the Mexico pavilion through his camcorder

screen:

> Perhaps because "reality" at Disney World is already a construct, transforming it
>
> further into a two-dimensional screen is a way to actively participate in the magic.
>
> The guest…did not delude himself that he was in [actual] Mexico; he knew
>
> that…he was playing a game with technology, aware that the goal is not an
>
> objective copy of the original but a fictional version based on the original (p. 27).

Now take a moment to consider the fact that the above account occurred in the mid-1990s before

the rise of social media, filters, VR, and augmented realities. This "game-playing with

technology" could be seen as a harbinger of our modern tech-selves where various filters used

for social media alter our reality on a daily basis.

The lines between reality and imaginary are further blurred by the fact that all of the Cast

Members (Disneyspeak for park employee) who work in the "countries" of *World Showcase* are

actual residents from the country represented. The Cast Members are mostly exchange students

who are eager to spend a few months in America. There is nothing subversive about this on the

surface, however, the desired effect their presence has is the true story. They, not unlike the

guests, are really there to play a part; in this instance, they add a bit of "reality" and legitimacy to

the synthetic environment. Guests *feel like* they are in Italy because we are surrounded by real

Italians in *World Showcase*. When one overhears French being spoken between co-workers in

the France pavilion, it can be pleasantly disorienting. Add to the sensory mix a soundtrack of a

French café playing in the background, and the illusion is impressively presented. In this respect,

the international Cast Members become part and parcel of the immersive experience and, in

truth, become the ultimate Disney Animatronic. Garlen and Sandlin (2016) observe that all of

these are examples of the numerous "texts" in "which the consumers engage and through which

they produce new negotiated meanings" (p. 2). The disorientation and skewing of reality is,

paradoxically, one of the most alluring characteristics to the Disney parks. The desire to escape

and create something new is presented to those who are willing to let the "magic" of Disney do

its work.

　　Jean Baudrillard's seminal work, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) set the tone

discussion for the type of hyper-reality presented at the Disney theme parks. While he did not

write directly about EPCOT, Baudrillard did give a few specific nods to Disneyland in

California. "The imaginary of Disneyland is neither true or false, it is a deterrence machine set

up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp" (p. 12). Like Debord

before him, Baudrillard's writings criticize the exchange for the real for the simulated spectacle.

Disneyland fosters childishness, warns Baudrillard, and is an ultimately a "waste product" of the

hyperreal civilization. One cannot help but wonder if Debord and Baudrillard are correct and the

real has been supplanted by the representation. If that is the case, then where does that leave us?

　　Furthermore, as will be demonstrated in at the end of Chapter Three, the present Epcot

(1994-present) is the purest form of cynical capitalism in that it is now both the producer and

consumer of spectacle. Guests and the Disney Company itself caught in a Möbius strip of

upping the ante of fantastical environments. Stephen Fjellman wrote in *Vinyl Leaves* (1992) that

"in a world of images to be consumed, it is hard not to be carried away. It becomes difficult to

tell what is real and what is fake" (p. 6). Tourists provide the consistent and ever-increasing revenue flow while Disney supplies (ideally) the experience of escapism. "In truth, happiness can only mean: to escape" (Theodor Adorno quoted in Dahmen-Ingenhovan, 2004, p. 66) but what does that really mean for the people living this existence? Why is escapism required for "happiness"? What are we escaping from?

At Disney parks, the escapist element is built in to the experience and is, therefore *part of the expectation*. Each guest crowds his/her way into Epcot's 260 acres to see, feel, and experience something that is not provided by everyday life. Douglas Kellner's *Media Culture* (1995) contended that modern, capitalistic societies need not depend on "ideological indoctrination" to keep the machine running. All that is required is pleasure. "Consumer culture offers a dazzling of goods and services that induce individuals to participate in a system of commercial gratification" (p. 3). The present form of Epcot (1994-present), may not be on the same tier as the Magic Kingdom when it comes to blatant consumerism but it still offers a chance to shop, eat, be dazzled…in other words, pleasure into Being. In this current incarnation, tourists are willing dupes participating in a commodification of fun and contrived social interaction. Pulling from the work of Richard Hoggart, John Weaver (2009) wrote that those living in the Western world have learned "to live is to consume and to have fun at any cost..." (p. 41). Garlen and Sandlin (2016) remind us that "Disney products, services, and experiences, like all texts, are never neutral, they are produced, marketed, and consumed within particular social, historical, and political contexts" (pp. 10-11). Disney parks do not and could not exist outside of these contexts because they are simulacra of modern beliefs, desires, and agreed-upon structures of pleasure and Being. So, what does that mean for this project? Rather than contend with all of these realities, this project will try to turn these into teaching opportunities. Synthetic realities

could be flipped from purely commercial exercises into making EPCOT a living laboratory operated for the public good where futuristic ideas are discussed and scenarios are explored.

There's a Great Big Beautiful Yesterday

Spectacle, synthetic realities, pleasure seeking, simulacra are all tools used effectively by the Disney Company in their theme parks. However, one of the more effective methods used by Disney is the connective power of nostalgia. In my Social Studies classroom, the degree of understanding of historical contexts and events varies greatly by the high school students I teach. Nevertheless, I can personally testify that that making a reference to a Disney film or park attraction is a reliable signifier when it comes to helping students understand the presented material. This has been true despite my: having taught for fifteen years, having taught students who come from a wide-range of economic and cultural backgrounds, and considering that many of the "classic" Disney movies viewed by these high-schoolers may be considerably older than their grandparents. Disney's media legacy has made its brand the universal, time-traversing language of popular culture.

All of which begs the question: "How is this possible?" There is no one simple answer but the Disney formula for longevity is layered, multi-faceted, and a story of adaptability to current trends. However, one constant has been Disney's successful bridging time periods by use of nostalgia. One of the contributors to *Teaching with Disney* (2016), William Reynolds, discusses the role that Disney plays in shaping childhood (and eventual fosters nostalgic feelings). In his essay, *Teaching Disney Critically in the Age of Perpetual Consumption*, Reynolds confesses his "sins" to the academic world. "Yes, I will admit it," he writes, "I was a proud member of the Mickey Mouse Club. I had a Mickey Mouse Membership pin, Mouseketeer

ears, and a Mouseketeer Member t-shirt. I was, indeed, a card carrying member" (p. 111).

Reynolds' admission at the outset serves the double purpose of producing positionality with a

healthy dose of self-deprecation. As an aside, while the anecdote is extremely effective, it does

reinforce the prevalent academic narrative that Disney fandom is something to be ashamed of or

apologetic for. Nevertheless, Reynolds' essay demonstrates the hold that Disney and nostalgia

(or in-tandem in this case) can have over us and, ultimately, curriculum. In relating how he uses

Disney studies with is undergraduates, Reynolds opined,

> While we may shake our heads and wonder why youth are so infatuated,
>
> enamored, and unwaveringly loyal to Disney, some of us were just as taken not so
>
> long ago. These fond childhood memories also provide an important example of
>
> the allure of nostalgia and the important role of corporations can have in shaping
>
> our early lives (p. 112).

These serve as further proof that even in our ever-increasing, media saturated landscape, Disney

still stands above the rest. The lure of fantasy and childhood escapism provides us with a safe

harbor in today's twenty-four world where the news is rarely good and stress creeps around

every social media post. Childhood, in part, is romanticized because of the (alleged) freedoms it

provides. No bills to pay, no dry-cleaning to pick up, no faculty meetings, etc. Modern life is

viewed as hectic, overstuffed, and without anytime to "relax." Enter Disney. "Disney

simulations remind visitors of something they know, somewhere they've been, something

they've seen or heard (Fjellman 1992, p. 11). For better or worse, Disney is acutely aware that

people will go to great lengths (financially and otherwise) for *someone* to ease the burden of

modern life.

This seemingly inherent call of nostalgia could be found in the AMC network program, *Mad Men*, which ran from 2007 to 2015. Although there is no direct connection between *Mad Men,* and the Disneyverse, useful comparisons are applicable. Just as part of the creation for Walt's Disneyland in 1955 was an effort to capture and sanitize the American past (i.e. *Main Street U.S.A., Frontierland*, etc.), *Mad Men* was an exercise of re-contextualizing America in the 1960s for modern audiences. There is even an episode entitled *Tomorrowland* where some of the characters visit Disneyland (unfortunately off-screen). Through its seven seasons, the show inverted American history and saw the transformative 1960s through a 21st century gaze. The penultimate *Mad Men* episode is the Season One finale entitled, *The Wheel*, which one can see how the show uses the idea of nostalgia as a means of message delivery. The show's main protagonist, Don Draper, is conducting a presentation for an upcoming ad campaign on behalf of his advertisement firm. In this instance, the presentation is for a photo slide projector to executives of the Kodak film company. Originally, the Kodak executives had wanted to use the device's new technological appeal as the main selling point but Don convinces them that the machine has other possibilities. "Technology is a glittering lure," he begins, "but there's the rare occasion when the public can be engaged on a level beyond flash, they have a sentimental bond with the product…nostalgia. It's delicate but potent" (Weiner, 2007).

This particular line about the potency of nostalgia sent me back on my heels when I first heard it and I immediately drew parallels to the experiences between Disney parks and its devotees. "The term 'nostalgia' was coined in 1688 by the Swiss medical student Johaness Hofer" from combing the terms "*nostos*" (return to the native land) and *algos* (pain). Nostalgia, then …is the pain caused by the desire to return to one's native land" (Routledge 2016, p. 4). Nostalgic models can be replicated time and again in Walt's studio and theme parks began when

old fairytales of Europe were retold and given the "Disney" treatment. By most accounts by those who knew him, Walt instinctively had a knack for appealing to white-American nostalgia in the realm of historical re-creation and fantastical representational. In the usually critical biography, *The Disney Version* (1968)*,* author Richard Schickel acknowledged that "there was undeniably some almost mystic bond between himself and the moods and styles and attitudes of this [white, middle class American] people" (p. 361). More poetically, Steve Mannheim (2017) compared Walt to a modern da Vinci and that "from the outset, Disney's Medici family was the public" (p. xvii). These innate skills of connecting art to audience were profoundly useful in the creation of the Disney empire. In *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, Neal Gabler (2006) wrote this about Walt's Disneyland

> What was uncanny, as always, was how much Walt Disney's personal experience converged with the national experience…Some regarded this nostalgia for a bygone era in a time of anxiety [i.e. the Cold War] as yet another form of comfort and another source of the park's appeal (p. 499).

Walt and his employees at WED Industries (now known as Imagineers) knew the connection of nostalgia on the human psyche and used it to create one of the largest media outlets in the world.

An investigation into how nostalgia creates these media-scapes was conducted in the aforementioned *Inside the Mouse* (1995) by Karen Klugman, Jane Kuenz, Shelton Waldrep, and Susan Waldrep. The authors ("project members") pointed out that "Disney World might be thought of as an immense nostalgia machine whose staging and specific attractions are generationally coded to strike a chord with the various age categories of its guests" (p. 10). To bring the discussion back to this project, I wonder is it possible that Disney parks perpetuate mental constructs of the past and projections of "the future"? Are the parks more designers or

reflectors to what we (already) have in our mind when we think about the past and future? When

the architecture and Revolutionary era ideals of colonial America can be reduced to a space

occupied by a couple of restaurants, the replica takes on a dual function of being what we

actually see (reinforcement presented) and what we *expect* to see (reinforcement via previous

constructs).

In addition, if we are what we spend, the question is not what do we say about Disney

but, rather, what does our infatuation for Disney say about us? In *The Mouse Machine: Disney*

and Technology (2008), J.P. Telotte explained that

> While at times suggesting a kind of simple wish fulfillment and firmly
>
> embedding…within the realm of the fantastic, the emphasis on connection
>
> also underscores an important dimension of the Disney product, the way
>
> in which it consistently points to the possibility of unseen, often denied,
>
> but also hoped-for links, ways of bridging the past and the future, connecting to
>
> others, and even of reaching other, most secret parts of ourselves… (p. 8).

Like Don Draper's slide projector, Disney feeds on our desire to be connected to *a* past, if not *the*

past. It is this bridge that we, and perhaps specifically Americans, constantly find ourselves on.

In his essay, "*The Betrayal of the Future: Walt Disney's EPCOT Center*", Alexander Wilson

(1994) wrote "among Walt Disney's many contributions to American popular culture, his theme

parks call for special attention, because they form the landscape against which Disney's visions

meet the historical and political realities" (p. 118). Sometimes, if not usually, Distory (as Stephen

Fjellman calls it) and the "political realities" seem highly incongruent.

Yet, it is the unquestioned prerogative of the Disney "historical" attraction to do just that.

Guests sit in dark theaters and on ever-moving ride vehicles (Omnimovers) that present stories

and actual events but there is no allowance for rebuttal or questioning what we are shown. Thus the attractions of Disney World exist in this paradoxical reality: Acknowledging that time will continue to move forward (*Tomorrowland* and *Future World*) but we like to keep one eye on our (alleged) collective past (*Frontierland* and *Liberty Square*).   This adds to the "near-sighted/far-sighted" phenomenon as described previously by Joseph Ellis. Imagineer Marty Skylar said, "Walt Disney had one foot in the past, because he loved nostalgia, and one foot in the future, because he loved new technology" (Patches, 2015). That ability to take what is encoded to the point of familiarity and merge it with emerging technologies has always been the secret sauce to Disney theme parks. Imagineers are able to work their magic because our desire to be entertained surpasses our ability to engage in Pinarian "complicated conversation."   The Disney mastery of tapping into nostalgic idealism is, to echo Don Draper, "Delicate but potent."

Disney as Curriculum

Nostalgia, of course, extends beyond entertainment and media possibilities; it applies to the field of education as well. A considerable portion of my teaching is spent deconstructing the narratives that have been fed into my students from the early years of the schooling process. Rather than think of all of these stories as outright "lies" as James Loewen called them in 1995, I have learned to view them as "mythologies" that have been passed down to fulfill our human need for story creation and narrative structure. Michael Real's *Exploring Media Culture* (1996), wrote that "humans live and breathe in stories…story narratives fill our lives and our media culture" (p. 128). In other words, there is a sense of satisfaction received in the perceived completion of a narrative. Real further explains that part of this connection to the story stems from the fact that our identity is fluid. "Our story is not set in stone from childhood…we can

review, revise, and amend our story" (p. 128). The "narrative tools" that humans have developed

over time are ultimately what give our lives structure and the power to create meaning.

When discussing Disney in particular, Real theorizes how Disney has a longstanding

tradition of coding texts through its various media mediums. Since the Disney media

conglomerate touches almost every conceivable aspect of popular culture and consumerism, their

message is especially potent and worthy of academic analysis. Real added

> The Disney text takes countless forms but the message remains consistent…Their
>
> message is: Feel happy in seeing good triumph and evil be destroyed. This
>
> message is the classic utopian attraction. Happiness is possible by restructuring
>
> the world into an ideal form where good and evil are clearly distinguishable, the
>
> good is like us, and the evil is identified and eliminated (p. 120).

By stripping away any complexity or moral ambiguity, Disney is able to basically tell the same

morality tale over and over again to new generations. Youth and beauty are valued over age and

perceived ugliness, princes are rescued by valiant princes, evil is present but can be defeated; a

happy ending is possible, etc. By fostering, recreating, enforcing, and cultivating this tested

narrative, Disney is (usually) able to cast themselves on the "right" side of history since the

alternatives are not deemed as desirable (i.e. Who would want the evil witch to go unpunished?

Who could want Scar to get away with his treachery?) Our nostalgic, embedded need for a clean

ending narrative is satisfied through many Disney films and theme park attractions.

In *Vinyl Leaves*, anthropologist Stephen Fjellman (1992) took these ideas of storytelling

and combined them with thoughts on the nature of control (a topic addressed more in Chapter

Two). "A good way to make sure that people police themselves is to get them to believe

essentially the same stories about what the world is and why the way it is is good, true, and

beautiful. The world needs to be described, and it needs to be justified by arguments about nature, philosophical principle, history, or the gods" (p. 3). Disney, through its vast media empire and theme-parks are able to explain, if not outright define, the world around us. The interconnection to American idealism, commitment to free-market capitalism, and "good versus evil" storytelling is the not so hidden secret to Disney's success. EPCOT's entire *zeitgeist*, both for better and for worse, sought to provide a specific version of futurism based on these values and a willingness to create that narrative for us. In doing so, the Disney curriculum that has shaped our past via nostalgia is able to manipulate our ideas of what tomorrow *should* look like.

The Pivot

As promised, I have outlined the more critical aspects of the Disney texts that helped shape this project. I hope I have made clear that this dissertation does not seek to inherently disagree any of the existing literature that is critical of Disney in all of its media iterations. Quite the contrary, I agree with many of the points made by those who are concerned with Disney and its influence over pop culture, education, childhood, commerce, and the arts. Furthermore, as my literature review has demonstrated, I am acutely aware that the consensus on Disney's role of being a potential for good is antithetical (and perhaps heretical) in numerous academic fields and circles. I assumed going into this process that the vast majority of academia would be stacked against Disneyana. And I was not necessarily proven incorrect in that regard. There were plenty examples of what I expected to find from the works of cultural critics like Henry Giroux and Alexander Wilson.

Yes, I am admitting that I made assumptions in the defense of populism (i.e. Disney) over elitism (i.e. everything but Disney). Pop culture is generally not viewed as "high art" and

Disney, well, that's an easy mainstream, billion-dollar company with a target on their back which makes them easy to criticize. I cannot totally ignore these problems that do arise when talking about Uncle Walt and his far-reaching empire. But does that tell the whole story? How informative is a critical analysis? More importantly, how do these concerns affect this project? Rather than ignore these critiques, I will address them headlong in the upcoming paragraphs with full vigor and academic analysis.

Disney as an engine of consumerism is a now familiar narrative and one that still holds relevance. However, what of the merits of Disney culture? What about the times when the grand vision of Uncle inspired artists, scientists, inventors, and teachers? Has not the Disney experience been a boost for numerous artists and musicians to earn a living while expressing creativity? What of the stories of people like me that were inspired by what they encountered at EPCOT Center in those early days? Are their stories any less meaningful?

Thankfully I had Dr. Julie Garlen serve as an advisor on this project to help me bridge the critique with a more positive spin. I say thankfully because she has done considerable work on meshing curriculum studies and Disney together in numerous publications. In true curriculum studies fashion, Dr. Garlen reminded me in my prospectus defense that, "it [Disney studies] is not simple, it's very complicated and it's very complex. There aren't 'heroes and villians' because this is not a binary story" (J. Garlen, personal communication, December 6, 2018). This was refreshing to hear because this project is taking a stance on the redemptive possibility of EPCOT Center. When I discussed earlier about the trials of trying to balance historical milieu and modern attitudes, well, the same holds for my relationship to Disney. I can acknowledge the parts that are uplifting and condemn the aspects that are problematic; it is possible be a believer and critic.

To help unpack this pivot, Dr. Garlen pointed me to the works of Douglas Brode who has books, *From Walt to Woodstock: How Disney created the counterculture* (2004) and *Multi-culturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney's Entertainment* (2005) offered viewpoints that stand in contrast to what I originally expected to find. Case in point, Brode begins *Multi-culturalism and the Mouse* with "today, some critics—those who find a reason to attack any offering that bears the Disney logo---complain that these [the dolls in *It's a Small World*] are stereotypes, reductive instead of realistic. To a degree, they are correct. 'Rather than a caricature of individuals', Walt himself stated in defense of his approach, 'our work is a caricature of *life*.'" (p. 2).

Brode went on to write

> Disney—whether one means…the works of the man himself or of the company that today still displays his name—has been bandied about as the primary symbol of an American mid-cult sensibility that project the precise opposite of our modern view. To try and alter that perception…is to challenge a notion that for years has been set in stone to such a degree that many believe any argument ought not be raised (p. 6).

This really got me thinking about challenging perceived notions and prejudices that are associated with academia and Disney. Brode goes even further by calling out Henry Giroux for "the academic demonization of Disney" because of its "anti-populist quality!" All of this is to say that there are defenders that do challenge the paradigm because, honestly, there are countless ways in which to engage with the Disney texts.

How does all of this relate to this project? In truth, there was not written about EPCOT Center other than the original planned community was never built. I did find scant articles and

artifacts here and there about the pavilions of EPCOT Center but nothing comprehensive. Is it possible that Brode's point about the case against Disney being a settled matter had prevented extensive research into EPCOT Center? Did its opening in 1982 come at a "bad time" when scholarship was expected to be negative about all things Disney? The lack of existing literature may bear out Brode's thesis by proxy and that of my own that EPCOT Center was not given its due diligence (more on this in Chapters Two and Three).

There is more that I will expound upon from Brode but I want to keep the focus now on the connection between Disney and its positive impact on the field of education. In 1996, the Disney Company released Jeff Kurtti's *Since the World Began*: *Walt Disney World the first 25 Years.* Kurtti's book aims directly at any critic who thought Disney parks might be a passing fad. On a side-note, this book is even more interesting now that Walt Disney World is closing in on its 50th anniversary in a few years. The not quite two-hundred-page book serves as both a reminder of past corporate success as master developer of grand ideas as well as a snapshot of where the company occasionally fell short of its goals. The scope of the book is grand and self-serving (it is admittingly a pro-Disney book published by the Company) but its archival and "current" photographs help provide insight into how the company views itself and also how it wants to be viewed. The range of topics is pretty vast which shows the broad breadth of topics that are filtered through the Disney lens. More importantly, it demonstrates that Disney can be a force of good in shaping curriculum through its educational films division. Kurtti (1996) put it this way,

> Through Disney's introduction, via television and theme park, I learned about the
> American West, pirates, futurism, and technology, even the paranormal. Disney
> offered easy entrée to a variety of subjects, and although many pundits and

educators decry the 'Disneyfication' of history, science, and mythology, I would

have never made it through ninth-grade algebra without *Donald in*

Mathmagicland… (p. 10).

This particular quote captures the duality of the Disney as cultural and curricular creator. Just as

Reynolds did in his somewhat apologetic essay, Kurtti deems it necessary to point out that

Disney as curriculum can be problematic and that that fact must be pointed out. Nevertheless,

his general argument is clear: Disney can play an important and beneficial role in education.

EPCOT's Role

But what of EPCOT and its place in the larger body of scholarship? I have dedicated

large portions of my life, both informally and scholarly, to reading, studying, and absorbing all

things regarding education, Disney, and EPCOT. Through that study, I have discovered much

that has been written is about the influence that Disney has over curriculum, pleasure, and

fantasy creation. Regrettably, as previously stated, there is not much in the academic literature

about EPCOT specifically. It is usually lumped together into the greater Disney "world" and

rarely as a separate entity outside of. Rather than see this as a detriment, I accept the challenge

of threading EPCOT to the already rich and existing scholarship.

In the introduction to *Understanding Curriculum* (1995), William Pinar, William

Reynolds, Patrick Slattery, and Peter Taubman, explain that curriculum does not operate in a

vacuum; there are always external forces at play. "We are acknowledging that a field of study is

a field of study, a tradition of language or discourse. A field is rooted in the world…in that world

it chooses to examine. It is influenced by the entire world: history, politics, life and death" (p. 7).

EPCOT's mission statement has been set by internal and external forces over the course of time.

Like any "living" curriculum, its textualization has been realized, forgotten, revamped, and so

on. The original concept of the futuristic city was forged by Walt's life experiences, his beliefs, his successes, and his failures. When he died, WED industries picked up the mantel and created the second iteration of the concept: EPCOT Center. Its goal was to serve as a sort of interactive curriculum deliverer for its guests via its various educational pavilions. It was shaped by the historical and political forces of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Regrettably, those in charge decided it was best to quit on this model in the mid-1990s rather than continue to update the curriculum.

This project is not about delving into nostalgic pasts which can be remembered but never replicated because the observer-participant is lost to time. Moments are just that; they are meant to be fleeting. However, it is an exploration into the hopeful futurism that was once the basis of EPCOT. It is (past) time for EPCOT to be held accountable for abandoning its mission statement. It needs to be held accountable because it has provoked so much possibility and inspired many but has been allowed to just *be* in its current reduced form. EPCOT Center asked the questions about tomorrow but then gave up and retreated to become another vehicle to mostly sell merchandise and promote current intellectual properties (IPs) such as *Marvel* and *Pixar*. While the experimental city was never attempted, let alone realized, EPCOT Center at least displayed an effort into creating a hopeful curriculum. One can brush off this sort of thinking by stating "utopia is a fantasy" but dismissal of an idea does not absolve it the question of "what if." This is why this project is interested in separating the ideals and democratic potential away from its current model and bring it into the public sphere. Sustainable future building is bigger than the Walt Disney, the Disney Corporation, and even EPCOT; it belongs to all of us.

Futurism: Part of Our Nature?

But why do we care about the future? Humans are sentient beings with consciousness but so are some other animals such as apes and crows. The degree to how much future planning other species are capable of is beyond the scope of this project but the question remains: Is there something special about our species that makes us able to contemplate "possible futures?" Could it be that futurism is tied to the long-debated "human-nature?" If such thing as a universal human nature exists at all is, admittedly, an old discussion but still one worth considering. A useful example of this debate was held when Noam Chomsky (a modernist) and Michel Foucault (a post-structuralist) engaged in for Dutch television on the proposed existence of an innate core that could be identified as a human nature. The debate took place in November of 1971 as part of a series of debates (as an aside, this was one month after Walt Disney World's Magic Kingdom opened to the public). Unfortunately for this project, the two intellectual giants do not engage in a lengthy diatribe about the opening of the Magic Kingdom nor do they specifically focus their discussion on Walt Disney's proposed Experimental Community. However, the timing of this debate, when considering Disney as a backdrop, is useful because it provides some grounding to the entire feasibility of the Disney Florida Project. Ultimately, the debate allows for some conversation and dialectic pushback on Disney virtues and the telos of EPCOT.

The debate begins with the customary opening statements in which Chomsky argues that there is an innate human nature which is provable through language acquisition. He says, "that this instinctive knowledge…this schematism [sic] that makes it possible to derive complex and intricate knowledge …is one fundamental constituent of human nature" (1971/2006, p. 4). It is through this natural hardwiring, or "collection" as Chomsky says, that humans ultimately are able to interact with other beings. This process demonstrates that the brain is, empirically,

"creative" because being able to express "language." It is through the process of language that any claim of human nature can be constituted.

"It is true that I mistrust the notion of human nature a little," Foucault begins his rebuttal to Chomsky's assertion. He elaborates by exploring the ways in which scientific notions are organized as identifiers of specific features which explained lives of natural beings. He then delivers one of the most important lines which goes to the core of the debate. "I would say that the notion of life is not a *scientific concept*; it has been an *epistemological indicator* of which the classifying, delimiting, …had an effect on scientific discussions, and not on what they were talking about" (p. 6). Human nature does not innately exist outside of these structures.

When probed as to why he likes politics more than philosophy, Foucault humorously and characteristically deflects, "why shouldn't I be interested?" (p. 36). The Dutch moderator turns the conversation over to Chomsky and asks him about his thoughts on anarcho-syndicalism. Chomsky states that one of the foundations of human nature is "the need for creative work, for creative inquiry, and for free creation without the arbitrary limiting effect of coercive institutions..." (p. 37). With that point established, Chomsky states that the only reason institutions are allowed to stifle this fundamental desire is that the oppressors (i.e. political leaders, the State, etc.) prey upon human desires for security and subsistence. These "autocratic restriction" tactics cannot be "justified intrinsically."

For a brief moment, Chomsky almost sounds like he is reading from the linear notes to a script about EPCOT. He says, "…in the technologically advanced societies of the West, we are now certainly in a position where meaningless drudgery can very largely be eliminated", however, he goes on to say that "elimination of economic institutions" and "private capital" has to be overthrown. "There is no longer any social necessity for human beings to be treated as

mechanical elements in the productive process…we must overcome it by a society of freedom and free association..." (p. 39). Clearly, the tenants of anarcho-syndicalism are in stark contrast to Walt's plans for how EPCOT would operate. Such ideas were not in the works for Walt's EPCOT but it is likely that he would have been interested in some of the ideas regarding "meaningless drudgery" being "eliminated." This idea was one of the cornerstones of the 1964 World's Fair attraction, *The Carousel of Progress*, which Walt took a personal interest in. What is less certain is if Walt would favor any talk of overthrowing private capital. His Cold Warrior roots and dedication to capitalism would have been offended.

Towards the end of the debate, the conversation turns to the final, and most relevant question of does human nature point to a positive future? The discussion thus far has been heavily grounded in the politics of the time (Vietnam, Soviet Union) but this look forward provides some insight into the driving force of this project. Chomsky states that there are "fundamental human qualities" that "embody a kind of groping towards the true humanly valuable concepts of justice and decency." He then pivots towards tomorrow and says

> And I think that any future society, which will of course never be the perfect society, we'll have such concepts again, which we hope, will come closer to incorporating a defense of fundamental human needs, including such needs as those for solidarity and sympathy (p. 57).

Although I doubt Mr. Chomsky would have too much favorable to say about the arch-capitalist, Walt Disney, I do believe that Chomsky's appeal to a fundamental core of hopefulness would align with the general spirit of Walt's proposed utopia.

Cynics of utopian thinking would be more inclined to Foucault's final assessment in which he describes humanity as being struck with "disease" and "madness" which has been

evidenced by our inhumanity (wars, treatment of the mentally ill, has been evidenced by our inhumanity (wars, treatment of the mentally ill, etc.). Foucault says that this "disease for which we haven't found the name; and this mental disease has a very curious symptom, which is the symptom itself brought the disease into being" (p. 59). Clearly, he is less than convinced that there is an innate human nature that can point to a hopeful future.

Much has changed since the Chomsky-Foucault debate and Walt Disney's death but one that has not is this debate whether or not humans can create a hopeful, better future. One of the reasons is utopia has taken downturn in the public consciousness. Sam Gennawey (2014) quoted historian Joseph Corn and the changing attitudes the public has toward utopian projects such as EPCOT by pointing out, "Technological utopianism, a creed once widely held…has been dealt a number of serious blows. It has become at once compelling as a topic of historical inquiry and problematic as a guide to public policy" (quoted in Gennawey, p. 11). Perhaps EPCOT never stood a realistic chance. No doubt that Pinarian "complicated conversation" requires that we be skeptical of anyone or any entity that claims to have all of the solutions. However, that does not presuppose that we should imagining, and working toward, a better tomorrow.

Hopeful Futurism

In order to bring the Chomsky-Foucault debate back to Walt and EPCOT, it seems to me that he would more likely be found in the Foucault camp because Disney theme parks are designed more as signifiers of concepts that are well-ingrained in most industrialized/Western societies. However, within those signifiers are elements of hopeful futurism which, although synthetic, manufactured, and designed to generate billions in profit, which can speak to park guests. "*Tomorrowland.*" "*Future World*."   "Experimental Prototype Community of

Tomorrow." All of these labels point to a possible future; a future that is embedded with a sense of hopefulness. "Whereas *Tomorrowland* endeavors to construct the future…*Future World* exists to contemplate it—practically and with optimism" (Wallace 2017, p. 34). We have always had the potential to be Creators and Destroyers but the 20th and 21st century with its increased environmental degradation, creation and threat of nuclear annihilation, and wealth disparities have made the pessimistic outlook easier to latch onto as the threats become more real. In the end, which one will win out: hope or despair? Is balance even possible? Is it foolish to even consider hopefulness?

