

Brand New Worlds: Disney's Theatre Assemblages

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## Abstract

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The significance of brands within our media-intensive culture can hardly be overstated. Having emerged in the mid-20th century as platforms for the distribution of commodities, brands have since become, as scholar Celia Lury argues, “the logos of the global economy.” Brand interfaces not only differentiate mass production, but produce cultural assemblages that rewrite social and political relations. This dissertation concerns itself with the meaning of theatrical production within brand performance, with a specific focus on the Walt Disney Company. Although there are many corporate producers in commercial theatre today — Warner Brothers, MGM, Universal, and Cirque du Soleil, to name a few — Disney has the distinction of being the first to make live theatre a cornerstone of its brand relationships. Disney has also had, in branding terms, the most depth, breadth and consistency of any global entertainment brand.

Using the concept of *assemblage* as an applied framework, I consider how Disney's brand theatre functions as a form of communicative/affective capitalism, as an interface for consumer interactivity and exchange. Following Deleuze and Guattari, DeLanda and Lury, I argue that Disney's theatre assemblages are heterogeneous, contingent, emergent and most of all *generative*. At the heart of this project is the question of how Disney's theatre assemblages cohere – the question of identifiable, intensive continuities. What kinds of historical contingencies are replicated in Disney's texts and territories? How does the company code cultural flows? In what ways are

Disney's theatre assemblages networked to social formations like childhood, gender, race, sexuality, and nation? What kinds of consumer interactions and socio-technical conditions are most important to the ongoing process of developing brand relations? Although Disney's multi-modal theatre assemblages are a function of neoliberal logic and labor norms, and sustain dominant modes of production, they are also highly mutable, often supporting contested claims of intelligibility and citizenship.

The company produces a vast range of theatre experiences. This dissertation focuses on character encounters, children's theatre, Broadway musicals, a re-creation of *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* and animal/safari performance. The chapters are composed as a nested set of assemblages, starting with theatre for Disney's most important demographic: children. I then move into larger social fields/assemblages, considering theatre that addresses the nation, theatre that reframes transnational/global space, and finally, animal/ecological theatre. Taken together, the chapters present an argument for the significance of brand theatre as a localized, expressive, collaborative and extremely flexible site of cultural affiliation, agency and assembly.

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## **Dedication**

For my mother and father. And for Josie.

## Introduction:

People tend to look at you a little funny when you say you're writing a dissertation about Disney theatre. There's the bemused look that implies that anything Disney can't possibly merit serious study. There's the look that wonders, with a little anxiety, whether you are some kind of Disney fan(atic). And then there's the look of outrage, a kind of rage against the *machine*. I understand these reactions — even the rage. It does seem these days that the Disney corporation owns just about everything — every cherished character from children's literature, every superhero franchise, indeed, every media network. Over the past few years Disney has embarked on a run of high-profile acquisitions including, on March 20, 2019, the \$71.3 billion purchase of the Fox Network. The Disney/Fox takeover represents Disney's latest attempt to consolidate as many media properties as possible in preparation for the launch its own dedicated streaming platform (Disney +) and for what Emily Todd VanDerWerff at *Vox* calls the coming "streaming apocalypse, where every media company in existence tries to convince you to subscribe to its streaming service by any means necessary."<sup>1</sup>

For Disney "by any means necessary" means (at least in part) a significant reinvestment in the company's immersive, participatory theatre spaces. As Brooks Barnes of the *New York Times* writes,

with its television business facing significant challenges in the streaming age, and lots of popular movie franchises to put to use, Disney is spending billions to supercharge its theme park division, which has emerged as a surprisingly strong moneymaker.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, with the parks delivering a one hundred percent increase in operating profits over the past five years, Disney is looking to invest \$24 billion in its theme parks

worldwide as part of a spectacular bid to produce what Bob Chapek, head of the theme park division, calls “enhancement on steroids.”<sup>3</sup> For the most part, these enhancements herald new themed “land” and resort areas — immersive environments dedicated to specific media properties — but they also promise increasingly personalized offerings for consumer self-expression and brand identification. In addition to its theme park projects, Disney also intends to add ships to its popular cruise line division, multiplying the fleet twofold by 2023. And plans are already underway for Project Hubble — an immersive resort styled as a Star Wars starship where outfitted guests will cruise virtual galaxies.<sup>4</sup>

Although the company has been in operation since 1923 and, as Barnes notes, there is “nothing small” about Disney, the company does not necessarily see itself as a conservative corporate giant. As Chapek notes, the company has made a commitment to what he calls “relentless innovation,” meaning an increased premium on technology and customization. “We want, Chapek says, “to be the disruptor not the disruptee.”<sup>5</sup> The bigger and more dynamic the company becomes the more important it is to take its products and services seriously, to consider their value both for those for whom the brand is beloved and for those for whom Disney is just another fact of global consumer life. What kind of machine, exactly, is Disney?

Although the stakes are high, the scale of my particular project is limited to what amounts to a study in genre. I consider only explicit theatrical assemblages and their immediate geo-spatial contexts. It is of course impossible to disentangle *Aladdin: The Musical* on Broadway from either the 1992 or the 2019 *Aladdin* films or the *Aladdin* theme park attractions or the vast catalogue of *Aladdin* media and product tie-ins. Still, privileging theatrical assemblages maintains a primary focus on one platform, all the while considering intra and inter-active relationships between experiences, brand

identities and consumer engagements. Theatre and theatricality are also at the heart of Disney's identity — implicitly related to its affective and civic dimensions. Theatre is part of the brand's genetic code and, as such, has a lot to tell us about the machinery of branding as a social process today.

The literature on Disney is vast. Since theatrical forms are by nature interdisciplinary, my work on Disney's theatrical assemblages interacts with the literature on Disney and children (Bickford, Giroux, Langer, Sammond); Disney and theme park spaces (Fjellman, Marling, Rutherford, Sorkin, Scott, Tuan, Willis); Disney's effect on urban planning and socio-technical assemblages (Bryman, Francaviglia, Schickel, Telotte); Disney's media output, both animated and documentary (Crafton, Mitman, Parnatt, Wells, Whitley), as well as works of cultural criticism. There is a significant range within Disney cultural criticism — from Disney aesthetics (Baudrillard, Eco, Eisenstein) to Disney's representations of social formations like race, gender and class. Many of these works (collected in *The Project on Disney's Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World*, Eric Smoodin's *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom*, and in Mike Budd and Max Kirsch's *Rethinking Disney, Private Control, Public Dimensions*) fall into a somewhat standard critique of mass culture that I will address later in this introduction, but works like Douglas Brode's *Multiculturalism and the Mouse* and Sean Griffin's *Tinker Belles and Evil Queens: The Walt Disney Company* look carefully at the processual and often playful nature of Disney's representations. To a lesser extent I also draw on histories of Walt Disney and the Disney company as well as materials generated by the Disney company itself.<sup>6</sup>

Although the company has been making theatre since the very early days of the studio back lot and the theme parks are themselves expansive theatrical sites, there is less in the way of literature about Disney theatre. The company's theatrical division has

received increased critical attention since its arrival as a theatrical producer on Broadway in the early nineties, particularly in the wake of its success with *Lion King*. Still, until recently this attention was limited to only a handful of articles and chapters (Bell, Nelson, Wickstrom). A recent collection edited by George Rodosthenous and released in 2017 seeks to amend the lacuna in academic writing related to Disney's reinvention of the American musical (roughly half the essays in this collection address theatrical production, the other essays reference on-screen musicals). Essays in this collection address issues of representation as well as questions related to pedagogy (Wolf) and Disney's artistic innovations. Although Disney produces a wide range of theatrical assemblages in its parks and resorts, there is virtually no scholarship related to these productions, something I attempt to redress here.

More recent scholarship has a wider range of attitudes, but scholarship on Disney theatre (as with Disney cultural criticism as a whole) is still largely in the grip of a now longstanding bias against mass culture. This bias has been forged in large part in relationship to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's essays on "the culture industry"—in which (fetishized) mass commodity forms take on extraordinary powers of mystification and reification. To be sure, there is perhaps no better encapsulation of the "culture industry" than the Disney corporation, which has merged mass entertainment and standardized business principles for over three quarters of a century. The rise of neoliberalism and the broad extension of Disney's 21st century global reach have in some ways only given further emphasis to Adorno's declaration that consumers are free only to "choose what is always the same."<sup>7</sup> In her book *Performing Consumers*, Maurya Wickstrom argues that consumer performances today are essentially exercises in leveraged mimetic desire and embodiment. For Wickstrom, all capitalist art/neoliberal performance is produced *and received/reproduced* as a form of corporate

legitimation. The trouble with this approach is that important questions are given somewhat short shrift. What is the relationship of commercial theatre to the commodity form? What kinds of theatrical embodiment are made possible for the consumer? In what ways are consumer identities related to theatrical iteration? What kinds of politics does a mass theatre enunciate and can commercial theatre spark forms of community or ethical engagement? And how do consumers actually participate in brand boundary-making/marking? Setting Walter Benjamin's particular affinity for Mickey Mouse aside, a culture industry perspective tends to tell us that we already know the answers to these questions. Moreover, since we assume to know the answers, we have become caught up instead in authenticity debates, (nostalgically) parsing out the *real* from its (degraded) copy, as if by simply isolating what is inauthentic or derivative we can somehow negate it. Or we find ourselves painted into strange critical corners, abjuring not only any true pleasure afforded by these entertainments but holding the very idea of pleasure at all as suspect. In her introductory article, "The Problem with Pleasure," for The Project on Disney's essay collection, *Inside the Mouse*, Susan Willis makes this particular stance plain.

Here I find it useful to turn to Jane Bennett's challenge to Adorno and Horkheimer's sense that pleasure itself is a kind of blind or at least half-lidded form of stupefaction. "It does seem," she writes, "that pleasure entails some kind of affirmation. But, is the subject to which this assent is addressed always the system hegemon?"<sup>8</sup> Speaking of the pleasures of a GAP ad featuring swing dancers, Bennett advances the question of what it means to say YES as a consumer.

Yes to GAP investors and a corporate system of worker exploitation! Yes to WWII and swing dancing!" "Yes to the creativity of the film technician!" "Yes to a human body that can fly with birds and fuse with sound!" "Yes to the exuberance of beige cotton molecules!" Which is it?"<sup>9</sup>

The culture industry worry, as Bennett outlines, is that thinking about each YES may distract/seduce us (Baudrillard) from thinking critically about what really matters, ie. about ‘investors and a corporate systems of worker exploitation.’ Worse, thinking too much about (with?) pleasure might not only redirect our political attention but threaten to undo *critical thinking itself*. But these anxieties obscure the deeper predicament of whether, as Bennett writes, “the effects of commodity culture are sufficiently confronted and challenged,”<sup>10</sup> by an insistently negative, dialectical mode of thinking. If our concern is primarily ethico-political, how effective is this kind of thinking as a *praxis* at least when it comes to thinking about popular theatre? In an essay on transnational commercial theatre(s), David Savran argues that “critical antagonism has repeatedly been ineffective in stopping popular success.”<sup>11</sup> Hostility on the part of critics and the press “proved useless,” he notes, “during the 1980s in slowing the dissemination of the megamusical.”<sup>12</sup> Bennett points out that even Horkheimer and Adorno noted that enlightened self-consciousness doesn’t necessarily stop people from consuming. It may be that living under neoliberal capitalism is to simply accept life, as Jia Tolentino argues, as a constant state of moral compromise,<sup>13</sup> but I think there is also more to consumption, and commercial theatre, even the society of the spectacle (Debord), than we may, as critics, readily admit. As Bennett writes,

The animation of artifacts that Marx, Horkheimer and Adorno lament might not all be bad. It might embody several dissonant possibilities; it might have all of the following incompatible effects — pressing people to submit to the call to consume, distracting them from attending to the unjust social relations embodied in the product, reminding them that they share the world with nonhuman modes of agency, drawing them to the wonders of material existence, and opening them to unlikely ecological connections and political alliances.... This recognition opens the way for a deliberate receptiveness toward, even an active courting of, those “fetishes” among whose effects can be counted surprise, wonder and even enchantment.<sup>14</sup>



Paying attention to surprise, wonder, enchantment and other affects (like cute, cool, animated, interesting) goes beyond thinking just about commodity performance, towards an understanding of how performance assemblages work as emergent, co-constituted processes in which there are a multitude of actors, actants and affects. In particular, expanding the range of actors we consider in the co-production of these assemblages helps us to recover the agency of those whose voices are often muted, at least in the current Disney scholarship: those of children and teenagers, middle class female consumers, native people and nonwhite others, animals/nonhuman others.

Thinking about agency doesn't always mean thinking about resistance or even the possibility of leveraging commercial theatre, as Benjamin and Brecht hoped, for a kind of radical politics. The agentic qualities of consumers (of enunciation and embodiment) often take place within a brand's representational orders — they have to do with participating in reconfiguring the boundaries of the brand. Nonetheless, these qualities should be taken seriously — not only because they privilege the experiences of consumer/spectator/participants, but also because they are crucial to brand development, and, as such, to an understanding of the nature of both theatrical and brand assemblages.