Rebecca Solnit's *Hope in the Dark* (2004/2016) quoted Czechoslovakian playwright Vaclav Havel's thoughts on hope. He wrote,

> The kind of hope I often think about …above all is a state of mind, not a state of the world. Either we have hope within us or we don't it is a dimension of the soul; it's not essentially dependent on some particular observation of the world or estimate of the situation. Hope is not prognostication. It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart; it transcends the world that is immediately experienced, and is anchored somewhere beyond its horizons (p. 11).

Discussions of hope in a world where the situation seems bleak or unwinnable are rarely the focus of American public-school curriculum. Futurism and "possible futures" probably even less so. These are the kinds of discussions completely absent in the modern-day classroom that curriculum theorists should be considering. Ultimately, it all has to come back to the field of curriculum studies since that is the main shaper of my ideological thought for the past several years. It is my hope that this project will demonstrate why I think the time is right for such a place to exist. The dream of EPCOT matters because the future is *always* at stake.

Sustainable Utopianism

In addition, any attempt of inquiry into the nature of possible futures must acknowledge that part of the mental exercise involves using a bit of utopian imagination. Yar (2014) explained that

> 'Utopian thinking' thus maintains a compelling hold upon the ways in which we individually and collectively conceive life and its possibilities, and the ways we imagine the past, present, and future. Utopian thinking is always a projective endeavor in which the immediacy of the present ('what is') blurs and marries with 'what once was' and 'what might yet be' (p. 3).

At its core, EPCOT was/is an embodiment of "projective endeavor" thinking realized in a theme park designed to "entertain, inform, and inspire." Furthermore, the heavy emphasis on the collective past of human progress was a cornerstone of EPCOT Center through such attractions as *Spaceship Earth* (human communication), the *World of Motion* (transportation), and *Horizons* (futurism). Though not without its flaws, EPCOT Center of the early 1980s at least *aspired* to let guests feel a certain hopefulness about the future. The original utopian pull of EPCOT is still there but it mostly resides within those who want more from EPCOT than it wants from itself. A revitalized EPCOT, perhaps not as Walt Disney envisioned and certainly not as a theme park, may transcend all of our expectations of what is possible. However, it is still important to fight for the future, as unknowable as it is. Yar (2014) wrote "the utopian is above all a *sensibility*, a way in which human culture understands itself and interprets and evaluates lived experience in all its ambiguities and tensions.   The utopian landscapes that emerge from such exertions can be both 'positive' and 'negative' in character" (p. 3). And therein lies the key to understanding. Educators and curriculum theorists need to embrace this 'utopian sensibility'. We must choose

to believe that (some) problems are solvable. We must choose hope over apathy. A reinvigorated EPCOT that is inclusive, democratic, and built on future-focused principles where all people can come and share ideas on how to make our world more sustainable can be a path forward. It will take courage to dream; it always has. "The real is not impossible; on the contrary, within the real everything is possible, everything becomes possible" (Deleuze and Guattari 1977/2009, p. 27). To put it in EPCOT-speak, the now extinct (and much missed) attraction *Horizons*, had the motto, "If we dream it, then we can do it."

CHAPTER TWO

FROM ANIMATOR TO FUTURIST

Welcome to the World of Yesterday!

To fully explain the relationship between curriculum studies, utopian thinking, and EPCOT, it is necessary to provide a thorough account of both the origin of Walt Disney's experimental city and the historical context from which it was conceived. Chapter Two seeks to address one of the foundational questions of this project: "What were Walt Disney's original plans for EPCOT?" The story is fascinating to trace because it truly encompasses the entire life experience and evolution of Walt Disney, as a human being, and his relationship to his entertainment empire. For any serious student of EPCOT, the 1966/1967 promotional film known as the *EPCOT/Florida Project*, serves as a crucial nexus point of what was supposed to be and what instead became. The twenty-five minute film, authored by Imagineer Marty Sklar (2013, p. 8), serves as the foundational text of the entire essence of what Walt Disney's Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT) was supposed to be. Through concept art, models, blueprints, and animations, the film takes the viewer on a step-by-step sales pitch of grand proportions. Sklar wrote of the script, "He [Walt] asked me to write two endings. One was aimed directly at audiences in the state of Florida [state legislature]…the second ending for the film was aimed at potential corporate sponsors (p. 9). Financial investors were needed to fund Walt Disney's massive construction plans for central Florida. The entire "Florida Project" was to be the animator turned theme park creator's magnum opus: a planned, futuristic community.

With considerable fan-fare, the *EPCOT/Florida Project* film begins with an upbeat score and the giant letters "Disneyland U.S.A." emblazoned on the screen while Sleeping Beauty's Castle serves as the familiar backdrop of Disney television specials of the era. The narrator, not wanting to waste any time, immediately begins by espousing the virtues and wonders of Walt's first theme park in Anaheim. "This [Disneyland] was all a Disney dream a dozen years ago. A far-out project that was totally untrue" we are told from the film's outset. Footage of Disneyland's rides and attractions serve as the background action while the narration gives over-dubbed commentary into how Walt Disney revolutionized the entertainment industry by creating "an amusement park" that "offered more to the entire family." Viewers are told that Disneyland is "no mere amusement park" and that the "touchstone of Disneyland's success has been its…wholehearted dedication to the happiness of the people who visit…" (director unknown, 1967).

On first inspection, the film seems to serve as nothing more than a commercial for Uncle Walt's California theme park with no mention of plans for Florida at all. However, the underlying message is unmistakable: Disneyland, and the Walt Disney Company by extension, is at the forefront of urban planning and design. The alleged squalor of previous amusement parks has now replaced by post-WWII era innovations and Disney know-how. A considerable early portion of the film is dedicated to the numerous transportation improvements found in Disneyland such as the WEDway People Mover and the Monorail system ("the first monorail system in the Western Hemisphere" we are told). America is on the move and, with Uncle Walt's guidance, will have a smooth ride getting there.

It is around the six-minute mark where the true purpose of the *EPCOT/Florida Project* film reveals itself. Images shift from Disneyland in California to a giant, illustrated map of

Florida. Echoing the beginning of the short, the screen is then filled with the words, "Disney World" over the map of Florida. Walt Disney himself, sitting on a desk, appears after a quick dissolve. He is equipped with a giant, wooden pointer and there are enormous blueprints behind him covering the vast wall. The narrator then hands the program over to Walt and the remaining twenty minutes give a detailed overview of the company's big development plans for Florida. Walt begins by informing the viewing audience that the entire project encompasses "twenty-seven thousand, four-hundred acres" or "forty-three square miles." Such a large area, Walt informs, would provide his Florida park something lacking in California: "the blessing of size" that will "hold all the ideas and plans we can possibly imagine." The total project was to have: a theme-park modeled after Disneyland, an airport, an industrial park, and the coup de grace, a futuristic city. Walt planned to use undeveloped Florida swamp land to build his homage to American entrepreneurship, free-market ideals, and urban planning from the ground up. It was his hope that his community would be a new city upon a hill; an "exciting, living blueprint of the future" (unknown director, 1967).

There are numerous aspects of the film that will be unpacked throughout this chapter with exhaustive analysis provided but, for now, one key point must be pointed out. When the EPCOT film was finally shown in February of 1967, *Walt Disney had been dead for nearly two months*. The fact that the film was released *at all* serves as proof that enough groundwork and investment had been done in the pre-production phase to warrant the confidence of the Walt loyalists that such a project was still possible. It is very difficult to conceive of any modern-day company airing the footage of their recently deceased founder, especially one that had such a high public profile. Even less conceivable would be that the deceased leader *would be announcing a project as massive and ambitious as a futuristic city*. Such was the bizarre nature of the Disney

Company in the weeks (and years) after Walt's death. His shadow loomed large over the company and his near deification by the company that still bears his name was just around the corner.

The Animator

A revisiting of the *E.P.C.O.T.*/*Florida Project* film will occur throughout this chapter because of its foundational nature; it provides the clearest artifact of what Disney planned for central Florida. First, however, this project must map out how Walt Disney arrived at the idea of an experimental community. The purpose of this is two-fold: first, it allows for the historiography component of this project that was outlined in Chapter One to be fully realized. Secondly, it will demonstrate why EPCOT has to be transformed into a creative space for innovators and educators. In order to make the transition from the historical reality to the imaginary, I must give the history of EPCOT its due.

How exactly did the animator turned fantasy theme park creator pivot to such an undertaking? One source that provides insight into Walt's evolution is Steven Watts' *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life* (1997) which goes beyond a mere biography by providing background into the elements that created both the Disney aesthetic and his affinity for creating popular entertainment. Watts outlined Walt's foray into the world of animation that began in May of 1922 when he and his fellow collaborators began mixing live action and animation in the *Alice's Wonderland* series in which a young actress would interact with a cartoon world. These first animations were made under the banner of Laugh-O-Gram Films (Watts p. 26). Unfortunately, Laugh-O-Gram was not financially profitable and the studio folded the next year. Disney decided to leave Missouri and headed to Hollywood. It was not

long after his arrival that he received an offer to continue the *Alice* series in cooperation with a

New York distributor. He convinced Ub Iwerks, a key animator who had worked with him in

the Laugh-O-Gram days to join him. The newly formed Disney Brothers Cartoon Studios (later

renamed Walt Disney Studio) continued creating on Alice comedies which made enough money

to allow the Walt and his staff to move into a larger studio on Hyperion Avenue (p. 29). It was

in 1927 that Walt Disney tapped Iwerks to create a new character since the Alice series had run

out of steam. Iwerks came up with the character Oswald the Lucky Rabbit which was a hit for

the studio and popular with movie-going audiences. However, events in 1928 would have a

profound impact on Walt's career and, more importantly has a partial connection to the origins of

the EPCOT project. A studio boss named Charles Mintz had taken over responsibility of

animation distribution for the Oswald series (which was done by Universal Studios). Steven

Watts (1997) explained

> Early in the year, as the current Oswald contract expired, he [Walt] traveled to
>
> New York to negotiate a new one with Mintz. Full of confidence, he asked for a
>
> modest increase in the price per cartoon…Disney was stunned and confused when
>
> Mintz offered him less!...Mintz told him to take it or leave it, because [Mintz] had
>
> lured away most of Disney's staff, with the exception of Ub Iwerks.
>
> Moreover…the character of Oswald was the legal property Universal Pictures, not
>
> Walt Disney (p. 29).

Walt refused the deal opting instead for something new. More importantly, this event taught him

several key lessons. Neal Gabler theorized in *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American*

Imagination (2006) that Walt's takeaways from this experience was transformative. "He [Walt]

would…talk often of this episode as a betrayal…he would say that you had to be careful whom

you trusted; that he had learned that control what you had or it would be taken from you…" (p. 109). Mintz's actions and the "betrayal" by the animators would have sweeping implications that would eventually push Walt to seek more control over his creations.

Furthering this desire would also be driven by the increasing demands of his studio and the laborious amounts of time spent honing the craft of cartooning. In the course of development there would have been: the creation of a script, the recording of dialogue by the voice actors, creating storyboards, inking and painting the animation cells by hand, and finally the filming. Obviously, that was an extremely condensed version of the process of what is highly labor-intensive process. Every step of the animation process has to be carefully choreographed from inception to completion which required a great deal of concentration and will of those involved to get the desired tone, expression, feeling, etc. out of still drawings. This can ultimately give all who participate an intense ego boost when they look upon their completed creation. Walt's professional career working in animated shorts and later feature-length animation gave him the final say over an "actor's" performance. Film production allowed the chance to breathe life, create character, and make people smile, all from lines and shapes. This is bound to reinforce some narcissistic tendencies in even the best person. Did the animation process compel Disney to believe that he could stretch the limits of the possible? It is highly likely. In the end, Walt's work in animation put him in the position of being primed for the dream of creating a futuristic planned community.

Technology

Following the disappointment over losing Oswald, Disney and Iwerks went to work co-creating one of the most famous pop-culture icons of all time: Mickey Mouse. His creation in

1928 would also lead to a major breakthrough as Mickey became the star of the first cartoon

produced with sound, *Steamboat Willie* (Gabler 2006, p.123). The resounding success of the

Mickey shorts allowed for another name change, this time to Walt Disney Productions in 1929

and the animation studio was finally able to undertake more ambitious projects. Most notably

among these were the Silly Symphonies series beginning with *The Skeleton Dance* in 1929. Silly

Symphonies were different because they would not have continuing characters but would

"permit his [Walt's] animators to experiment with new story material and new techniques"

(Thomas 1994, p. 99). This era in Disney animation history led to a massive explosion in the

relationship between Walt and technology. J.P. Telotte (2008) explained

> The studio…helped innovate sound into animation…it blazed a trail into three-
> strip color filming through its 1932 agreement with the Technicolor Corporation,
> which granted it a two-year monopoly on the use of the new technology. Disney
> added a greater illusion of depth to animation with its award-winning
> development and application of the multiplane camera…it created a stereophonic
> and surround-sound system that anticipated industry developments in this area by
> more than two decades (p. 15).

All of these innovations grew the creative output of the studio. Specifically, the multi-plane

camera changed the way audiences connected to the visual image. "Walt had long recognized

the inevitability of the cartoon feature" wrote Bob Thomas in *Walt Disney: An American*

Original (1994) but the concern of the perceived flatness of two-dimensions stymied the ability

to hold an audience's attention. "The answer was the multiplane camera. It developed into a

towering device with a camera pointed downward through four or five layers of paintings. The

various levels depicted planes of vision" (pp. 129-134) which created the illusion of three-

dimensions. Technological advances and innovation were becoming increasingly important to the Disney methodology. This relationship between technology and film would later show up in more ambitious projects such as the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow.

Soon enough, animated shorts gave way to feature length films beginning with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). The first wave of creative, if not always financial, success continued in the pre/early days of WWII years with *Pinocchio* (1940), *Fantasia* (1940), *Dumbo* (1941) and *Bambi* (1942). During those years, the animation process was lengthy and not all of the films gave a strong return on their investments. To make matters worse, World War II (WWII) had shut off the lucrative European markets and the Disney animation department was forced to reduce its productivity to propaganda shorts and "package" films which were mostly skits loosely tied together to create a feature length movie. These are usually looked upon as some of the lost years of Disney Animation which the studio, and Walt himself, never really was able to recapture the magic of the *Snow White* years.

While this may have been a detriment to the field of animation, it did give Walt a chance to develop other interests which would all lead to the dream of EPCOT. Therefore, I will move away from animation for the time being and focus on the emergence of Walt the theme park creator. Specifically, I will focus on questions: What made Walt switch from animation to theme parks? What animation techniques would show up later in Disney theme parks? How could Walt guarantee the level of performance reproduction (built into the medium of film) into a park attraction? The answer to the last question, in part, would lead to another major step in Disney's evolution toward EPCOT: automation.

Automatons

      In February of 1951, actor/dancer Buddy Ebsen was called into the Disney studios to perform a brief tap dance sequence for the rolling cameras. The purpose of the screen test was to study Ebsen's movements with the hopes that the experiment would yield some insight into creating a three-dimensional automaton character (Gabler, 2006 p. 482). Ultimately, the results of the screen test would prove to be a pivotal moment in Walt's continuing evolution from film animator to immersive experience creator and futurist. Walt's further moving from two-dimensions into the third had partially been sparked by a recent acquisition of a wind-up toy on one of his European vacations. The mechanization of the toy caught his imagination and it was not long after that he called for the screen test. The wind-up toy likely appealed to his propensity for making the inanimate take on life-like qualities through motion.

      Personification had been a hallmark of his *Silly Symphonies* cartoons in the 1930s. Neal Gabler (2006) explained, "In animation, one took the inanimate and brought it to life…in animation one could exercise the power of a god" (p. xvi). Animation, film, and now automation gave this "god power" to whomever could wield it. Such phenomena can be seen in the most iconic of Disney co-creations: Mickey Mouse. Michael Sorkin (1992) pointed out that Mickey is "hairless, sexless, and harmless" that ultimately represents not only the "product of the animator's assembly line" but also "confirms a key switch: at Disney, nature is appearance, machine is reality" (p. 223). His increasing interest in three-dimensional automation demonstrates a fusion of Walt's post-WWII selves. Specifically, the skills he had developed running a film studio that had gone from making animated shorts, to feature length animated films, to live-action and documentary, follows the trajectory of one interested in manipulating life-like automata. J.P Telotte (2008) explained in *The Mouse Machine: Disney and Technology*,

"…Disney has, in order to survive in an increasingly competitive environment, repeatedly had to innovate or adopt new technologies or move into new media forms…" (p. 5). By the early 1950s, Walt was no stranger to the realm of mechanization as a way to tell stories. As studio boss and, especially in the early days, a hands-on manager, he was now reaching the next level. This change had evolved out of years of the animation staff cranking out drawings out to produce drawings to be filmed. In creating the three-dimensional automaton, Walt's desire to be the ultimate Creator/Manager makes the desire for a planned city further come into focus.

The Fourth Discontinuity

For more insight into the complex nature of man, machine, and automation, I researched Bruce Mazlish's *The Fourth Discontinuity* (1993). Mazlish's thesis challenges the presumed notion that human evolution was a process where biological evolution was a given and all advances with the technological was/were separate event(s). Building upon a speech by Sigmund Freud, Mazlish's "fourth discontinuity" is based on the concept that that humans and machines actually evolved and shaped each other. The usual conventional wisdom is that sapiens evolved and tools/technology became more sophisticated as the humans "progressed." Mazlish's "fourth discontinuity" argues that "the 'evolution' of machines…is closer to domestic than natural selection" (Mazlish, 1993 p. 8) and that instead of being a trajectory ("continuity"), the role machines played in shaping us is (purposefully?) overlooked since it would not fit into the narrative humans have laid out for themselves. "Humans may or may not be machines, but that humans have been creating an increasingly mechanical civilization…and perhaps even aspiring to be machines, is part of the reality" (p. 10). Whether he was aware of it or not, Walt Disney played his part in hastening and, perhaps, shaping the path of the "fourth discontinuity."

The automata he would be involved in creating, Audio-Animatronics, would not only advance the field of inanimate robots but, more clearly, provide them with a wide-reaching "audience" at Disneyland and later the 1964 World's Fair.

In addition, Walt Disney's need to create an automaton that could be programmed and manipulated further fostered Walt's increasing autocratic tendencies as the head of a major film production company. Neal Gabler's *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination* (2006) reinforces this idea of Disney's personal affinity for wielding control became the driving force behind his near obsession with creating first Disneyland in 1955 and later his plans for EPCOT.

> It had always been about control, about crafting a better reality than the one outside the studio, and about demonstrating that one had the capacity to do so. That was what Walt Disney provided to America—not escape…but control and the vicarious empowerment that accompanied it (p. 479).

By most accounts, Walt was a tough studio boss whose outbursts of anger are well-documented if an artist under his employ was not doing exactly what Walt expected. He was not known to be especially complimentary to even his most steadfast of employees. "The first scheme you had, Walt would completely tear apart," said WED employee Marvin Davis (quoted in Gabler, 2006, p. 496). "Walt was not a boss who wanted a 'yes' at all costs," remembered Marty Sklar (2013), "he just didn't like no" (p. 35). To put it plainly, Walt increasingly saw himself as the idea-man and it was up to everyone else to give him what he wanted. How much of this was tied to the earlier "betrayal" of his animation staff to Mintz and the loss of Oswald the Lucky Rabbit? It is difficult to say but it is highly probable when remembering how powerless Walt felt after that event.

When Disneyland opened in July of 1955, Walt took another step closer to EPCOT in that he now had an actual three-dimensional space in which to wield tremendous power and tell the stories the way he wanted to (Watts 1997, p. 438). Disneyland also provided a tremendous boost to what synthetic realities were possible though simulacra and automation. Furthermore, Disneyland provides the ultimate window into how much his desire to replicate reality extended. Steven Watts (1997) draws upon the work of Disney Imagineer John Hench, himself a major creative force behind numerous Disney attractions, to point out, "nourishment of the Disney aesthetic, Hench believed, ultimately came from a much deeper source. Beneath the fantasy and the sentimentality, and supporting the environmental controls and the purified expressions of Disneyland, surged a profound, primordial impulse to regenerate life" (Watts p. 438). The life-like Audio-Animatronics housed in Disneyland attractions served a dual purpose for Walt: first, the need for replication and the reproducible performance that could be "perfected" through the automation process. If something needed to run multiple times it day, it could do that. If a robotic performance were not up to standard, it could be re-programmed until it was right. Secondly, the Audio-Animatronics fueled his desire to replicate and yield the power of the Creator. It was not long after that Walt's fantasy world began merging with the (sur)real.

Now is the Time, Now is the Best Time

All creative works are informed by their time and place; Disneyland's was America in the post-WWII years. The end of WWII brought significant changes in both the United States and the Walt Disney Studios. Eventually, these changes would intersect in the realms of film, theme parks, city-planning, and futurism. After WWII ended, the U.S. would see: the baby boom, a rise in worker's wages, a revolution of mass communication in the form of television, a

national highway system, increased bureaucratization, etc. In the words of sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset, it seemed as though "the fundamental problems of the industrial revolution have been solved" (quoted in Gabler, 2006 p. 480) and this transition would have a direct connection to EPCOT. Case in point, one of the most significant was the massive migration from America's cities and urban centers to the suburbs. In *Thoughts on Building Strong Towns* (2012), Charles Marohn Jr. wrote that "following World War II, the United States embarked on a great social and financial experiment that we know as suburbanization. It created tremendous growth, opportunity and prosperity for a generation of Americans that had just lived through economic depression and war" (p. 1). The impact of each of these changes had on shaping both America and the Walt Disney Company cannot be overstated. John Findlay (1992) explained

> It [Disneyland] succeeded not so much because it allowed people to escape from the present as because it capitalized so brilliantly on postwar tastes and trends. It enshrined the Cold War…competition with the Soviets in productivity, in space, in ways of life. It celebrated corporations and in fact made them integral partners in the park...And the park embodied the optimism and the suburbanization that accompanied the emergence of postwar affluence in America (pp. 55-56).

Ultimately, the combination of these historic shifts would allow Walt the tools, technology, and ability to consider building a futuristic, planned community. But for now, it is important to examine the growing relationship between government and private enterprise.

Specifically, the post-war shaped California, which became the location of the Disney Studios after Walt left Missouri in the early 1920s. In *Magic Lands* (1992), John Findlay wrote that "no state profited more from World War II than did California, which had received federal funding of $35 billion by 1945" and that "NASA and the Department of Defense drove the

development of the electronics industry" during the 1950s (p. 19). Although none of these government contracts specifically added to land to the Disney Company, California, which had long been a mecca for those involved or wishing to be involved with entertainment, was going to have vital connections that went beyond Hollywood. The entire state was feeling the economic and technological changes as part of the post-WWII economic and developmental boom. Furthermore, Findlay added "twentieth-century Americans have tended to move from rural to urban locations, from zones of economic stagnation to zones of expanding opportunity, and between large metropolitan areas" (p. 23). Continuing on this theme, Michael Sorkin (1992) wrote "The organization and scale of Disney World and the Disneylands is precisely that of a garden city. Located on the urban perimeter, they are, as phenomena, comparable to the office parks at other intersections in the highway system" (p. 215). Connecting the highway system to Disneyland is just one clear example of how the relationship between commerce, government, and entertainment came together in post-WWII California.

All of these factors would shape the Disney Company and Walt himself as the effects of the Eisenhower years radiated through the state. As mostly white Americans moved to the suburbs, urban sprawl increased. Family sizes began to grow as Americans had more children. In addition, the increasing dependence on the automobile would shape how Americans viewed the role of physical space, building location, and accessibility. "The suburbs…were predicated on the preeminence of the family, it autonomy expressed by freestanding structures on clearly delineated plots" (Sorkin 1992, p. 219). Would Disneyland in Anaheim have been constructed without these social and economic changes occurring? It's possible. However, it is more certain that the Disneyland that *did* come into being would not have been possible without the development of the combination of technological growth and government bureaucracy. In

regards to this project, the key element is that this formula proved successful enough to even consider the highly ambitious Florida Project just a few years later.

One possible explanation for its success is that 1950s Disneyland perfectly captured the essence of the historical moment (baby boom, suburbanization, affluence) while reinforcing what white Americans saw their place in the world to be. Much of the identity that came to define America in the latter twentieth century was built on the "Othering" those who were different (communist, black, urban, queer). All of this was done while also upholding the desires (both innate and programmed) of the emerging affluent class that wanted to engage in conspicuous consumption. Disneyland expanded the possibilities, both positively and negatively, of what all of those narratives could be. "In numerous ways Disney struck what may be the very fundament of entertainment: the promise of a perfect world that conforms to our wishes" (Gabler, 2006 p. xv). Andrew Ross (1999), who spent a year living in the Disney created town of Celebration, Florida wrote,

> In the early 1950s, Walt Disney's disgust for the postwar urban sprawl of Los Angeles (and his distaste for the lack of hygiene in other popular entertainment facilities) fueled his idea to build a theme park in Anaheim. Disneyland sprang up as a quarantine zone, artificially purged of urban ills, design tragedies, and traffic atrocities that plagued its California area surroundings (p. 4).

This idea of a "quarantine zone" is what makes Disney a uniquely American phenomenon in that it is hopelessly optimistic in its reach. Furthermore, Walt's work in two-dimensional animation had already primed the American mind for an experience like Disneyland for nearly three decades by the time the park opened. By then, the expectation of consumer-audiences and theme-park guests was for the Disney Company to deliver of a certain brand of "family"

entertainment that utilized fantasy, personification, and nostalgia as successful narrative devices. Disneyland delivered on all fronts.

During the same period when California and America at large were changing in the post war years, the Disney studios found themselves entering both familiar yet unchartered territory. The end of the war meant the end of the so called "package" films and a return to full-length feature films. It was decided that *Cinderella* (1950) would herald the return of Disney feature-length animation projects. While the film was fairly profitable and did much to restore the prestige of the studio, the reality is that Walt Disney's taste for traditional animation had worn out. The animation process took too long and the financial return on investment was inconsistent. In order to shift focus, the Disney Studies began their foray into live-action first with documentary films beginning with *Seal Island* (1948) and later into theatrical films beginning with *Treasure Island* (1950). The shift from solely animation to live-action gave the studio much-needed cash flow but also allowed Disney to bring his narrative style (i.e. personification) into different mediums.

Walt and his employees may have been headed in new artistic directions but they brought all that they had previously learned with them. The connection to animation as a means of storytelling has always been part of the Disney theme park DNA. When it came time to construct Disneyland, all of the previous techniques and technologies were put to use. Rather than viewing Disneyland as an end, it should really be seen as a continuation. "Disneyland did not represent the demise of the company's filmmaking; rather, in Disneyland the company applied filmmaking skills, ideas, and methods to a three-dimensional medium" (Findlay 1992, p. 56). This would also later be applicable when Walt turned his attention to city-planning. Legendary Imagineer John Hench once said "Walt saw building a city very much like a movie.

You start with scene one, which relates to scene two and scene three" (Hench quoted in

Gennawey 2014, p. 155). This approach summarizes the perceived simplicity of the entire

Disney theme-park experience: guests walk in a simulation. This is important to remember

because the Florida Project would require an acceptance of the reality proposed by Disney as a

plausible alternative to the so called "hectic-squalor' of American cities. EPCOT, and all it

symbolized, was to be the ultimate simulation; Disneyland provided the necessary warm-up.

Disneyland U.S.A.

"Walt Disney did not invent the theme park. He did not even invent the name…Walt

Disney invented the *American* theme park, not just in geographical location, but American in its

egalitarian spirit" (King and O'Boyle 2011, p. 5). Disneyland's origin can be traced back to the

early days of the Walt Disney Studios. Overly enthusiastic fans would come by to see how the

animation process worked. Visitors who were clamoring to see where the movie magic was

made but they were usually disappointed by what they saw because Mickey Mouse was, in fact,

not a living creature! Nevertheless, the intense public interest was enough to at least provide a

kernel of an idea for something grander. In addition, Walt was also inspired by unauthorized

"tours" of the Universal Studios backlot when he first moved to California. These extra-

curricular explorations provided an education in creating a physical, three-dimensional space of

fantasy and hyper-reality. These two events were instrumental in fostering the need to create

some sort of fanciful place for the ever-growing number of fans visiting the studios. "It is

impossible to say exactly when, but Walt Disney had decided to build an amusement park"

(Gabler 2006, p. 483). Plans were made up for a park called Disneylandia where guests could

view miniature scenes from Disney movies such as *Pinocchio* and be surrounded by model

trainsets (one of Walt and animator Ward Kimball's passions). Those initial plans eventually gave way to bigger aspirations; first in California and then later in Florida.

Moreover, Walt wanted his Disneyland to be free of the pitfalls of previous amusement parks with their reputation for being crowded, dirty, and full of carnival hucksters. "Obviously there had been amusement parks before Disneyland, but they had been grab-bag collections of various rides, games, and shows," wrote Neal Gabler (2006), "Disney reconceptualized the amusement park as a full imaginative experience, a *theme* park…his park eventually revised urban design" (Gabler p. xiii). This later portion, the re-shaping urban design, is one of key elements of this project and demonstrates how vital Disneyland was to bringing the formation of EPCOT. Prior to anything even being discussed in Florida, Disneyland played a crucial role in shaping Walt's desire to be a city planner. "…Disneyland altered both the design and perception of all sorts of landscapes…those concerned with the layout, architecture, and construction of the built urban environment have taken Disneyland as a model for such projects as shopping malls, public and private buildings, sports stadiums, and historic preservation efforts" (Findlay 1992, p. 53). Disney parks have changed the expectation of how spaces should be laid out through its various pathways, greenbelts, shopping centers, and visual orientation. Margaret King and J.B. Boyle (2011) expanded on this by suggesting

> Both Disneyland and the Magic Kingdom have an instantly identifiable narrative
> quality, beginning with a 'title page' or opening scene…from this, visitors are led
> naturally up Main Street by the beckoning vista of the castle, which draws them
> into the heart of the park with its central hub. Both parks have a *natural*
> *progression* [emphasis mine] of pathways and plotlines which invite exploration,
> with the central icon of castle as the visual bookmark (p. 13).

I contend that the pathways only *seem* as if they have a "natural progression" because enough years have passed where guests (and even scholars) do not even notice how many alterations there have been. That is the power of re-defining an expectation; the three-dimensional illusion has completed its mission.