Brand managers, for their part, often look to their constituents to see what's beyond the next curve. Soon after Andy Mooney left Nike to be the head of Disney Consumer Products in 2000, he visited one of the franchise performance divisions: a "Disney on Ice" production in Phoenix, Arizona. Mooney notes that he was "standing in line with mothers and daughters, all dressed head to toe in princess regalia."<sup>15</sup> As Mooney told Peggy Orenstein in a *New York Times* article,

They weren't even Disney products. They were generic princess products they'd appended to a Halloween costume. And the light bulb went off. Clearly there was latent demand here. So the next morning I said to my team, 'O.K., Let's

establish standards and a color palette and talk to licensees and get as much product out there as we possibly can that allows these girls to do what they're doing anyway,"<sup>16</sup>

Certainly, it's possible to read this anecdote as a story of capitalist capture, of "coded belonging" (Massumi), a cynical exploitation of homegrown creativity and identification to the corporate tune of \$3 billion a year.<sup>17</sup> This version of the story assumes, however, that the story ends with Disney flooding the market with dresses. But waves, as the philosopher Karen Barad notes, can be diffracted. Each girl or boy or mother in a princess dress is both a particle and a wave, capable of interference or further diffraction through multiple sets of relations of interiority and exteriority. Moreover, diffraction, as Barad writes

is not a set pattern but rather an iterative reconfiguring of patterns of differentiation and entangling. As such there is no leaving the old behind, there is no absolute boundary between here-now and there-then, there is nothing that is new, nothing that is not new.<sup>18</sup>

Consumers often diffract narratives through "intra-actions." Barad argues that these "intra-actions enact *agential cuts*, which do not produce separations, but rather cut together-apart (one move)."<sup>19</sup> Agential cuts challenge the very notion of, as Barad notes, the dichotomous (that which is cleaved in two)<sup>20</sup> emphasizing incisions, openings, tiny rivulets that can gather in strength and flow. Agential cuts are much like what Jane Bennett calls *assemblage crossings* —a term I take up within my own work here. Agential cuts and crossings challenge the notion that there are distinct entities at all — what Brian Massumi identifies as the fiction of "already constituted individuals and societies."<sup>21</sup> In a chapter entitled "The Political Economy of Belonging and the Logic of Relations," Massumi builds on the metaphor of the chicken and the egg, asking the rhetorical question of which came first: the individual or the society? For Massumi, both answers take recourse in "foundationalist" myths. More importantly, Massumi

argues that even notions of in-betweenness fall into a trap of “blending or parodying” positions on the “always-already positioned” map.<sup>22</sup> Massumi warns of seeing an “interrelation” that “simply realizes external configurations implicit as possibilities in the form of the preexistent terms. You can arrange the furniture, even move it to a new location, but you still have the same old furniture”<sup>23</sup>

It’s particularly easy to think of Disney in these terms, where many of the same films, characters, tropes, and stories about the company itself have been in circulation for anywhere from thirty to ninety years. As a brand, Disney has also itself invested heavily in promoting a sense of small-scale, small-town, *same old furniture* continuity. By 1937, as a Time Magazine feature noted: “Walt Disney ha[d] not drawn his own pictures for nine years.”<sup>24</sup> But the company continued to sell itself as a one-man operation for decades — conflating the creative output of the thousands of artists with Disney management.<sup>25</sup> Over half a century after the death of Walt Disney, the cult of the “Uncle Walt” continues unabated, sustained by an array of Walt photos, captions, videos and statues displayed in immersive Disney spaces (theme parks, resorts, cruise ships) and in advertising drives. With the ascendancy of corporate managers in the 1990s, Disney’s CEOs have also become frontmen and public brokers for the company, standing, in some cases, shoulder to shoulder with “Walt.” My point is not, of course, that individuals or social groups or fields do not exist. Or that individual decisions do not matter. Given that I focus on productions running from the 1990s to the present day, Michael Eisner (CEO from 1984-2005) puts in frequent appearances throughout this dissertation. But it’s important to question the tendency, particularly within brand assemblages, to believe that “individuals” define the assemblage (at least on the production side). “At the end of the day,” argues Disney producer Peter Schneider,

it's the individuals who make the shows. Corporations, movie studios are good sources of money because, well, we have some...But the bottom line is, corporations don't make decisions. People make decisions. At Disney that's me and my colleague, Tom Schumacher, and good old Uncle Mikey Eisner.<sup>26</sup>

But, as I hope to show, the faculties of individuals are immanent not only to the corporation but to the larger assemblage that sustains it and to the increasingly dispersed networks to which it is connected. This is true also of individuals within audiences who are, after all, not totalities but components of idiosyncratic, participatory *assemblies* connected to other assemblages. In the end, the trouble with thinking of the same old furniture as the same old furniture is that “what gets the slip,” as Brian Massumi notes, is the possibility of *change*.<sup>27</sup> And in fact what we see is that Disney’s theatrical assemblages are very much about both assemblage crossings and change.

#### *On Assemblage Theory & Brand Theatres*

I have started my own assemblage here very much in the middle. Perhaps there is no other way. Assemblages after all are not arboreal but botanic: they are rhizomatic in structure. Still, it bears making a re-turn toward the term assemblage, if only to clarify how and in what ways I connect to this particular network. Assemblage theory is its own assemblage of theorists and wide-ranging applications in geography, sociology, archeology, anthropology and political philosophy.<sup>28</sup> There is of course common ground or at least a common grounding in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, in which Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari outline the logic and operation of what they call assemblages. It’s worth clarifying that the word assemblage has a common meaning in English that comes from the French. This meaning has the sense of something that has already been put together. The Oxford English Dictionary definition is “a bringing or coming together; a meeting or gathering; the state of being

gathered or collected.”<sup>29</sup> In addition, assemblage has technical meanings. In archeology an assemblage is a collection/classification of artifacts. In art, assemblage initially defined a kind of sculptural work, but now tends to refer to a work of collage or montage — often of found materials (the OED defines these as “miscellaneous objects fastened together.”<sup>30</sup>). But the French term used by Deleuze and Guattari and translated as assemblage is an altogether different word: *agencement*, from the verb *agencer* which means to arrange, to lay out.<sup>31</sup> An *agencement* is an arrangement or laying out of multiple components. This meaning has a kind of machinic inflection to it, as in the obsolete English definition of assemblage, which privileges the mechanical “joining” or “conjunction of things,” and in current, common French usage where *c’est bien agencé* has the meaning that something is well-equipped or well-outfitted. The notion of a *machine* (or even a “desiring machine”) as a kind of totality that makes things is of course far from the meaning of *agencement*. What’s important is the dynamic, work-a-day interactivity of multiple components, the property of a kind of processual *agency*. As Deleuze and Guattari note the assemblage is an “abstract machine” that has to do with the sets of relations, the relational lines imbricated in the actual thing being assembled (what they call “concrete assemblages.”). As Deleuze noted in an interview with Claire Parnet in 1987,

What is an assemblage? It is a multiplicity which is made up of many heterogeneous terms and which *establishes liaisons, relations between them*, across ages, sexes and reigns — different natures. Thus, the assemblage’s only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a “sympathy.”<sup>32</sup>

Still, the materiality implicit in Deleuze and Guattari’s abstract machine is also important. As Deleuze and Guattari note, assemblages are “simultaneously and inseparably a machinic assemblage and an assemblage of enunciation.”<sup>33</sup> In an example, Deleuze notes:

Take an assemblage of the type man-animal-manufactured object: MAN-HORSE STIRRUP. Technologies have explained that the stirrup made possible a new military unity in giving the knight lateral stability.... This is a new man animal symbiosis, a new assemblage of war, defined by its degree of power, for freedom, its affects, its circulations of affects: what a set of bodies is capable of. Man and the animal enter into a new relationship: one changes no less than the other, the battlefield is filled with a new type of affects...In the case of the stirrup, it was the grant of land, linked to the beneficiary's obligation to serve on horseback, which was to impose the new cavalry and harness the tool in the complex assemblage of feudalism.. The feudal machine combines new relations with earth, war, the animal, but also with cultural and games (tournaments), with woman (courtly love); all sort of fluxes enter into conjunction.<sup>34</sup>

For Deleuze and Guattari, even nature is a machine (another example features the wasp-and-the orchid, which, like the stirrup-warrior-horse, and the nomadic warrior-horse-bow could likely merit a feminist reimagining): what's important to note here is the matter of matter. Tools and technologies and pollinating wasps have agentic qualities and entanglements- they reshape our relationships to ourselves and our communities as well as our relationship to other non-human others. Ideas about the particular agency of technology are of course well developed within the field of STS (Science and Technology Studies), in particular by Michel Callon, Bruno Latour and John Law's work on Actor Network Theory, a theory that shares its own set of coordinates with assemblage theory. ANT informs aspects of my second chapter, in relationship to digital platforms and mediatization (on the web, as Latour et al note, "the more you wish to pinpoint an actor, the more you have to deploy its *actor-network*."<sup>35</sup>). But I have overall opted to stay closer to assemblage theory (or better put assemblage thinking) because of its sense of the machine as above all social (as Deleuze notes, "Tools always presuppose a machine and a machine is always social before it is technical."<sup>36</sup>). This sociality includes an openness to *relations of exteriority*<sup>37</sup> (as opposed to Latour's "black boxes") and carries always the possibility of excess. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "There is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the

overcoding machine.”<sup>38</sup> I am also drawn to a particular set of concepts or key terms within assemblage thinking that seem especially relevant to me when thinking about brand theatre: coding and territorialization.

Before turning to these key terms, I should say that there is of course division about whether Deleuze and Guattari developed a theory of assemblages per se. Manuel DeLanda argues that Deleuze and Guattari offer “half a dozen different definitions,” which “when taken in isolation... do not seem to yield a coherent definition.”<sup>39</sup> DeLanda’s own work attempts not so much to make the definitions cohere but to bring into being a theoretical field. Thomas Nail counters that even though Deleuze and Guattari “never formalized it as a theory per se, but largely used it ad hoc throughout their work,” they “do in fact have a full-fledged theory of assemblages.”<sup>40</sup> These discussions have to do with philosophical preoccupations (and a politics of the Left) that are well beyond the scope of this study. To the extent that Deleuze and Guattari use assemblage (theory) as a methodology, they seem to circumvent the formalization of a unified (field) theory as a matter of practice. This said, this dissertation does *not* attempt to engage epistemological questions. Despite my interest in the political philosophy of Jane Bennett, whose theories of the “agency of assemblages,” distributive agency and even vital materiality thread through my own work here, I am interested in the concept of assemblage as an *applied framework* for thinking about how (branded) theatrical assemblages interact with other components within the brand assemblage and by default with larger socio-technical and socio-material assemblages. Above all, I find the notion that assemblages are heterogeneous, contingent, emergent and most of all *generative* particularly useful when thinking, somewhat paradoxically, about the persistence of Disney as a brand. For, as Deleuze wrote in 2007,

An assemblage is first and foremost what keeps very heterogeneous elements together: eg. a sound, a gesture, a position, etc., both natural and artificial elements. The problem is one of consistency or 'coherence', and it is prior to the problem of behavior. How do things take on consistency? How do they cohere? Even among very different things, an intensive continuity can be found.<sup>41</sup>

The question of how assemblages cohere — of identifiable intensive continuities — is at the heart of my project. How are cultural flows de and re coded within theatrical brand assemblages? What kinds of consumer interactions are most important to the ongoing process of developing relations? What sorts of historical contingencies inform how populations (identified as "market segments") and territories (actual physical spaces and imaginary geographies) are de and re territorialized? In what ways do Disney's theatrical assemblages become networked to social formations like childhood, gender, race, sexuality, and nation as a way of stabilizing the brand? What kinds of distributive agencies can we identify as not only irruptions within the brand but as immanent properties of the (brand) theatrical experience itself? The density, intensity and coherence of theatrical assemblages is of course a question of both orientation and degree. People buy tickets to Disney shows for any number of reasons and have any number of responses. Theatrical assemblages, like all assemblages, are not strata. Rather, they are as Deleuze and Guattari note "produced in the strata... operat[ing] in zones where milieus become decoded."<sup>42</sup> Brand theatres then work within zones of deterritorialization and reterritorialization — orienting consumers towards new variations and gradients, new ways of upgrading, optimizing, morphizing, or, as the blockbuster song from the movie and Broadway musical *Frozen*, puts it, just "let[ting] it go."

*Key Terms*



Beyond the conceptual framework of assemblage, I often invoke concepts of coding/decoding/recoding as well as de/territorialization. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, these terms often describe the gathering and ordering of flows under capitalism. I find it helpful to think of coding much the same way we think of computer codes — as (non-binary) rules that order and sequence — *decoding* refers to the breaking down or dissolution of codes, *recoding* as the reapplication of codes in a new context (or assemblage) and *overcoding* as the over-writing of existing code (like the overcoding of many fairy/folk tales and even historical narratives (Pocahontas) as Disney stories). As mediatized bodies come together as entities (eg. “Disney’s Buffalo Bill’s Wild West”), they are territorialized along axes that are in a constant process of simultaneous de and reterritorialization. These are, I know, loose, selective and somewhat philosophically and politically impoverished engagements with Deleuze and Guattari’s own terms (in *A Thousand Plateaus* for instance, there are four kinds of territorialization). At the same time, these two terms have proved especially useful in thinking about how brands as abstract machines find concrete expression and identity.

Because the concepts of brands, branding and brand assemblages are so central to an understanding of Disney’s theatrical assemblages, it also bears introducing brand assemblage as its own key term. In her article on “Brand as Assemblage: Assembling Culture,” Celia Lury notes brands are assemblages in a purely descriptive sense: they are constituted by and through a multiplicity of disciplinary fields and practices.

“Brands,” she notes,

are the outcome of diverse professional activities, including marketing, graphic and product design, accountancy, media, retail, management, and the law, with each of these professions having multiple histories, being internally divided, in tension with each other, and sometimes being contradictory or opposed in their relation to specific instances of branding.<sup>43</sup>

Disney's theatrical assemblages add yet another set of professional activities to this roster: playwrights, directors, designers, actors, dramaturgs, line producers, technical directors, unions (representing artists as well as teamsters), agents, managers. This list of participants has yet, of course, to include assemblies of audiences/consumers. To be sure, Lury goes beyond the notion that brand assemblages are simply an aggregated bundle of relations. Building on the work of Deleuze and Guattari and Callon's notion of assemblages, Lury argues for "branding as a process of assembling culture."<sup>44</sup> Starting with the evolution of the brand over the past half century, Lury highlights the shift in the 1980s and 1990s towards performative marketing — in which products no longer had status simply as stand alone goods sold into direct markets, but became part of a range of goods, services, market positions and distribution channels. This shift towards multimodal development and distribution represented a trend in favor of both (re)qualifying products through differentiation and bundling (of goods, services, advertisements, and even market sectors.) Bundling goods and services (as anyone with a cellphone carrier understands) means a relational emphasis on the links between them: what Bernard Cova calls the linking value between different product lines that help maintain the identity of the brand itself.<sup>45</sup>

In her book *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*, Sarah Banet Wisner notes that thinking about branding requires moving away from assuming that branding is simply a process of commodification<sup>46</sup> or even finding, with Jane Bennett, a particular enchantment in commodities. Commodification, Banet-Wisner elaborates, involves the

monetization of the different spheres of life, a transformation of social and cultural life into something that can be bought and sold. In contrast, the process of branding impacts the way we understand who we are, how we organize ourselves in the world, what stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. While commodities are certainly part of branding — the process of branding is broader,

situated within culture. It is this cultural process of branding — that marks the transformation of the everyday, lived culture to brand culture.<sup>47</sup>

Today, the concept of branding extends beyond brands themselves to nations, institutions and individuals who attempt to cultivate “a personal brand.” Lury notes that brand extension (identified as width and depth) and “brand abstraction” have made brand consistency and explicit, territorialized brand space priorities. She argues that increased abstraction of the brand means an increased need for embodied physical environments, environments with the ability to de and reterritorialize space according to qualities, attachments and intensities. Brands, Lury affirms, “emerge in a series of experiments in auto-spatialization.”<sup>48</sup> This concept is particularly applicable to brand theatrical assemblages which function as spatialized brand interfaces. Through the brand’s theatrical assemblages, it becomes possible to see the ways in which the boundaries of the brand are “auto-spatialized,” how they are tested and remade, de and recoded to expand the brand’s latitudes and enhance its interactivity.

As Lury notes, the brand plays a part in the production of itself<sup>49</sup> but it is also an interactive, creative space. In the epigraph to her essay, Lury quotes the writer and advertising guru Jeremy Bullmore noting, “people build brands as birds build nests, from scraps and straws we chance upon.”<sup>50</sup> For me, my question is less what is a brand (theatrical) assemblage (what kind of nest, or whether the nest is beautiful or useful or truly political), but how it holds together and what kinds of relations (scraps and straws and chance happenings) become visible (or invisible) the more closely we look.

### *Overview of Chapters*

I began by thinking of Disney assemblages as nested sets—with the understanding that these sets are composed of actual expressions (or what Deleuze and Guattari call

*collective enunciations*) within larger discursive or socio-technical sets. The chapters are in fact composed as a kind of nested set, starting from what I saw as the smallest unit first: children, and then expanding to larger social fields: nation, transnational/global space, ecological/nonhuman space. This notion of sets is however compromised by an implied sense of intactness or impermeability — as if each assemblage sits inside a larger one, like a set of perfectly stacked baking spoons. This is one of the reasons I sometimes refer to the chapters as mappings— of social space (like the space of childhood) or geographic/neoliberal space or even ontological space (both human and non or more-than-human). It's important to note that these are all overlapping rather than distinct spaces.

Each chapter attempts to localize the assemblages in question, to identify physical and often socio-technical and socio-cultural conditions and contexts. I also dedicate significant time to thinking about how the shows were put together, the ways in which they decode and recode the media properties (films and commodities) to which they are related, as well as the ways in which they de and recode components from other theatrical assemblages. I see this work — of thinking about the process of making theatre — as central to an assemblage approach. I'm interested in how and when and where and in what ways Disney's theatrical assemblages find expression. I'm interested in the material conditions and embodiments and styles of structuration that make these Disney properties *territories*. All the chapters look at processes of branding and marketing, practices that I hope (perhaps in a "culture industry" mode) to demystify and to reframe as processual rather than immanent. Where I have been able, I have tried to include diffracted perspectives, but this is not an ethnographic work and, as such, the number of voices I have been able to include has been somewhat limited.

Chapter 1 explores the relationship of the Disney company to children (and vice versa) both from an historical perspective and through two theatrical assemblages: a (roughly) two-minute character meeting/scene at the Town Square Theatre in Walt Disney World, and a 20 minute in-park interactive puppet show for preschoolers at Hollywood Studios. In this chapter I highlight the agency of children in animating things and worlds, an agency the brand well recognizes and attempts to enfold.

Chapter 2 considers Disney's Broadway assemblages. Beginning with the localization of Disney in Times Square and its impact on Broadway, I then proceed with readings of two Broadway musicals: *Newsies* and *Aladdin*. These readings look at intersections, or better put the *friction*, to use Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's term, between the theatrical assemblages in question and social formations like class, race, gender and sexuality. The section on *Newsies* also explores the socio-technical aspects of digital platforms in relationship to prosumer and consumer investments. Chapter 3 takes a tour of Disneyland Paris. I localize the identity of Disneyland Paris through a brief history of how the project came together, as well as through readings of its theme park and resort spaces that highlight the performativity of the park's expressive American identity within European space. Chapter 3 also features a reading of "Disney's Buffalo Bill's Wild West" — a performance reconstruction (of sorts) of Buffalo Bill's Wild West (which stopped in Paris both in 1889 and 1905), considering the meaning of the frontier "West" for transnational audiences today. The fourth and final chapter looks at the performance of conservation/"environmentality" at Disney's Animal Kingdom theme park. This chapter highlights the capacity of the park as both a theme park and a zoo. As in other chapters, I read both the setting of the park and a theatrical assemblage, in this case *Kilimanjaro Safaris*, an immersive safari ride in which guests travel through assembled grasslands housing a large range of animal performers.

As far as I know only one other study in theatre studies, on the British Georgian Theatre, by David Worrall, entitled *Celebrity, Performance, Reception*, uses the framework of assemblage. It is my hope that I make the case here, as Worrall does, for the value of assemblage for thinking about the complexity of theatrical production and its more-than-representational apparatuses, as well as in thinking about audiences as populations (rather than masses). If nothing else, multi-modal theatrical production today asks us to begin to see theatrical particles in relationship to larger waves and vice versa, to catch the traces of these crossings.

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<sup>1</sup> Emily Todd VerDerWerff, "Here's what Disney owns after the massive Disney/Fox merger," *Vox*, March 20, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/3/20/18273477/disney-fox-merger-deal-details-marvel-x-men>

<sup>2</sup> Brooks Barnes, "Disney Is Spending More on Theme Parks Than It Did on Pixar, Marvel and Lucasfilm Combined," November 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/16/business/media/disney-invests-billions-in-theme-parks.html>

<sup>3</sup> In Barnes, "Disney Is Spending More,"

<sup>4</sup> In Barnes, also see Disney's official fan website for the most recent updates on themed lands from its August 2019 expo. See Beth Deitchman, "The Most Fantastic News from D23 2019 Expo 2019," D23, August 29, 2019. <https://d23.com/top-news-d23-expo-2019/>

<sup>5</sup> In Barnes, "Disney is Spending More."

<sup>6</sup> All referenced works cited here appear in the bibliography. For a biography of Walt Disney, I have turned to Neal Gabler's *Walt Disney: The Triumph of American Imagination*, (New York, Random House, 2007). Gabler is the only Disney biographer that I know of who has had access to the family's archives.

<sup>7</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, (London: Verso, 1997), 167

<sup>8</sup> Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 128.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, *The Enchantment*, 130

<sup>11</sup> David Savran, "Trafficking in Transnational Brands," *Theatre Survey* 55, no 3 (2014): 337.

<https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1017/S0040557414000337>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> See Jia Tolentino, "The Story of a Generation in Seven Scams," *Trick Mirror*. (New York: Random House, 2019). Tolentino argues that "the choice of this era is to be destroyed or to morally compromise ourselves in order to be functional," 193.

<sup>14</sup> Bennett, *The Enchantment*, 127

<sup>15</sup> Will Smale, "How one man's eureka moment earns disney \$3bn a year," *BBC News*, December 24, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-46546014>

<sup>16</sup> In Peggy Orenstein, "What's Wrong with Cinderella?" *New York Times*, December 24, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/24/magazine/24princess.t.html>

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- <sup>17</sup> Will Smale, “How one man’s eureka”
- <sup>18</sup> Karen Barad, “Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart,” *parallax*, 20:3 (2014), 168-187. DOI: [10.1080/13534645.2014.927623](https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2014.927623)
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Brian Massumi, “The Political Economy of Belonging and the Logic of Relations,” *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) <https://www.brianmassumi.com/textes/Political%20Economy%20of%20Belonging.pdf>
- <sup>22</sup> Brian Massumi, “The Political Economy”
- <sup>23</sup> Brian Massumi, “The Political Economy”
- <sup>24</sup> Quoted in Nicholas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 27.
- <sup>25</sup> Indeed, as Sammond notes, “Disney couldn’t really draw his most famous creation, nor could he easily reproduce his own hallmark signature during autograph sessions.” Sammond also outlines the ways in which the company built something of the myth of “Walt Disney,” but that newspapers and journals in the 1940s not only reproduced but contributed to the invention of “Uncle Walt.” In Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, 29, 30.
- <sup>26</sup> Quoted in Barry Singer, “THEATER; The New Musical: Will Corporate Money Call the Tune,” *New York Times*, August 30, 1998. <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/08/30/theater/theater-the-new-musical-will-corporate-money-call-the-tune.html>
- <sup>27</sup> Massumi, “The Political Economy,”
- <sup>28</sup> There is also one study of Georgian Theatre by David Worrall, *Celebrity, Performance, Reception, British Georgian Theatre as Social Assemblage*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) that uses an assemblage framework, which I address at the end of the chapter.
- <sup>29</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “assemblage,” accessed June 16, 2018. <https://www-oed-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/view/Entry/11781?redirectedFrom=assemblage#eid>
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> *Collins French-English Dictionary*, s.v. “agencer,” accessed June 16, 2018. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/us/dictionary/french-english/agencer>
- <sup>32</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 69.
- <sup>33</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 555.
- <sup>34</sup> Deleuze and Parnet “Dialogues II”, 69-70.
- <sup>35</sup> Bruno Latour, Pablo Jensen, Tommaso Venturini, Sébastien Grauwin, and Dominique Boullier. 2012. “‘The Whole Is Always Smaller than Its Parts’ - a Digital Test of Gabriel Tardes’ Monads.” *British Journal of Sociology* 63 (4): 590–615, 592. doi:10.1111/j.1468-4446.2012.01428.x.
- <sup>36</sup> Deleuze and Parent, “Dialogues II,” 70.
- <sup>37</sup> Relations of exteriority, according to Manuel DeLanda in *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), have to do with relations that are contingent – that have their own independence from the larger assemblage.
- <sup>38</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 214.
- <sup>39</sup> Manuel DeLanda, “Assemblage Theory,” (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 2016), 1.
- <sup>40</sup> Thomas Nail, “What is an Assemblage?” *SubStance*, Volume 46, Number 1, 2017 (Issue 142), pp. 21-37, 21. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/650026>
- <sup>41</sup> Gilles Deleuze. *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and interviews 1975–1995*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 179.
- <sup>42</sup> Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 503.
- <sup>43</sup> Celia Lury BRAND AS ASSEMBLAGE, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 2:1-2 (2009) 67-82, 67. DOI: [10.1080/17530350903064022](https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350903064022)
- <sup>44</sup> Lury, “BRAND AS ASSEMBLAGE,” 67.
- <sup>45</sup> Bernard Cova, “Community and consumers: Towards a definition of the ‘linking value’ of product or services,” *European Journal of Marketing* 31, no. 3,4 (March 1, 1997): 297, ISSN: 0309-0566.

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<sup>46</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 4. Lury also makes this point in her article, in relationship to the work of Liz Moor, 73.

<sup>47</sup> Sarah Banet Wiser, *Authentic™*, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Lury, “BRAND AS ASSEMBLAGE,” 78

<sup>49</sup> Lury, “BRAND AS ASSEMBLAGE,” 77

<sup>50</sup> In Lury but attributed to Denzil Meyers ““Whose brand is it anyway?””. In *Beyond Branding: How the New Values of Transparency and Integrity are Changing the World of Brands*, Edited by: Ind, N. (London and Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2003), 21–35.



## Chapter 1: Disney, Junior.

Soon after we adopted our daughter at fifteen months, I realized that I couldn't make purchases on her behalf without also choosing a brand character or identity: The Dora or Nemo toothbrush? The Winnie the Pooh or Minnie Mouse diapers? Everything from sippy cups to towels to backpacks featured bug-eyed animated sponsors. We threw her a birthday party and I roamed Party City looking for a non-branded option among the party sets: there wasn't one. Because our daughter arrived home as a toddler, it wasn't long before we became a "four-eyed, four-legged consumer."<sup>1</sup> By the time she was two, she was making consumer choices as a right of self-determination. (She would "cart load" at the grocery store, selecting and adding her own items.) By three, she had badgered me into buying necessary household items mostly according to her preferences. By four, she was wearing a Disney Princess dress every day of the week. Each dress represented not only a brand character but an identity: Aurora or Cinderella? Pocahontas or Mulan? When she turned five, we made the requisite middle-to-upper-middle-class pilgrimage, together with some friends, to Disney World. By the time we arrived in Orlando, she had seen the Disney characters on TV, in books, on toys, on every conceivable kind of household item. She had slept in Disney Princess pajamas under a pink Disney Princess blanket, surrounded by a coterie of plush creatures and the clutter of her mostly branded toys. She had already, in some sense, been living in Disney World, in a complex psychic field in which her individual practices and affective life were always already in the process of being co-constituted by brand imperatives.