Walt's playground had more than its share of setbacks and critics whenever Disneyland finally opened its gates to the public on July 17, 1955. However, it was an instant hit with the public at large that looked passed the imperfections and superficiality. "As early as 1956, it [the term "Disneyland"] had come to mean 'any fantastic or fantastical land or place; a never-never land' that signified 'any large, bustling place noted for its colorful attractions" (quoted from the Oxford English Dictionary in Findlay, p 52).   Walt had created something both classic and original that struck a chord with middle-class, white America. But what *specifically* was it about Disneyland? There had been other amusement and theme parks in the past, what made Disneyland stand out? Reasons for the success of Disneyland have been written about by journalists, scholars, and cultural critics since it first opened. One of the more intriguing passages about why Disneyland was a success comes from Michael Sorkin's *Variations on a Theme Park* (1992)

> Disneyland wits its channel-turning mingle of history and fantasy, reality and simulation, invests a way encountering the physical world that increasingly characterizes daily life. The highly regulated, completely synthetic vision provides a simplified, sanitized experience that stands in for the more undisciplined complexities of the city…(Walt) Disney is the cool P.T. Barnum-there's a simulation born every minute-a Disneyland the ultimate Big Top (p. 208).

Sorkin's quote demonstrates how Disney was able to weave together so many story-telling elements that foster the fantastical elements while also maintaining a sense of order over large amounts of park guests. "In the Disney parks, appearance is everything… (Telotte 2008, p. 1) and this is done to help maintain the balance of fun with order. Disneyland is designed to remove the "drudgeries" of normal life and make guests are made to feel that they are not in the "real" world, they are *somewhere* else. This is easily summed up by the signs posted in both the California and Florida parks: "Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow, and fantasy." It should be noted that "today" is not one of the locations you will find yourself; only yesterday and/or tomorrow. Today serves only a perfunctory purpose as being in service toward the past and future. In other words, the present is merely the vessel, not the destination.

Narrative Control

I have already established the how Walt Disney became more entrenched in his desire for control after the loss of Oswald the Lucky Rabbit and the "betrayal" of most of his animation staff in the late-1920s. Disneyland furthered this driving force as evidenced by Walt personally overseeing key aspects of the construction. Moreover, his ever-growing media empire of film and television provided both a revenue stream but also a means to continue telling the kinds of stories that he wanted to tell. Both Walt and the Disney Company had the ability to add to an existing story but could also revise and omit elements that contradicted that story. The themed lands of all the Disney parks, beginning with Disneyland, are designed to tell set a stage in which narrative structure is both created and reinforced. As mentioned in Chapter One, the role of story, especially nostalgic mythology, is what gives Disney its staying power.

The physical space including layout, crowd flow, synthetic environments, and narrative

creation allows for ways of treating the park guest as an "audience" that only sees what is meant to be seen. In this respect, the analogy between school and Disney theme park is readily apparent. Students are seated, desks face forward, free range of movement is discouraged, and ultimately, the participation is scripted. Disney parks work on the same principles. Consider the highly successful Omnimover system in which ride cars run on a continuous stream (*the PeopleMover, the Haunted Mansion, The Seas with Nemo and Friends,* etc.). All of these rides incorporate a vehicle system that is completely restricted to what the Narrator wants the viewer to see. Despite the change in layout and concept, EPCOT fit right into this pre-existing schema. Alexander Wilson (1994) wrote "The organizing principle of the EPCOT (Center) landscape is control. Direction is given to the gaze of the spectator: visual perspectives, aural terrains, the kinds of movement permitted—all reinforce and reinterpret the various themes of [EPCOT] Center" (p. 122). Everything is calculated, purposeful, and restrictive for the purposes of control.

If we acknowledge that part of Disney's success comes from controlling what audiences are allowed/supposed to see, then why is this acceptable?   Again, the answer partially harkens back to Walt Disney himself and his innate knack for storytelling. Over time, the Disney brand has become synonymous with a certain brand of (family) entertainment and we are willing to forgive because we crave stories so badly. Michael Real (1996) observed that "humans live in and breathe in stories so that, unsurprisingly, story narratives fill our lives and our media culture" (p. 128). Disney has been able to fill our lives by positioning itself as the premier memory-maker and storyteller. Their arsenal of cross-generational, pop-culture characters armed with a vast film library has embedded nostalgia in a significant portion of Americans for almost a century. Within these remembrances are messages that asks us to forget, not only the drudgeries

of modern existence, but our identity. Disney theme parks have gone ever further to take us to places foreign and familiar; places to walk through, touch, feel, and experience.

In addition to storytelling, the level of hopeful futurism propelled guests to feel positive about where they were and what they were doing. Of course, some people would never equate the theme parks with anything enjoyable due to crowds or fakeness, etc.   However, those who do, are those who may inadvertently be seeking the utopian ideal. Disneyland (and later Walt's EPCOT and EPCOT Center) contained elements of utopian thinking by its relation inside and outside of reality. "Utopias, for all of their disjunction from the 'real space of Society', nonetheless, always have their roots in that very space: their disjunctive quality arises from the ways in which they break with a lived reality that fundamentally defines them" (Yar 2014, p. 6). Visitors to Disneyland could expect the park to be grounded in a familiar and "realistic" world where there are still hot dogs, streets, and commerce. Yet the hyper-emphasis on cleanliness and order created Yar's disjunction which proved to be a vital element in both the financial success of the park and Walt's evolution to utopian city-planning. King and O'Boyle (2011) wrote "the theme park, in essence, temporarily suspends physicist H.A. Lorentz's theory of space-time interdependency…the theme park can transport us into the hyperreality of past or future" (p. 11). Who you are in the "real world" is not as important as *what you can feel* in the immersive experience at a Disney theme park. Disneyland was not the first amusement park, nor the first theme park. However, it was, and remains, a cultural touchstone that continues to feed off our nostalgia by appealing to our desire for story. And that is the ultimate control.

A Day at the Fair

It is important to remember that the story of EPOCT does not begin and end with Walt Disney. Historical indentions had left their mark on all of the men and women who worked on the theme parks. One of the key informers were World Fairs and International Expositions that were prominent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I must provide a brief overview of the nature of World's Fairs and International since they are the forerunners of the Florida Project. To include all such fairs would be a project into itself so I will limit the focus to brief overviews of the World's Fair/Exposition (expos) that occurred in: 1939 New York, 1962 Seattle, 1964 New York, and 1967 Montreal. All of these events contributed to the culture of design and futurism which eventually became part of the DNA for Walt's futuristic community and the work of the Imagineers that completed the project following his passing.

The first world's fair held in New York lasted from April 30, 1939 to October 27, 1940 and holds early clues to EPCOT's origins. Beginning with the New York's World Fair of 1939 is appropriate because this aligns relatively with the Golden Age of Disney cinema. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* was around two years old and Walt would have been riding high from its critical and commercial success. I mention this because having grand visions of empire building is one thing, having the financial capital to make them a reality is quite another. In other words, the Walt Disney of 1936 would have viewed this Fair in a different way than a version three years later. According to Imagineer Ward Kimball, Walt Disney did attend the 1939 Fair but my research yielded very little substance of specifically his thoughts or interactions. What is known is that the Disney Company was involved in some of the events of the fair in regards to licensing and promotion including Disney's promotion of Nabisco products and one interesting case of Donald Duck receiving an honorary degree on "Donald Duck Day" (Korkis, 2018).

If I may back up a second and give some context to how all of this relates to the project. Perhaps the best way to consider what I am doing here is establishing a sort of "EPCOT backpack" where ideas are collected and stored by Disney for later use. That established, what was it from 1939 New York World's Fair that would later shape EPCOT? The answer lies in the three key elements: theming, centerpiece creation, and the overall layout of the fair. First, the theme of the 1939 fair was "Building the World of Tomorrow" which meant a synergy between government, industry, labor, and international cooperation. While not unique since most expos have a future-driven narrative, this one is particularly on the nose as it relates to the Experimental Community of Tomorrow. Pavilions such as "The Hall of Industry" and "Consolidated Edison" could have easily found themselves a home at a Disney theme-park in the ensuing years. Secondly, the previously described exterior of *Spaceship Earth* (Chapter 1) likely drew inspiration from the Fair's *Perisphere* forty years earlier. Both structures are geodesic spheres with minimal coloring which serve as the centerpiece for their respective park's entry. The parallels go even further when one discovers what was inside the 1939 structure. "Visitors rode…on what was then the world's highest escalator, then entered the *Perisphere*, stepping onto one of the two moving rings, from which they viewed the vast diorama of "Democracity", *a planned urban and exurban complex of the future* [emphasis mine] (Appelbaum 1977, p. 3). Fans of all things EPCOT would recognize this as a likely connection to the Progress City model that would later inhabit the 1964 World's Fair and then Disneyland and now resides in Florida. Finally, the layout of the 1939 New York World's Fair closely resembles what would occur in central Florida in 1982. Keith Mahne, of the *Disney Avenue* website, wrote an entry in which he explained

you can see how Imagineers likely got their ideas when deciding the layout of

EPCOT Center… [the] seven different zones and exhibitions, each with their own

theme: Communication, Transportation, Community, Food, Health, Production,

and Science... In the center was the Lagoon of Nations where over twenty large

pavilions featuring the likes of Italy, France, Japan, Great Britain, Brazil and the

U.S.S.R. The Hall of Nations surrounded the lagoon and offered slightly smaller

scale pavilions representing an additional forty countries and featured pavilions

from 22 different states.

To put it plainly, *Future World* and *World Showcase* of EPCOT Center. Theme, design, and layout provide a clear relationship between the New York World's Fair of 1939/1940 and EPCOT Center.

Moving on to our next example takes us to Seattle's World's Fair which ran from April 21 through October 21 1962 with the theme of the "Century 21 Exposition." As the name would suggest, Seattle World's Fair kept the focus on futurism and human progress akin to previous fairs. One major difference from this event and the New York Fair in 1939 is that there is documented proof that Walt did visit for a weekend with his family from September 21st through the 22nd. This would allow him an eye-witness position that likely influenced the Florida Project three years later. Alan Stein (2012) wrote

Disney was eager to see the fair, and made a short visit on Friday night soon after

his plane landed. When he visited on Saturday and Sunday, huge crowds followed

him everywhere. When he wasn't signing autographs, he was often being

interviewed by newspaper and television reporters. Disney was quick to point out

that drawing a comparison between the fair and his Disneyland theme park was

difficult. "This fair is not Disneyland and Disneyland is not a fair. Disneyland is a place of fantasy and adventure. It is built around a carousel. The fair is built around the Science Pavilion, the Coliseum, and the Space Needle" (*The Seattle Times*, September 23, 1962). He seemed impressed with the Space Needle, predicting that there would be "Space Needles cropping up all over after the success of this one."

This passage is significant because it highlights another key difference in regards to Walt/The Disney Company's interaction with World's Fairs: the changing of roles. Disneyland was seven years old in 1962 and Walt had moved from the auteur of animation (*Snow White, Pinocchio, Fantasia*, etc.) to his "Uncle Walt" persona (1950s *Mickey Mouse Club, Walt Disney Presents*, etc.). In the twenty years after the New York's World Fair of 1939/1940, Walt had amassed more wealth which he had reinvested into an expanding his media and theme-park empire. In *The Future Remembered: The 1962 Seattle World's Fair and its Legacy*, Paula Becker and Alan Stein (2011) wrote that, "Disney's approval meant a lot: His Disneyland had taught fair planners many important lessons about how to keep a public venue like the fairgrounds shipshape, even under heavy use" (p. 182). The flow was now a circuit; Walt was now having an impact on World's Fairs *while they were* shaping his visions of EPCOT. Another sign of the changed times was that there was now there was a direct connection to the Seattle fair. George Whitney, an original Disneyland designer and operator, was named director of "Concessions and Amusements" for the Seattle Fair (Becker and Stein, 2011 p. 46). This serves as evidence that Walt and his team had now entered the larger realm of developers and planners.

The final lesson Walt took from the Seattle Fair may have been the most instructive especially when considering the timeline in relations to Florida. Alan Stein (2012) is a historian who has written several articles and books on the Seattle World's Fair. Stein remarked

> Although Disney's comments on the fair were generally positive he did have one
> complaint -- it wasn't large enough. Planners had designed the fair as what they
> called a "jewel box" -- small in size, but high in quality. Built on 74 acres,
> Seattle's World's Fair was much smaller than previous world's fairs -- a concept
> that the promoters highlighted as a positive when selling the fair to exhibitors.
> But Disney didn't like it. "I think that 74 acres is too skimpy. You lack settings for
> these astounding buildings" (Seattle Post-Intelligencer, September 23, 1962). He
> believed that if the ground were larger, various areas could be separated by vistas.
> "You don't load up a showcase with everything. To get the proper effect, you put
> in just a few things" (The Seattle Times, September 23, 1962).

Walt's experience in tinkering ("plussing" in Disney-speak) with Disneyland had given him the insight into how to organize layout based on what the public needed. More importantly, it reinforced the need for physical space to make big ideas turn into realized places. Remember that just a decade earlier saw the Disney Studios: return to full length feature animation, enter into both documentary and live action film, and open Disneyland. However, nothing, including success, comes without a cost. Specifically, the response by local businesses in Anaheim responding to the gold-rush of Disneyland dollars. In the years following Disneyland's opening, the tourist landscape surrounding Walt's theme-park had begun to get crowded. In *Walt Disney and the Promise of Progress City* (2014), Sam Gennawey wrote "by the 1960s, Disneyland was surrounded by low-quality tourist-orientated motels, restaurants, and services" (p. 7).   If Walt

was going to ever have a chance to test out his growing interest in city planning, he would have to look beyond Anaheim. Furthermore, he would have to be willing to spend large amounts of money to buy land to prevent another buildup like the one that occurred in California.

Two years after Seattle would see the New York World's Fair of 1964 which is widely considered by Disney historians to be a pivotal moment in the company's evolution. For this fair, there would be two distinct seasons for operation: from April 22 through October 18, 1964 and then again from April 21 to October 17, 1965. The site was the same as the old 1939/40 Fair due to the infrastructure already being in place (Cotter and Young 2013, p. 9). Planning and getting Disney involved began long before construction. As early as 1960, Walt had met with one of the Fair's organizers, Robert Moses, as well as executives from General Electric, RCA, IBM, and AT&T (Gabler 2006, p. 575). Walt's involvement in the fair was two-fold: one was the financial incentive of conducting business with America's titans of industry while the other brought him one step closer to his experimental community. Neal Gabler (2006) wrote

> the fair, like Disneyland before it, allowed Walt to hole up with his Imagineers in yet another small, creative enterprise where he could enjoy their camaraderie and actually see the uncompromised results of this own imagination now that even Disneyland had outgrown its origins (pp. 575-576).

When the 1964-1965 fair opened, WED Imagineers (and their corporate sponsors) had created some of the more memorable attractions of both that event but later the Disney Parks. Fan favorites such as *The Carousel of Progress, It's a Small World,* and *Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln* would stem from Disney's involvement with the fair. All of these shows would push WED in the realm of automation since, in the case of *Carousel* and *Lincoln*, life-like animatronics were necessary to sell the effect. Stephen Watts (1997) wrote

By the early 1960s however, work on such figures was utilizing the advances

made with hydraulic air cylinders, electronic tape for more sophisticated

programming, and a hot-melt vinyl plastisol called Duraflex for skin, which didn't

crack as latex did. The dramatic culmination of this technology came with the

famous Abraham Lincoln project, which won wag described as the 'winkin',

'blinkin' Lincoln" (p. 413).

It is possible that these innovations would have occurred without WED's involvement in the fair,

but it is safe to say that the process was definitely sped up since they were.

The final fair that I would like to include is the Montreal Expo in 1967. By this time, it is

probably inevitable that there would be a direct Disney connection to a world's fair but this

Exposition is interesting for the ways in which it is different from the others. Originally planned

to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Canadian independence, this fair would be the only one

included on this list that occurred after the death of Walt Disney. Therefore, one has to examine

what impact it had on the Disney Company and WED (Imagineers) as they moved forward into

the Florida Project. The fair ran from April 27, 1967 to October 29 and was a massive success

(Cotter 2016, p. 8). The standout from the Montreal Expo was the United States pavilion. To

write that was an influence on Walt Disney World would be a gross understatement. Here is a

description of the US pavilion, "at 187 feet high and 250 feet in diameter, the United States

pavilion was the largest transparent structure in the world. The *geodesic dome* [emphasis mine]

was comprised of 1,900 plastic panels attached to a tubular frame" (Cotter 2016, p. 35). Sound

familiar? The dome itself was designed by Buckminster Fuller (Highmore 2010, p. 139) who, in

an unrelated connection, coined the term "Spaceship Earth." In addition, the elevated Minirail

(similar to both Disney's Monorail and WEDway PeopleMover) actually traveled through the

structure (not unlike the Monorail and WDW's Contemporary Hotel). Clearly the connections are not too close to be coincidental.

In his essay, *Into the Labyrinth: Phantasmagoria at Expo 67*, Ben Highmore (2010) begins with an explanation of how film was used for one of the pavilions and the Disney company's involvement in its production.

> Among the pavilions using multiple screen displays the most popular…was…the 'film' *Canada 67*. This display was by Walt Disney Studios and used their 'Circle-Vision 360' film technique, 'in which the screens completely surround the viewer [and] gives him [sic] the feeling of actually participating in such typically Canadian events such as the National Hockey League…(p. 125).

More importantly, the use of film and screen technology that was on full display at the Montreal Expo would be of immense importance to EPCOT Center. Technology such as the "Circle-Vision" would show up in World Showcase pavilions such as China and Canada (which seems highly appropriate). And one in one final connection, the film for the Czechoslovakian pavilion was done by Emil Radok who later created an elaborate screen mosaic for EPCOT Center's Universe of Energy! The Montreal Expo, like Disney's involvement in the various World's Fairs, taught Walt and his Company valuable lessons on how to work with corporations for sponsorship, the importance of innovating new technologies for shows, and the need for space to make ambitious goals come into being. All of which are crucial to understanding why and how EPCOT came into being in the first place.

Hello Florida!

An exhaustive account into the how, when, and why the Walt Disney Company decided to build their East Coast park in Florida is outlined in *Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney and Orlando* by Richard Foglesong (2001). As the title suggests, the book includes a through history of the relationship between the two parties which begins with the scouting for possible locations for a second Disneyland. As early as 1958, the Disney team was looking for another location which is hard to believe considering that this was a mere three years after the original park opened in Anaheim. Sites in contention for this massive expansion included Niagara Falls, St. Louis, and New Orleans (p. 37). Florida emerged as the winner in part because of its highway system and favorable governmental concessions. Walt had been paying attention to the transportation shifts of the 1950s that made central Florida an attractive property. That being said, Florida was no California in terms of infrastructure. Much would have to be done in order to make this new Disneyland East a reality.

In the two years from late 1963 to late 1965, the Disney Company would buy up 27,000 acres in central Florida through multiple dummy corporations. Although somewhat under-handed, economic realities made the cloak and dagger routine an absolute necessity. Osceola County's Reed Creek Basin, Disney formed several real estate companies that strategically purchased plots under government and reporters' radars. Factions like 'Reedy Creek Ranch Co.,' 'Latin-American Development,' 'Ayefour Corporation,' 'Tomahawk Properties,' and the 'Compass East Corporation' swooped in to buy property, baffling locals." Walt would not allow this new park to become overrun by outside eyesores and interlopers as his beloved Disneyland had been.

The formal announcement that Disney was building a second park occurred via an Orlando press conference on November 15, 1965 (Sklar, 2013, p. 12). The most important outcome of the announcement, at least in Walt's eyes, was not the big news that the reporters were expecting. "The November 15 press conference was a slight letdown…Walt spoke in vague terms about something bigger and better than Disneyland" and that the details of a possible experimental city were sparse at best (Fogelsong 2001, p. 51). Regardless of whether or not he clearly expressed his goals was beside the point; the plans existed clearly in his mind and that was all that was needed at the time. Regrettably, this press conference would end up being Walt's only live appearance in Florida discussing his plans.

The EPCOT Rationale

Expansion into Florida was really about Walt culminating his life's work into something that he thought would be meaningful and cement his legacy. Just as the *Alice's Wonderland* shorts had led the way to the full-length *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs,* the live-action animator was going to take the lessons of Disneyland, the New York World's Fair of 1964, etc. and apply them to the public good. Steven Watts (1997) explained that by the time Walt was buying land up in Florida, he had "embraced a kind of 'technocratic populism'…which sought to harness the creative, technological, and productive capacities of modern industries and use them for the benefit of ordinary people" (p. 442). This is a key element to understanding EPCOT's original inception because, regrettably, it stands in stark contrast to the modern Disney Company which offers little in the realm of the public good outside of entertainment.

The original concept for the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow was to be a fusion of private industry profit motive and public works style thinking aligned with his

"technocratic populism." Walt's community called for the synergy of industry, city-planning,

free-market enterprise, and transportation systems all with the goal of making a better tomorrow.

Would this process have benefitted some groups over others? If history of human systems is any

indication, the answer would be "yes" since these systems have been engrained in the human

societies to look out for the interests of those in Power rather than those seeking or without.

Again, this project is not suggesting EPCOT is a panacea but rather a possibility. Moreover, the

fact that these benefits that EPCOT might have reaped for those on the top rungs is perhaps

inevitable but not overtly intentional in Walt's eyes. "For Walt, EPCOT would be a way for

American corporations to show how technology, creative thinking, and hard work could change

the world. He saw this project as a way to influence the public's expectations about city life…"

(Gennawey, 2014 p. 9). In the *EPCOT/Florida Project* promotional film, Walt said "I don't

believe there is a challenge anywhere in the world that's more important to people everywhere

than finding solutions to the problems of our cities." He goes on to purposefully state that

EPCOT is going to address the "public need." He saw himself as a prime mover of this

movement because it allowed him to straddle the line between staunch individualist,

representative of hard work and as a populist with the common/public interest at heart. In

Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction, Lyman Sargent (2010) wrote

> Many utopias are like a photograph or a glimpse of a functional society at a
>
> moment in time containing what the author perceived to be better and designed to
>
> break through the barriers of the present and encourage people to want change
>
> and work for it (p. 104).

In this respect, the move toward the Interstate Highway System, suburbanization, and urban

decay were what helped spur Walt Disney's interest in city-planning. And remember that no

creation is made in a historical vacuum. Majid Yar's *The Cultural Imaginary of the Internet* (2014) outlined four "modes" of utopian thinking. Walt's plans for the original Experimental Community of Tomorrow, and the eventual completed EPCOT Center, fit into Yar's second "mode" which

> looks not to utopia as the restoration of the natural condition now lost in the past, but imagines utopias as the *intentional product of rational action,* [emphasis mine] through which the good society might be realized in the future. Here, utopia is fabricated through an alliance of rational planning and human will… (p. 8).

Walt believed that he could create a futuristic community that would "always be in the state of becoming" through constant innovation and invention. In *Walt Disney and the Quest for Community*, Steve Mannheim (2017) acknowledged that all of this planning was occurring during a time of government investment in urban areas. "In November 1966, President Lyndon Johnson signed the *Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act of 1966* (Model Cities Act). The Act's purpose was to provide financial and technical assistance to develop 'new and imaginative proposals'" and that "Congress found and declared 'that improving the quality of urban life is the most critical domestic problem facing the United States'" (p. xiv). The public and governmental push was already building; Walt was planning on bringing the private sector through his considerable influence. As Neal Gabler (2006) put it "in both Disney's imagination and the American imagination one could assert one's will on the world; one could, through one's own power…achieve success" (p. xvii). Walt had already revolutionized animation and later changed how Americans viewed amusement parks. Why not take a swing at a planned community that could accomplish his goals and Uncle Sam's?

Subsequently, the entire Florida Project occupies a very strange socio-political-historical space. Steven Watts (1997) explained how the entire framework for the Florida Project was a product of its times

> At first glance, his agenda for urban reform seemed to swim against…1960s style liberalism…With Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society at high tide, the federal government, not private industry, was the primary engine of social reform. But Disney's Florida Project expressed the spirit of the times equally. Like urban renewal and federal housing projects, it represented an idealistic experiment in social engineering that relied on the expertise of technocrats. Moreover, much like Johnson and his liberal cohorts, Disney…shared a towering confidence in America's capacity to solve any problem (p. 442).

In that regard, Walt almost seems like the fore-runner of the "Third-Way" movement which attempt to blend capitalistic notions with near-socialistic stop-gaps on free-enterprise. This may sound surprising when considering how much Disney is associated with hyper-capitalism but this distinction is extremely important (and will come into focus later in the chapter when Disney becomes both corporation and government entity). For now, to understand this paradox requires a partially exploration into the mind of Walt Disney himself. In his article, *Fifty Years Later, Recalling Walt Disney and Scientism* (2016), John G. West wrote

> Disney's idiosyncratic mixture of moral traditionalism and techno-optimism didn't always seem to cohere, and it led people to admire him for vastly different reasons. Conservatives embraced Disney for his defense of Judeo-Christian morality, his unrepentant support for American republicanism, his love of free enterprise and entrepreneurship, and his distrust of big government and the

welfare state. By contrast, fellow futurists were attracted to Disney's modernist ideas about urban planning, his exalted view of science and technology, and his utopian visions of human progress.

So, how does one attempt to settle these two (seemingly) conflicting appeals? Is there middle ground that can be found that can contextualize how Walt can be hero of Left and Right?

The answer is found in EPCOT itself. Steve Mannheim (2017) wrote "Disney's EPCOT concept combined company town, visitor attraction, and experimental laboratory. Unlike utopian communities, EPOCT was not advertised as the perfect solution to the urban crisis of the 1960s but instead would be in a continuous state of technological 'becoming', drawing upon the best minds of American industry, government, research institutes, and academia" (p. ix). The free-enterprisers would be appeased since American corporations would have considerable involvement while those more interested in government involvement could find solace that there would be public institutions to offer ballast.

Again, it is impossible to say with certainty if any of this would have "worked" or lasted because the Florida Project changed quite drastically after Walt's death. And of course all of history is shaped by events that are rarely in the control of the participants. What is better suited for analysis are the fragments that can be culled from the historical record. In the *EPCOT/Florida Project* film, considerable time is spent discussing the "happiness" of visitors to Disneyland the future contentment of EPCOT residents. Michael Real (1996) pointed out that "the quintessential Disney text in all this is bright, upbeat, optimistic, simple, and clever. The text celebrates the 'light' side of life…" (p. 121). Optimism, utopian delusion, and a sprinkle of patented pixie dust have always been a part of the EPCOT experiment. Through this lens, it is easy to see EPCOT as the ultimate fairy tale in the true Disney tradition. Urban blight? Not a

problem, corporations will fix it for you. Racial unrest? Not a concern in our planned

Community. George Claeys (2011) explained that "by the early modern period the promotion of

city planning and the design of urban spaces became a means of creating and maintaining social

control in utopian plans and fantasies" (p. 113).

And part of that "social control" would have certainly involved who was allowed to be a

resident of the community. It is unknown, and probably doubtful, that people of color would

have found residence in the early days of EPCOT. Bear in mind that the time frame of the

Florida Project runs parallel to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965

which meant the doors of opportunity were less open to those who had been historically and

presently disadvantaged. Progressive technologies were one thing; forward thinking on race

relations may have been a bridge too far for the conservative Walt Disney Company but I cannot

say with absolute certainty.

In summary, EPCOT was a somewhat logical next step for a person who had continually

used technology to advance his career. Walt Disney had been at the fore-front of adding sound

to animation, creating the multi-plane camera, producing the first full-length animated film, and

created his brand of themed entertainment with Disneyland. Successes, and failures, had shaped

his narrative on what was possible if he envisioned and willed it into existence. It did not hurt

that along the way he accumulated personal and corporate wealth to make these projects

possible. The turn to city-planning and futurism went along with his desire to control the

creative process that began in the studio system.

Finally, EPCOT was to be the ultimate legacy project. Walt wanted to give his audience

of mostly white, traditional Americans a three-dimensional place where they could interact with

developing technologies and ideas of improving the conditions of cities. The special emphasis on

improving the public sphere is what makes EPCOT a topic worthy of inclusion in the canon of curriculum studies scholarship. Utopian thinking is always at the background of public education despite constant challenges by political and private forces. In this regard, the thinking that was behind the inspiration of EPCOT should find itself in our classrooms as we try to reinvigorate our civic engagement and work on social progress. Through this, one sees how the project of curriculum studies and EPCOT (Center) are linked because the construction of utopias has always been filled with aspirational imaginaries. In *Searching for Utopia*, Gregory Claeys (2011) wrote "The concept of Utopia in every stage is some variation on an ideal present, an ideal past and an ideal future, and the relation between the three. Each of these may be mythical or imaginary, or have some actual foundation in history" (p. 7). EPCOT was to be the culmination of Walt Disney's career as an animator and believer in American capitalism to solve problems of urban life. Historical realities of post-WWII America allowed him to build Disneyland first with its nostalgic past in *Frontierland*, *Adventurelan*d, and *Main Street U.S.A*. It was all parts mythical and historical in its creation and execution; the embodiment of a utopia.

Mapping It Out

Now that the where and why have been established, it is time to delve into the specifics of the Florida Project. At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced the 1967 promotional film and covered the introduction, Disneyland's role as background, and Walt's on-screen outline for what he hoped to accomplish. The final segment, which begins around the thirteen-minute mark, sees Walt turns over the hosting duties to a series of animations, rich still-images done by Robert McCall, and voice-over narration to provide greater detail for the proposed Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. Questions addressed are: How would the community be laid out? How many residents would be allowed to work and live in EPCOT? What should

residents, visitors, and those tied to commercial interests expect to see? How would this experimental city work in conjunction with the Florida legislature? For these answers, the promotional film serves as the primary source while Sam Gennawey's *Walt and the Promise of Progress City* (2014) helps fill in the gaps.

Proving that EPCOT is indeed a product of mid-century American thinking, the final act is a strong emphasis on transportation and industrial spaces. Specifically, the "radial plan" since this planned community would have been built when there was a high emphasis on the role of the automobile. Walt had used this "radial plan" for the template of Disneyland with Sleeping Beauty's Castle serving as the hub and the themed lands extending out like spokes. EPCOT's "radial plan" would also extend out from the central hub to connect the "four primary spheres of activity surrounding the central core." A business/commerce area was planned for the center with a towering hotel (which was going to be weather-controlled via a giant glass dome), next would be the high-density apartment housing, then came the greenbelt for recreational activities as well as churches and schools, and finally, the low-density residential areas (EPCOT film, 1967).

Underneath the recreational and residential areas would have been the transit lobbies where the monorail and WEDway PeopleMovers would transport guests in and around EPCOT. The PeopleMover had already debuted at Disneyland, and similar to the one currently operating at the Magic Kingdom in Florida, never stops moving due to the motors are embedded in the track itself. Below the transit lobby, roads designed to keep a constant flow for motorists who would "never have to wait for a traffic light" according to the film. Finally, a third level created for large trucks to bring in supplies and other consumer goods. Ultimately, the idea was to

minimize traffic as much as possible by keeping all cars as far away from the center hub as possible.

It is through the proposed layout that we see the culmination of Walt's life's work. All of the lessons he had learned in film-making and by creating Disneyland are apparent when watching this promotional film. He had learned how to control crowd flow by watching the crowds at his theme park; he had learned the necessity of keeping the "outside" world far away from view by watching the various hotels, restaurants, and shops crop up around Disneyland. The emphasis on transportation (Monorails and PeopleMovers) stemmed from the growth of the highway system in post-WWII California. Finally, the medium of animation as a means of storytelling reaches its apex when viewing the promotional film. It allowed for the merging of the realistic with the fantastical to demonstrate complex ideas to a general audience via easily understood drawings. I have no idea if this version of EPCOT would have been operational feasible or not but I will always lament that the world never got the chance to find out.