As consumer theorist Daniel Cook notes, “no one in contemporary wealthy societies... ‘chooses’ to be a consumer in large part because it is impossible not to be one, as we are born into regimes of consumption.”<sup>2</sup> For children growing up today, consumption is a compulsory performance, an “intrinsic part,” as Jennifer Hill argues, “of everyday life and identity.”<sup>3</sup> Although children have played an active role in consumption processes since the nineteenth century, they have become increasingly important figures within brand economies. Aside from being a significant futures market,<sup>4</sup> children today are more highly attuned to brand narratives than their parents.<sup>5</sup> They exert tremendous spending influence, beginning with the range of products marketed directly to them (like juice or toys), and then, as they get older, on *all* household purchases (like cars or vacations).<sup>6</sup> Martin Lindstrom affirms that today’s eight- to twelve-year-olds are “the richest generation in history,” accounting for \$1.6 billion in direct spending.<sup>7</sup>

The Disney Company’s address to children has emerged over the course of the century, together with the development of the brand itself as the “key locus for the reconfiguring of contemporary processes of production.”<sup>8</sup> Even as it has acquired competing networks, expanding its theatre of operations, Disney has sold itself as a uniquely inclusive, “family-oriented” brand. This “family-friendly” interface is both an historical development based on the careful negotiation of ever-evolving fears about the vulnerability of children to media/advertising -- and a multi-generational outcome. Disney pocketed parents when they were kids: they grew up associating the brand with their childhoods (or with childhood itself). When these parents raise their own kids, they perform a kind of nostalgic restoration of their attachment to Disney products and experiences.

But for all the nostalgia, the world of Disney today is not your grandmother's, or even your mother's, Disney. The nature of brand assemblages today makes it impossible to distinguish between commodity forms, media, and live performance since all products and experiences function as promotions for yet more products. Cross marketed platforms or assemblage "crossings" also fuel what Scott Lash and Celia Lury call the increasing "mediation of things and the thingification of media."<sup>9</sup> This is to say that "transmedia brands"<sup>10</sup> like Disney do not simply produce affinity items (like a Mickey Mouse lunch box), they build brand characters and storylines *across platforms*. Each platform deepens or develops a character's profile and/or narrative.

In order to strengthen demographic-specific assemblage crossings (and to help consumers navigate the inevitable clutter of brand ecosystems), Disney also increasingly micro-segments consumer markets. There is no longer "one" Disney for the whole family, particularly in the home environment. Instead, there's a Disney for each member of the family. On television alone, there are separate, dedicated twenty-four-hour channels for the very young (Disney Junior), for the slightly older (Disney Channel), for eight- to twelve-year-old boys who want to be "cool" and slightly disobedient (Disney XD). Then there are the franchise brands within the brand—something for just about any segment (or childhood attachment): Princesses, Muppets, Winnie the Pooh, Alice in Wonderland, Pixar, Star Wars, Marvel, Avatar, even The Simpsons.

This chapter focuses on theatrical assemblages for just one of these micro-segments: children from three to eight years old. I spotlight Disney theatre for the mini-masses because looking at this demographic provides a unique window into how theatrical assemblages work with(in) a larger brand assemblage, as emergent processes of looping and linking, connection and conjunction. Despite the huge range of brand

commodities and interactions aimed at younger children and their significance to brands as a speculative market, there currently no studies that consider the value or meaning of brand theatre for very young children.<sup>11</sup> As multi-sensory, multi-modal, affective experiences, theatre for the very young connects every day practices, consumer commodities, memory making, and affective aesthetics (like cute, cool, uncanny and animatedness) to larger social assemblages (like gender, race, and nation). Disney's pre and elementary school theatrical assemblages also tell us about the unruliness of brand assemblages—the ways in which the kinds of disciplinary power they aim to perform misfire, becoming redirected or simply diffracted, even or perhaps most especially when children are involved.

A common refrain in Disney criticism has to do with the outsize influence and particular evil of Disney properties with respect to children. From Jack Zipes to Janet Wasko, to Susan Willis, to Henry Giroux (whose work declares that Disney has put an end to childhood itself),<sup>12</sup> scholars have tended to see the company as a corrupt peddler of sexism, racism, colonialism, and above all, consumerism. In her book, *Performing Consumers: Global Capital and Its Theatrical Seductions*, performance scholar Maurya Wickstrom argues that consumers have in fact become conscripted as worker bees for corporate brands, performing “immaterial labor” on their behalf, producing and reproducing the lure of the corporate through performances of mimetic correspondence. For Wickstrom the consumer body is the site of “embodied comprehension”<sup>13</sup> in and through which each individual apprehends their assigned social roles and identities, identities that she sees as “foreclosed,” however playfully, by the “corporate agenda.”<sup>14</sup> She sees children as particularly endangered by consumer regimes, perhaps most especially by Disney. For Wickstrom, the hypnotic force of

consumer culture is so strong that children are at risk not only of being stupefied by mass culture but of being body snatched.

Many of these arguments depend, as argued in the Introduction, on an inherited Frankfurt School narrative in which commodity fetishism is the twentieth-century version of bread and circuses, which is to say an instrument of social control. They also depend, as Beryl Langer argues, on a nineteenth century vision of childhood in which there are essentially two camps: one that sacralizes children (particularly in opposition to commerce) and the other that worries about their “development.”<sup>15</sup> In both camps, children are not only vulnerable but naive. But assuming that children have no agency risks a misunderstanding of the nature of their participation in market economies. It’s also not clear to me that an unqualified moral stance (of Disney or consumer / commodity culture in general as “bad”) helps us understand what is, in the end, an extremely complex relational field, composed of multiple actors and, to use Latour’s term, *actants* (forces like matter or technology). Daniel Cook argues that the question of whether children are naive or competent not only hyper-moralizes the issues, it’s largely beside the point. Like adults, they are social actors, actors who are both stable individual entities and constantly coming into being.

By looking directly at Disney’s theatrical assemblages, particularly in its most dedicated, “embodied,” and interactive performance space—the Disney theme park—we see the ways in which mass-mediated spectacle, commodity culture, and brand identities are emergent, fluid, and co-constituted performances. I do not say that the playing field is even. I do not deny the territorializing power of Disney, with its empire of aggregated media networks and franchises. In fact, I argue here that performance modes and aesthetic affects, even negative ones, are crucial to brand differentiation and identification. I also understand children as distinct from adults and in need of legal

protections against corporate predation – protections against data mining and other digital incursions into privacy / consent, against targeted food advertising. And yet, I question Wickstrom’s sense of the performative apparatus of brand subjectification, that children assume, through the operation of mimetic desire and transformation that “to have” is “to be.”<sup>16</sup> More importantly, I question her assumption (and that of the aforementioned critics) that the brand superstores categorically dominate forms of difference, that Disney hegemonically reproduces or disciplines subjects as apolitical consumer-performers. As Jane Bennett might argue, I simply wish to deny corporate performances the kind of efficacy critics have previously ascribed to them. I also hope to open up a different set of questions related to brand assemblages. In what ways do media objects within live, networked performances for children function as brand vehicles? How do we think about the embedded materiality of objects, particularly toys, with their various animations and personalized meanings? How do we understand representations of time and space within theatrical assemblages composed of overlapping time signatures, spatialities, and merged modalities? How do aesthetic affects produce a sense of differentiation and / or belonging, what Lauren Berlant calls “the affectivity-of-being-in-common?”<sup>17</sup> In what ways do theatrical assemblages for children code and decode age, class, gender, and race to performatively enhance consumer identities, and how do children understand these codings and recodings? And perhaps most importantly, can a sense of distributive agency that *includes* children better inform how Disney’s assemblages really work, the ways in which theatrical affects exceed representational control? Children may not have a choice today about consumer culture, but they can, or eventually will be able to, decide where and how to spend their time and money. It goes without saying that in market economies,

consumer performances matter. But children also decide how to use brand performances for their own purposes—they assimilate the brand as a form of vital/material culture, as social currency, or as a way of building their own dynamic, ever-shifting social networks. They are aware of brand technologies *as* theatrical technologies and this awareness is a kind of play – a ludic, participatory performance that is also part of the circulation of the political economy of the global brand. Children use commodities and consumer experiences (including theatre) to code and decode for social relations that they in turn *enact*. They not only use brands to express themselves, they influence how brand personalities are perceived<sup>18</sup> as well as how they are updated and transformed.<sup>19</sup>

This chapter begins with a brief “history” of the company’s address to children in the US. This history is less of a history or historiography than it is a series of tracings. The aim in this section is to show the emergent, processual nature of the brand’s development in relationship to children, and to identify how assemblage crossings between various platforms have accumulated over time. This section is followed by two in-depth studies of in-park performances. The first study highlights performance elements within *Meeting Mickey in Town Square Theater*, an interactive character encounter or scene (commonly called a meet-and-greet). The second study analyses an interactive puppet and digital media show for preschool children called *Disney Junior Live on Stage!* Both productions have appeared in multiple locations. You can “meet Mickey” at either the east or west coast Magic Kingdoms (Orlando or Anaheim); you can attend *Disney Junior Live on Stage!* at California Adventure Park, Hollywood Studios, or Disneyland Paris.<sup>20</sup> Only the Orlando productions are referenced here, based on field visits in 2016 and multiple viewings of different performance dates on YouTube.<sup>21</sup> These two productions represent very different theatrical forms: *Meeting*

*Mickey in Town Square Theater* profiles the Mickey Mouse walk-around puppet or what Donald Crafton calls the “human-toon,”<sup>22</sup> highlighting the performativity of the mediatized brand body and the aesthetic affects of animated, commodified, and automatized media forms. In this section, I consider the meaning of branded theatrical assemblages for differentiated encounter, affective flow and consumer co-presence.

*Disney Junior Live on Stage!* is a Russian Matryoshka Doll of a show—five TV shows in one. This section pays attention first to how the show came together as an assemblage and then turns to the ways in which narrative, participatory and production elements code, decode, and recode social texts through theatrical interactivity and the spectacular animation of material goods.

#### *Disney, Children, and Consumer Cultures*

Children, real and imagined, have been at the heart of the Disney brand for over three-quarters of a century. As Nicholas Summerson outlines in his book, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, from the early 1930s the company leveraged cultural anxieties about the impact of mass media, the decentralization of the family, and the enculturation of children in order to “differentiate its products from those of its competitors.”<sup>23</sup>

Championing the potential of mass media for social “uplift” and a robust Americanism, Disney identified and aligned itself with local organizations (like the Boy Scouts) and civic practices in order to showcase its commitment to middle-class American family values. In 1930, the company established chapters of The Mickey Mouse Club in association with local movie houses. A precursor to the popular 1950s TV show and to the current CGI animated *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* series on its dedicated twenty-four-hour preschool channel, Disney Junior, this network organization encouraged local movie houses to establish themselves as both entertainment and social centers for children. For



ten cents, an overworked mother on Saturday mornings could send her children to the theatre for three hours, where they'd watch cartoons and then participate in organized leisure and community activities: kids would paint Easter eggs, or hold a paper airplane contest, a dog parade, or an ice cream social.<sup>24</sup> On Mother's Day, the theatres would forego ticket sales and the kids would perform in a talent show sponsored by the Clubhouse.<sup>25</sup>

In this way, animated entertainment was reconfigured as productive, civic activity that privileged the family unit without requiring significant participation from parents. Disney introduced children to public technologies and culture, while at the same time safeguarding their moral development and class status (since a significant concern about movie houses was that they promoted inter-class contact). No aspect of childhood well-being was outside the company's concern. Sammond describes an early licensing agreement with local dairies in which the company distributed copies of *Mickey Mouse Magazine* to accompany milk deliveries. The first issue of the magazine broadcasted "An Important Message to Parents from Mickey Mouse," in which parents were advised that they should instruct children to drink at least a quart of milk every day. As Sammond argues, the magazine not only encouraged increased milk consumption, but equated the company with "children's health."<sup>26</sup> "Uncle" Walt not only made great films, he helped build strong young Americans. Through the Depression, when his *Three Little Pigs* became a hit and "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?" was virtually a national anthem,<sup>27</sup> Walt Disney and the Walt Disney corporation were synonymous with the vitality and future prospects of its youth.

Licensing deals covered, of course, much more than milk. Mickey Mouse, as Sammond puts it, was Disney's "front man" and there were all kinds of opportunities to bring him home. As early as 1932, department stores promoted tie-in activities,

selling Mickey Mouse–embossed accessories and housewares. By 1935, as the Cleveland Plain Dealer described, brand life had already fully entered the child’s domestic sphere:

In his room, bordered with M.M wallpaper and lighted with M.M. lamps, his M.M. alarm clock awakens him, providing his mother forgets! Jumping from his bed where his pajamas and the bedding are the M.M. brand, to a floor the rugs and linoleum are M.M. sponsored, he puts on his M.M. moccasins and rushes to the bathroom to have the first chance at... no, you’re wrong...at the soap made in the Disney manner, as are also his toothbrush, hair-brush and towels.<sup>28</sup>

According to Richard deCordova, although the film industry raised flags for Americans in the early 30s, generating concerns about class status, appropriate content, and even the relationship between films and consumerism, “ancillary products relating to Mickey Mouse were not an issue.”<sup>29</sup> He argues that the lack of controversy (belied perhaps somewhat by the tone of the Cleveland Register) had to do with a Romantic “valuation of toys” in the early part of the century, in which virtually all toys and play were considered educational, and the equally Romantic equation of children with animals. For deCordova, toys and products made to seem like toys (a phenomenon now called “trans-toys” or “trans- toying,”<sup>30</sup>) played an important role in “naturalizing Disney animation’s address to children” over time.<sup>31</sup> By 1947, Mickey merchandise was pulling in roughly \$100 million a year.<sup>32</sup>

From the late 1940s, Walt Disney built on this early connection to children as he developed a market for his nature films, targeting schools and building an early alliance between mass culture and public-school networks (including curricular materials and teacher development programs). By the 1950s, *Mickey Mouse Club* had found its way to what Sammond calls the “two-way mirror” of the television market.<sup>33</sup> The show ran in the after-school time slot. *Mickey Mouse Club* featured children and adults alike — all in Mickey Mouse ears hats and letter sweaters. The show developed many of the features still used in the CGI and *Disney Junior Live on Stage!* versions today: a theme song, a

military style roll call, educational segments, cross promotional marketing hawking representations of the “normative” childhood of the generic “American” child.

By 1955 Disney had opened Disneyland in California. Art Linklater and Ronald Reagan narrated the live telecast — the parade included a fly over by the California National Guard, a US Marine Band, a Color Guard and Grand Marshal cavalcade, with a local high school marching band rounding out the day. The park was a near-instant success. The first summer, a million visitors pushed through the turnstiles. Part amusement park, part world’s fair, part department store, part studio back lot, part immersive theatre site, Disneyland was the first theme park and the first brand assembled leisure site dedicated not only to the middle classes but to their children.

Over the course of the next half century, the Disney company leveraged its entertainment and product divisions to become the leading synergistic brand for children, running products in 137 categories.<sup>34</sup> Today, there are 25,000 products in the Disney Princess line alone.<sup>35</sup> The company is the world’s largest licensor of products. And Mickey Mouse, who turned 90 this year, has greater name recognition in the US than Santa Claus.<sup>36</sup> Mickey of course exceeds his own representation. As Hank Sartin notes, Mickey is now a “double signifier...denoting Disney as a corporation, but connoting a whole set of values associated with the Disney vision of childhood.”<sup>37</sup> Given the persistence of Disney’s relationship with children over time these values may seem stable but they are still emergent and constantly shifting. Like all assemblages, Disney’s ‘vision of childhood’ is finite and time bound – subject to new orders of being, of feeling and theatrical encounter.

*“Who’s the leader of the club that’s made for you and me?” Meeting Mickey in Town Square  
Theater*

After passing through the gates of the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World, the visitor—or “guest” in Disney parlance—enters a public square. The square is part of Main Street USA, which acts as a portal to the rest of the park’s districts or “lands.” Everyone entering and exiting through the park passes through Main Street USA, which is nostalgically fashioned in the style of a small town American main street at the turn of the twentieth century, complete with a railroad stop, city hall, fire station, horse-drawn streetcar, bank, penny arcade, and movie house. Commercial shops line the street—among others, there’s an ice cream parlor, a “crystal arts” boutique, and a massive shopping emporium stocked with up-to-the-minute merchandise. A widely circulated story maintains that Walt Disney modeled Disneyland’s Main Street USA after his home town in Marceline, Missouri. But, as Robert Neuman notes, the autobiographical angle is over-stated:<sup>38</sup> Main Street, he argues, already existed as a saturated American archetype, and the small-town Disney version owes more to Hollywood renderings (like Sam Wood’s 1940 film version of Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*) than to any specific town.<sup>39</sup>

If the origins of Main Street USA are celluloid, they are also extremely practical and sociable urban spaces, so much so that they have had, as many critics (Francaviglia, Marling, Zukin)<sup>40</sup> have noted, a remarkable impact on actual urban planning. With an emphasis on pedestrian, “civic” centers with multiple modes of public transportation and integrated commercial and entertainment districts, the Disney Main Street “hubs” are, in all their kitschy nostalgia, walkable, efficient, and lively. Main Street USA is also the site of near-constant mobile (and mostly patriotic) performances, with barbershop quartets, parades, and brass bands occupying the streets, along with walk-around Disney characters.

At the southeast edge of this all-American town square, a performance in the Town Square Theatre features Main Street USA's (and the brand's) default mayor, Mickey Mouse. The "performance" runs in intervals throughout the day and is what's called a character "meet and greet." The marquee invites guests to "Meet Master Magician Mickey!" (A smaller sign also lists the waiting time.) Inside the theater, Mickey—standing at about 5'0, sporting a bow tie, red vest, and a blue and yellow magician's cape—greet patrons in a room styled as a "backstage" area. Between ostensibly readying for his Magic Show (a show that never actually materializes), Mickey, master entertainer and politician, dispenses hugs and autographs, smiling readily for the camera.

This kind of "character experience" is a primary field of activity for preschoolers and young children at any Disney park. On any given day, hundreds of "fur" and "face" walk-around characters populate the parks—appearing in designated spots at designated times, often taking breaks so that the people who "portray" them can be swapped out.<sup>41</sup> "Fur" characters are walk-around puppets of primarily animal characters, like Mickey and Minnie or Winnie the Pooh; "face" characters are look-alike actors dressed as human characters, like Snow White or Alice in Wonderland whose faces, quite obviously, are visible. Like all stars, they have handlers. The handlers make sure that children and parents observe the queue, ready their autograph books for signing, pose for the Disney PhotoPass photographers, and move on.<sup>42</sup> The wait times for popular characters, like Anna and Elsa from the hit animated feature *Frozen*, can expand to four hours. Most "character dining" experiences—where multiple characters appear during a meal setting at a themed restaurant—book six months in advance. Advance planning in the form of Disney Fastpasses can cut wait times, but for many

children, lining up and waiting it out to meet your favorite Disney celebrity is what Disney World is all about.

The relationship of the child to the walk-around character is complex. In her introduction to The Project on Disney's book, *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World*, Susan Willis marvels at the appeal of Disney characters in the park—arguing, “In the midst of Disney’s rational and controlled environment, the characters are patently grotesque.”<sup>43</sup> She faults the characters’ “big heads”—and writes that she often saw “tearful” young children “scream” in response to their “grotesquerie.”<sup>44</sup> In multiple visits over the course of five years, I have never seen a young child scream in direct response to a walk-around character. The performers are incredibly skilled at calibrating distance when they sense a child is fearful. This said, as the authors of the *Unofficial Guide to Disney World* (the best-selling travel guide to the parks) note, small children can feel “intimidated” by larger characters.<sup>45</sup>

Disney designer John Hench has said that walk-around dimensions are negotiations between the animation sheet models (which establish the character’s proportions in relationship to other characters and the theatrical backdrop) and the need to translate a character’s “identity” to human scale. On one level, since Disney animation is anthropomorphic, most characters (with the exception of Pluto) walk and move essentially like people, so the translation to three dimensions is relatively straightforward. Still, as Hench affirms, the designers “had to find the right degree of exaggeration that would make the walk-around heads large enough to establish the character’s identity while relating well to their body size.”<sup>46</sup> These negotiations put most characters at quite a height for most children (in addition to putting their heads at a strange width). Mickey himself is quite short for an “adult”—the height range for

performers is 4'7"–5'2"—which is why, most of the time, Mickey is performed by a woman.<sup>47</sup>

The demands of the fur costumes—the armature, padding, limited visibility, and, most of all, the weight of the heads, which, according to OSHA injury reports can come in at forty-seven pounds—impose significant physical constraints on the performers.<sup>48</sup> They move deliberately, have a repertory of gestures and choreographed movements. With their bulky movements and fixed expressions, many of the walk-around characters seem less animated than their animated counterparts who, for all their two-dimensionality (at least pre-CGI), appear, as Scott Bukatman argues, “living.”<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, for guests both small and tall, the walk-arounds are living incarnations of the character’s identity if not vivacity. According to Hench, the designers were particularly attentive to highlighting each character’s positive traits—to theatricalizing Mickey’s “optimism, honesty and enthusiasm,”<sup>50</sup> in order to ensure, above all, that he would be “likable in... walk-around form.”<sup>51</sup>

At a basic level, the walk-arounds perform the exact function Walt Disney intended for them when he first conceived of the park(s)<sup>52</sup>—they are backlot celebrities greeting their fans. Animation theorists Donald Crafton and Hank Sartin have argued that “toons” are just as much stars as their human counterparts, even if they are cut, quite literally, from a different cloth. The notable difference is, of course, the missing body: “the star is not a person,” Sartin writes, but sheer performance, “performance with no performer.”<sup>53</sup> In animation, this limitation merely collapses the distance between two possible bodies. An actor may inhabit a character or be identified with a character, but, as Crafton would argue: Mickey is Mickey.<sup>54</sup> This is perhaps why even though a performing body has been given to Mickey in walk-around form, spectators, even adults, tend to cognitively “erase” this performance.

Early toon stardom emerged as a byproduct of the need for recognizable “stock” characters and the Taylorist demands of “cel” (short for celluloid) animation: “continuity characters” saved both labor and time. But toon stars, as Sartin argues, developed the same qualities as human ones during the studio era. They all have what Sartin calls “star texts”—identities that have been invented for them by the studios and that accumulate meanings and references over time. Today, toon characters live within a vast set of popular culture references—many of which reflexively comment on and parody star culture (think of Betty Boop or Bugs Bunny). Interestingly, although Mickey is the star of the Disney brand, his star text often disavows his own stardom. He’s a regular guy (what Paul Wells calls a “John Doe” type): in fact, meeting Mickey “backstage” in the character meeting fuels the illusion that he is the “real,” regular Mickey—separate from his more “staged” personality. The displacement of Mickey’s stardom both affirms the reality of Mickey present in the meet-and-greet and makes additional space for the child in the interaction.

For children meeting Mickey in Town Square, proximity to the “live” version of the character is authenticated not simply by the actual body of the walk-around performer, but by the theatrical backdrop of the park, which is perceived, for all its reproduction, as unique, since for the child it is a localized, individual experience. In this way, designated meeting spots, timed entrances, and story- or theme-based contexts that surround the character encounters enhance a sense of personalization. This experience is separate from transformation—from the felt perception that the child, suffused with the desire to be like the toon star, “becomes,” as Wickstrom suggests, the character. Even in instances where children are dressed in the exact same costume as the character they are meeting, it isn’t that they imagine they “are” the character, but that they know they are uniquely aligned in time and space, *co-present*, with the



character. Indeed, part of the pleasure of the autograph (although this doesn't always happen with fur characters because they have a harder time writing) is the recording of the child's own name in (typically) big, loopy letters—TO SALLY, followed by the character's live "signature" (signatures are standardized for each character).<sup>55</sup>

I do not subscribe to the notion that children categorically conflate the experience of "live" encounter with a belief that Mickey is "real"—a conceit that theme park employees and many parents try somewhat frantically to protect. In a 1991 study led by developmental psychologist Paul Harris, over ninety percent of the children, ranging from three to five, could readily make distinctions between fantasy and reality contexts.<sup>56</sup> Even very young children are aware of the doubleness of puppets. As Matthew Reason has shown in his engaging study, "Did You Watch the Man or Did You Watch the Goose: Children's Responses to Puppets in Live Theatre," young children know there is a puppet, and they know there is a puppeteer (however hidden).<sup>57</sup> Reason also argues that children know there is a social text that requires them to perceive the puppet as "real"—to perform, as it were, their own "wonder." My sense is that most children know that the Disney characters are "performed"—it's just that the context asks them to behave *as if* they are real, to, in effect, act. Children who want to act in this way then actively co-constitute the star texts of the toon characters—if only by authenticating them. The true delight of the walk-around performance, for children who enjoy them, is in fact, the child's agency—in what Tzachi Zamir identifies as the "suspended" space they create between "the animate and the inanimate,"<sup>58</sup> between the puppet's status as subject and object. For Zamir, this status is less distinct (which is not to say missing) for children than for adults, who face "a separation from the world of things."<sup>59</sup>

The material thing-ness of the toon-puppet touches on another dimension of the experience for young children—the extent to which the human body (conflated with the anthropomorphized animal body) exists for the child as a mediatized body/commodity. The toon-puppet is after all, a human-sized version of the ubiquitous plush doll, brought to a kind of half-life. In the preschool television marketing world today, toons need to be as “toyetic”<sup>60</sup> as possible, which is to say that the careers of animated characters live and die based on how well they sell as toys. This has to do with the value of merchandise and licensing revenues, but it also speaks to the interactive and, even, intersubjective nature of toys. Without getting into the theatricality of doll play, the doll, as Zamir argues,

is not merely a space for imposing an illusory subjectivity and empathy but captures the child’s own unclear allocation between the subject that he or she is called to become and the disorganized entity that he or she is, one that is aware of experiencing the world but also of the gaps in such experience, moments of nonexperience, in which input processing does not occur, temporal segments in which the world has suddenly vanished.<sup>61</sup>

This is to say that the toon-puppet taps into the inchoate and ambivalent space of childhood play, in which, as Zamir argues, the child’s subjectivity emerges within a larger sensorial and affective network—one filled with gaps or jumps or disjunctions in understanding, of synesthesia, or simply awake awareness (what Zamir calls nonexperience, and the Buddhists call *turiya*). This is to say each child’s experience of meeting Mickey is deeply individual and intersubjective. For some children, Mickey is the character on the diapers that scratch, or on their soft pajamas. For others, Mickey is part of the television show they watch over and over again until its rhythms program a sense of steadiness, of routine, at least for a time. For many children today, Mickey is simply the part of the flow of the child’s experience—her reasoning, her command of

media signs, her social capital, her worries about separation, the emergence of any number of nameable and unnameable feelings and experiences.

This feeling of personalized flow, of quite literally live-streaming larger networks has much to do with how Disney sees its future relationship with children/consumers, which is why in 2000 Disney launched the Living Character Initiative, a series of digital puppetry projects, designed to enhance the interactivity of non-human character experiences. One of the most popular projects to come out of the initiative was *Turtle Talk with Crush*, which debuted in 2004 at Epcot, featuring Crush, a surfer-dude turtle from the animated feature *Finding Nemo*. *Turtle Talk* is an interactive show, set in a dedicated theatre, where Crush appears as a digital avatar on a giant screen made to look like a virtual underwater seascape. The avatar is a digital puppet controlled by a backstage actor who can “see” the audience members through hidden cameras and whose voice is synthesized to sound like the character. This enables the actor to specifically identify members of the audience—for example, to say, “Hey dudette in the red shell, front row, what’s your name?”<sup>62</sup>—and to converse with them in real time. As Seth Porges of *Popular Mechanics* notes, it’s “live-action” animation, and the effect is particularly enchanting for kids, whose questions make up the bulk of the “show.” Although kids tend to ask relatively sedate questions like, “Where do you live?” or “How do you swim?”, their contributions are celebrated and they are duly applauded as “righteous dudes and dudettes,” as well as co-creators of the show.