Lawmakers, Bureaucrats, and Imagineers

Walt had his vision, a creative team and undeveloped land in which to build his futuristic community. The missing element was the "how"; how was all of this going to come together? A crucial sticking point to the development stage of the entire Florida Project revolved around would be how EPCOT would handle issues of construction, housing, and governance for its residents. There were massive amounts of red tape and state laws to overcome and circumvent. Obstacles to the Florida Project can be roughly categorized as follows: construction, bureaucratic, infrastructure, commercial considerations, and citizenry of the planned community. Firstly, to construct anything in central Florida requires overcoming the swampy topography

which involves displacing wildlife, re-routing of waterways, and building on land that is below sea level. Next, the infrastructure, such as much needed roads, would be handed off to Disney paid lobbyists who would work with state senators. "[Disney's] government needs, requiring the support of both county and state government, centered on taxes, roads, and—of particular interest—an autonomous political district" (Fogelsong 2001, p. 57). This last point is the most important aspect of the entire Disney venture into the Sunshine State. In summary, these practical construction issues certainly had their pitfalls to the project for the Disney Company (never mind the negative effects to the natural environment) but they were nothing compared to the questions of governance. As I will show in the upcoming paragraphs, Disney was not only allowed *but encouraged* by the politicians and business leaders in Florida to create his technocratic wonderland.

As expressed in the notes of Walt himself, the most important need was control. Through lobbying efforts and promises of economic development, Florida's legislature granted the Disney Company large amounts of leeway in the form of The Reedy Creek Improvement District (RCID) which is still in operation today. The plan was to give the Disney Company a "special taxing district…that would act with the same authority and responsibility of a county government" (RCID website). It is noteworthy to point out that, although EPCOT as a fully-functioning community was never realized, there are still remnants of the original vision that survive today.

Fig. 1.2
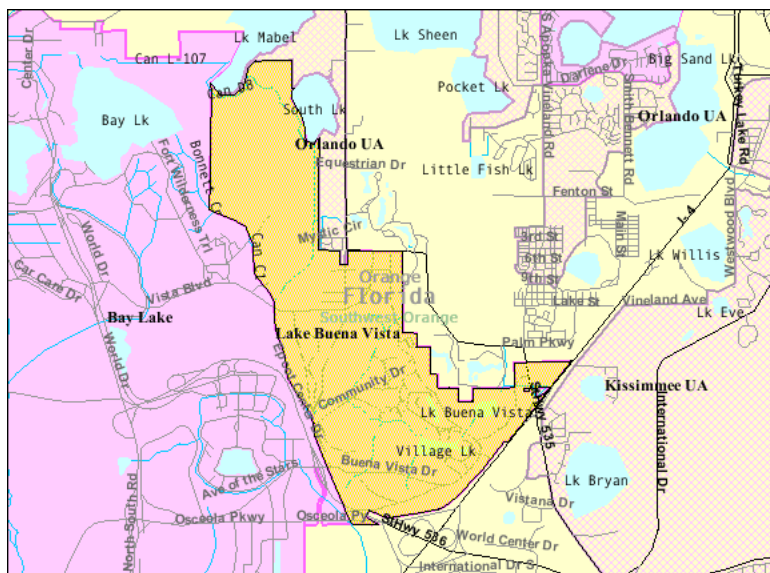
From the map, we can see the two cities of Bay Lake and Lake Buena Vista which are under the authority of the Reedy Creek Improvement District.   This figure allows up to see the layout of the Disney owned properties under special arrangement with the state of Florida.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reedy_Creek_Improvement_District#/media/File:Lake-buena-vista%3Dfl.gif

Fig 1.3

The purpose of this diagram is two-fold. First, it shows the land Disney purchased by the various dummy companies in the 1960s.

Second, we can see how that land was developed. Note the current location of each theme park.
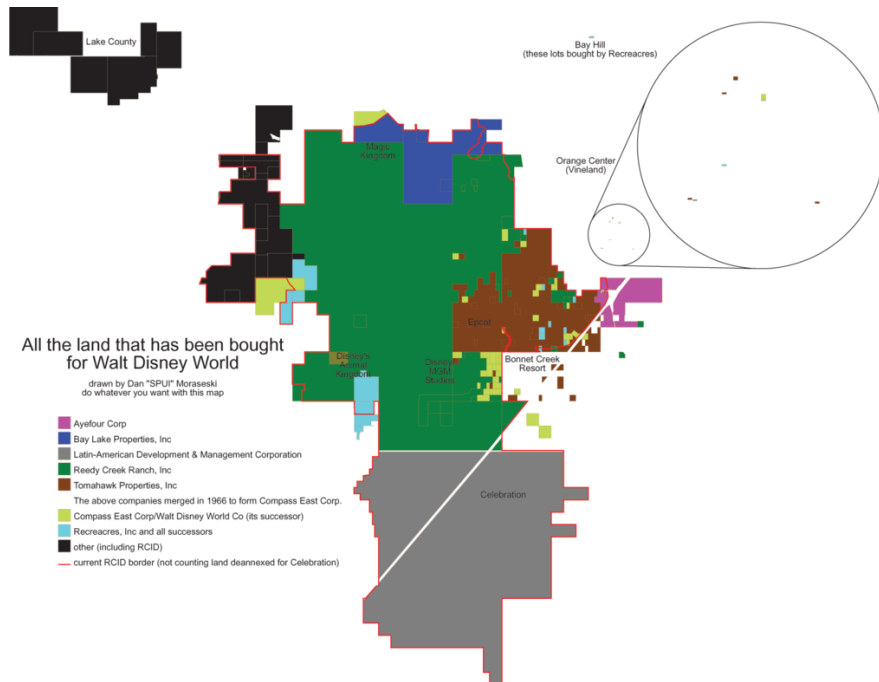
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reedy_Creek_Improvement_District#/media/File:DisneyLandByCompany.png

EPCOT Citizenry?

No issue stands out more than the thorny issue of EPCOT's governance and residency. To address the stickier aspects involving the human components of the Florida Project, Disney would have to get creative. Before I address how Disney and Florida lawmakers were able to come to a series of arrangements, it is important to note what the Disney Company originally envisioned for the residents of EPCOT. Walt Disney speculated that it would take fifteen years to get phase one of the Florida Project off the ground. During that time, the Magic Kingdom theme park, an East Coast clone of Disneyland, would be constructed first so as to provide a steady income flow for the company. Once that was completed, then the focus could be turned to the true *raison d'être:* the planned city. Residents of EPCOT would number roughly 20,000 temporary residents and they would live in houses and apartments provided to them by the Disney Company (Gennawey 2014, pp. 127-130). In addition, residency would be tied to the Company in the form of employment (likely Cast Members for the *Magic Kingdom*) for roughly nine-month stints in order to create a revolving door system. No retirees would be allowed since full employment of the "residents" who had a direct tie was the ultimate goal.

It is here that the first signs of concern with Walt's would-be-utopia emerge. The questions that immediately began to swirl include: Would the residents of EPCOT be guaranteed rights under the established national and state government or would a sort of this "dual-citizenship" emerge as a requirement for residency? Would residents be allowed to have voting rights and participate in elections that shaped EPCOT? What forms of private property would be allowed or would that notion be surrendered as part of the conditions of residency? All of these concerns would have to be worked out before construction began. What is noteworthy is that these concerns were present from the inception. Richard Fogelsong (1992) wrote "not

democracy, but freedom from democracy, would make the Disney city responsive to its

residents. *Such thinking revealed the mesmerizing power of Disney: whatever they wanted must

be good* [emphasis mine] (p. 66).

A quick aside is required to address that Fogelson quote. As a U.S. government teacher, I

am unofficially charged with spreading the virtues of representative democracy. How could I

possibly be interested or endorse a policy that would be the antithesis? First of all, I am not anti-

democracy but I am interested in experiments in governance. The main caveat to me is that

residence was temporary (and voluntarily). No doubt that some would have had second

thoughts, concerns, or dissatisfaction while living at EPCOT; that is true for any place.

However, what I am advocating for is the experimentation or, better yet, purposeful

experimentation that is not tied to tradition for tradition's sake. Towns (and schools) should be

the living laboratories OF democracy but not done haphazardly; the balance between

liberty/experimentation and structure/purposeful action is what I find intriguing.

But how would the original EPCOT address this balancing act? In the promotional film,

Walt promised that his EPCOT would "always be a showcase to the world of the ingenuity and

imagination of American free enterprise. It will be a community of tomorrow that will never be

completed." Those may seem as though they were banal corporate slogans but they ended up

being crucial in EPCOT's development. Furthermore, even though EPCOT as an experimental

city never became a reality, this phraseology became the cornerstone that gives Disney

unprecedented power and influence in Florida today. When Disney applied for a federal planning

grant from the Housing and Urban Development department, they language included that this

area would be a city "always in a state of becoming." Moreover, in a report created by an

independent research firm hired by Disney, this idea of "becoming" meant that Disney should be

"freed from the impediments to change, such as rigid building codes, traditional property rights, and elected political officials" (quoted in Foglesong p. 62). Bluntly, EPCOT was going to be experimental in city-planning and technology but not in democracy. The issue of citizenry was solved by making sure that there would be non-permanent residents who would not have voting rights. In an ironic twist, the studio head that made numerous propaganda films against fascism and totalitarianism during the war years had no qualms about creating a city where democracy would be severely limited.

How this bizarre concoction was possible at all is in part due to the shifts in mentalities on how government and citizenry would interact? John Findlay's *Magic Lands* (1992) suggests that this was part of the mindset of the mid-1960s. Findlay wrote

> National and state governmental influence on local growth sometimes severely compromised citizens' control over their own destinies. In the middle decades of the century, however, Westerners did not appear to mind. The encouragement of growth by higher levels of government would be perceived as a problem only after the mid-1960s, when expansion itself came to be questioned. Until then, *the region generally saw government policies in positive terms, as a source of venture capital that would promote growth and prosperity* [emphasis mine] (p. 21).

Findlay was writing about the American West and specifically California, however, the themes are applicable to 1960s Florida which was eager for growth and, perhaps, willing to overlook the constitutional interests of the citizenry. This provides with a framework to understand how and why Disney was able to ask *and receive* so much latitude from the Florida power brokers and decision makers.

In the end, a compromise was proposed (though never fully enacted) that allowed for citizens to have voting rights, private property, etc. but gave Disney authority over zoning and administrative decisions for a period of twenty years. However, Walt was firm that EPCOT have no permanent residents lest they decide to go against his company's wishes (Foglesong 2001, pp. 62-63). Walt Disney said "In EPCOT there will be no slum areas because we won't let them develop. There will be no landowners and therefore no voting control" (quoted in Wilson, 1994 p. 118). Although he was not specifically writing about EPCOT, I am reminded of James Carey's idea that "no matter what form of government we live under in the future, it will be called democracy" (quoted in Pinar 2012, xvii). EPCOT might have very well existed as a quasi-fascist city-state but I believe the temporary living arrangements would have diminished its effects. Moreover, and for what it is worth, few power brokers or Florida residents at the time seemed overly concerned as EPCOT's lack of democratic ideals. Regrettably, the question will have to go mostly unanswered. The ongoing debate over EPCOT's governance and operational execution would never fully get finalized due to the unexpected death of Walt Disney on December 15, 1966.

Realities and Compromises

Walt's sudden passing took most by surprise. Marty Sklar, an Imagineer with over fifty years with the company, wrote "the truth is they [Management] were scared as hell. Disney without Walt Disney, its founder, leader, creative genius, and sole decision maker in the story, design, and invention business" (Sklar 2013, p. 8). However, his death did not mean that the Florida Project was necessarily destined to be to be shelved. Walt's older brother and company co-founder, Roy, called a meeting of the top Disney brass to discuss the Florida Project. A

presentation was delivered by Marvin Davis on what Walt's latest plans had been before his death. "After Davis sat down, Roy turned to him and said 'Marvin, Walt's gone.' That was the end to Walt Disney's experimental prototype city of tomorrow" (Gennawey 2014, p. 207). Even more brutal is this account from Imagineer Bob Gurr to *Esquire*'s Matt Patches (2015)

> Gurr recalls one particularly devastating headline published in the wake of Walt's death: "Epcot Died Ten Minutes After Walt's Body Cooled." While not entirely accurate, questions remained. Up until then, the Imagineers' had focused on the big picture. But how would families in EPCOT function? And who would live there? ... Bigger problems weren't clarified either. What would Florida weather, around-the-clock public transportation, and high-powered trash disposal mean for daily life under a 50-foot dome? There were too many concerns. It made great sense to Walt, but he didn't live long enough to get into the nitty gritty details of getting an idea to work.

This begs the ultimate EPCOT question: Why did the Disney Company even bother attempting to create *any version* of EPCOT after Walt's death? I will put forth two possible explanations here which are economic development and nostalgia.

Economic Considerations

First, for the Disney Company to simply walk away from the 27,000 acres it purchased in central Florida would have been economic suicide. For starters, the use of the dummy corporations that allowed for advantageous land deals in the first go-around would not be a possibility if Disney tried to pull out of the deal. In fact, the opposite would be true as buyers would know that Disney would be in the position of having to sell their land at a financial loss.

Too much time, energy, and money had been spent obtaining the acreage. Additional labor hours spent designing concepts, animations, storyboards, and models were another aspect of the development process that would have been a tough loss for the company to absorb. Then there is the credibility issue to consider. The announcement of a second Disneyland to be built in Florida had already occurred with much press interest. It would not have been impossible but the Disney brand leans heavily on goodwill between itself and the public. How would it look if Disney lost heart and retreated after having promised so much? Perhaps some sunken fallacy thinking applies here but the Disney Company had come too far in the development stages to completely abandon the project.

Nevertheless, it was still uncertain what would happen. Marty Sklar (2013) recounted how the loss of Walt plus global crises such as the oil shortage were beginning to take their toll on the early days of Florida's Magic Kingdom. "So it was a surprise to me to receive a call from Disney CEO E. Cardon Walker about a signature project that had remained dormant since it was first unveiled…'What', Card Walker now asked, 'are we going to do about EPCOT?" (p. 2). Based on what Roy Disney had said to Marvin Davis and Bob Gurr's account of EPCOT being lost, Sklar was correct to be startled. Surely, the CEO had the economic considerations on his mind but was there another reason?

Death as Commemoration

When Walt Disney died, the dream of EPCOT did not immediately pass away with him after all. This project contends that nostalgic forces were the most potent reason for the Florida Project to move forward despite the necessary compromises that would have to be made. Perhaps EPCOT as a planned, futuristic city was gone but enough of the vision still lingered on. The push

for the "realization" of the full Florida project by the Disney Company is analogous to NASA's plan to fulfill the posthumous desire of John F. Kennedy to put a human on the surface of the moon.   When Kennedy addressed the crowd at Rice University on September 12, 1962, he proclaimed that the United States would put an American astronaut on the moon by the end of the 1960s. Kennedy acknowledged that the goal would not be easily accomplished. "We choose to the go to the moon in this decade and do the other things," he told the crowd, "not because it is easy *but because they are hard*" [emphasis added]. (Kennedy 1962). Little over a year later, Kennedy was struck down by an assassin's bullet in Dallas. His premature and tragic death provided the extra pressure on NASA to make his public promise a reality. By landing on the moon in July of 1969, the nation cemented its commitment to the aspirations of a fallen leader.

Unlike Kennedy, Walt would never have his (fully realized) posthumous victory. When EPCOT Center opened to the public on October 1st, 1982, it was done so with a mix of trepidation and catharsis. Opening Day was the culmination of a concept that had been discussed, dissected, examined, delayed, and teased for fifteen years. While it is true that the Disney Company did eventually open an "EPCOT," it was not *THE* EPCOT. Walt's EPCOT was to be a place where corporations would showcase their latest innovations to enhance the public good. EPCOT Center was an unconventional theme park to be sure, but it was not what Walt had wanted for central Florida. The futuristic city had indeed died with its creator. Instead, the public was given EPCOT Center in 1982; an assortment of ideas that had been on the Imagineers drawing boards going back to involvement in the World's Fairs. However, the Disney Company could claim partial victory on opening day due to the fact that at least now no one could say that they had let their beloved founder's dream go *completely* unfulfilled. It was an act of unwavering devotion to the man that had started it all.

So, why is it important to remember? Why is it likely that EPCOT would have been an unfinished project if not for those who believed in Walt's vision to will it into being?   In *The Philosopher and the Wolf,* Mark Rowlands (2009) wrote

> But there is another, deeper and more important way of remembering: a form of memory that one ever though to dignify with a name. This is the memory of a past that has written itself into you, in your character…The most important way of remembering someone is by being the person they made us—at least in part—and living the life they helped shape (p. 46).

In the end, the Imagineers did what most of us do when we lose someone: we honor the memory of the dead by completing the life unlived. "Unlike many holy places, which become so through the unanticipated quirks of history, WDW is an intended shrine. It was built by a corporation for corporate purposes" but has "transcended that corporation by assimilating and even inventing key symbols of the version of the United States it presents" (Fjellman 1992, p. 21). Seemingly, whatever nostalgic forces that helped create Walt Disney and his theme-parks demanded that EPCOT be built, even if it was a compromised interpretation in the form of EPCOT Center.

We all know that one day we will die; it will happen to us all…someday. As Michel Serres (1995) wrote in *Genesis*, we are all guaranteed "a certain death at an uncertain hour" (p. 6). And when death does come to take us away, many of us will feel that our lives are, at best, an incomplete. "Life, my life, work, my work, my project, this desert with or without a masterpiece, with or without any Mount Carmel Summit" (p. 6). Mark Rowlands (2009) wrote "death…is not something that occurs in a life…Death harms us because it takes away all of our possibilities…to satisfy a desire, you have to survive long enough for the arrow of that desire to reach its mark" (pp. 196-197). Walt's "arrow" was aimed on what he hoped with the

culmination of his life's work. What does it say about humankind that they feel the need to take on seemingly impossible tasks after the original driving force has passed on? Is there a "correct" way to honor a life? Why is it important to remember?

When considering the EPCOT project and the timing of Walt Disney's death, "incomplete" almost seems like a malpractice of language. Walt had big plans, big dreams, and big desires for his massive Florida property. The entire Florida Project, Walt estimated, would take at least fifteen years (Gennawey 2014, p. 124). In his mind, there was enough to be done to keep his Imagineers hard at work for years to come. If anybody had the resources, the access to talent, the slightest hope of making EPCOT a reality, then Walt was the most likely candidate. Unfortunately for both Walt and EPCOT, the driving will to create a techno-utopia would not be enough to stop the cancer that he was diagnosed with in October of 1966 (Gabler 2006, p. 626). This would leave him with an impressive legacy yet so much left undone.

Goodbye EPCOT, Hello EPCOT Center

Prior to Walt's passing in December of 1966, most of EPCOT existed in the charismatic leader's head. The promotional film provided at least a framework of possible path but details were still being worked on between the conceptual and the actual. "The question was what to build in Orlando. They knew how to build a Disneyland-style Magic Kingdom…they never worried about how to do that. But what about the City of Tomorrow idea?" (Fogelsong 2001, p. 65). The apparent lack of specifics never seemed to bother Walt but that did not always apply to those who were around him. Indeed, the lack of concrete details had been an issue even when Walt was pitching the idea to potential investors. However, his reputation and track record of success was enough for those wishing to get in on the ground floor of this potentially lucrative

idea. Matthew Patches wrote

> Soon after the [1964] World's Fair, Walt and the Imagineers visited Westinghouse
> Electric headquarters to discuss the Community of Tomorrow. They'd eventually
> hit all the majors—IBM, DuPont, General Electric…Disney's EPCOT plans
> elicited blank stares and blind support. If Disney was in, so were the bigwigs
> (Patches, 2015).

Despite any potential doubts, most of the courted corporations had been willing enough to fall in line with whatever Walt had in mind. Now, that was all over. George McGinnis, the last Imagineer personally hired by Walt himself wrote "rounding up sponsors for EPCOT took longer than it would have had Walt lived" (McGinnis 2016, p. 24). The company would need some time to plan out how to proceed.

The pressure fell on his brother Roy to postpone his retirement to finish the work began in Florida following Walt's death. First on Roy's agenda was renaming the Florida Project/Disney World to *Walt* Disney World in honor of his little brother and the company's visionary co-founder. More pressingly, the complicated details that still needed to be worked out between the Florida legislature, the Disney Company, WED Industries, and the land developers. This was going to be much more complicated than a mere name change. By the late 1960s, Disney's vast real estate holdings meant that the metaphorical train had already left the station so something was going to happen. "When we lost Walt, the people who were in control knew what Walt liked and were confident we would do what Walt wanted. There was a lot of confidence in the team Walt built" recalled Imagineer George McGinnis during that transitional time. (pp. 49-50). That confidence would be crucial as the Company forged ahead.

On February 2, 1967, just shy of two months after Walt's death, the EPCOT promotional

film was played in nearby Winter Park, Florida with Roy Disney and the Governor of Florida in attendance. Unlike the 1965 press event where Walt was light on details, this reveal was more forthcoming into what the phases of the Florida Project were going to be. One of the most important revelations to come out of this event was that the City of Tomorrow would indeed be put on the back burner in favor of building a Disneyland-style amusement park (i.e. the Magic Kingdom). However, it is important to stress that the plans and deals *still were made under the assumption that the planned community was still a go*. Within a matter of days after the event, bills were being drafted for the Florida legislature. On May 12, 1967, Governor Claude Kirk signed several pieces of legislation that gave the Disney Company almost everything they had asked for. A comprehensive list of what all was established is exhausting but the key points are: the establishment of the Reedy Creek Improvement District (RCID) to manage the marriage of government and corporation and the founding of two municipalities, Bay Lake and Reedy Creek which is now Lake Buena Vista (RCID website n.d.). Furthermore, Florida granted Disney the power to create their own fire department, police and security, and even the authority to build a nuclear power facility! Alexander Wilson (1994) pointed out that, "the Disney fiefdom is designed to withstand challenges to its global vision of the future" (p. 119) with all of these protections in place. All of these agreements and concessions demonstrate the allure that Disney dollars had on the state and local power brokers. More importantly, the laws gave Disney the autonomy it wanted to create EPCOT the way they saw fit. Walt may not have been around anymore, but his legacy of control was cemented into his company.

Where's the Future?

An updated *Project Florida* film was made by the Disney company in 1970 and first

aired on January 31, 1971 to show the public the progress had been made (no director, 1971). It seemed as though all of the pieces were now in place for Disney to do whatever they wanted to in central Florida but when the Magic Kingdom opened on October 1st, 1971, the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow was nowhere to be found. The Company had delivered on its promise to construct a Disneyland East (i.e. Disneyland on a much larger scale) that followed the template of its California predecessor but aside from a few hotels, there was nothing that justified the massive amount of power bestowed to Disney by Florida lawmakers. But for the moment, everyone seemed relieved. Roy O. Disney could now retire with the knowledge that part of his brother's final wishes had been fulfilled and the company could capitalize on its land investment. Regrettably, his retirement would be short lived because Roy passed away just two months later.

But what of the rest of the Florida Project? With no futuristic city to speak of, the question then becomes did Disney act in bad faith in its negotiations with the state of Florida. It is difficult to say. The fact that the promotional film was still shown after Walt's passing does provide partial evidence that some of the Disney bosses intended to follow through with the original concept. There were even vague mentions of further projects at the end of the 1971 *Project Florida* film but nothing really about EPCOT. The most likely scenario is that the original EPCOT was a victim of bad timing. Too much work had been done and too much money invested to entirely stop the project entirely. But without Walt's vision and connections with American companies, EPCOT as a futuristic community, was no longer a feasible option for a company trying to rebuild after the loss of their founder.

Further complicating the issue were the arrangements made between the state of Florida and the Disney Company. At the start of 1972, yes, the Magic Kingdom was open but Walt and

Roy were deceased and Governor Kirk was no longer in office. Perhaps several of the Florida lawmakers wondered in retrospect if they should have been less trusting before giving Disney such broad decision-making authority? As it turns out, during the mid-1970s, the company was finally ready to turn its attention to making EPCOT a reality. Well, at least *a version* of it. Michael Crawford (2015) wrote "by 1975, Walt Disney Productions had given up any pretense that it was ever going to build Walt's city of the future in Florida. The stirring images of Progress City had disappeared from their promotional materials, and by July of that year a Disney spokesman publicly stated that 'the concept that was originally envisioned is no longer relevant" (p. 123). However, it is not as though the Disney Company could just give up and abandon the plans altogether. *Something* had to be built to justify the land, legislation, and the very public announcement of the futuristic city.

Finding the Center

Speculation over what was going to happen to the vast Florida property ended in September 1975 at the Southern Governor's Association held at Disney World's Contemporary Resort. It was at this event that the revised and compromised version of EPCOT was finally revealed (Foglesong 1992, p. 100). Bizarrely enough, the presentation at the Contemporary Resort opened with the Florida Project promotional film being shown…again, even though what was being presented did not align with what was actually being proposed. What it was that exactly Disney now had in mind was an attempt to satisfy the major stake holders and justify the expansive power they were given. Bear in mind that the favorable legislation for Disney was partially based on the *quid pro quo* premise that, in exchange for leeway in zoning matters, etc., this land would "always be in the state of becoming." This phrasing was important to both

parties for different reasons. For lawmakers, they could make the case that the permissions not only brought in dollars but also could be viewed as a place creative, problem-solving ideas for public problems.

> As the original EPCOT concept of an actual working city faded, Disney slowly began to promote the narrative that the Walt Disney World property itself, with its innovative use of technology and new systems, was EPCOT made real. EPCOT was never meant to be an actual city, the story would go as the decades passed, but instead it was the set of values upon which the Florida property was modeled (Crawford 2015, p. 123).

Despite promises being made and favorable legislation enacted, the pivot away from the community into theme-park experience had occurred. Essentially, this event was Disney putting the final nail in the planned community concept.

One other event that occurred before ground-breaking began was during the 1978 convention of the International Chamber of Commerce. In attendance was none other than President Jimmy Carter who praised Disney for its "vision." It was this event when the shift from city to theme park was publicly announced. Models for *Future World* pavilions and the *World Showcase* made their first appearance to governors, delegates, and President Carter. However one of the most striking pronouncements was from then Florida Governor, Reubin Askew, who stated that "what you are going to have…are young people [cast members working the World Showcase] who are going to get know each other, *through private enterprise, not government sponsored* (emphasis mine)…to learn to know each other and then they're going to form potential cadres of leadership throughout the entire world. (news footage, 1978). Here we see the further divorcing of the idea of creative governance through an experimental community

and more toward a theme park in a state of "becoming." Promises, agreements, and legislation were skirted in favor of the private profit over public interest prevailed. Imagineer Marty Sklar summed up the post-Walt conundrum by explaining that "there's a gigantic difference between the spark of a brilliant idea and the daily operation of an idea" (Patches, 2015). Disney leadership had successfully changed the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow from the now proposed EPCOT Center by the mid-1970s. Yet they could not completely let the idea go. The next phase of the Florida Project, whatever that entailed, was moving forward.

CHAPTER THREE:

EPCOT CENTER

Welcome to the World of Compromised Vision!

Groundbreaking on the new EPCOT Center officially took place on October 1st 1979 with a target opening day set for just two years later (it would eventually be pushed back to three). Walt Disney's Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow had been discussed, dissected, examined, delayed, teased, and reconfigured multiple times in the fifteen years since Walt Disney's death. While it is true that the Disney Company did eventually open a version of "EPCOT" (i.e. EPCOT Center) on October 1st, 1982, it was not *THE* EPCOT. Walt's EPCOT was conceived as a place where corporations would showcase their latest innovations to enhance the public good. Instead, EPCOT Center was the closer aligned with a culmination of several ideas that had been floating around WED mixed with elements of the Florida Project.

Mulling through the details on the transition between the Florida Project as it stood after the 1975/1978 re-designs to the completion of the EPCOT Center of my youth (1982-1994) and ending on its lamentable decline (1994-present) is the purpose of Chapter Three. A comprehensive exploration of the EPCOT Center pavilions that inspired my interest in hopeful futurism which sparked the initial inspiration of this study. As previously established, this project is almost exclusively interested in analyzing the *Future World* section which makes an overview of the attractions extremely important to Chapter Three. It should be noted as a historical fact that not every pavilion was completed in time for the park's opening day in 1982. Consequently, I have indicated the operational years when appropriate to provide the proper time-frame and context. Chapter Three serves as the bridge of what The Florida Project/EPCOT

Center became and how those ideas could be used a potential model of curriculum exploration

and utopian futurism as outlined in Chapter Four.

WED and the Disney Company knew that the anticipation was going to be running high

for their first ever "second-gate" theme-park. The *EPCOT/Florida Project* (1967) promotional

film was already over a decade old as the 1980s approached and the company had stoked interest

through the various presentations to the point where hype was inevitable. However, the general

public, or at least those who were interested, were likely unaware of the specifics. Subsequently,

a preview book for EPCOT Center, filled largely with concept art since the park was not

completed yet, attempted to orientate future guests as to what to expect in this compromised

vision. The preview book informed guests that

> Within the realms of EPCOT Center a family vacation becomes a series of
>
> adventures unlike any ever encountered. Unparalleled in conception and form,
>
> EPCOT Center represents the ultimate in Disney-imagineered
>
> entertainment…EPCOT Center is a celebration of ingenuity and innovation.
>
> Inspired by the incredible visions of Walt Disney, EPCOT Center marks the dawn
>
> of a new era in Disney communication, bringing to the art of theme park
>
> entertainment a new level of creative energy, producing a brand new
>
> phenomenon: the EPCOT Experience (n.a. ca. 1982).

This passage serves its purpose of introducing us to this different style theme park but also

acknowledges that it is merely "inspired by the incredible visions" of Walt Disney and not an

actual community.

Another example that does a similar feat but goes further by *almost* including the

language of the state of Florida agreements of 1967 is in the official Walt Disney World pictorial

souvenir book from the mind-1980s. In order to bridge any possible schism between Walt's now

abandoned concept for EPCOT and this new EPCOT Center, the souvenir books hailed *Future*

World as "a bold 'Community of Ideas'" which "explores the challenges and potentials of life in

the 21st Century" (n.a. 1986 Disney Pictorial Souvenir book). Although not resembling the

original concept by most measures, the language surrounding EPCOT attempted to make a nod

to the spirit of the experimental community.

The completed EPCOT Center demonstrated an amalgamation of ideas even in its

realized layout. WED was working on two projects simultaneously, the first of which dealt with

exhibits dedicated to futurism (*Future World*) while the other focused on a World's Fair inspired

salute to internationalism (*World Showcase*) which demonstrates how informative the World's

Fairs mentioned in Chapter Two really were. Disney Imagineer Marty Sklar stated that one day

the two models were pushed together and thus the figure-eight layout of EPCOT Center was

born (Gennawey, 2014). In other words, EPCOT Center's layout was less of a calculated move

and more of a happy accident.