In 2010, the Living Character Initiative debuted “Talking Mickey” in what was then Disneyland’s Toontown (in Anaheim). “The attraction” was then brought to Disney World’s Town Square in 2013. Talking Mickey is a fur character/toon-puppet who can talk if not actually take questions or hold an especially meaningful conversation. This means that the Mickey that children meet in Town Square, Main

Street USA—the “magician” taking time out from his backstage prep to say hello—actually says hello. This technological sleight of hand makes Meeting Mickey in Town Square adds an important feature to the “meet-and-greet” assemblage.

Of course, “face” characters can say your name, ask if you’re having a nice day, and (within range) even respond to a question, even if the answers tend to be pre-scripted. But toon vocal performances are so crucial to their animation and identities that they cannot be variegated. In character experiences, “furs” have had to rely solely on gesture: they hug, they give a paws up, or a high five. In order to compensate for their lack of speech, character movements also tend to be broad, slower, and highly theatrical (meaning telegraphed). This kind of theatricality is perhaps ideal for very young children, for whom Mickey is really more toy than person, but parents with slightly older children are cautioned by the Unofficial Guide to “prepare” their children for disappointment. But now, when it’s your turn to meet him, Mickey will see you reflected in his dressing room mirror, turn around, rush toward you and say, “There you are, I thought you’d never make it!” He’ll even say to your Dad, “How are ya, pal?” or “Good to see you!” to your grandma. As you’re ushered into the space, he might even ask you where you’re from and if you’re having fun and whether, characteristically turning the tables on his own stardom, he can get a picture with you. “Look at the camera,” he says, directing the moment, then “Cheese!” After the camera shot, he may even announce, brightly: “Wow. I’m gonna keep that one for sure!” Sometimes, if you’re big enough, he’ll hug you and then propose a specific interaction, “Say, have you ever flown like Peter Pan?” he’ll ask. He’ll show you how to airplane your arms and then say, “How about we get a photo where we pretend we are flying?” “Let’s say ‘pixie dust’ on three!”<sup>63</sup>

The “live” encounter is about two kinds of technologies: Mickey’s Wizard of Oz–like ventriloquism and, somewhat paradoxically, the photograph (the future memory to be purchased and preserved as a silent souvenir): you, Mickey, your family—everyone smiling broadly or looking like they are flying through the sky. Or not. Not everyone loves these moments. Crushed between Mom and a cybernetic Mickey, feeling like a poseable doll, some kids balk. But the professional photographers (the PhotoPass “cast members”) make every effort to recast the moment for the future. When my then-five-year-old daughter refused to smile on cue, the photographer asked her if all her teeth had fallen out, a suggestion that haunted her for months. The actual character meeting itself, if everyone is relatively compliant, takes about sixty to ninety seconds.

Through it all, parents and children can often seem a little awkward, the photo session notwithstanding. It isn’t just that Mickey has a giant animated head and is no longer mute—it’s that his voice comes through his head and when he “talks,” his mouth actually moves in sync. The audio-animatronic magic has an uncanny quality, one that is amplified by the slight time lag before Mickey speaks and the exaggerated gestural choreography common to the ordinarily silent costumed character/actor. Talking Mickey is part animal, part human, and, in a strange restoration of his animated origins, part machine. He’s not quite an automaton—and unlike other audio-animatronic performances at Disney, it’s not a complete machine performance—but the sense of technological control in the performance is striking. One cannot help but think of Edward Gordon Craig’s uber-marionette actor, except without the transcendental quality and grace that both Kleist and Craig idealized.

The wizardry of Talking Mickey is “proprietary”—which means Disney will not officially explain how the magic works. But through an analysis of patents filed by the Disney Corporation over the past twenty years, the web blog *Stitch Kingdom* hazards

guesses about how the mechanisms work. Looking at US Patent Application “Method and System for Articulated Character Head Actuation and Control,” the bloggers argue that an independent operator likely controls the movement of Mickey’s mouth using something like a joystick controller (not unlike controllers used in gaming systems like Xbox or Playstation). This leaves the human to perform as she might have without an articulated head. Based on the limited repertory of Mickey’s phrases and Disney’s patent for “Simulated Conversation by Pre-Recorded Audio-Navigator,” the generation of speech is based on some kind of transcription method—perhaps something like a soundboard app—which allows the operator to choose and string together a set of pre-recorded and pre-programmed statements (hence the delays in conversation). The character’s eye blinks are likely randomized, but a patent application for a technology that uses audio-visual cues/controls to prevent blinking during the all-important photo op (“System for Controlling Robotic Characters to Enhance Photographic Results”) suggests that Disney is also taking all steps possible to ensure that a half-lidded Mickey doesn’t show up in your photostream.

Audio-animatronics are themselves not new to Disney. Walt Disney used robotics as three-dimensional and “live” adjuncts of the animated cartoon—from an operational standpoint, fake animals (and actors, for that matter) were much easier to control than real ones. Many early audio animatronic attractions are still standards in the Disneyland and Disney World theme parks—guests can still visit the Enchanted Tiki Lounge, Jungle Cruise, or Hall of the Presidents. For Walt Disney, the emphasis in audio-animatronics was always on “realism”—birds that looked like birds, rhinos that spewed actual water, detailed and reverent robo-replicas of American statesmen. In his book *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace*, Matthew Wilson Smith argues that each audio-animatronic exhibit at Disneyland is a *Gesamtkunstwerk*—a total work of

art—"in miniature," a combination of sculptural, pictorial, theatrical, musical, and industrial design; a "microcosm" of the principle of aesthetic "unity" that dominates Disney. "The robots," he writes, "are not only the ideal actors, but also the ideal inhabitants of this mechanized utopia."<sup>64</sup>

But if, as Smith also argues, Disney relentlessly attempts to hide its means and modes of production, robot Mickey feels a little too constructed to be a "total work of art"—something about him is off. It's that his toon movement belongs to what Crafton calls a figurative mode—the acting, so to speak, feels stiff, for all the fussy movement, especially for a generation of children who have grown up with stop-motion and CGI technologies and for whom the embodied movements and expressive acting of toon characters can hardly be distinguished from human ones. The unity, the perceptual wholeness, of Mickey is missing (although certainly it may also be argued that the walk-around already lacks the wholeness of the animated figure). It may also be that Talking Mickey invokes the Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori's "uncanny valley" theory. Mori argues that humans are attracted to robots up to a point—there's a certain moment, though, when a robot achieves too much likeness to a person, and the attraction morphs into aversion. We're in the "uncanny valley"—a dip in our feelings of curiosity and identification that resolves only when the robot achieves an even greater likeness to a human being, at which point we feel, somewhat strangely, interested again. Or perhaps it's just that the automatization of Mickey negates some aspect of his reproduced "liveness," reminding at least the grownups of the laboring body inside the costume, evoking its helplessness.<sup>65</sup>

But Disney is, I would argue, unafraid of the uncanny valley—in fact, this space of tension, even antipathy, is all part of the package, particularly when it comes to children whose feelings, at any given time during a park visit, are amorphous and

unpredictable. For Disney, aesthetic affects are fungible: you can always trade on them. Here is a Mickey that can walk, talk, and pose (without blinking!) with you, a snapshot image and experience of Mickey that will be smoothed over in time. With the emergence of Magicbands+, the RFID technology introduced in 2014 and used by, according to the 2015 Shareholder's Report, over 10 million guests in its first year alone, automatized Mickey will soon be able to know it's your birthday, or ask you about the ride you went earlier that day on or how you like your resort. Eventually, with access to your My Disney Experience account, it may be possible for him to comment on the Disney purchases you have at home, the TV shows you watch, and your top score on your favorite apps. This is the brilliance of Talking Mickey—the conflation of control, surveillance, commodification, play, and *personalization*. The point of the audio-animatronics here goes well beyond the absented but still too-present body of the performer or the uncanny valley—the point is a customized experience of Mickey, the default mayor of Disney World in Main Street USA and the brand's most iconic character—an experience that is about not only your ongoing relationship to the brand but your lifeworlds.

Certainly, it's a little creepy. Even a child will want to know how Talking Mickey knows so much about them (although in these days of social media broadcasting, children increasingly feel known by "digital" audiences). But the negative affects related to being watched or potentially governed are also subsumed by the overall image of Mickey, reproduced everywhere—an image that is, finally, so benign, so toyetic, so *cute*. Cute may sound ridiculous as a serious judgment, but, as we will see a little later, cuteness is everything to Mickey and to the brand's projection of familial intimacy, domesticity, and care. As evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould has noted, just as he was on his way to becoming "a national symbol,"<sup>66</sup> Mickey changed. Through



“progressive juvenalization,” Mickey “travel[ed] the ontogenetic pathway in reverse,” which is to say that, over time, his features became increasingly babyish or baby-like or cute.<sup>67</sup>

To some extent, Mickey’s cute makeover had to do with an intentional cleanup. In the early days of his career, as many critics have noted, Mickey was something of a scamp—with a penchant for mischief and not a little spite. And although he didn’t, as *TIME* Magazine noted in 1931 “drink, smoke, or caper suggestively,” his cartoons riled censors at home and abroad.<sup>68</sup> For Scott Bukatman, Mickey’s early unruliness was a feature of the genre: it was a comment on the automatization inherent to the form—in their very animatedness, cartoons defied their creators, or at least the very terms of their creations. “Cartoons,” as Norman Klein writes, “are automata that struggle.”<sup>69</sup> For Sergei Eisenstein, whose essay on Disney is often cited by animation theorists, early Mickey cartoons were a “displacement, an upheaval, a unique protest against the metaphysical immobility of the once-and-forever given.”<sup>70</sup> Eisenstein was particularly drawn to what he described as plasmaticness of the toon—a quality he connected to forms like the folk tale and circus, and to the appeal of cartoons for children, an appeal that goes beyond just anthropomorphism to a celebration of morphisms in general.

But as Mickey became more and more of a brand and national icon, which is to say increasingly mined for his commodity value, his struggle, his very animatedness, became suppressed. Some of this had to do, too, with wartime rhetoric and a realignment of Mickey with pro-American “values.” Above all, as Sartin notes, Mickey in his wartime films was a “happy” laborer—able to turn any chore into play.<sup>71</sup> But by 1954 he stopped performing altogether.<sup>72</sup> By this time his “neotenic” evolution was complete: he shot what was basically his last film and was effectively retired as an actor.

He was primarily a commodity figure and, to return to where we started, he was primarily cute.

In her book, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, Sianne Ngai argues that cute is, in fact, one of the “foundational” aesthetic categories of late capital, and the one most closely aligned with the commodity. Ngai argues that cuteness aestheticizes “helplessness”—the product calls out for a “mother” figure: to be nurtured, cared for, protected, possessed.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, cute evokes a range of feelings, not just protectiveness and warmth, but also, somewhat paradoxically, aggression. In a reading of the history of children’s toys, Ngai notes that the plush toy “emerged...with new-found awareness of the aggressiveness of children with the advent of 20<sup>th</sup>-century psychology.”<sup>74</sup> The stuffed animal or toy could be carried anywhere, smushed for its very cuteness, even battered. Ngai also argues that the affective ambivalence of the cute is also “indexed” in our desire for the cute/commodity to restore Adorno’s “utopia of the qualitative”<sup>75</sup>—for the product to call up a “simpler” or more “primitive” time when we had a more “authentic” or “genuine” relationship to objects (a rhetorical gesture that speaks to the current trend in expensive home-spun or “hand-crafted” toys).

This nostalgic quality of cute, which we see so clearly in the nostalgic construction of Main Street USA, appeals more to adults of course than to children, but it may be that children, with their rapid development, also “look back,” to their more “authentic,” which is to say, “primal” experience of objects, to the significance of their first blanket or beloved mascot. But cute effects go beyond nostalgia, and while Ngai argues that cute offers no catharsis—only tension between the “oscillat[ing]” poles of “domination and passivity or cruelty and tenderness,”<sup>76</sup> recent work in psychology argues for a kind of cute catharsis particularly if we hold children in mind, not merely as cute objects but as subjects. In “The Appeal of the Cute Object: Desire, Domestication

and Agency,” Joshua Paul Dale takes up Ngai’s point that in English the word *cute* derives from *acute*, meaning clever, quick-witted / duplicitous, arguing that we harbor a cultural suspicion of *cute*.<sup>77</sup> Drawing on contemporary studies in psychology, Dale argues that cuteness proceeds from an affective register that is “fundamentally benign rather than adversarial”.<sup>78</sup> Dale notes that the “physical response triggered by *cute* “disarms the subject and imposes an imperative against harming the *cute* object.”<sup>79</sup> This response, then, is fundamentally cathartic: “the purpose...is to avoid the negative outcome...that would accrue if this excess affect were discharged in harmful fashion onto the body of a living being.”<sup>80</sup>

Cuteness is also a way of dispelling fantasies of dominance in favor of sociality. In his essay, Dale cites studies by Gary Sherman and Jonathan Haidt, in which they argue that infants are less *cute* than their toddler counterparts (an argument that all on its own summarily upends Lorenz’s theory) and that toddler cuteness is a biosocial indication of a child’s readiness for social interaction.<sup>81</sup> Dale takes up Sherman and Haidt’s argument that “cuteness is as much an elicitor of play as it is of care.”<sup>82</sup> Indeed, in their article, “Cuteness and Disgust: The Humanizing and Dehumanizing Effects of Emotion,” Sherman and Haidt argue that as a form of what they call hyper-mentalizing, “cuteness is as likely to trigger a childlike state as it is a parental one.”<sup>83</sup> The evocation of cuteness then enjoins audiences (children and childlike adults) to enter into an atemporal state of play with potentially prosocial objects.

Importantly, as Ngai herself argues, cuteness is an “encounter with difference” and an assimilation of that difference.<sup>84</sup> Mickey then is a kind of playful frame for encountering difference, a way of translocating a child into new spaces and experiences. Of course, the point is to brand these spaces. No matter the feelings Mickey inspires—feelings of protection or aggression or a wish for life to return to being what it might

have been (but never was), prosocial feelings toward a cute intersubjective object—the most important thing about Mickey is the way he identifies and even delimits the brand assemblage. He denotes brand difference, a difference that can't quite be named but is nonetheless assimilated: this is a Disney product, a Disney place, a Disney feeling, a Disney relationship. Talking Mickey calls out to the child, whether or not he can say her name, however he or she might be feeling about him at the time: here you are, coming into being, here is what it means to be, to tweak the lyrics from *The Little Mermaid* song, “part of our world.” The child can take or leave this world, but Mickey's job is to make certain not only that she knows it's there, but that she herself plays a part in its very constitution.

*Disney Junior Live on Stage!*

In the middle of “Animation Courtyard” in the Hollywood Studios theme park, hundreds of empty strollers, packed into tidy rows, occupy the street. The strollers have been abandoned by their charges in favor of a red carpet, lined with a velvet rope, zigzagging into the *Disney Junior Live on Stage!* theatre. Inside the theatre, Disney cast members work ground traffic control, shuttling little “stars” and their families to different sections in the open seating area. Upbeat music plays through the loudspeakers as grownups struggle to settle their preschoolers on the carpeted floor.

The stage is a raised platform, about four feet off the ground, built to accommodate multiple puppet traps. This puts the stage floor right above the heads of the smallest patrons, particularly when seated, and especially for those closest to the stage, so kids jostle with their caregivers to figure out the best view. During the pre-show, the audience floor teems with restless children, their voices carrying well above the *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* song even as it blares through the loudspeakers. In part, the sound carries because the space is cavernous. Originally built as the Soundstage

Restaurant and the Catwalk Bar, the space was repurposed as a children's theatre space only when the restaurant was shuttered in 1998.

Although Disney has been part of live "family" entertainment/theatre for children since the 1950s (beginning with a licensing agreement with the Ice Capades), dedicated theatrical experiences for preschoolers (character experiences aside) have been few and far between. In truth, for all the marketing of Disney parks to the parents of young children, the parks themselves are inhospitable to the youngest set. The rides are often too scary, the lines interminable, the crowds overwhelming, and the days are hot and long. Anyone who has spent significant time in a Disney park has seen plenty of desperate parents alternately pleading, exhorting, and even bullying ambivalent or plainly unhappy children to have a good time. And while character experiences like Meeting Mickey give preschoolers interactive and affective time with the brand, functioning as memory-makers/markers for young children and their families, these encounters are limited in time and space: kids meet characters (usually their favorites) one long line at a time.

The first theatrical assemblage built for the space in 1998 was a live-performance show for preschoolers based on the hit series *Bear in the Big Blue House*, which ran on television from 1997–2006 and was created and produced by Jim Henson Productions for the Disney Channel. *Bear* was the first park show that recognized the opportunity not only to give preschool children (and their families) the chance to sit for a feature attraction—at a designated time—but to engage with demographic-specific characters familiar to them from their home environment. Because the characters were familiar to many viewers, children could also (at least in theory) concentrate on the show's specific story or lesson. As a TV show, *Bear* was a particularly good candidate for adaptation or, in fact, transfer, since the show itself was already composed in a theatrical format—

most of the characters were puppets (the kind we typically think of as Muppets) and almost all the action took place on a single set.

In each episode of the TV show, *Bear*, a seven-foot walk-around puppet played by puppeteer Noel MacNeal, tended to some smaller puppet friends as they made their way through a preschool theme (eg. how to overcome shyness and make friends or how to go to the potty). The show incorporated shadow puppet segments as well as two animated characters (Luna, a moon character voiced by Lynn Thigpen, and Ray, a sun character voiced by Geoffrey Holder), providing a mixed-media interface common to many preschool shows in the 1990s like *Blue's Clues* or *Teletubbies*.

Like *Blue's Clues*, which aired on Nickelodeon and is widely credited with reinventing children's television, *Bear* was highly participatory: preschool viewers were asked to dance, gesture (mostly point), sing and speak. Although participation is certainly not required (as in an interactive iTV or digital platform), and the show runs regardless of whether the child follows the presenter / character's instructions, verbal and kinesthetic responses encourage higher attention and comprehension levels from children.<sup>85</sup> In addition, the consistency of the format (a welcome and closing song, interrupted by a formulaic storyline) gave kids the reassurance and familiarity they needed to feel oriented enough to focus on the episode's specific theme.

The live version of *Bear* featured all the elements of the on-screen experience—although it ran at a slightly sped-up pace (fifteen minutes). It's worth noting that the vocal performances were audio-recorded, as are virtually all vocal performances for Disney characters in "live" performance: Disney "magic," as mentioned earlier, involves the representational accuracy and repeatability of the experience. The voice performances come through the loud speaker, and the puppeteers synchronize their movements to the audio track. The quality of "liveness" for *Bear*, then, had much to do

with the audience reception of the piece—preschoolers (and their families) were given the sense that they were in the studio with the TV characters.

Since so much of the performance depends on *reproduction*, it's worth defining "liveness" here, since what I mean is specifically the *performance of liveness*. As Philip Auslander argues, "liveness" is itself a historical concept, directly related to recording technologies and mediatization. Before radio broadcasts, the category of "live performance" simply didn't exist. Writing about Disney, Auslander notes that the "traditional status" of live performance "as auratic and unique has been wrested from its shell and...all performance modes, live or mediatized are now equal."<sup>86</sup> This said, for the child at any Disney "Live!" performance, the performance is an ephemeral event (even if you could see it up to eight times in one day), requiring their presence. Being part of a live audience also means being among other kids, rather than at home in front of the television while watching the show. It also means co-viewing the show with a parent/guardian and/or other family members. Since parents often use television or screen time as a way of getting other things accomplished, the live version gave some children a *unique* opportunity—to have their show (or a show for them) hold their grownup's attention, too. (Although most Disney shows work on more than one level, addressing both children and parents, preschool shows, on the whole, cater much less to adults than shows for older children).

As preschool television and the commodities markets for three- to five-year-olds grew, Disney began to use the *Bear* show as an assemblage platform for other TV shows on the new Playhouse Disney programming block. *Bear in the Big Blue House* became a framing device for a magazine-style show introducing three "vignettes" or segments representing three new shows from the programming block. Mark Wendland created a new set. A theatre designer who often works with metal—Wendland fashioned a bright

yellow metal set with an elevated stage (for puppet traps) and cat walks that extended far into the wings. The backdrop of the set was a six-foot-tall, yellow metal rimmed book, with moveable “pages” highlighted by some three-dimensional detail. With each “page turn,” the setting would shift to a representative space or image from the corresponding television show. The new format gave the company the opportunity to swap show segments in and out, depending on each TV show’s popularity. The challenge for the designers was to create theatrical representations of interactive, animated TV shows using both stop-motion animation and computer-animation. Animated characters were theatrically translated as hand or rod puppets, depending on the character’s heights, built painstakingly to scale and operated by a team of puppeteers in puppet traps. The puppets’ movements—including mouth and eye blinks—were hand operated, with several puppeteers assigned to different tracks. Vocal performances were recorded and ventriloquized by the TV show’s voice actors.

When the Playhouse Disney programming bloc was replaced by the launch of Disney Junior, the 24/7 preschool channel designed in 2010 to compete with Nick Jr. and PBS Sprout, the live park show was rebranded as *Disney Junior Live on Stage!* The new creative team inherited the old Playhouse set, but added digital enhancements to make it look more like the story pages were set inside a giant TV screen, and additional projection screens were placed house right and left, as well as on the ceiling, giving the space a sense of digital enclosure. The shows were once again swapped out, with, perhaps most importantly, the new CGI *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* show replacing *Bear in the Blue House* as the “frame play” for the whole show.

The launch of the Disney Junior channel came with some significant changes—led by Nancy Kanter (who had previously run Sesame Street), Disney built a new advisory board and curriculum research team. Although Disney programming for



children, or edutainment, has always focused on socio-emotional development rather than on literacy or numeracy skills or language acquisition (as in Nickelodeon's *Dora* or *Ni Hao, Kailan*, which feature, respectively, Spanish- and Chinese-language learning aspects), Kanter announced that Disney Junior would have a renewed commitment to prosocial "values"—including exercise and healthy eating. This commitment was in part a public relations maneuver—a way of dispelling rising anxiety about the influence of new media in young children's lives.<sup>87</sup> The more likely reason Disney Junior brand put renewed emphasis on its socio-emotional curriculum was competition for consumers across platforms. Children today are often watching television content across platforms, which is to say that they may be watching a *Dora* or *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* episode (or indeed a modified "appisode") on a tablet or smartphone. As Ana Hulshof, Lyn Pemberton and Richard Griffiths note in their article "Design Principles for Preschool Children's Interactive TV," children's television viewing has gone from "when to where to what"—from scheduled programming, to designated channels, to any number of viewing or "merged screen" platforms.<sup>88</sup> Cross-platform environments mean that television viewing is available pretty much on demand: any show, anytime, anywhere. The cross-platform environments mean that brands have to work harder to "pull" viewers and to differentiate their products.

"Teaching" children "good values" solicits parental complicity, particularly if they already feel ambivalent about screen use. But more importantly, reaching out to children on an affective terrain—not just to evoke feelings, but to help *process* them—frames a child's feelings and their *awareness* of their feelings as related to brand space. As a genre, preschool shows feature characters struggling with emotions—they can't figure out how to do something, they have conflicts with their friends, they're confused, afraid, sad, or even angry (rendered as "mad"). There are always helpers or mentors—

often these helpers are animal sidekicks, but sometimes they are helpful, if somewhat peripheral, adult figures. In comparison to Nick Jr. or Sprout, The Disney Junior TV shows tend to emphasize the confusion and vulnerability of the child, while at the same time accentuating the helpfulness/mentorship of Disney characters who are always ready to dispense important “life lessons.” They also foreground the need for making alliances with others to resolve problems (often couched as “teamwork”). At times, children are solicited for their help, although the newer shows have almost no participatory features. They are, instead, mini-musicals where familiar songs and tropes are often recycled, so kids can sing along or recognize a particular story pattern or sight gag.

The *Live on Stage!* show, however, highlights both interaction and mentorship. Children are asked constantly to “help” the befuddled characters on stage—to “find” and point out missing items, to “clean up,” cheer them on when they are nervous, to clap along, to celebrate a special occasion. In this way, the theatrical assemblage calls on spectator/consumers to labor, as Wickstrom argues, on behalf of the brand. But this immaterial labor is more complicated than simply desiring a commodity and buying into a brand identity. The labor required also moves beyond mere co-presence, asking children to identify the social (con)texts and affects (emotions) that support certain kinds of labor identities. *Disney Junior Live on Stage!* provides a performative and celebratory occasion for children to recognize performative labor scripts, with Disney characters, in turn, helping children understand how these scripts are affectively underwritten—for example, what kinds of roles and “jobs” girls and boys are meant to have, and, more importantly, what kinds of feelings go along with them.

*Disney Junior Live on Stage!* begins with a live-action human host named Casey dancing and singing to the Disney Junior Channel block theme song. S/he<sup>89</sup> asks the

kids in the audience, “What’s your name?” And then s/he asks them to shout out their names so s/he can “hear all of them.” As the kids scream their names into the space, the Mickey Mouse rod puppet pops out of the puppet trap. Mickey asks the kids if they want to go to the Clubhouse, telling them that they’ll need to say the magic words all together. The kids who have seen the TV show shout out, “Miska Mooska Mickey Mouse,” with which they conjure the appearance of the Clubhouse set and Mickey’s (rod puppet) friends Donald, Goofy and Daisy. At this point the frame play begins. Puppet Mickey tells the kids he wants to throw a surprise birthday party for Minnie. The frame play is loosely based on an existing *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* episode, but is really just a way to frame the show through a readily accessible social occasion/celebration. Virtually all kids over three know, after all, what generally happens at a birthday party. Donald, Daisy, and Goofy have all volunteered to “chip in” for Minnie’s party—but they are flummoxed. They are just not sure they know how to hang up a birthday sign, bake a cake, or write a special song. Casey reassures the puppet characters (they come up to her/his knees, which has the effect of making them seem like children or at least child-sized). “Whenever I need some helpful ideas,” Casey says, “I get them from stories!” Mickey agrees and calls for “Toodles” to help display a few “Mouseketools.” Toodles is a “computer-like” character from the *Clubhouse* show—a machine whose overall disposition is cheerful and, on occasion, cranky or overworked. Toodles appears just as it does in the TV show (as an animated digital form on an on-screen display). Toodles presents the audience with digital icons of signature objects that relate directly to the three helpful “stories”/shows about to be presented (a tiara, stethoscope, a treasure chest—the stethoscope aside, it’s hard to see how these objects are “tools” but such is the logic of interactive preschool theatre).

Casey points to the first signature object, “the tiara!”, and with a page turn, the “set” for a *Sofia the First* segment appears.