When guests enter the 260-acre park using the main entrance today, they are entering

into *Future World* which itself is divided into *Future World East* and *Future World West*. The

walkways narrow and converge as one enters the park before expanding again for the second half

of the park known as *The World Showcase*. Prior to this design, Disney had been famous for the

hub and spoke system of both Disneyland and Florida's Magic Kingdom. Commentators at the

time took notice of this new layout. J. Tevrere MacFayden commented "with EPCOT Center,

Disney is marrying an international exposition to an industrial trade show, sending the happy

couple off in a shower of technologically sophisticated amusements to set up housekeeping in an

immense shopping mall" (quoted in Gennawey, 2014).   The story behind the park's figure-eight

configuration is just one example of how EPCOT Center was often evolving during the creative process.

Finally, another seemingly minor change that occurred during the development stage provides evidence that the Disney Company was not ready to completely throw in the towel on Walt's futuristic concept. The addition of the word "Center" after EPCOT was done so in hopes that the park would become so popular that maybe some version of Walt's EPCOT would still come to pass and then, the theme park would be the "center" of the community. The goal was to keep the spaces between the pavilions expansive enough to add on whenever necessary. Epcot was eventually profitable for Disney but not nearly enough to warrant anything near this sort of expansion. As time goes on, it is highly unlikely that such addition will ever come into being. Nevertheless, and regardless of the numerous compromises made, the Disney Company could claim partial victory that October day due to the fact that at least now no one could say that they had let their beloved founder's dream go *completely* unfulfilled.

Sponsorships and Mapping the Park

EPCOT Center's opening on October 1, 1982 would not have been possible without considerable corporate sponsorship of its shows, attractions, and pavilions. In *Understanding Disney* (2001), Janet Wasko wrote that "the [Disney] company became especially reliant on various kinds of strategic alliances in the 1950s with the construction of Disneyland. As more theme parks and diverse activities were added, more partnerships emerged" (p. 34). This was especially true for EPCOT Center. Disneyland (1955) may have been ground-breaking but it still relied on established properties such as *Snow White*, *Pinocchio*, and *Dumbo*. Although it is difficult to imagine now, one must remember that EPCOT Center was Disney's first attempt at

"second gate" theme park. Moreover, when compared to today, remember that the original vision was distinctly removed from being "Disney-esque" theme-park. Florida's Magic Kingdom (1971) followed this model but on a larger scale. Today, Epcot, Hollywood Studios (1989), and Animal Kingdom (1998) are part of the larger Disney "World" in Florida and Disney's California Adventure (2001) accompanies the original Disneyland in Anaheim. EPCOT Center pre-dates all of the international parks: Tokyo Disneyland (1984), Disneyland Paris (1992), Hong Kong Disneyland (2005) and Shanghai Disneyland (2016). Taking this into consideration, EPCOT Center briefly served as a template for Disney to build different kinds of parks (I say briefly because all of the Disney parks have themselves been more "Disneyfied" via increased reliance on Intellectual Properties in the past decade). Again, all of this is true now but that was not the case in the late 1970s. EPCOT Center was to be a break from the proven formula of straight fantasy and adventure. Furthermore, add the pressures of budget issues and attempts to keep some elements of Walt's dream of a techno-utopian community…it is pretty amazing that anything ever opened. It is therefore no surprise considering the company's history and the realities of opening a new park that each of EPCOT Center's attraction pavilions had corporate sponsorship.

The following is a list of the early (1982-1986) Future World attraction locations and their respective (original) sponsors. Please note that three attractions mentioned here, *Spaceship Earth*, *The Land*, and *Horizons*, will receive a more extensive write-up later in the chapter. Beginning near the front entrance stands the Bell Systems sponsored *Spaceship Earth* which serves as the divider between of *Future World* East and West. After exiting *Spaceship Earth*, if one was heading over to *Future World West*, the impressive greenhouse structure that housed the original *The Land* attraction would be directly in front of you. *The Land* was sponsored by Kraft

Foods and housed several attractions focusing on nutrition and agricultural topics. Turning your head to the right would reveal the site of The *Living Seas* brought to you by United Technologies. As its name suggests, this pavilion focused on the vast frontier of Earth's oceans. Finally, if one turned around and looked to the "top" of *Future World West*, you would find Kodak Film's *Journey into Imagination*. More details on this very special pavilion will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Leaving this side of the park and crossing over to *Future World East,* one could encounter the two halves of *Communicore* (divided into East and West) which straddled the middle of Future *World*. These served as the closest link between EPCOT Center and World's Fairs in that *Communicore* was a series of exhibits mostly dedicated to communication technologies. As such, *Communicore* did not have a specific sponsor but relied on numerous vendors for financial support. Regrettably, my family always skipped *Communicore* so I have no personal memory of it. After leaving *Communicore East,* three other attractions from the early days of EPCOT Center were right ahead. Up first on the left is the *Universe of Energy* sponsored by Exxon which was housed in a colossal structure with solar panels on the roof. Inside was a forty-five-minute dark ride that was one-part educational films and one-part dinosaur diorama. *Universe of Energy* displayed various types of energy from fossil fuels and more sustainable forms. Leaving *Energy*, one could walk up the path to one of the crown jewels of EPCOT Center: *Horizons*. This pavilion, sponsored by General Electric, was dedicated to futurism itself. Conceived as a sequel to the *Carousel of Progress* at the Magic Kingdom, park guests explored imagined futures via an Omnimover dark ride. Completing the attractions of *Future World East* was *The World of Motion* brought to you by General Motors. Shaped like a wheel, this dark ride provided a humorous look at the history of transportation from the cave

dweller days through the airplane (and beyond!)

And Now a Word from Our Sponsors

The merging of these various corporate interests is very important to understanding the character of EPCOT Center. On one hand, sponsorships were to be expected. After all, Walt's EPCOT was, in part, to be a showcase for American businesses with corporations playing an active role in the storytelling. The Disney Company had relied on some sort of outside sponsorship in most of its major developments including World's Fairs and Disneyland itself. Mixed with the need for a steady cash flow and prior experience with corporate messaging, creating ten-year sponsorships agreements with willing partners seemed like a no-brainer. The final result seems almost predictable when matching the attraction theme to its benefactor. "EPCOT Center is the essence of Corporate Disney. What had been envisioned by Walt Disney himself as a living city of the future…has instead become a kind of permanent World's Fair, with its industrial expositions and national pavilions" (Fjellman 1992 p. 213). One of the early monorail spiels informed guests that "EPCOT is technical know-how combined with Disney showmanship—550 acres exploring the innovations of tomorrow and the wonders of enterprise" (quoted in Wilson 1994, p. 118). And the hidden benefit of this arrangement was the allowance for a bit of selective memory or cognitive dissonance for all parties involved. Disney could almost say it was fulfilling Walt's dream of working toward the public good via this techno-wonderland while the corporations could play an active role in shaping the future to their designs while providing a service of escapist entertainment. Everybody wins!

Allowing sponsors meant accommodating corporate interests and messaging into EPCOT Center's vision. Admittedly, I offer no evidence to back this claim but I am confident that more

than a few artists and storytellers that made up WED/Imagineering were more than a little

disheartened at the possibility of becoming corporate shills. This is not to suggest that the Disney

Company is/was naïve or a victim that was duped. As a major media-entertainment entity,

innocence regarding any compromise to corporate demands is beyond laughable. However,

companies and organizations are made up of individuals. It is example of the problem that

anyone who wants to achieve something potentially ground-breaking has to come to terms with:

idealized vision versus harsh realities. As a classroom teacher, I run into this problem

frequently. My high school students are at an age where they have heard the meta-narrative of

U.S. history and, whether they will admit it or not, are heavily programmed by their parents. My

hope for them is to consider areas where they are other possibilities exist but I am also honest

enough to know that one hour a day with me can only accomplish so much. So goes the life of a

teacher, so goes the realities of EPCOT Center's construction.

To cement the arrangement so that all parties would be satisfied would require a bit of

that Disney showmanship mixed with the desires of the sponsors. This compromise would lead

to one of the hallmarks of EPCOT Center: the inclusion and usage of the word "we." This

monosyllabic word was used to describe how corporate sponsored futurism was to unfold

assuming guests would play their role in this vision of the future. Case in point, emblazed in the

entryway of the *Horizons* attraction and reinforced via song was the motto, "If we can dream it,

then we can do it!" Which raises the big question: what's with the "we"? What does "we" hope

to gain? Stephen Fjellman (1992) wrote "the first-person plural at *Future World*…marks…an

attempted alliance between the middle-class people who visit WDW and the giant corporations

that would control our destiny" (p. 14). In this interpretation, the usage of "we" suggests a

triangulation between guests, Disney story-telling, and corporate interests. In his essay, *Betrayal*

of the Future: Walt Disney's EPCOT Center, Alexander Wilson (1994) wrote

> EPCOT specifically addresses the future in a way Disney's other parks do not. Its
>
> publicity says its dedicated to the imagination, to our fantasies and our 'dreams
>
> for better tomorrows.' Disney publicity makes it seem as though a brighter future
>
> were just a matter of 'creative thinking' and 'futuristic technologies.' The
>
> widespread sense of impending ecological and military catastrophe that people
>
> have today is thoroughly absent. At EPCOT we're told what the future is going to
>
> be and that it is a hopeful one…Progress, development, expansion, growth—these
>
> will ensure (some-day) leisure and well-being for all (pp. 119-120).

The alliance and implied complicity of the "we" are required for EPCOT Center's attractions to

take shape. Admittedly, I was blissfully unaware of such messaging as a young visitor to the

park. However, as an adult, I have mixed feelings. If presented as a collective endeavor where

various interests of public and private entities discuss, "we" does not seem overly problematic.

The inclusion of hyper-capitalist corporations that may have a certain view of what the "future"

should look like is another matter.

At best, the final realized version of EPCOT Center was a mixed bag. At times, the

attractions contained too much overlap (*Spaceship Earth* and *The World of Motion* both

contained massive historical overviews via timeline scenes) accompanied by a quick nod to a

better future tagged on toward the end of the ride. In *Vinyl Leaves* (1992), Stephen Fjellman

argued that the overall narratives of the rides were that "the past was zany …The present is

terrific, mostly because of the commodities the corporations have developed and marketed. The

future, however, is full of challenges. New frontiers are everywhere...the natural world exists

only for human use" (p. 14). Or, as Wilson (1994) put it "here [at EPCOT Center] technology

figures large as an agent of history" (p. 120). "Technology" is presented the main contributor to

human utopian vision; the ability to live in comfort and conquer the natural world. Wilson went

on to write about what is not included in the discourse of EPCOT Center. Questions such as

> Will we have access to the new instrumentation? Will we be able to determine
>
> how it will be introduced to society, at what pace and with what effects? What
>
> implications does it have the future of centralized urban societies? Is information
>
> an essential public resource or a privately owned commodity bought and sold in
>
> the marketplace? Isn't it dishonest to talk of the liberatory [sic] potentials of
>
> telematics without considering the shortcomings of the society? What kinds of
>
> genuinely democratic uses are already being made with these technologies? These
>
> are questions that EPCOT never remotely considers; they are not simply not on
>
> the agenda (121).

This sums up the EPCOT Center paradox: a theme park that is unique in that it focuses on issues

of futurism and technology but also frustrating because the interactivity (*currere*) with the topics

is non-existent.

This harsh reality of early EPCOT Center is part of the reason why this project is arguing

for a publicly funded EPCOT that divorces itself from the need to accept potentially troublesome

dollars. The feedback loop that Disney's EPCOT Center and its sponsors created was not always

overt or obvious to the average guest. Nevertheless, it did (and still does) exist. Taking

corporate dollars to create narratives about the future is where most of EPCOT Center's critics

have aimed their critical fire over the years. As mentioned in Chapter One, I am not here to

defend every decision made (as if I could) and am fully aware of the potential dangers of such

relationships (*Universe of Energy* being sponsored by Exxon comes to mind). Rather than avoid

the debate, this project argues for the imaginary EPCOT of Chapters Four and Five that would be freed of these constraints. This reconciliation is necessary because it is the idealized, nostalgic EPCOT Center that gave me a hopeful futurist outlook and desire to bring "possible future" studies into the classroom.

Spaceship Earth and Communication

"Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going? What are we waiting for? What awaits us?" -Ernst Bloch

"Where have we come from? Where are we going? The answers begin in our past…Answers recording on the walls of time…" -opening narration to *Spaceship Earth* (1982)

The centerpiece of EPCOT (Center) was, and still is, the behemoth *Spaceship Earth*. The dark ride contained inside is currently on its fourth version but has avoided the major overhauls of most of the other opening day pavilions. *Spaceship Earth* is geared to the overall theme of human communication and the ride provides an abbreviated history from pre-history to the Information Age. The ride vehicles, playfully referred to as "time machines", take guests from the base of giant sphere to the top and then back down again with the goal being that the viewer subconsciously feels as if progress is being made on the communication timeline. This attraction deserves its own section of this project because communication is in close relationship with curriculum studies.

Spaceship Earth's overall narrative focuses on the universal need for human communication as means of delivering information. One place where this theme is evident is on a mural just outside of the entrance that has been present since the park's opening day. Guests

receive a visual snapshot of the upcoming message via this mural which depicts an early Man creating a cave painting towards the bottom and astronauts working on satellites at the top. The guest is thereby primed to receive the upcoming curriculum but also is invited to consider communication as a transformative event passed down through history. Moreover, the mural captures something else which has been previously mentioned…the theme of the familiar merged with the unknown. Beginning with the caveman, the visitor is supposed to understand and have a connection even though no one living from 1982 on has truly experienced this world. Imagination is required to fill in the missing pieces of what the world of the Ancients was like. The image of the astronaut only fairs slightly better. It can be assumed that guests have some general knowledge of space voyages, but is it really something most people have experienced?

What the mural is doing is engaging in a form of collective memory. Barbie Zelizer's (1998) *Remembering to Forget* reminded us that "discussions of visual memories thereby become at some level discussions of cultural practice—of the strategies by which images are made, collected, retained and stored, recycled, and forgotten" (p. 7). Can the same be said if the collective memory is not one that has direct experience with? The mural outside *Spaceship Earth* would imply the answer is an indefatigable "yes." Reminiscent of Hall's encoding-decoding model, the mural thereby strikes a strange chord of being equally understood as real and completely existing in our imagination. How is this possible? What is this mural here and what are we, the guests, supposed to do with this text? What is the message of *Spaceship Earth*?

To begin with, Disney's usual white-washing of history is less prevalent in here as people from various lands and traditions are included as part of the narrative. The story begins with the ancient Paleolithic peoples, continues on to Ancient Egypt and Phoenicia, includes a scene in Athens, takes the rider through the Italian Renaissance, and highlights such evolutionary

technologies as the printing press, telegraph, radio, television, and the internet. The show's finale has guests looking back down on to Earth as the vehicles begin their descent with the intent to show the rider how far humans have come because of our ability to communicate. This was not a complete list of show scenes but, hopefully, a respectable representation of what one could expect to see while riding *Spaceship Earth.*

In all of my research, one book that really helped me during this project is one by James Carey, the much cited, *Communication as Culture* (1992). Carey's work puts forth the idea that there are "two alternative conceptions of communication…alive in American culture…since the nineteenth century" which are "a transmission view of communication and a ritual view of communication" (p. 14).   At first glance, *Spaceship Earth* is relishing in the transmission view prominent in Disney dark rides because it engages in what Carey defines as "imparting", "sending" or "giving information to others". Again, we see the relationship between control and all things Disney. Carey wrote

> The center of this idea of communication is the transmission of signals or messages over distance for the purpose of control. It is a view of communication that derives from one of the most ancient of human dreams: the desire to increase the speed and effect of messages as they travel in space (p. 15).

He even mentions the messaging system of Ancient Egypt later in this description! More to the point is how the "story" presented in *Spaceship Earth* cries out to be heard across space and time via this transmission view. In this regard, communication takes on its role similar to that of the nation-state in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983/2016) in that the history is presented to create a connection from past to present. Beginning with the exterior mural and continuing to the ride's starting point of the Ancients and ending with the guests in space, the

theme of communication is presented as both understood and inevitable but is ultimately imaginary in its connection.

Although the transmission view is extremely blatant, *Spaceship Earth* does contain the second view if one is willing to look for it. "In the ritual definition, communication is linked to terms such as 'sharing', 'participation', 'association', 'fellowship', and 'the possession of a common faith'…A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space *but toward the maintenance of society in time…the representation of shared beliefs* (emphasis mine) (p. 18). Seen through this lens, *Spaceship Earth* goes beyond the limited scope and pushy, glossy history. James Carey (1992) wrote "the latest in technology is always the occasion of metaphysical voyages outward in space but backward in time: a journey of restoration as much as progress" (p. 8). Admittedly, Carey was not writing about a Disney theme park ride. Nevertheless, his insight captures the hopeful optimism and curricular potential on display during EPCOT Center's early days. Richard Beard (1982) writes of *Spaceship Earth* that "the story of communications transmits a message at once profound, provocative, and promising" (p. 26). Simply put, he was right. The combination of historical storytelling, mixed with the ride design, and the theme of communication is one reason, I believe, that *Spaceship Earth* has mostly remained in-tact as opposed to the rest of the attractions of EPCOT Center. In its way, *Spaceship Earth*'s early incarnations were perhaps the closest to the "entertain, inform, and inspire" mission statement. The fact that such an attraction even exists is a testament to a value bigger than itself; that of communication as community. And that is why the concept of EPCOT (Center) holds meaning to so many like myself.

One aspect, which should never be ignored, is how much work is put in to bridging the gap from simulacra to "reality" or at least a representation thereof. In *Vinyl Leaves,* Stephen

Fjellman (1992) explained that

> the attention to detail is overwhelming. The tiniest bits and pieces of the sets are
> constructed with a passion for authenticity—an authenticity that escapes all but
> the most-detailed orientated and knowledgeable visitors. For example, there is an
> early scene…in which a pharaoh of the New Kingdom of Egypt is dictating a
> letter to his scribe…this dictation is excerpted from an actual letter received by an
> agent of a ruler of this period. It is authenticity inside inauthenticity (p. 87).

Again, the theme of finding the real through the unreal is one of the staples of Disney theme
parks. In *Animation: Form Follows Fun* (2004), Regina Dahmen-Ingenhoven suggested that
"total design, according to Disney, covers every conceivable aspect of design and
experience…the most effective impact of this attention to detail lies in achieving the goal of
setting up leisure time as a positive alternative to the everyday" (p. 65). My high school social
studies classroom cannot come anywhere near the level of technological sophistication as an
EPCOT attraction but I have increasingly used that as my advantage. To Dahmen-Ingenhoven's
point, I seem like the anti-Disney World in that school is the workplace for these students; many
would rather be anywhere than in a Civics course. Interestingly enough, I have found that using
that same eye for detail that people appreciate about Disney can work with lessons that
purposefully get the students to "slow down" and contemplate. Providing detailed discussions
and lessons can be an antidote to a world inundated with screens and apps fighting for our
attention.

Another commonality between *Spaceship Earth* and the social studies classroom is the
omission by compression model. As Fjellman put it, park guests are "gliding past the splices
where the silences of Distory have been edited out" (p. 87). My students come to me with the

vaguest of outlines on U.S. History and Government. The initial consensus is that the U.S. tends to fight for the side of good as evidence through our numerous military engagements. Yes, mistakes were made in regards to slavery but, as one student informed me this week, "That's all in the past. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 put racism behind us" and then he added, "They won." Students have little to no knowledge of the U.S.-Mexican War, the U.S.-Filipino War, *Loving v. Virginia*, the Stonewall Riots/Uprisings, etc. Moments when the U.S. was not heroic nor virtuous or even living up to its creed are severely glossed over or omitted entirely.

This is where I struggle the most for my nostalgic love and occasional intellectual hate for EPCOT. On the positive side, the fact that ANY inclusion of historical events, no matter how edited, is at the centerpiece of a major gathering spot for a large array of people (i.e. a tourist theme park) is commendable. The level of detail and immersion are nothing short of fantastic in their ability to fuse curricular narrative with spectacle. As I have attested, I do believe that it had a positive influence on me and, in a small way, propelled me into education. However, the non-stop barrage of edits, whitewashing, and corporatization of history are no doubt problematic. How does one reconcile the two? Perhaps one should not have to deal with such compromises. Again, that is why this project seeks to keep the more uplifting elements through public engagement as opposed to corporate narratives that seek to gloss rather than challenge.

Perhaps some insight can be drawn into coming back to the theme of *Spaceship Earth:* Communication. "Of all things," John Dewey wrote in *Experience in Nature*, "communication is the most wonderful" (quoted in Carey 1992, p. 13). That is definitely the position of the attraction since only moments of progress are shown, no room for any "Tower of Babel" moments in this attraction. However, James Carey (1992) argued that "if we interpret [Dewey] literally, it must be either false or mundane" (p. 13) in that most communication focuses on the

daily routine ("Pick up the kids at 4 o'clock") or useless chatter about the weather or worse, news of events of which we have no agency over. For example, a useful analogy about the current mass media environment can be found in Timothy Snyder's *On Tyranny* (2017) when he wrote "everything happens fast, but nothing actually happens. Each story on televised news is 'breaking' until it is displaced by the next one. So we are hit by wave upon wave *but never see the ocean*" [emphasis mine] (p. 60). The historical events inside *Spaceship Earth* do not contain the mundane or the unpleasant, only the signifiers of progress are included.

If we view EPCOT in a theoretical sense, we can see something is being communicated with and to us. Curriculum studies teaches that that all actions are political ones. Communication is political; Messages have weight, meanings, and narratives behind them. The connection between our collective past and interconnected future is why a living curriculum is always futuristic in its orientation. Although he was specifically writing about culture, James Carey's *Communication as Culture* (1992) had this to say

> To study culture is to seek order within these forms, to bring out in
>
> starker relief their claims and meanings…to render experience
>
> comprehensible and charged with affect (p. 44).

EPCOT matters because it should be part of our collective imaginary in order to cultivate this connection between experience and meanings. It should be a place where thoughts, feelings, and proposals are "charged with affect." We cannot know the future but that does not mean we should ignore it. *Spaceship Earth* should serve as a rallying point; a tower that transmits our Being across time.

***The Land* and Agriculture**

"Let's listen to the land we all love/nature's plan will shine above/listen to the land, listen to the land…" lyrics from "Listen to the Land" (1982)

Experimental agricultural techniques and human interaction with the environment were the overall themes of *The Land* pavilion. A boat ride called "*Listen to the Land*" (currently operating as "*Living with the Land*") began by taking guests through scenes of various environments with ranging climates and topography. Early show scenes included the "symphony of the seed" where giant plastic vines glowed, a rainforest, the arid plains of the American Midwest, and a farmhouse. Originally, there was a live narrator but that has since been replaced by recorded narration which is unfortunate because it makes the ride more static than vibrant. The second half of the boat ride includes a tour of the greenhouse where experimental and "futuristic" agricultural techniques were displayed. Richard Beard's promotional *EPCOT Center: Creating the World of Tomorrow* (1982) informed us that "the story of the land and its potential partnership with man comes closest to the philosophy, purpose, and image of EPCOT [Center]…it's a story you can see, and touch, and feel, and even eat!" (p. 60). Aaron Wallace (2017) added to this by pointing out that the "larger thesis of *The Land*…is that humanity and the environment share a special connection, one we should value and seek to better understand for the sake of improving the future" (pp. 65-66). This narrative still holds true at *The Land* today as it is one of the least changed attractions since the park's opening.

Okay, confession time: this was not my favorite ride as a child. It did not leave its mark on me in the same way that the other attractions of *Future World* did. However, as I have matured, my thoughts towards *The Land* have grown fonder and more urgent. Specifically, the

need for innovative agriculture techniques in a world where the human population has continued to increase. In the greenhouse portion of the attraction, guests were shown plants growing without soil (think mineral rich sprays) and even hydro-farming in co-habitation with fish farming. The song "*Listen to the Land*" and its upbeat lyrics were definitely a highlight. Through the song, guests were told that "*the seasons come/and the seasons go/nature knows everything that it must know/ the earth and man/can be good friends/let's listen so our harvest time will never end*". Similar to *Tomorrow's Child* from Spaceship Earth, this was one of the elements of hopeful futurism found in the early days of EPCOT Center.

Not everyone shares my new found appreciation for this pavilion. Critics of the original version were quick to point out that *The Land* may have been (or may be) the prime example of the mixed messages of EPCOT Center. Alexander Wilson's essay, *The Betrayal of the Future: Walt Disney's EPCOT Center* (1994) is fairly blistering assessment in general but Wilson saves his strongest critique for *The Land*. He begins by stating that the entire pavilion is designed "like a shopping mall" and that the greenhouse gives the impression that "the farm has been erased from memory; this is a laboratory, and it must be the place they told us where food is grown" (p. 124). When contrasted to the entry in Beard's promotional book ("see, touch, feel and eat!"), Wilson's assessment is one that the existing narrative does the opposite. Instead of engaging subject to content, the story of *The Land* is one that fosters scientific sterilization into the natural world. Wilson (1994) wrote

> In truth, however, the family farm was far more than the site of food production in North American society. Thus its destruction entailed not only the rationalization of the agricultural landscape, but the decimation of local communities and rural communities. Yet there is scarcely time for such musings, for by now we're

passing giant tanks of bass, eels,…called aquaculture….Despite the exhorations, the message is clearly "Leave farming to the scientists." As the high priests of industrial civilization, scientists are a signal part of the agribusiness complex (pp. 124-125).

Wilson's take is that *The Land*'s message further alienates humans from agriculture while Beard writes as though nature was just an unwilling business associate that needed a little more coaxing into this "potential partnership." Softening the narrative in Beard's way suggests that the natural world need not be something to be conquered if it can be seduced into this mutually beneficial relationship.

Which brings us to one of the largest critiques of EPCOT Center: the belief in human progress. C.A. Bowers' *The False Promises of the Digital Revolution* (2014) is a critique on the narrative of human progress prevalent in Western society. Bowers wrote "every new technology reinforces the myth of a linear form of progress, and that progress is inevitable when scientists and technologists are in control" (p. 7). Linear progress as an ideological construct is in full force in *The Land*. The aforementioned show scenes from the boat ride that takes us from American farmhouse to the laboratory greenhouse with its hyper-mechanized agricultural techniques ensures that progress is part of the story. "Progress is also a context-free metaphor that has an equally large number of analogs that various groups use to justify their social, economic, and religious agenda" (Bowers 2014, p. 71). Seen in combination with Wilson, Bowers' words can directly be applied to *The Land* in that so much visual and audio information is presented without debate, discussion, or dissension.   Stephen Fjellman (1992) labeled the problem more whimsically: "EPCOT's little dramas tell us about evolution, pregnancy, and other secular processes. Norman Rockwell, yes. Oral Roberts, no" (p. 320).

Ecological sustainability and human progress have, regrettably, not been part of the mainstream school curriculum. This is another topic on which I am personally conflicted. I applaud the efforts for a major theme park to address the issues of agriculture even though the takeaway that "everything will be fine" is simplistic at best and may lead to the path of ecological destruction if no larger message of conservation is presented. In the foreword to *Fields of Green: Restorying Culture, Environment, and Education*, Vandana Shiva (2009) wrote "for centuries, the human mind has been shaped by education that treated the universe as a machine, and humans as cogs in the machine. We have to begin again, with a new education for a new imagination" (p. ix). The goal of this project is to present the case that EPCOT *should be* a reflection of the changes and innovations of technology, culture, and sustainable futurism via this "new imagination." The harsh critiques presented in Chapter Three are done, in part, as service to the upcoming chapters. Only by acknowledging the flaws and limitations can one hope to revitalize the current incarnations to something which aims toward the best parts of humanity. Education and curriculum are explorations designed for both collective and individual possibilities of realization; EPCOT Center, despite its limitations, provided both.

The Land is an example of where the ideas of EPCOT Center shined. Its message of working with nature, instead of against her have never been more urgent. A re-imagined EPCOT would take this concept of working in harmony with nature where humans are a part of instead of separated from. Imagine how much visitors could learn from a working agri-laboratory that combined scientific ingenuity with eco-sustainability! We have removed ourselves from the affirming work of agriculture, particularly since the latter half of the twentieth century. A revitalized *Land* pavilion that allowed students and adults the time and tools to learn more about farming would do us all a service in fostering a better tomorrow.

Horizons and Futurism

> "*If we can dream it/then we can do it/yes we can…*" *Horizons* 1983

Horizons was the crown jewel of EPCOT Center. It opened a year into EPCOT Center's existence, October 1, 1983 and immediately embodied the spirit of the entire park. Shaped like a diamond, guests entered via the "Future Port" and embarked on a journey of "possible futures" via an Omnimover dark ride. Stephen Fjellman (1992) wrote that *Horizons* was "*Future World's* table of contents" where the "robot couple from the *Carousel of Progress* guides us through a futurist retrospective and on past a set of stages that portray four different scenarios for upper-middle-class life in the future" (p. 322). Audio-Animatronic dioramas of life in a stylized "future" were the majority of show scenes which is fairly standard fare for a Disney attraction. But the real reason why *Horizons* topped all other attractions of its era was the interactive climax in which guests were allowed to choose between a finale involving either a space colony (Omega Centuri), a desert colony (Mesa Verde) or an underwater colony (Sea Castle Resort). Each ride vehicle was allowed to "vote" for which futuristic community they wanted to visit via a touchscreen panel. What followed was a brief, first-person film of your chosen "colony" that was very impressive in its day and was the forerunner of the audience participation model now prevalent in theme parks.

As mentioned previously, there was a repetitious rhythm to the EPCOT Center attractions. Shows began in the past and end with an ambiguous nod to a future "yet to come." *Horizons* definitely fit into this pattern but was different for a couple of key reasons. First off, unlike the others, the starting point of the past is much closer to modern times. *Spaceship Earth*

and *World of Motion* both start with the Paleolithic Era of early humans while *Universe of Energy* and the *Living Seas* begin with the origins of Earth itself. In contrast, *Horizons'* first show scenes are a mixture of Jules Verne and Victorian Age travel which situates the story much closer than its cohorts. By doing so, *Horizons* was able to take the guest further into the realm of tomorrow than many of the other *Future World* attractions. Secondly, the interactive feature at the conclusion gave guests a little an actual taste of new technologies and possibilities via touch screens. It was this combination of classic Disney dark ride with animatronic figures and a freshness of "choose your own adventure" storytelling that made *Horizons* the closest to the mission statement of "entertain, educate, and inspire."

The exterior building itself was designed to set the tone for what *Horizons* was presenting. John Hench, one of the members of WED, was responsible for much of the emphasis on visual storying telling. In *Designing Disney: Imagineering and the Art of the Show*, John Hench (2003) wrote "story is the essential organizing principle behind the design of the Disney theme parks. Imagineers interpret and create narratives for guests to experience in real space and time" (p. 67). Much of the Disney storytelling is done subconsciously through attraction structures and *Horizons* was a prime example. Its sharp points and sleekness served as a noticeable contrast to the spherical *Spaceship Earth*. "The building that houses *Horizons*, like the future itself, can be interpreted in many ways. This ambiguity was intentional on the part of the designers, who wanted a structure that would gear the viewer's mind toward visions of the future" (Beard 1982, p. 40).

As appealing and intentional as the exterior design was, it could never deliver on the promise of "ambiguity". This was, after all, a General Electric sponsored pavilion in a major theme park. However, *Horizons* did not have the overt commercial message as other *Future*

World attractions did (I mean, how could it?). The narrative of "a better tomorrow" was the

product. Like Don Draper's slide projector, *Horizons* was reaching for a deeper connection

between audience and message; a longing for way out of today's ills such as "housework" and

even being bound by terrestrial constraints. Alexander Wilson (1994) warned that, "these

corporate narratives of progress attempt to build a consensus about the historic mission of

American capitalism, thus deflecting the questions of power and control that pervade our

everyday lives in consumer society" (p. 126). *Horizons*, on the surface, *feels* less insidious than

the other problem areas of EPCOT Center because, unlike agriculture and energy, the future

seems more flexible. At *World of Motion*, we are shown a future that still involves the

automobile; the *Universe of Energy* suggests that fossil fuels will continue to play a role in our

energy needs, etc. True, *Horizons* shows us an affluent vision of the future where the problems

of human-environment interaction, urban decay, and ocean pollution have been solved

(conveniently "off screen" of course) but it did encapsulate the hopeful futurism that is part of

the experiment. Where exactly does that leave *Horizons* and its relationship to this project? The

short and unsatisfactory answer is that it is complicated. Perhaps my nostalgia is blinding me but

Horizons is where I find the seeds of redeeming Epcot and making it an exploration of utopian

curriculum.

There also is something to the message of *Horizons* that stands out in control that

narratives of the schooling process. For example, school is usually the place where either the

future is never discussed or, worse, where the future goes to die. Consider the reality of school

subjects: History courses look backward, Literature classes offer the canon of "classic" literature

but provides little space for new entries, Science curriculum is often stymied by budgets or

"culture war" issues that can stand in the way of progress.

In addition, consider the trajectory from K-12 as a story. Primary school students are told to share and collaborate in their learning often using play. This is slowly undone by the latter grades of elementary school and likely completely dead as middle school gets the students ready for "the real world." Then comes high school. Students begin to turn their thoughts to their personal plans for after school but never in any existing curriculum is there communal building of society/tomorrow. The only time the Future is even given lip-service is when students are asked: "College, military, or workforce". We are going the wrong way. Could an updated *Horizons* attraction that allowed students and adults a chance to discuss topics relating to the Future save us? It is certainly worth a try.

Losing the Center

Looking back now, I can only ask "what happened?" Where's EPCOT Center when we need it most? Almost everything described in Chapter Three, with all of the futuristic swagger found in the attractions of EPCOT Center, are now relegated to nostalgic memory. None of the previously outlined pavilions are in their original state and some have completely vanished. Eventual changes and updates can be understood, and even forgiven, considering that 1982 was eons ago in the life of a theme-park. What cannot be undone is the damage caused by abandoning the spirit of the original mission statement to "entertain, inform, and inspire." Today, we find an Epcot reduced to a shell of a shell from its early days. The pretense of any "future" has been removed from *Future World* and replaced with characters and attractions based solely on Disney owned intellectual properties; only the "entertain" component remains from the original mission statement. "It isn't change itself…that irks the '82 [EPCOT Center] loyalists, but rather the nature of it. Times change. People change. Theme parks change. But it is a

reasonable and noble hope that all of these things grow brighter, bolder, better, and never backward" (Wallace 2017, p. 161).

Of all the notable changes, the two that are the most revealing about the park's devolution involve the naming. The year 1994 saw the dropping of the word "Center" from the park's title. This change signified a total retreat from any pretense that the promise to one day construct a community "always a statement of becoming" would be fulfilled. The legal arrangements made between the Disney Company and the state of Florida would not be upheld after all. Walt's futuristic community had somehow died its second death. The second, and more alarming change that year, was that the word "EPCOT" was reduced to lower case lettering (just "Epcot") and subjugated, for a brief while, to the title "Epcot '94." In doing so, the acronym became completely hollow and replace with a nonsensical name. These two changes are minor to the average park guest who may not know of the park's storied history but for those who know better, these were devastating adjustments.

Soon after came the attraction/ride changes. *World of Motion* was dismantled in favor of a thrill ride called *Test Track* in 1996. *Horizons* was shuttered, torn down, and replaced by a screen-and-centrifuge simulator ride, *Mission Space. The Living Seas* had its track shortened and the entire pavilion was re-themed to include the characters of *Finding Nemo*. Comedienne Ellen DeGeneres was inserted into the *Universe of Energy* in 1996 which was rebranded as *Ellen's Energy Adventure* (interestingly enough, that version has also shuttered and is currently being replaced by an upcoming roller-coaster ride starring Marvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy* characters). *Spaceship Earth* and *The Land* escaped demolition and were upgraded to (mostly) maintain their original story but no longer have a framework from which to build on to.

Again, all of these changes may seem insignificant but they are of tremendous

importance to the spirit of this project. Disney's betrayal of *Future World* means that EPCOT Center, despite its flaws, can no longer be experienced by upcoming generations. There cannot be any hope of a child passing through the gates today having a similar experience to the one I had back in the early days of EPCOT Center. Fans of a certain age who do remember are categorized as overly-nostalgic by younger fans who did not have the experience of feeling the way that EPCOT made us feel. Furthermore, in a profoundly ironic twist, the devolution has also been a loss for critics and scholars as well. Most of the scholarship I encountered in my research pertained to the narratives of EPCOT Center. Now, there seems to be less to critique, or at least fewer original insights, now that the park has been Disneyfied. As evidenced by the lack of scholarship, the selling out of Epcot made the entire park irrelevant and boring.

This project seeks to reverse the devolution. Rather than blame, I choose to take all that I have learned and focus them on a way forward with EPCOT as a recognizable reference as a starting point. It is my over-arching contention that the existing literature that focuses on Disney has missed something important: the potential of EPCOT's to serve as a living model where teachers, students, decision-makers, etc. discuss "possible futures" in a living laboratory. This imaginary, re-conceptualized EPCOT has been overlooked by most of the academic community. So, why not turn these IP mediascapes into learning environments that require more of us than to fill our brains with escapist cotton candy? My goal is to contribute to the body of knowledge and to the field of curriculum studies by "adding the EPCOT chapter" to the story. The EPCOT Center (1982-1994) of my youth asked for more than escapism: it asked us *to believe.*

So far, I have outlined how Walt Disney changed from being an animator, to a theme-park purveyor, to almost having built a futuristic community. In addition, I have shown what happened following Walt's death which gave the world EPCOT Center. Now, all of that is done

and gone. My task is to take the story from the 1994 devolution and re-position EPCOT as a

viable source of curriculum. I will try to wake EPCOT from its slumber and re-story it into what

it should be for the increasingly global-digital world. Uncertainty about the problems facing the

planet did not cease in 1994 when EPCOT Center decided to turn away from the future and, in

many respects, the situation has become more dire. We cannot stop now. Earlier, I quoted

Vandana Shiva (2009) in *The Land* portion of this chapter when she wrote "we have to begin

again, with a new education for a new imagination…We have to imagine our way forward at a

time when the present trajectory is closing the future for humans. And with that new

imagination we have to act to generate a future-with care and compassion, with hope and

courage" (p. ix). If we can dream it, then we can do it.

CHAPTER FOUR

JOURNEY INTO IMAGINATION

Dystopian Landscapes

In Chapter Four, we leave behind the historical aspects of Disney and its relationship with curriculum and instead move into the realms of utopianism and cultural imaginaries. Our ultimate destination is our reconceptualized, publicly funded EPCOT in Chapter Five. But first, the necessary groundwork of why such a thing is needed to begin with has to be presented. Regrettably, the introduction to this chapter is not the most upbeat portrait but that does not mean its finale will not be inspirational. It is in this chapter where I will take my stand and make the case for why utopian thinking should be a major force in public school curriculum despite the overwhelming tide against such an idea.

One of the more useful sources for this project was *Existential Utopia: New Perspectives on Utopian Thought* (2012) which was edited by Michael Marder and Patricia Vieira. This work began with the acknowledgement of the somewhat troubling state surrounding utopia, hope, and optimism in the current time.

> Is there still any space, whether conceptual or practical, for the thinking of
> utopia…in a world marked by a chronic dystopian outlook? After more than a 100
> years of what Nietzsche first diagnosed as 'European nihilism', dystopia has now
> firmly established itself as the current *Weltanschauung,* a lens which we filter
> historical reality. In the West, the sense that all viable alternatives for a different
> political organization have been exhausted led to widespread voter apathy,
> resignation and nonparticipation in the political sphere. Aesthetically, this

dystopian mood have given rise to countless novels and films…An interpretation

of world history not as a triumphant march of Reason but as an unmitigated

disaster has been a hallmark of some of the most influential currents of

thought…" (p. ix).

Recent Social Science books with titles such as *The People vs. Democracy* (Yascha Mounk), *The Road to Unfreedom* (Timothy Snyder), and *How Democracies Die* (Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt) seem to echo this sentiment that classical, Western-style liberalism is in steep decline and that that impending doom is what awaits our world. Authoritarian and neo-fascist movements, long considered by political elites to be extinguished vestiges, are indeed on the rise around the globe. In light of these realities, the answer to Marder and Vieira's question is emphatically negative in regards to space for utopianism.

On a smaller, but no less significant plane, if one was to conduct a quick scan of current popular culture, one would likely find confirmation of dystopian landscapes. Pop culture touchstones such as the recent zombie craze (*The Walking Dead*, etc.) were based on fear of a post-apocalyptic hellscape, the *Hunger Games* series was partially based on scarcity and inequal distribution of resources, the *Divergent* series, etc. The dystopian trend cut across numerous genres. Whilst these may seem trivial, I contend that they are rather significant because these are the mediums the younger generations are more likely to interact with. In her article, "Is Ours a Post-Utopia World?" Patricia Vieira (2016) theorized as to why dystopian literature has overtaken the futurist narrative.

To be sure, dystopian thought shares utopia's goal of criticizing present society.

But while utopias show how the world can be improved by comparing it to a

better one, dystopias draw attention to the ills of our time by exacerbating them, imagining what would happen if our worst fears came true.

Vieira points to the nightmare worlds of George Orwell's *1984* and the gender horror classic, *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood as examples of why utopia has lost its luster (on a side-note, both of these works have seen a recent spike in sales since the 2016 U.S. presidential election which does not bode well for utopia's comeback). One final example comes from the 2017 film, *Trainspotting 2*. Mark Renton, the film's protagonist has returned after a twenty-year absence to his childhood town and friends. But this is not an uplifting story of renewal. Rather, it is a mid-life crisis film that specifically speaks to this current trend of unease in Western societies that have grown weary of the current state of existence. In a monologue that echoes a very similar one in the first *Trainspotting (*1996), Renton warns a much younger female character of her possible future (and his own)

> *Choose life…Choose handbags, choose high-heeled shoes, cashmere and silk, to make yourself feel what passes for happy. Choose an iPhone made in China by a woman who jumped out of a window and stick it in the pocket of your jacket fresh from a South-Asian Firetrap. Choose Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and a thousand others ways to spew your bile across people you've never met. Choose updating your profile, tell the world what you had for breakfast and hope that someone, somewhere cares. Choose looking up old flames, desperate to believe that you don't look as bad as they do. Choose live-blogging, from your first wank 'til your last breath; human interaction reduced to nothing more than data. Choose ten things you never knew about celebrities who've had surgery...Choose a zero-hour contract and a two-hour journey to work. And*

choose the same for your kids, only worse, and maybe tell yourself that it's better that they never happened. ...Choose disappointment and choose losing the ones you love, then as they fall from view, a piece of you dies with them until you can see that one day in the future, piece by piece, they will all be gone and there'll be nothing left of you to call alive or dead. Choose your future, Veronika. Choose life.

Renton's chilling words are meant to connect this present age with the one found in the first film and yet, while the monologue in the first film is meant to be ironic, this one reeks of despair. It speaks to the over-consumption of media and the bombardment of images abundant in the early 21st century. Bleakness is the current default and there does not seem to be a way forward but all seem unable to reverse course.

All of these aforementioned books and films did big business for their creators and purveyors which is, in itself, depressing. How do these pop culture examples speak to our current situation? Are these trends because we have become satisfied or dissatisfied with existence? Do modern audiences see science fiction or bleak dystopian films as a window into the inevitable decline of human civilization? Have we *chosen* dystopia over utopia? What has happened to positive spins on "what-if?"

An examination of when this present mode of thinking began to grip the public consciousness is impossible to say with certainty. As a Social Studies teacher with experience historical methods, I must first acknowledge the upcoming hypotheses are admittedly biased toward the American perspective. Nevertheless, one possibility comes from the great transitions that occurred in the twentieth century. Francis Fukuyama's controversial *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992) which opened with

> The twentieth century…has made all of us into deep historical pessimists…By long-standing tradition, Americans as a people are said to continually hopeful about the future. But when we come to larger questions, such as whether there has been or will be progress in history, the verdict is decidedly different…Our own experience has taught us, seemingly, that the future is more likely than not to contain new and unimagined evils… (p. 3).

Again, as one who makes their living studying and teaching history, I can clearly see where Fukuyama is coming from. The horrors of industrial warfare during the Great War, the unleashing of atomic bombs during WWII, the Holocaust, failed experiments of communism under Mao and Stalin, further development nuclear tests, environmental degradation through climate change and deforestation, the collapses of civic organizations, the failures of hyper-capitalism, U.S. imperialist adventures into Asia and the Middle East, and the rise of the surveillance state (and surveillance capitalism), etc. all are unfortunate hallmarks of the "American Century." Regrettably, these were not relegated nor did they end with the twentieth century although that was the time when the first emerged. We can update Fukuyama's list to include international terrorism, the Sixth Extinction, populism, cyber-war, etc.

However, is Fukuyama a harbinger or a false prophet of a less hopeful future? How can Fukuyama possibly even argue we have reached the end of history when there is so much left undone? (as of this writing, we took our first ever photograph of a black hole. That seems like a matter of historical significance, right?) Clearly, we did not reach the end of history as his title would suggest. Life has gone on. Let it register with you that all of my present high school students were born after the terrorist attacks of September 11th and have very little memory of the economic woes of 2008. To be clear, this chapter is attempting to explore why these dystopian

visions are dominating over utopian ones. In other words, our troubles are not new but the seeming disconnect between the reality of human progress and despair does seem to be a recent phenomenon. Fukuyama was incorrect in the long run but this idea of reaching the end of history is one that still continues to linger. Specifically, it was echoed in the work of Rutger Bregman (2017) in *Utopia for Realists*. Bregman spelled out this current malaise by writing

> Welcome…to the Land of Plenty. To the good life, where almost everyone is rich, safe, and healthy. Where's there's only one thing we lack: a reason to get out of bed in the morning. Because, after all, you can't really improve on paradise (p. 10).

This almost seems like a sick parody of human history, progress, and the current state. How can we be in the "land of plenty" and yet have no reason to do much of anything? Hasn't the story of human history to arrive at the better life not been pointing to precisely this moment? Is this not the very message of *Horizons* where work/toil/labor and scarcity are exchanged for leisure and research? Perhaps yes, perhaps not. Maybe it is the losing of the toil that frightens society the most. Bregman added

> Precisely when we should be shouldering the historic task of inventing this rich, safe, and healthy existence with meaning, *we've buried utopia instead* [emphasis mine]. There's no new dream to replace it because we can't imagine a better world than the one we've got…But the real crisis of our times…is not that we don't have it good…*No, the real crisis is that we can't come up with anything better* [emphasis mine] (pp. 10-11).

And this is, I feel, the crux of the argument. On the micro-level, schools have reached the assessment, accountability, and standardization breaking point but "we can't come up with

anything better" so we do more of the same. Perhaps teachers, and society as a whole, has turned into a chorus of Peggy Lee's asking, "Is that all there is?"

It may seem superficial but I believe the devolution from EPCOT to EPCOT Center and finally to Epcot was/is a symptom of this decline. Sure, it was a Disney theme park that sold souvenirs and was a vacation destination but *it was also something more*. Entertain. Inform. Inspire. EPCOT Center was a space in which a mass audience could be introduced to new technologies such as touch screens and hydro-farming while also considering their role in this "great big beautiful tomorrow." That was a place that aimed at "coming up with something better." And by abandoning its focus on the Future in exchange for attractions based on the Disney Company's intellectual properties (IPcot with Marvel, Pixar, etc.), Epcot demonstrates how much dystopian has conquered the present thinking. By abandoning the potential of hopeful futurism, it would appear that Western culture has has replaced it with what Johanna Hari calls "junk values." And it is these "junk values" that are killing us.

In conducting my research into the possible connection between the dystopian landscapes led me to the aforementioned Johanna Hari. I first encountered his work during an interview he participated in on the *Making Sense* podcast with the neuroscientist and philosopher Sam Harris. Hari has done extensive work on the nature of addiction and depression However it was one of his theories that really resonated with me on how this current age is perhaps unique because of some of the basic needs that are being ignored. Hari does point out that anti-depressant medications may have a place in the treatment of psychological needs but Hari contends that "the most effective strategies for dealing with depression and anxiety are the ones that deal with the reasons why we are so depressed and anxious in the first place." During the conversation with Sam Harris, Hari explains that we have been approaching the deadly increase drug addiction (i.e.

the opioid crisis) problem from the wrong direction. "The opposite of addiction is not sobriety; the opposite of addiction is connection…this does not mean that there aren't real biological dimensions to addiction…but I realized how much I'd underestimated the role of these social aspects." He goes on to explain how the rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide have gone up in the Western world in recent years. Hari stated

> Everyone listening to your [Harris'] podcast knows that they have natural physical needs…you need food, you need water, you need shelter, you need clean air. If I took those things away from you, you'd be in real trouble real fast. But there's equally strong evidence that all human beings have natural psychological needs, right? You need to feel you belong. You need to feel life has meaning and purpose. You need to feel as though people see you and value you. You need to feel like you've got a future that makes sense.

A need for belonging and meaning. Before I go all in, allow me to unpack and establish the requisite warning. Phrases like "belonging" and "meaning" (and yes, "utopianism") are loaded terms. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the call to "belong" has led to the uptick in nationalism and authoritarianism. ISIS can provide people with "meaning." Demagogues thrive in offering susceptible populations a road to "utopia" (if they are willing to buy the vision of the future that he/she is selling). Clearly that is not what Hari is arguing for but the marker has to be placed as a warning. This project is cannot afford to be naïve in its assessment and is watchful that democracy is hard-work.

Instead, what a utopian curriculum demands is the moral imperative! Making meaning that seeks to make a world more inclusive, not exclusive. A curriculum of liberation and sustainability where students are treated as human beings, not data points. This was the original

spirit of that led to the work Pinar, Grumet, Reynolds, Schubert, Aoki, Freire, and the scores of other curriculum theorists during and after the Reconceputalization. It was that spirit of hopeful futurism that this project is all about! Earlier this school year, a student wrote me a thank you note that said "thank you for making me feel like a human at school again."   It would be nice to live in a world where no teacher had ever gotten a card like that but I did. It happened. Tell me again why school has to be SO bad?

Back to the topic at hand, I do feel as though Hari's work does offer a plausible diagnosis of our dystopic disease. He argues is that we have abandoned our communities and tribe (note, not the same as tribalism) and been told that we could "do it all on our own." Our increasing rates of depression are tied to our increased isolation. The erosion of civic organizations such as labor unions, churches, clubs, sewing circles, etc. mean that we are more likely to turn to our electronic devices than each other. What used to be done via social interaction is increasingly done on a screen. And in doing so, citizens are, as Sherry Turkle put it, "alone together." These are what Hari refers to as "junk values." Case in point, in 2018 Hari wrote an opinion piece with the very blunt title of "We know junk food makes us sick. Are 'junk values' making us depressed?" which was also discussed on the podcast. Hari explained in the article that

> Junk food has taken over our diets, and it is making millions of people physically sick. A growing body of scientific evidence suggests that something similar is happening with our minds — that they have become dominated by junk values, and this is making us mentally sick, triggering soaring rates of depression and anxiety... Extrinsic values are KFC for the soul. Yet our culture constantly pushes us to live extrinsically.

This was the idea that really put the hook in me. The idea that society is not only becoming more tolerate but *expects* 'junk values' to be the core tenants of our lives. When human existence is reduced to the pursuant of money, success, and accumulation of material wealth and possession, the results show up in the human condition. "Lest there be any misunderstanding: It is capitalism that opened the gates to the Land of Plenty, but capitalism alone cannot sustain it" (Bregman 2017, p. 19). The "junk values" of the 21st century should be just as alarming as anything Fukuyama was warning against in 1992. The daily practice of finding meaning through conversing with others or building our communities is indeed challenging and takes time and investment. It is undoubtedly easier to go shopping and fill up our time, lives, etc. with possession or fill our time on our devices. Even something that could be beneficial as writing a journal and working self-reflection is not encouraged in the "junk values" system because it does not lead to more consumption. "Writing has never been capitalism's thing. Capitalism is profoundly illiterate" (Deleuze and Guattari 1977, p. 240). But those seeking meaning are not 'illiterate." They desire to speak the language of humanity. How would our world be different if we rejected "junk values" based on extrinsic pushes and replaced them with intrinsic allowances that sought meaning?

Michael Marder and Patricia Vieira's aforementioned work (2012) echoed much of the other scholarship that I encountered during the course of this project in that it places most of the rise of dystopia at the feet of eroding the communal bonds that once joined us.

> In the course of the twentieth century, technocracy became the avatar of
> naturalization, having replaced…the natural law. It forged,…an illusion of
> depoliticization, whereby citizens were led to believe that there was no more
> place for meaningful political decisions suffocated under the piles of statistical

data and that governance was a mere reaction to, and the management of, the

circumstances as they presented themselves (xii).

Their assessment of technocracy has very real consequences for curriculum theorists in that

students are often, as Mark Renton said "reduced to nothing more than data." One can debate

the utopian project of public school but the idea behind it will always have saliency because the

next generations are the Future. Spare me the Whitney Houston comparisons and forgive me if it

sounds trite but it is true.

Once more, I must remind myself that not everyone has been included in the roll call of

citizenry in this country. This project remains sensitive to vulnerable populations that have never

been included into numerous organizations due to race, religion, sexuality, and orientation. But

generally, Marder and Vieira's assumption that dystopia breeds in conditions when the citizenry

feels left out or overlooked is accurate. Cynicism will eat away at even the most stalwart of

Institutions if given the opportunity. Furthermore, if a utopian movement falters, then more

dystopian visions are likely to spring up when people lose heart. Worse still is if the utopian

drive for hope is used by those who want to bring about evil. Indeed, there are historical

examples of both failed and destructive utopianism from extremes such as Mao's Great Leap

Forward to more benign ones such as the box office failure of Disney's *Tomorrowland* (more on

that later). Utopia has a bad rap which is not totally undeserved. However, this project relies

heavily on keeping aspects that do work, or at least are worthy of considering, while learning

from past mistakes.

This reminds me of one more theme that I must include here and that is futurism fatigue.

James Carey (1992) explained this phenomenon as

whenever the future failed, as it often did during the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries, appeals was made to yet another new future patching up the miscarriage of previous predictions…preachers and politicians appealed to Americans to retain faith in the future as such; they appealed to the future as a solvent and asked the public to believe that the latest technology or social project would fully justify past sacrifices and the endurance of present turmoil (p. 178).

This why conservatives do not trust Karl Marx and why liberals abhor the Laffer Curve. To bring the conversation back to EPCOT, it is my contention that futurism fatigue was part of the reason why Walt's EPCOT was abandoned by the mid-1970s. I can fully understand why Walt Disney's vision of a futuristic community bolstered by private companies all working together for the public good was never built. By the 1970s, progressive government policies were running out of steam and the public was mired in the oil crisis, the Vietnam Conflict, Watergate, etc. In this light, Walt's utopian community runs the gamut between unrealistic, misguided, and potentially dangerous. The American public was not given much reason to trust that government or corporations (Dow Chemical, anyone?) would be the ones creating a more egalitarian society through a merger of these two entities.

Furthermore, Carey's assertion that the public is repeatedly told to just hold out and wait for something better is something that can still be felt today. Only now, the technological and societal changes are more global in nature (automation, outsourcing, climate change) and it seems as though citizens and democratic institutions are fed up with looking toward an optimistic future. Enter "junk values" as a replacement for working on creating a better world. Indeed, Western societies were primed for the populist wave because of this combination. Large masses of people got tired of waiting for their "past sacrifices" to pay off and that impatience manifested itself into a rejection of the status quo. This might have been a necessary releasing of the

pressure valve but the forces of reactionary policies are not aligned with the utopianism that

should be; the utopianism that this project is advocating for.

Finally, the work of Rob Rieman is vital to this portion of the project. In *To Fight Against this Age* (2018), he echoes some of the concerns that this project seeks to address. Rieman wrote

> There is unmistakably a deep cultural crisis in our own society. We no
> longer know what are common spiritual values are, education no longer
> provides self-cultivation and moral training, and we no longer have any
> idea how to answer the fundamental questions which form the basis of
> every ideal of civilization: *What is the right way to live? What is a good
> society?* (p. 64).

Briefly, I would like to point out that it is very important that I point out that "common" here is not the same as hegemonic. One must be careful not fall into the traps of the tyranny of the majority where other cultures and voices are ignored for the sake of commonality. Instead, an awareness that the great democratic experiment is an ongoing project in which trajectories are not set but forged. The questions that Rieman introduces are both ancient and modern in that it addresses Fukuyama and Bregman's ideas on how to live in an increasingly post-scarcity society.

As a quick aside and fully aware of the pitfalls of classification, it seems to me as though one of the great divides in our species is between those who focus on the now versus the later. Everyone knows on a subconscious level that life is finite but do you choose the Bacchian approach where today is all there is and the future be damned as long as you enjoyed the ride? The Nietzschean model where one can stare into the abyss while the abyss stares back? Perhaps the Platonic view that places an individual into the "great chain of being" where mortality is

recognized but so is the need to build for those who come after? This are just a small sample of lenses that can be applied to many of the challenges ahead in the twenty-first century. If we choose the "junk values" path of ignoring the work of civic engagement, sustainability, and inclusion, then it becomes harder for those who come after to live, grow, and flourish. If the collective "we" cannot decide on any common values, then the way forward will be paved by those who are more interested in selling answers than building utopias. When Bregman (2017) wrote that the "crisis is that we can't come up with anything better" (pp. 10-11), this is where the need for utopian curriculum comes into focus. Humanity needs a reminder at this crucial time that the Future is always up to the Living. No one is certain how much time we may have left but I can tell you that it is later than it has ever been before.

*Tomorrowland***: A Case Study in Utopian Rejection**

I have made a case that dystopian narratives have taken over the current moment by including the work of academics. However, this project is clearly influenced by all things Disney and pop culture. Fortunately for this project there is a film that merges dystopian media narratives and scholarship by providing a case study through its failure: the 2015 film *Tomorrowland*. I knew in the early stages of this project that this film would have to be included because of this crucial intersection of all of the topics included in this project. *Tomorrowland* was released in theaters on May 22, 2015 and was a massive financial and critical loss for the Disney Studios. The film has is largely forgotten just a mere four years after its release and yet, I feel that there are important connections, some obvious and some less so, that makes it worthy of inclusion into the conversation of utopian curriculum. As a quick note, I will be only including the aspects useful to this project and will ignore the more traditional film criticism of acting, plot,

etc. Finally, it is this project's contention that the failure of this movie is related to the demise of EPCOT's potential and the current state of dystopian thought prevalent in mass media.

The story begins with having a discussion with two of the film's protagonists, the curmudgeonly Frank and the upbeat Casey, arguing over whether or not the future should be viewed through the lens of an optimist or a pessimist. Although very brief, this scene does establish the overall friction of the plot (and perhaps the ultimate failure to connect with mainstream audiences). Frank, who is middle-aged, looks at the chaos and disorder in the world as justification of his bleak outlook ("…unstable governments, overpopulation, wars on every continent, famine, water shortages, environmental collapse…"). While he is delivering this monologue, the screen intercuts with montages of actual riots, protests, fires, etc. Despite this, Casey, a young high school student, repeatedly interrupts Frank's monologue with ways in which progress has made created a better future for us than our species has ever known. She argues that the future can be full of "wonder and beauty." The final moment arrives when Frank flashes back to how views of the future used to be different back when he was young. A flashback ensues and we seen young Frank attending the New York World's Fair of 1964-1965 while the Sherman Brothers' "*There's a Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow*" song plays in the background. This being a Disney production, the connection is appropriate.   Young Frank has developed a jet pack and wants to show off his invention to professionals. It is his hope that his jet pack will inspire and make others believe that "anything's possible." Frank is given a pin which allows him to visit the futuristic Tomorrowland. This community has been established by a group of scientists/inventors who have dubbed themselves the Plus Ultra Society so that they can work on experimental technologies away from interference from governments and corporations.

Out trip is cut short as the flashback ends and the film cuts back to the modern time for Casey's story. Her general philosophy is that she is "an optimist" who explains that dystopia has taken over because "it's hard to have ideas and easy to give up." She assures here brother that never will never give up. This outlook is later reinforced with a parable she tells her father: "There are two wolves, one is darkness and despair and the other is light and hope. Who wins?" The answer is "whichever one you feed" suggesting that one's outlook is a matter of choice. The very next scene is one of the most effective in the entire film and perhaps the one that made it mandatory for inclusion in this project. Casey is attending classes where she is bombarded with dystopic messages from her teachers. In history class, she is lectured on Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) nuclear war scenarios; in science class, she is taught about the perils of climate change and, finally, Language Arts where the assigned books are George Orwell's *1984*, Aldus Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. After seeing the barrage of negative messages, Casey asks some straightforward questions: "Can we fix it? What are we doing to fix it?" The bell rings before the teacher can respond. Identifying problems and facing them head on is the required work of both utopian curriculum and curriculum studies. Never should one confuse hopeful futurism and utopian thought with placing one's head in the proverbial sand. Rather, educators should take lessons from Casey's school day. Most students would probably state that school is lame, depressing, and demeaning. But how much of this lies on the feet of bleak curriculum? I can personally vouch for the overall stagnation prevalent in most high school history classes. There is not much in the way of hopeful futurism in the existing model.

The rest of the movie is mostly a road and chase adventure but the film does come back to its overall message of hopeful futurism at the end. So, the question becomes: why was it a

box office disappointment? I contend that this film's overall message fell flat with audiences mostly because of its generally upbeat take on utopianism. For example, there is a countdown to the apocalypse that is connected and fueled by the overall pessimism of the times. Casey's optimism and hopeful futurism stall the inevitable apocalypse and even show a reversal if action is taken. And that is the key element that I think critics and possibly audiences missed: the call to arms. One might think the film is preachy but I would say that, in light of the very real Sixth Extinction, any chastising of our current time is merited. Moreover, I wonder about the larger point as a classroom teacher. As one who has studied utopian thought, I often wonder how many of us educators are placing our own fears into our students. We "prepare" our students for an unknown world but do we sometimes (inadvertently?) pass down our own fears? Neil Postman wrote in *The End of Education* (1995) that "the reason…is that public education does not serve a public. It *creates* a public" (p. 18). Educators should be very cognizant of the public they are creating. True, the future is unknown which makes it uncertain which makes it scary as Frank stated. That is a fair assessment. However, what of the potential of the hopeful futurism that I experienced at EPCOT Center as a young person. William Pinar (2012) wrote "in fantasies of the future there are 'fear and trembling"—fueled by prospects of political polarization, economic crisis, ecological catastrophe—as well as hope and determination" (p. 138). It can be both but we, as educators, need to be less like the one's in Casey's school and more like Casey.

Tomorrowland's co-creator and director Brad Bird is sometimes criticized for his films which seem to advocate an outlook that pushes for extraordinary people having to come to aid of the normal or average individuals. Bird also was the creative force behind Pixar's *The Incredibles* (2005) in which a group of superheroes are forced to tone down their powers in order to live peacefully in a world that underappreciates them. In *Tomorrowland*, this view appears to

be reinforced through Casey since she is the one of the chosen few that can enter into Tomorrowland. Storytelling elements such as these have led to comparisons to the Objectivist philosopher Ayn Rand and her appeals for unapologetic selfishness have been occasionally attached to Bird's work. However, one dissenting voice on this trend was Forrest Wickman (2015) in his piece "No, Brad Bird Isn't a Disciple of Ayn Rand." Wickman points out in the article that

> …the more you look into it, the more the notion that Brad Bird is Randian, or Rand-ish, is misguided. The lodestar of Brad Bird's personal philosophy isn't Ayn Rand. It's Walt Disney… You might think the residents of Tomorrowland resemble Rand's selfish Titans of Industry, but really they're more like Disney's Imagineers, or those animators at A113 and Pixar….Tomorrowland might look like Galt's Gulch, but it's really more like Disney's own utopian visions, for Disney, CalArts, and (perhaps most obviously) for the original EPCOT, the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow—a futuristic city he never finished but that helped inspire elements of Disney's Tomorrowland attractions.

In this sense, a crucial lesson that may been overlooked by audiences who brushed the film off as shallow or vapid. The link between a major motion picture (albeit a financial disappointment) and Walt Disney's futuristic visions is still instructive. The fact that his ideas can still provide a model fifty years after his death speaks to the power of his legacy. More importantly, it is the lessons that educators should take to heart: experimentation, creativity, and a willingness to get it wrong so that we may get it right. The ultimate goal of education should not be to create consumers who live in gated communities but innovators and artists who open the gates to Tomorrowland. However, as the box office receipts indicate, this message has not been

delivered to the masses. Why is it that the case and what role has school played in this unwillingness to view the future with optimism?

School Deform

Theoretically at least, public school is properly positioned to address some of these concerns raised by Bergman (2017), Hari (2018), Rieman (2018), and even Bird, in part because it is one of the last true "common" societal experiences in America. School is where most of us begin the socialization process and, hopefully, begin to address the matters of building what Rieman called the "good society." However, is that really the case? Are schools equipped to confront such issues? Are teachers sitting in undergraduate classes *explicitly* charged with the task of building a better tomorrow? What if there were an educator version of the Hippocratic Oath at the end of the certification cycle that made teachers aware of how important their job really is? That last one is a small idea but one that I think would make a difference because it elevates what is already a noble profession into something greater: *a force to be reckoned with.* That is what is needed but sadly, not where we are.

Before reform, an acknowledgement of the current realities is required. Regrettably, this portion of the dissertation focuses on negatives that have diminished the profession. The very first book I read for this doctoral program was "*What is Curriculum Theory?*" (2012) by William Pinar. I was unsure what to expect when I first read it since I was completely new to the field but Pinar soon put me at ease…before he unsettled me. "The *present historical moment* [emphasis mine] is, then, for public school teachers and for those of us who work with teachers, an ongoing calamity. The school has been deformed into a business, plundered by profiteers…many educators are lost, submerged in present circumstances ***unable to imagine the***

future" [emphasis added] (Pinar 2012, p. 5). Pinar's words transported me back to one of my classes with Dr. Martha Jones when I was earning my Masters of Arts in Teaching. She commented that "everyone is an expert on education because everyone has been to school." Her words were not said out of cynicism but they still bother me because of how true they were. Educational decisions are often made by lawmakers and think-tanks and rarely by students, teachers, and parents. The "expertise through participation" way of thinking Dr. Jones was talking about only got worse through over-standardization which then opened the doors to private profiteers. This increasing influence of corporate influence on our schools has hastened the deform and made it harder to imagine a better future because we are only focused on the small goals of increasing test scores, graduation rates, and the replication of the workforce to perpetuate the engines of hyper-capitalism.

There are numerous actors in this situation that have led to this sad state of affairs in addition to the profiteers. I will begin with the most unpopular place of all: The Teachers. Collectively, we did this to ourselves. This is not to "blame" the teacher (there's too much of that already) but rather to call us out for those time when we acted in bad faith. Please hear me, I could not agree more with Pinar when he wrote that "…the simple timeless fact is that education is an opportunity offered; no one—not parents, not teachers—can guarantee that students will take advantage of it…this is an inconvenient truth politicians refuse to acknowledge" (2012, p. 6). Teachers are not miracle workers. They live in the milieu of their worlds and do their best. Consider the logistical concerns of schedules, safety, bus drop offs, lunch rooms, bathroom passes, class sizes, underfunding, and all of the realities that non-teachers choose to forget about. Trust me, I know what it is like to be told to do more with less.

For now, let's set all of that aside and focus on the actual craft of being an educator. I am referring to those times where we teachers did not use best practices. The days where we opted for the worksheet or non-sensical crossword puzzle because it was just easier than engaging. The normalizing/institutionalizing of standardized tests as a means to an instrumental means to an end instead of challenging lawmakers on bad policies. Days of "drill and kill" teaching done to keep order rather than spark imaginations, etc. When that happens, the student's love of learning has become regimented and the teacher becomes the dispenser of information and the gatekeeper of knowledge (Finn 2009, pp. 142-145). This is by no means a new problem. Ivan Illich wrote about this almost 50 years ago in *Deschooling Society* (1970). In a world where "complicated conversation" is stymied in favor of results, "the pupil is thereby 'schooled' to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, a diploma with competence, and fluency with the ability to say something new (p. 1). We have "schooled" the students to the point where the joy of learning has been depleted and the *ability to self-learn* has been annihilated. It is our job to remember why we became teachers in the first place. The call to inspire is our true heart. It is time to push back on school deform and demand more from our political leaders who continually underestimate us. I would ask us to remember about the recent teacher strikes in several states as a necessary action if school deform continues.

What of the larger players in education? What have they done to demoralize teachers and lead to deform? "Society will never be properly be governed either by the uneducated, who have no knowledge of the truth, or by those who are allowed to spend all of their lives in purely intellectual pursuits" (Socrates quoted from Carlson 2002, p. 29). Does this critique hold up in a time when democratization and universal (albeit unequal) educational programs exist for

American youth? Perhaps it is the kind of education being "administered" to the imprisoned that is at fault. Illich (1970) asserted

> The very existence of obligatory schools divides any society into two realms: some time spans and processes and treatments are 'academic' and 'pedagogic', and others are not. The power of school thus to divide social reality has no boundaries: education becomes unworldly and the world becomes noneducational (p. 24).

Illich's horror vision is all too real. Curriculum in most American schools is not living but merely a means of collecting data. This process happened over a long period of time but essentially it always comes back to the need to control and administer rather than challenge and question. Herbert Kliebard (2004) explained "people, after all, should not be taught what they would never use. That would be a waste. In order to reduce waste, educators had to institute a process of scientific management leading to a prediction as to one's future role in life. That prediction would then become the basis of a differentiated curriculum" (p. 84). Rather than let the curriculum grow organically, it is the ends that dictate the journey. Ask any student, they will tell you the effects of this over-regimentation has done to desire to learn independently but as one that was probably "schooled," I bet you probably already know the answer.

In *Why School?* (2009), Michael Rose wrote in the preface how schools are aligned with the present downward spiral of democratic virtue and the common good.

> We live in an anxious age and seek our grounding, our assurances in ways that don't satisfy our longing—that in fact, make things worse. We've lost hope in the public sphere and grab a private solutions…we've narrowed the purpose of

schooling to economic competitiveness, our kids to economic indicators (pp. ix-x).

This passage aligns with Carey's futurism fatigue in that it positions schools as a place where any semblance of civic engagement has been sold out to the "junk values" of the day. Furthermore, in a passage that pre-dates Rieman's work by ten years, Rose added "for some time now, our national discussion of education has been dominated by a language of test scores and economic competitiveness" (p. 4). More bluntly, John Weaver (2009) remarked "now, public schools exist for three reasons: job training for future workers, docile test takers, and future consumers" (p. 6). I seriously doubt that vision appeals to either parent or child and it certainly does not offer anything useful to the work schools *should be* doing. Instead, Rose argues that the entire purpose of school if found in the continued (re)examination of the values presented to the upcoming generations "because a neat and final answer is not possible or disable in an open society. We honor these questions best by revisiting them" (p. 165). Ultimately, a revitalized EPCOT with a futurist curriculum could be a way to discuss possible pathways. Particularly if it were structured around this idea of never quiet reaching the goal but always striving.

But back to Rose's main point, he is correct that it is not just schools and unmotivated teachers who have failed to fight school deform. The larger cultural and economic forces have done their share in changing the role of education to creating a "good society" to "what can be done for me?" Kenneth Saltman's essay, *The Rise of Venture Philanthropy and the Ongoing Neoliberal Assault on Public Education* (2012) sounds alarm bells warning against the hidden agendas of wealthy investors (the Broad Foundation in this essay). Saltman criticizes "business based" solutions that focus on "'achievement-orientated' reform efforts" instead of fostering common values. "The moment the goal of education becomes 'achievement', the crucial

ongoing conversation about the purposes and values of schooling stops, as does the struggle over whose knowledge and values and ways of seeing should be taught and learned" (p. 67). If we are to do the work of (re)building our schools, communities, and society at large then we will have to reverse the trend of school deform.

Again, the future is always worth fighting for but it is going to require us to expect more from our leaders and each other. In *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth,* Buckminster Fuller (1968/2015) wrote "we find it socially easier to go on with our narrow, shortsighted specializations and leave it to others—primarily the politicians—to find some way of resolving our common dilemmas" (p. 21). It has always been easier to duck our collective heads down while the tempest of problems come storming towards us. This cannot go on. How might a revitalized EPCOT connect the problems of today with the solutions for tomorrow? Well, it is going to require some imagination.

Welcome to the Dreamport

So far in this chapter, I have explained the reasons why this project is needed during this specific moment in time as well as the forces of school deform contributing to our collective malaise. However, there is one topic that seems to tie these threads together that I must include before I pivot into the latter half of the chapter. In Chapter Three, I included a fairly comprehensive list of the EPCOT Center attractions which inspired my interest in hopeful futurism and utopian thinking. However, there is still one attraction that I purposely withheld until Chapter Four. That attraction is the original *Journey into Imagination*. It is necessary to explore this particular pavilion in Chapter Four because the title itself encapsulates what both education and EPCOT should be. The original version of this ride still holds a mythical status in the minds of those who experienced it during its initial run. Part of the reason for this lies in the

connection to the Disney brand and the human imagination. In *The Thinking Fan's Guide to Walt Disney World: EPCOT*, Aaron Wallace (2017) wrote

> For Walt Disney World, the successful execution of an attraction dedicated entirely to the concept of 'imagination' is of inestimable rhetorical importance. The Disney Company traffics in imagination. Fantastic ideas are its stock and trade. Walt Disney World Resort markets itself as a place where the impossible can be realized and dreams can come true. Imagination is its vocation, especially in Epcot, a park poised as a new frontier for big ideas. To even attempt the pavilion, then, was a risk (p. 72).

Luckily for both the company and park guests, this pavilion delivered on its promise and continues to be a source of bittersweet nostalgia for those who remember it.

What made *Journey into Imagination* so special? Why does it, along with *Horizons*, hold a special significance to this project? To begin, although the glass pyramid located in the far corner of *Future World West* still stands (unlike less fortunate pavilions such as the *Universe of Energy, World of Motion, Horizons*). Regrettably, a mediocre replacement still operates at Epcot today which places the ride is on its third incarnation. This version has been shortened and is vastly different from the original version in a manner similar to what happened to *The Living Seas.* What made this first version so special was that it captured the zeitgeist of EPCOT Center's early days. Unlike any of the other pavilions, *Journey into Imagination* had two unique characters created for it. EPCOT Center was originally was to be as "non-Disney" as possible (i.e. no Mickey, Minnie, Donald, or Goofy) so the inclusion of Disneyfied characters in an attraction was a bit of a deviation from the norm. A jolly, orange-bearded man named the Dreamfinder was the first character. Aaron Wallace (2017) described Dreamfinder as a mix

between Santa Claus and The Wizard of Oz (p. 71) which is appropriate since he was to serve as the host/guide for the attraction aimed a slightly younger audience (especially compared to the more "serious" attractions). To provide some added fun, a little purple dragon named Figment accompanied the Dreamfinder on his travels. Richard Beard (1982) wrote that "Dreamfinder represents the spirt of imagination, and Figment-who is created before our eyes from the materials of imagination-embodies childlike spontaneity" (p. 53). From a purely commercial standpoint, this attraction and its "hosts" were EPCOT Center's big outreach to meet guest expectations of a "Disney" park as something for all ages. Or as Stephen Fjellman (1992) argued "*Journey into Imagination*…is the closest anything at EPCOT Center comes to achieving the more old-fashioned tone of the Magic Kingdom" (pp. 278-279).

Guests entered the base of the pyramid and were immediately surrounded by a giant mural adorned with clouds, rainbows, etc. with purple and orange swirls. After boarding the large Omnimover-style ride vehicle, guests were transported into the ride's entrance with a cloud motif. Darkness mostly shrouded the audience at first but soon the Dreamfinder appears aboard a steam-punk inspired flying contraption. This ship is equipped with a vacuum and storage system to collect and store imaginative ideas. "I love these flights of fancy" he informs the guests. "Searching the universe for sounds, colors, ideas, anything that sparks the imagination…everything I collect can inspire new amazing, and marvelous new ideas." Eventually, enough ideas are collected to "create" the co-host of the attraction: a little purple dragon named Figment. The Dreamfinder and Figment continue their quest and, once this "flight of fancy' is completed, unload the collected ideas at the Dreamport. The remainder of the ride takes guests through show scenes focused on the various aspects of the human imagination such as art, drama, suspense, film, and science. Guests could end their time at the *Journey into*

Imagination pavilion by visiting an interactive, indoor playground called the *ImageWorks* which was full of sound and sight-based games loosely tied to the themes presented during the attraction.

If that was not enough, there was the original song composed by Disney Legends Richard and Robert Sherman entitled "*One Little Spark*" which served as the anthem of *Journey into Imagination* with infectious lyrics meant to stir the creative side. "One little spark of inspiration/is at the heart of all creation/right at the start of everything's that's new/one little spark lights up for you." A reminder to all of us that we all have *the potential* to do amazing things through the power of imagination. During the song, Figment asks if the audience can imagine as he does. The Dreamfinder responds with "Of course, imagination is something that belongs to all of us!"

Admittedly, this is a quick aside but I feel that it is important to mention briefly. One aspect of this attraction that I cannot stress enough is that it does not shy away from all elements of imagination including some elements that would likely never be addressed in a "family-friendly" park today. For example, the Dreamfinder captures a lightning bolt that so that he can "combine it with ghostly shivers on a stormy night and turn them into a tale of fright!" Later in the imaginative horror portion of our journey, the Dreamfinder says "what chilling words, like 'shriek' or 'killer' can spark the mind/to start a thriller/add some more sparks like 'dagger', 'blood', or 'gory'/and then, a mystery story…" Just as a quick aside, I appreciate the overall sentiment of fear *being acknowledged as part of the human experience* rather than just play it safe. Today's Disney corporation may include some of these elements though its media projects but generally steer clear of such blatant tones (i.e. "Mickey's Not-So-Scary Halloween Party" is a far cry from the horror show found in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* witch

transformation, *Pinocchio's Pleasure Island,* the "Night on Bald Mountain" segment from *Fantasia*, etc.). Inclusions of the darker elements of fiction found in *Journey into Imagination* draw a line of distinction between EPCOT then versus Epcot now. To put it bluntly, I cannot imagine the words "blood" and "gore" coming from an animatronic Nemo figure.

I will return to *Journey into Imagination* in Chapter Five but now that the attraction overview is complete, I can begin the real work of Chapter Four which entails an exploration for the need for connecting EPCOT Center to the larger body of utopian scholarship. This thread is what connects the historical analysis of Chapters Two and Three with the framework of cultural imaginaries of Chapters Four and Five. Ultimately, the purpose of this entire project is to see why the EPCOT Center of my youth is worth fighting for and why it should be re-born as a cultural center based on the public need for science, technology, and the humanities.

Utopianism Primer

Definitions surrounding the idea of utopianism are seemingly endless since the concept of the "better" place or future have existed in numerous cultures across human history. The term "utopia" itself is attributed to Thomas More's 1516 book of the same name and is derived from the Greek *topos* (place) and the prefix "u" (no or not). "In *Utopia*, More depicted a ship discovering an unknown island, which has established a society based on far-reaching equality but under the authority of wise, elderly men" (Sargent 2010, p. 2). This fantasy gave utopia its name but not its origin. The question then is: What are some common themes that connect utopian views across human societies and histories?

For starters, it is useful to begin with Lyman Sargent's (2010) assertion that "All utopias ask questions. They ask whether or not the way we live could be improved and answer that it

could" (p. 5). This desire is to create something better than the status quo by calling on our best selves is at the heart of utopia. Sargent (2010) went on to explain "…basically, utopianism is a philosophy of hope, and is characterized by the transformation of generalized hope into a description of a non-existent society. Of course, hope can often be nothing more than a rather naïve wish-fulfilment…on the other hand, hope is essential to any attempt to change society for the better" (p. 8). This sentiment is echoed in Dennis Carlson's *Leaving Safe Harbors* (2002) where he wrote, "the mythology of hope is, from the beginning, associated with a belief that people need not accept the world the way it is but can reconstruct it according to a vision of a socially just world" (p. 50). Louis Marin's *Utopics (*1984) explained that "utopia is a discourse. Better yet, it is a book or volume of signs disposed in a certain order. These signs owe their meaning to a system of which the book is one among an infinite number of possible realizations" (p. 61) and that "utopia is an ideological critique of ideology. Utopia is a critique of dominant ideology insofar as it is a reconstruction of contemporary society *by means of a displacement and a projection* of its structures into a fictional discourse" (p. 195) [emphasis mine]. This is where I find utopia the most useful for possible futures and cultural imaginaries scholarship. It is through the "displacement and projection" of now that we can forge a path that is not based on "wish fulfilment" but of "changing society for the better." I can think of no better legacy than for we the living to create a more egalitarian and sustainable future for our children but that is a simple platitude to put forth.

What role did EPCOT Center play in "displacement and projection?" It is safe to say that the reality is that it better accomplished its mission on the later than on the former but I will address both. In regards to "displacement" I have already mentioned the futuristic transportation in the finale of *The World of Motion* and the entirety of the *Horizons* attraction but

I would like to continue on to demonstrate how it all connects. Both Walt's EPCOT and EPCOT Center were based on this principle that there was, to borrow from the Disney songwriting duo the Sherman Brothers, "a great big beautiful tomorrow, shining at the end of every day." It is from these multiple understandings of utopia that I will connect EPCOT with curriculum studies and offer a connection to the future.

In order to keep this project from veering off into infinite digressions, I will offer connections from utopian scholarship as it relates to this specific project. The definitions above contained some crucial words: hope, discourse, progress, and representation. All loaded words with multiple meanings, but it is from these ideas that color is added to the blank canvas of potentiality. Perhaps Gregory Claeys' *Searching for Utopia* (2011) explained it best

> A great number of people still envision a scientifically shaped future in which experts provide solutions to all our problems without disturbing our ambitions. Many would today regard the present as the best so far attained; certainly it is so for the privileged. Far fewer would identify a point in the past as an ideal worth returning to. But some, however, do find in the past a period in which our needs were in harmony with nature, our population not overly burdensome and our consumption balanced with our production…Whether our ideal lies in the past, the present, or the future, the concept of utopia often has some bearing on how we conceive this ideal [world]…something akin to a concept of utopia functions to reinforce our sense of the communal bond and offer hope in an uncertain world (pp. 7-8).

Again, I am reminded of the narratives of the early EPCOT pavilions which successfully interwove stories about humanity's past while calling presenting an exciting view of the Future.

The utopian visions of *Horizons* where we have made colonies under the oceans or in space were once science fiction but are increasingly becoming a reality. Alternative methods of agriculture that were part of *The Land* are sorely needed as developing countries increase their life expectancy and populations. EPCOTs original mission to "entertain, inform, and inspire" needs to make its return for the 21st century to bolster utopian thought.

One of the more compelling arguments I came across in my research was found in *Existential Utopia: New Perspectives on Utopian Thought* (2012) which is a collection of essays compiled and edited by Michael Marder and Patricia Vieira. In the introductory essay, Marder and Vieira argue that the 21st century requires "us to unbind the notion of utopia from its intellectual history" in order for the concept to reach its true purpose of improving society through existential utopia. "The essays comprising this book put their faith in this self-transformative, self-reinventing potential of existential utopia, which is not merely another utopia but the other of utopia" which is separate from the solely fictional. "In this sense, the unbound existential utopia is simultaneously theoretical and practical, singular and universal, present and future…" (xiii). In other words, to actually exist in a utopian space where practical considerations work with grand visions. Forging a future that never forgets the past but rather uses these lessons as posts toward sustainability. To dream the impossible seems cliché but it is through the lens of hopeful futurism that we can reverse the adverse. Or as Jean-Luc Nancy (2012) wrote "utopia is the impossible, not rendered possible, but shown as necessary" (p. 7). It is this notion that helps drive this latter half of this project. Through the use of cultural imaginaries, I will demonstrate how a reconceptualized EPCOT reaches for the "impossible" and is very necessary at this particular moment in time.

Finally, this project would be somewhat negligent if it did not include at least a nod to the

work of futurist and architect, Buckminster Fuller. After all, it was his work, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (1968), which popularized the term that was later used for EPCOT Center's centerpiece. More importantly, his work on how to improve our current condition and offer us a way to both improve the current state of school deform and cast a hopeful eye to the future. Fuller starts off by likening the (then) current state of intellectual malaise through an instructive metaphor.

> If you are in a shipwreck and all the boats are gone, a piano top buoyant enough to keep you afloat…makes a fortuitous life preserver. But this is not to say that he best way to design a life preserver…I think that we are clinging to a great many piano tops in accepting yesterday's fortuitous contrivings as constituting the only means for solving a given problem (p. 21).

This got me relating this to both how schools operate and the ways in which our society does (or does not) approach problems. Once policies are adopted, they quickly become part of the larger Institutionalization of thought. What "piano tops" are we holding on to that have long outlasted their usefulness? Who is having conversations about ways in which to leave safe harbors in exchange for new solutions? Who is helming the Dreamfinder's ship?

Hope in Schools

I point out all of these examples of school deform and the forces behind them for several reasons. First, it is the one area where, we the teachers, can have the most direct impact by being our best selves. Again, this is not about bashing teachers but rather a call for progressive action; a call to inject hope. Gallup's 2016 Student Poll Survey revealed that

Hope is linked to student success in school. Hopeful students are positive about the future, goal-orientated and can overcome obstacles in the learning process, enabling them to navigate a pathway to achieve their goal (Gallup poll 2016).

This project is mostly aimed at the big picture of hopeful futurism but it is important to acknowledge the daily practice of being a mindful educator. Hope in schools can be the small victory of passing a test or can be larger when it comes to earning a diploma. Although it the purpose of this dissertation to go beyond the small scale, in truth, not every hopeful action has to be the grand gesture. Small victories can pay large dividends toward a better tomorrow.

My second objective is much broader but more directly tied to this project. The same Gallup survey revealed that only 47% of students are hopeful for the future. Possible reasons for all of the reasons why are well-beyond the scope of this dissertation (except for the aforementioned problems in the previous section). Nevertheless, the fact that the number is underwater does suggest that these are problems are very real. Teachers, as the most direct link between a student and his/her education, could all reverse this trend by introducing utopian thinking and "possible futures" methodologies in their classroom instruction. More specifically for this project, EPCOT should be playing a role in fostering more hope in the future as a space focused on enriching the public good.

In other words, the heart of hopeful futurism is the never-ending examination of our current state and thinking of something better. Education and revitalized curriculum are a means to make this possible. William Pinar (2012) wrote about the importance of teachers conveying the promise (and realities) of the future to their students in *What is Curriculum Theory?* "Like the past, the future inhabits the present. The student of *currere* imagines possible futures" (p.

46). In order to accomplish this, Curriculum Studies demands something that is fairly difficult in

the public school classroom: engaging in discourse. Pinar writes

> To educate the public means individually reinvigorating the academic
>
> curriculum…the reactivation of subjectivity in teaching, of private passion in
>
> public service, teachers confirmed not as facilitators of learning but as
>
> individuated communicants in a complicated conversation that is the curriculum
>
> informed by academic knowledge, subjectivity, and the historical moment (xvii).

Since my first encounters with curriculum studies, I can say first hand that Pinar's worldview is

not the mainstream that I have encountered. Teachers in my system are indeed passionate but

there seems to be little emphasis placed on teacher subjectivity or "the historical moment." But

it does not have to be this way.

Alan Block wrote "education is a private engagement in a public world for the

redemption of both" (quoted in Pinar 2016, p. 19). Democracy is a conversation, not a

conclusion. Common values are not impossible if we walk the roads together on the journey of

constant self-reflection. "Our true identity is determined not by nationality, origin, language,

belief, income, race, or any way in which people differ from another, but precisely by what

unites us and makes the unity of mankind possible: universal spiritual values that shape human

dignity and that every man can adopt" (Reiman 2018, p. 67). Yes, these things are taxing and

exhausting but ***consider the alternative***. Look around you and you will see the results of what

happens when educational institutions are reduced to diploma mills or when students are reduced

to credit earners. Moreover, you will see what happens when the conversation of "what makes a

good society" is stopped because an individual "achieves" while his/her community suffers.

Friends, do not be surprised when you find yourself in a loneliness epidemic or in a society with

increasing amount of incarcerations and opioid overdoses. Do not wonder why demagogues are able to take control of governments at home and abroad.

Lest I interject any more despair in the world, I would like to agree with a passage from Bregman (2017) to state how this current dystopian thinking can be used to create a more utopian curriculum. He wrote

> progress has become synonymous with economic prosperity, but the twenty-first century will challenge us to find other ways of boosting our quality of life…In that sense, I am heartened by our dissatisfaction, because dissatisfaction is a world away from indifference. The widespread nostalgia, the yearning for a past that never really was, suggest that we still have ideals, even if we have buried them alive (p. 19).

Journey into Imagination…Again

Now that I have laid out case for why utopian thinking is sorely needed at this moment in our society, I need to turn the project's focus into ways in which utopianism can be incorporated. Similar to my literature review in Chapter One which began by agreeing with the critiques of Disney curriculum and pivoting to the more positive views, the rest of this chapter will be a bit more upbeat. A revitalized EPCOT (Chapter 5) is the ultimate goal but I would be remiss if I did not include a portion of how I got introduced to utopianism and curriculum studies. In one of the more creative and influential books I encountered during my coursework for this doctorate was William Schubert's (2009) *Love, Justice, and Education: John Dewey and the Utopians*. This work stands out for numerous reasons all related to this work but first it is important to provide a bit of autobiography. As it were, Dr. Schubert is not only one of the founders of curriculum

studies, a fact that already makes him important to this work, but also an "unofficial" professor at Georgia Southern University during his retirement. He and his wife, Dr. Ming Fang He, herself a giant in the field, have a seemingly endless knowledge of books on curriculum that was of invaluable importance to me and everyone fortunate enough to attend their lectures (although it should be noted that Dr. He was always in charge).

As previously stated, *Love, Justice, and Education* (2009) is a different breed of scholarly work of which I am sure the Dreamfinder and Figment would be proud. Schubert took an obscure article from a *New York Times* article with John Dewey and his "encounter" (?) with a species of beings called the Utopians. Using Dewey's description from his 1933 meeting, Schubert constructs an eclectic series of essays from the viewpoint of the Utopians seventy-five years after addressing Dewey (I told you it was a book like no other). I knew when I first read it that it would end up in my final project but had not anticipated that it would fit so well into a chapter entitled "Journey into Imagination!" Such occurrences seem almost cosmic in nature and I consider myself fortunate to be able to make connections between this work and my own. Admittedly, the book is not directly tied to utopian scholarship, futurism, and certainly not EPCOT. Rather Schubert's work provides a way in which to use the framework of utopianism as a way to conduct inquiry that dislodges us from our known worlds and propel us into reformative action. Lyman Sargent (2010) wrote "…a utopia is a mirror to the present designed to bring out flaws, a circus or funfair mirror in reverse, to illustrate ways in which life could be better…" (pp. 112-113). Schubert's Utopians conduct this exercise for us by engaging in conversation with each other over the effects of schooling, education, and various systems on human children.

The Utopians, each of whom are numbered, get one turn in speaking to either add context or ask challenging questions. In doing so, the book is able to provide a mixture of flow and reflection as it twists and turns around and, occasionally, in on itself. I will provide just a few examples to illustrate what I mean. In one of the more scathing questions, Utopian 46 asked:

> Do well-meaning liberals and even radicals, mistakenly hold to an ideal that schools on some parts of Earth (e.g. America), are supposedly open to all, that they can be a seedbed for democracy? Has this ever been the case? Is this faith in democracy through state sponsored schools warranted? ...Could it be that educators and educational scholars on Earth subconsciously want to keep the idea of schools alive, because it is their bread and butter? (p. 36).

Number 46's questions are answered by the successive Utopians but specifically Utopian 52 who stated "Earthlings need to consider cultivating more culturally and linguistically inclusive human conditions. Well-meaning teachers need to learn to feel not at home when they are at home in order to develop their cultural empathy toward strangers from other shores" (Schubert 2009, p. 39). This idea connects to what I wrote earlier in this chapter about how teachers need to do better by making the curriculum less safe and more complicated. If we (teachers) continue to submit to the authority of standardization, then curricular complacency will win. Dewey's Utopians saw this as a very real possibility almost a hundred years ago.

Schubert's willingness to write a very unusual book shows how liberating I have found curriculum studies to be. I will always be grateful to him and all of the professors in this program who let me write about pretty much whatever I wanted to. Specifically, Schubert's writing about Dewey's Utopians were a small but influential piece to making this project

possible. I doubt I would have had the courage to try a dissertation like this if I had not read *Love, Justice, and Education* (2009) five years ago.

Data Driven Hope?

It has been six years since I entered the doctorate program. So much has changed and through my studies I found myself researching topics that were not initially part of this project to construct my argument that there is indeed something new and possibly unique about the present age. These questions, I am thankful to say, are not unique to myself alone. In particular was the insight of my friend Michael who, in a moment when I was quite low, asked what is at the heart of our particular moment in time: "What do you do when you've accomplished all of your goals?" In truth, we were discussing the problems of middle-aged guys living cushy, suburban lives but it really got me thinking if this was not a question for all of affluent societies. Have we become a post-scarcity society? Consider the facts: We live in a society that throws away food with reckless abandonment, has seen drops in infant mortality rates, and, by numerous metrics, conquered much of what Mother Nature has thrown at "us" (flora, fauna, disease, scarcity, etc.). Again, this is not meant to be a blanket statement for ALL Americans and certainly not for all humans everywhere. But in a general sense, the numbers do not lie.

At the heart of Chapter Four is the need for utopianism in our present time of malaise which requires imaginative thinking. However, this can seem like a non-starter if, as previously stated, we consider the data that points to a time of unbridled human progress. How can it be both? What does that tell us about the need for utopian thinking? Where does curriculum theory become instructive? How does this all connect back into a revitalized EPCOT? Briefly, I will layout the case of progress by highlighting some of the observations of Steven Pinker (2018) in

his recent work, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress.* Pinker's overall thesis is that we need to be reminded that the ideals of the Enlightenment ("reason, science, humanism and progress") have led to improved living conditions around the globe. The "pessimism about the way the world is heading, cynicism about modernity, and an ability to conceive of a higher purpose..." is what Pinker is arguing against. Instead, Pinker wants to remind us that the gifts of the Enlightenment have led to a decrease in most of the world's problems and that these are "human accomplishments, not cosmic birthrights" (p. 4). Finally, he stated that

> the ideals of the Enlightenment are products of human reason, but they always struggle with other strands of human nature: loyalty to tribe, deference to authority, magical thinking, the blaming of misfortune on evildoers.

In all, Pinker contends that we have to fight to remind ourselves that progress is not easy and that positive trends can be reversed if we lose sight of the common good.

This is exactly where we see how this chapter is connected with cultural imaginaries. Education is analogous to a journey into the human imagination because it allows us to consider possible futures; a chance to be better than we currently are. Regrettably, dystopian thought is pervasive in popular culture at the present moment but this project clearly states that dystopia, while sometimes instructive, is also lazy. Imagination, hopeful futurism, dreams, and sustainability need not be the things of fantasy for infants (or the infantile). It is easier to squabble over how utopia gets it wrong rather than consider possibilities for getting it (closer) to right. Instead, curriculum theorists should consider the growing scholarship that uses utopian lenses as a way of creating better schools and communities. "The project of overcoming nihilism and its attendant dystopian malaise does not mean that these negative phenomena are to be left

behind; instead, this task would require deepening or working through them" (Marder and Vieira 2012, p. x). Utopian thinking is directly tied to the entire project because it has always been about making an ideal come into being. Existential utopia offers a way to engage with the cultural crisis through living consciously in a system that is otherwise focused merely on present pleasures rather than a meaningful life. And I am sure the Dreamfinder and Figment would agree with me.

CHAPTER FIVE

TOMORROW'S CHILD

Welcome to EPCOT Reborn

One of the most missed aspects from the early EPCOT Center attractions are their accompanying songs that provided a narrative soundtrack or theme reinforcer. For example, the closing song for *Spaceship Earth* was a choral entitled "*Tomorrow's Child*" which played as guests descended down from the top of the sphere and back to the ground floor. Its lyrics, in part, were

> "*Tomorrow's Child/gathering gifts from our past/shaping a world that will last/holding the spark/as we embark/on a great journey/together we're learning to/reach for hope and desire/building a world to inspire*".

Before I proceed with the imaginary "EPCOT," I want to pay one last homage to the EPCOT Center of my youth that served as the inspiration of this entire project. "*Tomorrow's Child*" sums up what a truly inspirational place this unique theme park was for me and countless others. But now what was is no more and it is time to move forward. EPCOT Center's preview promotional material stated "The 21st Century Begins October 1, 1982." Sadly this vision apparently ended sometime in 1994 when the original mission statement was abandoned and the slide into mediocrity began. There is nothing I, or anyone else, can tangibly do about it now and I refuse to forever chase a ghost. However, using curriculum studies, utopian thinking, and cultural imaginaries, I can propose a new space that revives Walt Disney's "living blueprint for the future" where technology exists for the public good. A place where utopian curriculum goes beyond the school walls and into the present and the possible. In the preface to *The End of*

Education, Neil Postman (1996) wrote "to the young, schooling seems relentless, but we [adults] know it is not. What is relentless is our education, which, for good or ill, gives us no rest" (p. ix). And I am restless with the current state of both education and EPCOT. As the *Tomorrow's Child* lyrics stated, I want to do my part in "building a world to inspire."

Please note that Chapter Five a completely imaginary endeavor where the focus is not on the possible or feasible. I am speaking now of the art of the impossible which is directly correlated to the ambitious spirit of utopian thinking. Jean-Luc Nancy (2012) wrote that "utopia is always suspended between a representation of *progress* and a representation of an *imaginary or symbolic leap*, in the course of which no progress would be attained" [emphasis his]. Furthermore, "utopia is always a fiction…it fashions itself as representation…according to which it implies the irreality [sic] of the represented" (p. 5). Also, it is not my intent to discuss every pavilion and give it an imaginary make-over. I cannot possibly do the imaginary EPCOT justice so some parts will be left up to the reader to ponder. The important thing is that this project is a conversation starter on the road to such a possible space becoming a reality. This project will, however, focus on possibilities for three classic EPCOT Center pavilions: *The Land, Journey into Imagination,* and *Horizons*. So, how do we take these fictions and turn them into something more tangible even if on the imaginary level?

One idea that serves as a sort of framework for our imaginary EPCOT is what Walt Disney did with Disneyland all of those years ago: Bring in the artists. The secret to Disneyland's initial and continued success is that it was essential designed by individuals from his animation studio. Claude Coats, Marc Davis, Mary Blair, Ward Kimball, Marty Sklar, Rolly Crump, etc. were all artists (animators or designers) before they were theme-park Imagineers. They understood what made environments immersive experiences and their work continues to

tell a story. Their contributions may not be held up as examples of "high art" but let the longevity of their work tell of their impact on successive generations. This includes the more technical artists as well such as George McGinnis, Bob Gurr, George and Piper Head, etc. Similarly, our imaginary EPCOT will draw upon experts with diverse backgrounds to work with educators and students on the necessary work of future-building. Exhibits and pavilions designed by these artists will be built to inspire and inspire (and perhaps even entertain). The common bond will be an understanding on the need for sustainability, inclusion, and a strong focus on the humanities. Education and curriculum are in need of reform and the way forward is interdisciplinary coalitions of arts and sciences.

Regrettably, this focus is not the current model of curriculum where STEM programs have been pushed into the forefront whilst the arts are going extinct in many schools. I am not advocating for a reversal where the tide flows the other way but merely an equal inclusion. In *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, Elliot Eisner (2002) wrote "to suggest that education has something to be learned from the arts is to topsy-turvy the more typical view that the arts are basically sources of relief, ornamental activities intended to play second fiddle to the core educational subjects. Yet those interested in enhancing the processes of education…have much to learn from the arts" (p. 196). Art working with science, imagination and technology; these are what have been lost since Epcot took over in the mid-1990s. Our EPCOT Reborn will work toward the goal of a better tomorrow by bringing all of these voices together.

All of the critiques and inherent Disneyfication of EPCOT Center are valid but this project is interested in this less explored aspect to EPCOT: its inspirational potential to forge a path toward a better future. Not one created by corporations, no matter how benevolent they may be, but one that allows for creative experimentation into sustainable, responsible

technologies. This chapter outlines a plan for a publicly funded space to exist that allows for

teachers, philosophers, scientists, and futurists to work together to build a more sustainable

future. I have come across more sources and had more ideas in this six year journey than what

would ever fully fit into this project. It is a good problem to have but I cannot help but feel

somewhat melancholic for all of the ideas that were not practical due to time constraints. Even

more lamentable are the sources that I came across very late in the process and struggled to fit in.

Perhaps that is just the nature of writing an eclectic work such as this; it can never really be

finished. However, there is one artifact that I just came across that serves as a fitting end to this

entire project: The "An Introduction to EPCOT" (n.a 1976). It is this document that captures

what EPCOT Center was supposed to be and serves as a model for a public funded EPCOT

reborn would look like. From what I can gather, this was a either an internal document or

something for the press to explain to them what was coming. It does not appear to be something

that was meant to be seen by the public at large which is unfortunate because it may have made a

difference when it came for WED to build. Such is life. What can be seen is that how this

document laid out the philosophy when it stated

> EPCOT is designed to respond to the needs of the people by providing an
>
> international forum where creative men and women of industry, government, and
>
> the arts can develop, demonstrate, and communicate prototype concepts, and new
>
> systems and technologies, and their application in creating better ways of living
>
> [emphasis theirs] (n.a., 1976).

This vision of EPCOT did not come into being in the 1970s but I see it more as it has *not yet*

come true. It is not too late to use this as a blueprint for our imaginary space focused on building

a sustainable future. In addition, this document contains a proposed structure that would be

beneficial to this imaginary EPCOT. It called for a three point structure: an Institute, a Theme Center, and Satellites. For the purposes of this project, I will focus mostly on the Institute which, according to the document "will be structured to facilitate participation in EPCOT by industry, universities, public agencies, foundations, and other supporters of the EPCOT concept" (n.a. 1976). This is the kind of revitalization that is needed at the present time to combat the "junk food values" of the age. And the fact that this is all stemming from EPCOTs past provides a nice poetic touch. This model helps foster utopian curriculum through the purposeful staging of interdisciplinary exhibits in invigorated pavilions which will host symposiums and conferences on building a sustainable future. There is no reason why our imaginary EPCOT could not be the rallying point for scholars and students interested in futurism and utopian thought. When EPCOT Center first launched, Disney created a series of films/videos under the banner of "EPCOT Educational Media" which suggests that the brand was intended to extend beyond the theme park. There was even a proposed teacher center that I came across in my research! I am not sure what all this would have entailed or what directions it would have taken but just the thought of it is enough to make me mournful for the lost possibilities. Missed opportunities aside, the time is now for EPCOT Reborn is now. As Rutger Bregman (2017) wrote

> It's time to return to utopian thinking. We need a new lodestar, a new map of the world that once again includes a distant, uncharted continent…what we need are alternative horizons that spark the imagination. And I do mean horizons in the plural; conflicting utopias are the lifeblood of democracy, after all (pp. 20-21).

I will leave aside the fact that Bregman mentions "imagination" and "horizons" to get the main point of EPCOT Reborn. His words are what this project has always been about; this spirit of utopianism working toward new visions of the future. I knew from my first semester in the

doctorate program that this is what I wanted to bring to curriculum studies. So, as we reach the climax of this project, what can we expect to see in our imaginary future park? Let's explore together and see what happens. For all who come to this imaginary place: Welcome.

Green Land

Earlier in Chapter Three, I outlined some of the critiques raised by Alexander Wilson (1994) in relation to *The Land*. Specifically, the idea that the existing message was sterile, overly scientific, and devoid of the humanity (Wilson, pp. 124-125). In this respect, Wilson's observation does give us some space to reimagine what a pavilion dedicated to agriculture and the environment could be. So, while acknowledging that the focus on the relationship between humans and the natural world is already a part of the message of *The Land,* the problem is that that message needs more vigorous humanity than it currently possesses. Our imaginary EPCOT, as always, will try to build on the elements that work while pushing for more substantive experiences. I would like to begin with a bit of lyrical refrain here on why the need for an agricultural pavilion at all. Throughout the last century, Americans have moved from rural areas to the urban and suburban. Farms and agrarian lifestyles are more likely to be in the minority for the first time since the Agricultural Revolution. I cannot help but wonder what it is we have lost as we move to the cosmopolitan world? What connections to the natural world have been severed by these new realities? How might we restore the crucial need for that connection while being realistic to our current existence?

I turned to one of the first books I encountered in this doctoral program for some answers. Robert Harrison's *Gardens: An Essay on the Human Condition* (2008) was similar to my experience with Schubert's Utopians in that I knew that this would eventually find its way

into my final project. Harrison's work does a superb job incorporating examples of gardens (both biological and otherwise) in their historical, mythological, and contemporary contexts. He challenges us to examine the nature of a garden as both part of nature and yet somehow its own entity. "The fact that human beings create such things as gardens is strange, for it means that there are aspects of our humanity which nature does not naturally accommodate, which we must make room for in nature's midst" (p. 41). Harrison argues that it is through individual toil and cultivation in the literal sense and that we carve out our own piece of nature. Not ours in a sense of private property ownership, but ours in the sense that we have communed with nature. One idea that resonated with me was when he wrote "the disproportion between giving and taking is first and foremost a principle of life--life exists where giving exceeds taking—yet it applies equally to human culture" (p. 33). I cannot think of a better way to view both education and futurism. Moreover, this serves as the mission statement for *The Land* Reborn where we teach the youth about the importance of ecological balance through giving more than taking. The story of the last century has been the opposite and we are indeed beginning to reap what we have sown in the form of climate disruptions and increasingly dangerous weather patterns. This new *Land* pavilion, with Harrison's wise words, can point to the work that has to be done to reverse the damages.

Another realization prevalent in Harrison's work is that the earth (soil) was here before us sapiens and will be here after we all return to it. This need not be a depressing epiphany however. Through the cultivation of the garden we have made a haven for ourselves in this moment in time. Gardens reverse the alienation that humans feel from nature and allow us to commune with it. Harrison wrote "if He [God] had wanted to make to make Adam and Eve keepers of the garden [Garden of Eden], God should have created them as caretakers; instead he

created them as beneficiaries" (p. 8). Harrison reminds us that Eden was not actually a paradise because nothing was required or asked; there was not human involvement in its success. "For humans are fully humans only when things matter. Nothing was at stake for Adam and Eve in the garden until suddenly, in one decisive moment of self-realization, *everything* was at stake." (p. 9). Whenever one toils in gardens or lawns, he/she is not seeking instant gratification. Rather, it is the toil and cultivation that bring the satisfaction and serves as the therapy needed. Both modern day lawns and gardens are somewhat synthetic because, for most people, they are not essential for survival in the literal sense. However, Harrison argues that gardens are necessary to escape the turmoil of modern life. "Gardens are vital to the degree that they open their enclosures in the midst of history, offering a measure of seclusion that is not exclusion" (p. 57). Harrison's *Gardens* reminds us of why the agricultural is needed at our imaginary EPCOT. To quote Neil Postman (1996), "to build a house is a fine and noble thing, but to keep it from crumbling is the essential task of a civilization" (p. 101). It would be the focus of this invigorated *Land* pavilion to impart the values of cultivation of the natural world into those who are presently living but also to future generations.

Now that I have established why *The Land* would be integral of EPCOT Reborn, the question turns to the how. Specifically, how best to balance humanity's desire to succeed/progress (at least on the material level) and be ecological responsible? One possible way forward comes from the work of C.A. Bowers' *Mindful Conservatism* (2003) in which he threads the needle between environmentalism and human progress. Bowers wrote

> Progress can be measured in the increase of human longevity and material
> conveniences that most people, even environmentalists, would not want to turn
> their backs on. Progress in the form of useful innovations is in a direct way of a

conserving process—that is, if it is motivated by a concern with enhancing the
well-being of individuals, as well as the cultural and natural ecologies they
depend on…it is involves abandoning the way of thinking where *every* innovation
in technology and *every* new idea is automatically embraced as the latest
expression of progress (p. 3).

And this is where the balance between progress and responsibility needs to be grounded. Rather than just showing what new agricultural techniques are being tested, visitors need to get their hands dirty. Literally. Mary Doll (2011) wrote "dirt is the skin of the earth, the interface between life and death" (p. 105).

In our imaginary new *Land* pavilion, guests are immediately greeted with a working garden outside of the pavilion. Perhaps it is planting time, maybe it is time for the harvest. Orange groves are a guest favorite since they keep the nostalgic connection to Florida's history but there are also fresh tomatoes and leafy greens. Immediately, we know that this new *Land* is a living laboratory because other guests are already seen cultivating the soil. As we draw closer, we see young people from all grade levels working with students enrolled at various agricultural focused universities conducting active experiments on the grounds. This crossover helps foster cooperation and expands the experience from to more interactive educational program with increased opportunities for hands-on activities for guests and students. Next, we see one booth dedicated to demonstration on how to make a compost pile in one's own backyard and another teaching how to build a worm bin. Once inside, there are live exhibits on how to start a backyard chicken coop, another that informs guests on how to build a bat box, and even more that focus on more serious topics such as eliminating animals for testing. Our new *Land* has partnered up with organizations who promote more ethical treatment of our animal brothers and sisters and seek to

eliminate the horrors found in factory farms. Eventually there will be entire portions dedicated to meatless-meat alternatives, etc. The possibilities are endless because human interaction with nature/agriculture is a salient issue of ever-increasing importance.

Needless to say I could go on but the central idea is that our new *Land* will not be a passive experience. As Bowers pointed out, the narratives of progress need not be completely destructive but should be reconfigured to be instructive. Humans must adhere to the Harrison notion of "giving more than taking" when it comes to the natural world. This overall sentiment reminded me of a quote from Michel Serres' The *Troubadour of Knowledge (*1997) when he wrote "only discovery awakens. Only invention proves that one truly thinks what one thinks, whatever that may be. I think therefore I invent. I invent therefore I think: the only proof that a scientist works or that a writer writes. Why work, why write otherwise?" (p. 93). As mentioned earlier, just as Walt brought artists to build Disneyland, a re-imagined *The Land* will require a blend of scientists and artists with a humanistic bent. EPCOT Reborn could foster that creative impulse so that it is used for making a future that works to restore balance between humans and nature; one that focuses on sustainability through technology rather than continued degradation by irresponsible progress.

Imagination

This project has been contemplated and worked on for so long that some of the original ideas have come moved from the possible to impossible and the unknown to known. As it turns out, the Disney Company has decided to revamp one of its empty pavilions into something whose working title is "The Play Pavilion" (it is unknown what the official name and opening

date will be as of this writing). I do not feel dejected at being "scooped" by Disney. On the contrary, I am thrilled to see them investing in such a pavilion that can be linked to increasing kinetic education through play. As stated in Chapter Four, the current Imagination pavilion is a reduced facsimile of the original version. This will not be in the case in our imaginary EPCOT Reborn.

The need to foster the human imagine in both the old and young is of vital importance. John Dewey (1934) explained that imagination

> more perhaps than any other phase of the human contribution, it has been treated as a special and self-contained faculty, differing from others in possession of mysterious potencies…it is a way of seeing and feeling things as the compose an integral whole. It is the large and generous blending of interests at the point where the mind comes in contact with the world. When old and familiar things are made new in experience, there is imagination (p. 278).

For too long the use of imagination was something that was deemed to be only for children or something to outgrow as one ages. However, as both Dewey and the Dreamfinder pointed out, imagination is something that belongs to all of us.

Our imaginary EPCOT Reborn will restore the Dreamfinder, Figment, and the upstairs ImageWorks area while maintaining the glass pyramid. Guests will be drawn in from the outset in experiences that were similar to our reimagined Land pavilion. Learning stations for activities for all ages begin even before we enter the pavilion. The main focus of the attraction is on how play allows us to see things from different perspectives. In *Lifelong Kindergarten: Cultivating Creativity through Projects, Passion, Peers, and Play* (2017), Michael Resnick wrote that "not

all types of play are created equal. Some types of play led to creative learning experience; others don't…What types of play are most likely to help young people develop as creative thinkers?" (p. 130). This is why the cross-section of universities and artists is so important to this imaginary place. In addition, this is also why a publicly funded EPCOT is the way to go to avoid the influence of profit seekers pushing their agendas. Our *Imagination* pavilion will be focused on addressing the forms of creative play that Resnick was describing. Guests will be encouraged to engage in activities designed to challenge and enrich. A mix of tactile and virtual games will be available as well as individual and group play. Elliot Eisner's (2002) extensive work into the arts, creativity, and imagination reminded me that

> the point here is that the kind of deliberately designed tasks students are offered in school help define the kind of thinking they will do. The kind of thinking students learn to do will influence what they come to know and the kind of cognitive skills they acquire…we design educational programs not merely to improve schools, but also to improve the ways in which students think (p. 13).

The current Epcot model only plays lip service to anything educational, let alone address the larger topics of curriculum. This is a missed opportunity and one that was alluded to in the 1976 Introduction document! EPCOT Reborn will use Elliot Eisner's rationale to create exhibits based around purposeful cognitive growth for guests of all ages. No one should leave without having their ways of thinking unaltered. Utopian curriculum bends toward imaginative solutions to real-life problems. But these ideas must be enacted with care so as to deliver the message of hopeful futurism.

How easily can I see Figment and Dreamfinder revived! The need for characters that provide actual, not solely commercial, inspiration could be a powerful weapon against the

malaise of our "junk food values."   Moreover, just having an actual pavilion dedicated to one of

the great experiences of humankind would be a boost to hopeful futurism. John Dewey (1934)

explained

> Esthetic experience is imaginative…for while the roots of every experience are
>
> found in the interaction of a live creature with its environment, that experience
>
> becomes conscious…only when meanings enter it that are derived from prior
>
> experiences. Imagination is the only gateway through which these meanings can
>
> find their way into a present interaction…the conscious adjustment of the new and
>
> the old *is* imagination (p. 283).

Educators, parents, civic organizations, etc. need to be more responsible as to what kinds of

experiences (imaginations) they present to the upcoming generations. EPCOT Reborn will be a

place that will encourage all who visit to work to building a more sustainable future.

Imagination will be provide the fuel to the creative spark as it spreads.

New Horizons

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there were more resources on this topic

than I could have possibly imagined. Some I was familiar with but many were brand new to me.

One that I had no familiarity with was yet another promotional film for EPCOT Center this time

from 1978. It begins with the then head of Walt Disney Productions, E. Card Walker, addressing

the some of the questions of why the company was forging ahead with the project. Walker asks

the rhetorical question of "why is Disney getting into so many things that are apparently

unrelated to the entertainment industry? What can Disney possibly contribute?"   In a move that

is highly reminiscent of the Florida Project/EPCOT film from 1967, a narrator takes over to

answer these questions. "EPCOT will be a community of ideas. A public forum for information

transfer about emerging new technologies, prototype systems, and promising new concepts" (n.d. 1978). From this I gathered that this was closer to the plans outlined in the 1976 document with its EPCOT Institute than what actually got built for EPCOT Center in 1982. This project remains neutral on the questions of whether Walt's vision of an experimental community would have been feasible. It will always remain a mystery since he tragically died before any ground was broken. However, I remain intrigued by this middle version the most. The EPCOT Institute offered more than just a theme park but was probably more realistic than a city.

I mention this because this is the final entry into this project. So we end our brief tour of EPCOT Reborn at the pavilion where so many hopeful futurists continue to long for: *Horizons*. This is appropriate revival because it is the bridge between EPCOT Center and our EPCOT Reborn project. We actually live in the 21st century now but uncertain to exactly what that means. It is no wonder why EPCOT Center fans keeping looking at this beloved attraction. It offered a vision that is the opposite of what was described by Mark Renton in *Trainspotting 2*. James Carey (1992) wrote of our modern age that "we are now awash in nostalgia for the future" (p. 198) which is somewhat ironic to me because it was written almost thirty years ago back when the original *Horizons* attraction was still operating. I feel as though this idea is even more poignant now that there is very little future visible in Epcot's *Future World*. Well, this project has been about trying to pave a way forward while never ignoring nostalgia so I will have one last go at it.

Our imaginary *Horizons* pavilion will be the epicenter of the entire park. A place where teachers and students, professionals and amateurs, can come together to actively create a better tomorrow. This will be a place that is never fully settled but always advancing by keeping one eye on tomorrow. Instead of that being a detriment, as was thought by those who closed down

the original in 1999, our *Horizons* embraces the paradox of looking forward while never quite

getting to "tomorrow." James Carey (1992) reminded us "and yet while the future as a prophetic

form has a long history, the future as a predictable region of experience never appears. For the

future is always off stage and never quite makes its entrance into history; the future is a time that

never arrives but is always awaited" (p. 174).

The approach to the *New Horizons* building will begin as guests hear the uplifting synth

sounds emanating from the speakers. Sounds that are once familiar yet otherworldly; pleasurable

but also nudging one out of his/her expectations. The show building itself is sleek, smooth,

perhaps inspired by a John Hench sketch or one from the artist Moebius. Once inside, guests

will know that they have arrived somewhere very special because the repeating the same

experience will be impossible. Of all of the pavilions at EPCOT Reborn, *New Horizons* will be

the most flexible and interchangeable; a futurist outlook requires nothing less. Participants will

be encouraged to drop their pretenses and engage in educational play. Exhibits will include

discussions on the newest technologies that cover a wide array of topics such as health,

communication, and space travel.

Mainly just a pavilion that is focused on the future is an imperative step in the right

direction. That is all it really needs to be; a place where the future is never realized but is strived

for anyway. Not in a mediocre "everything is going to be great" sort of way but in a way where

Pinarian complicated conversation interacts with problem-solving. If this all sounds too

fantastical, recall Steven Pinker's data driven look at the route of human progress. Towards the

end, and after thoroughly arguing his case with empirical data, Pinker wrote "I can present this

optimistic vision [of the future] without blushing because it is not a naïve reverie or sunny

aspiration. It's the view of the future that is most grounded in historical reality, the one with the

cold, hard facts on its side" (p. 327). That is what I want my students to know: I want to combine the toil and cultivation of Harrison's *Gardens* with the viewpoint (not guarantee) from Pinker's *Enlightenment Now*. We cannot allow ourselves to be the authors of destruction for the living world and all of inhabitants. When I consider a future without giraffes, coral reefs, numerous plant species, I get discouraged. However, I try to remind myself that I have a platform, albeit small, to make a difference. Imagine how much more so this would apply to *Horizons*! The future can be better if we choose to put in the work.

Perhaps this entire project is naïve, maybe none of this work matters…but then again, maybe it does. Abraham Lincoln once said that the battle *of* today is not necessarily the battle *for* today.   Maybe that is what EPCOT Center subconsciously taught me in those formative years. Maybe its message that we can do better is one that needs to go out to all educators. Maybe we do not have to be afraid of the future. Maybe, just maybe, we can reverse the tide of despair and dystopia. In her essay *Primer: Alphabet for the New Republic* (2009), Dunlop created a poetic and quite literal alphabet on how we should live ecologically responsible. From A to Z, Dunlop uses poetry and, letter by letter, a new way to think. Once her alphabetic exercise is complete, there is an afterword which actually serves as the essay's forward. The afterword encourages the readers to add "your own stories of once upon a time and never again…stories of place, your readings of home." In doing so, we will "enter the dialogues between public and private worlds in which a paramount freedom is the right to imagination" (p. 58). If our imaginary EPCOT Reborn seems incomplete, it is because I cannot do it alone. It is not up to me as just one person but rather the viewpoints of those who deny selfish pursuits to work toward common goals. At the end of *Tomorrowland* (2015), Frank Walker and Casey Newton are addressing the new recruits. Frank says

> It isn't hard to knock down a big, evil building that's telling everybody that the
>
> world's gonna end. What is hard is figuring out what to build in its place. And if
>
> we're gonna do that, we can't do it alone. We're gonna need all of you.

Casey then says, "we are looking for dreamers. Anyone who will feed the right wolf." Through

incorporation of utopian thought, designed to elevate the public need, our imaginary EPCOT

could be the place that puts us on the path of sustainable futurism by reaching a mass audience. It

is not enough to acknowledge all that is wrong with schools, curriculum, the public sphere, (the

"big, evil building") etc. Neil Postman (1995) wrote

> It does not matter if you are unhappy about the way things are. Everybody is
>
> unhappy about the way things are. We experiment to make things better, and we
>
> argue about what experiments are worthwhile and whether or not those we try are
>
> any good. And when we experiment, we make mistakes, and reveal our
>
> ignorance, and our timidity, and our naivete. But we go on because we have faith
>
> in the future—that we can make better experiments and better arguments (p. 142).

I hope that this imaginary EPCOT will serve as a new and better attempt to address the

challenges of our time. All of this is going to take work to "feed the right wolf" but that is what

is needed to break us out of the "junk values." The road to healing, reconciliation,

understanding, and sustainability are paved with bold calls to change the present to impact the

future. "It is a question of learning hope…Hope, superior to fear, is neither passive like the latter,

nor locked into nothingness. The emotion of hope goes out of itself, makes people broad instead

of confining them…" (Bloch p. 3). This needs to be the marching orders of educators

everywhere. "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. Buckminster Fuller once

wrote that "to change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."

That is what this imaginary EPCOT will continue to strive for. To all who come to this

imaginary place, welcome.

We can walk our road together/
if our goals are all the same/
We can run alone and free/
if we pursue a different aim

Let the truth of Love be lighted/
Let the love of truth shine clear/
Sensibility/
Armed with sense and liberty/
With the Heart and Mind united/
In a single perfect sphere

(From *Hemispheres* by Rush)
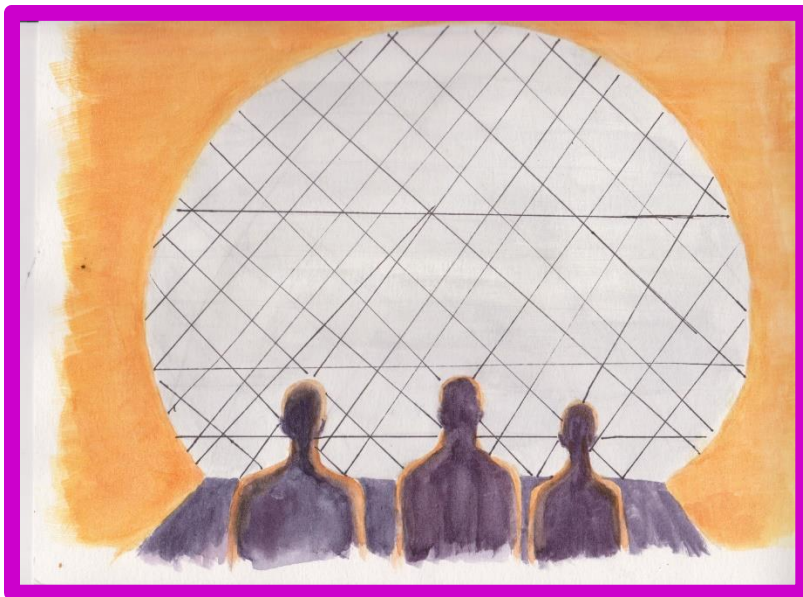
Original artwork by Kaylie Heath

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