*Sofia the First* features Sofia, a “regular” “village” girl. Her single, shoe-maker mother has married the widowed King of Enchancia, turning Sofia, as her theme song goes, into a “princess overnight.” As she makes the adjustments of any child in a new blended family (like negotiating step-siblings), Sofia works out being a princess. Aside from the insistent production of gender as a consumer good (tiaras, wands, dresses, bags, etc.), the show highlights class anxieties then “treats” them with the bromide that any girl who has a kind heart is a “true” princess. There are of course many variations on this lesson, which are delivered over a series of episodes by different Disney princesses, so that, for instance, Cinderella appears in the first episode to tell Sofia that a “true” princess would forgive her jealous step-sister.

In the segment for the live show, Sofia is trying and failing at a spell—she wants to make the flowers sparkle for the King’s ball. Eventually, Sofia and her step-siblings enlist the help of the King’s magician, Cedric, whose incompetence is a familiar trope in the show: much to the delight of young viewers, he botches everything. He too is trying and failing at his own spell—to make it snow. When he mistakenly enchants his spell book, the characters ask for the audience’s help in finding it (“It’s OVER THERE!!” the kids scream). Eventually, Sofia and her stepsiblings figure out that the best way to run a spell is to say it “slow and steady”—and the audience is enjoined to cast the spell with the characters: “snow” falls from the rafters; magical, digital sparkles light up the flowers. The materialization of spectacular effects is a theatrical enchantment, a way of not only producing spectacularity, but of engaging the audience’s energies in order to present spectacularity as an outcome of participation/performance/belief. It’s a kind of

catharsis, but not quite. For as the snow falls and the flowers light up, puppet Sofia sings part of a hit song from her hit TV show:

I can be anything  
I can see anything  
You can teach anything  
I can reach anything  
I can do anything  
So can you  
Anything that you try  
You can be anything<sup>90</sup>

This message is a crucial part of *Sofia the First*, a show that teaches above all that class divisions can be overcome by values like honesty and determination, and that Disney characters are there to help children to broker the distance between commoners and royalty, which goes beyond the distance between themselves and the “things” they want. In the world of *Sofia the First*, it is not enough to own seventy-dollar Disney Princess dresses and countless accessories, girls must also invest in their goals for personhood—their “dreams” in Disney parlance, to be “anything” they want. Although princess status is effectively offered to any girl entering a Disney Park or store, since she is invariably greeted with a “Hello, Princess!”, being a “true” princess like Sofia means assimilating Disney Princess lessons which almost always have to do with performing emotional labor, which is to say with being helpful to others. But in order to learn their lessons, girls have to first code for class distinctions, something the television show helps children learn, over the course of each season, by bringing back Sofia’s village friends, Ruby and Jade, whose clothes are plain and whose grace and manners are identified as lacking. Ruby is, in fact, African American and Jade is vaguely half Asian, although her Asian-Americanness is suggested more by her name than anything else. When she was first introduced, Sofia was initially identified as Latina, although the denotation was quickly retracted when critics argued that the character was too white-

washed. Still, Sofia and Ruby and Jade are clearly minoritized, underclass kids, particularly when compared to Sofia's blonde, ultra-rich, royal step-siblings. Sofia and her "village" friends are more fun; they make bigger messes and their humor is uproarious, suggesting a kind of class- (and potentially race-) based affect that Sofia has to negotiate, walking the balance between her "roots" and her now aspirational self (being a princess). Ruby and Jade do not appear in the live version, but Sofia's need to learn to the spell (or class code) and to repeat it "slow and steady" reminds spectators that being a princess / practicing enchantment requires not only access and knowledge, but a kind of performative intention and discipline.

The significance of emotional labor for girls and the interaction of gender, labor, and racial social texts are also at work in the show's next segment, which features a six-year-old African American girl, Doc McStuffins, who performs as a "doctor" to her stuffed animals. If *Sofia* presses on a class angle, *Doc McStuffins* seems on the surface to address issues of race or, more optimistically, post-raciality. *Doc McStuffins* features a TV rarity: a comfortable, upper-middle-class African American family: a working professional mom, a sweet stay-at-home Dad, and two kids (Doc and her rambunctious little brother, Donny). Aside from looking African American, the characters are not overtly racialized in part because the characters were not, in fact, originally conceived as African American. Disney executives, hoping to create a "diverse" show for the network, proposed the change to writer and executive producer Chris Nee. (Nee is herself a lesbian, whose son's fear of doctors inspired the show.) The racial transposition has been widely celebrated as a diversity coup for the brand. Unlike its early Latino-inflected show *Handy Manny*, *Doc McStuffins* has been one of the channel's most successful shows among all demographic segments. Doc's plush incarnation is the first African American doll to have "crossover" status.<sup>91</sup>

For all the network triumphalism surrounding the show's diversity, research shows that, on the whole, preschoolers tend not to categorically reject people or characters based on racial or ethnic categorization.<sup>92</sup> This is not to say that they are not aware of race—a claim debunked in the 1950s. Preschool children filter racial attitudes and bias through familial, educational, and social contexts<sup>93</sup>—given forced-choice questions, they will also tend to favor their own ethnic/racial groups. But more importantly, the show is not really about a black upper-middle-class family, but rather the family of toys Doc tends to with affection and bemusement: Stuffy, the fearful and often klutzy dragon; Chilly, the hypochondriac snowman; Lambie, a sweet cuddle-seeking lamb who is also a somewhat controlling diva; and Hallie, the hippo with a Southern twang and tell-it-like-it-is attitude who “works” as Doc’s assistant. Doc’s family is kind but peripheral—Doc animates, takes care of, and is supported by her (Disney) toys who share domestic and familial intimacies: anxieties about injuries and accidents, insecurities about bad breath, and, even, illness.

During the *Live on Stage* segment, the audience members become part of Doc’s extended family network: they’re asked to help Doc “clean up” after Stuffy has accidentally spilled a bottle of bubbles (a setup for the standard toddler class activity of popping bubbles), to encourage Doc when she feels nervous about “stitching up” Lambie’s ripped skirt (“Everyone say, ‘You can do it!’”), and to dance together in celebration. The message here is that the world of toys is as real, and certainly more fun than the “real” world, but that the fun requires some emotional labor. Belonging to a(n imaginary) world means taking care of its denizens, even if they seem like mere objects to other people. To be sure, most of the heavy lifting is being done by nurturing African American females – Doc and also Hallie (voiced by Loretta Devine) on behalf of the brand, freeing kids to pop bubbles, to cheer on their toys and to dance, to let their

wonder and bodily delight carry them outside of themselves, to feel that perhaps these affects are one and the same – being carried by others, being carried away.

If *Sofia the First* genders girls as emotional laborers and *Doc McStuffins* genders girls (particularly girls of color) as nurturers, the next segment in the *Live on Stage* show (identified by its treasure chest icon), *Jake and The Neverland Pirates*, solicits kids to recognize and participate in a different kind of gendered consumer experience—one of adventure and accumulation, or perhaps better put, the adventure of accumulation. *Jake* premiered on the network in 2011 to bring the Peter Pan franchise to younger boys, although the show does feature a female character, Izzy, who has a connection, not surprisingly, to the Tinker Bell and Fairies franchise. Like the Lost Boys in *Peter Pan*, Jake and his friends, Cubby and Izzy, are scrappy, adventure seeking, and parentless (although we do not have a sense that they are orphans or need/want parents). The TV episodes are all staged around competitions with Captain Hook and Smee. In a typical segment of about eleven minutes, Captain Hook steals their loot (or, for instance, their basketball) and they have to solve a set of problems, often using maps or puzzles, to reclaim their goods. (It should be said that the puzzles are not difficult nor are they real problem-solving prompts: rather, they have the appearance of prompts. For instance, “map reading” consists of identifying the very large X on the map.) The problems are in effect prompts to *participate*, to engage, if only to have an occasion to be rewarded. Indeed, the TV segments end with virtual rewards—the characters (and audience) count the gold doubloons they’ve “earned,” to be stashed back in the “team” treasure chest until the next episode. Like the TV show, the theatrical *Live on Stage!* version of *Jake* focuses on reclaiming the treasure chest. Audience members are asked again to “find” and point out the object in question to the characters on stage in an effort to best Captain Hook. Jake and his friends win their contest against Hook by engaging the



audience members—everyone pretends to be the crocodile from Peter Pan (“Tick Tock,” they shout) and a terrified Hook runs off. The segment ends in a shower of paper “gold doubloons” that almost brings the show to a standstill. Kids scramble to collect the doubloons (some are shiny which intensifies the hunting and collecting). Children wander away from their spots, some losing all interest in the show itself, until the ushers step in to help reseal them. By the time the segment is over, and Casey (the human host) dutifully asks Daisy what she has learned from the *Jake* story, *Disney Junior Live on Stage!* essentially turns over its cards—the moral of the story, Daisy says, is “to have friends in high places,” a reference to the character of Skully, a pirate parrot, who has acted as a lookout for Jake and his friends, but a reference, too, to what Disney can do for you. In its most boy-friendly accumulation-adventure for preschoolers, Disney, having only recently thrown down the gauntlet in its bid for boy dollars, through the acquisition of the Marvel characters in 2009 for \$4 billion and Lucasfilm (the Star Wars franchise) for yet another \$4 billion in 2012, announces itself as a high-placed friend, a spirit-of-capital guide in which simulated adventures are always rewarded in commodity form. Labor for boys has to do with competitive play: it’s about winning, of course, but also about the logic of accumulation, constant collection. It is perhaps not entirely surprising that *Jake* does not intersect with other social texts—research has shown that girls have more social competence than boys,<sup>94</sup> although this is likely related to the discursive production of gender and the very fact that social cues are more often directed at girls.

*Disney Junior Live on Stage!* concludes with the celebration for Minnie—a “Happy Birthday” sign is flown from the rafters, the cake appears, the song is sung, everyone claps along, and streamers explode from the sky. Kids reach for the streamers and begin once again a process of collection. (This process is also aided by many parents who

scramble for streamers lest their child somehow come up empty handed.) It's pint-sized spectacularity, but feels generous, even if there aren't enough streamers for everyone to take home. Indeed, the show sequences itself through the accumulation of material enchantments – snow showers, a cascade of bubbles, a lottery win of paper coins fluttering from the sky, streamers. As the children exit, they are also handed the preschool show equivalent of a goody bag—a collection of buttons imprinted with the characters from the show. A memento from the show; an ad to wear on your shirt; an extension of the brand experience; a reward for the child's participation/affiliation; an attitude to display about how you see and feel yourself in relationship to the world—as a Sofia, a Doc, a Jake. Girls have the option of choosing which character to “wear” or which kind of labor to perform—Sofia or Doc—a decision that is not generally inflected by race, although African American girls are probably more likely to choose Doc than not. My daughter, who at almost seven was at the boundary of the Disney Junior demographic, and already much more interested in Minecraft than Disney Princesses, pocketed two sets of buttons. As far as she was concerned, it was all just more stuff from yet another random birthday party/event, whose value to her collection would have to be assessed later at home.

Many studies have attended to the impact of TV exposure for children, particularly in relationship to consumerism. Not all have actually measured the impact of segment-specific programming. This said, some overall conclusions about outcomes are clear. There is a correlation between TV viewing in children and obesity.<sup>95</sup> Children can learn literacy and numeracy skills from children's television; television can even enhance problem-solving skills and academic learning over time.<sup>96</sup> Prosocial behaviors can be taught on TV<sup>97</sup> and can increase social competency and behavior. At the same time, prosocial lessons in educational television also seem to actually increase

aggressive behavior; researchers argue that in order to present a correction, television shows model “bad” behavior which kids then emulate.<sup>98</sup>

Countless studies indicate that television can and does teach children about social membership categories and that children pick up cues about age, gender, racial, and class identities and entitlements, which is where and how we see prosocial texts actively mobilized in Disney Junior shows. These texts both leverage and suppress existing social membership categories in order to provide inclusive, interactive environments that model branded consumer citizenship—what it feels like and what it means to be a Disney kid. The *Live on Stage!* version samples these texts in a highly participatory theatrical environment—providing a unique, “live,” cross-platform, and “merged screen” experience—one that both activates the child and settles the channel’s prosocial texts inside a dedicated, spectacular sensorium and tech-enchanted community space.

For preschoolers we see that above all gender norms configure consumer entitlements—this is perhaps because gender proposes the most capacious categories for consumer inclusion, but is also related to the historical relationship of women to consumerism. Moreover, gender norms filter affective labor. For children whose emotional lives are, for all our management, marked by disarray and intensity, gendered performance offers an efficient way to shape behavior, enlist compliance with social codes, and propose consumer choice as a technology of the body. Gendered labor scripts, as well as class and racial categories also shape how very young children comprehend how social texts work as interactive platforms for identity categories.

For all the effort, not all the messaging about labor, gender, class, race, or spectacular neoliberal accumulation lands. As Margaret Werry notes in her article “Nintendo Museum,” “neoliberalism...should not be interpreted as the structuring (and

implicitly hostile and unassailable) backdrop to the agency of performance; rather, certain modes of performance can be analyzed as constitutive elements of neoliberal systematicity.”<sup>99</sup> Still, at the end of the day, kids take what they will. They participate in the ways they participate. At any given time in the show, only about a third of the children followed “instructions” — to shout out their name, to say the spell, to get up and dance (although roughly 2/3 popped bubbles). For any child at the show, *Disney Jr. Live on Stage!* is only one part of the day, one element of their Disney World “vacation.” Indeed, many preschoolers will not yet have developed a conventional sense of time and space. They will have no idea that it’s Tuesday at 3 in February in Orlando, Florida. By the time they do have a deeper sense of time and space, they are likely to have lost interest in these properties. For the most part, kids move on to the next thing. As children get older their interests are often aspirational – they want to see what the bigger kids are doing, which explains how five and six-year olds these days can be Taylor Swift fans. They will outgrow the need for Disney Princess mentoring. Or the trend will wane and a new one will take its place. But they will have understood, as consumer pre-citizens that media, particularly interactive media like Disney theatre, is a site, as Sarah Banet-Weiser says, “for productive identity making.”<sup>100</sup> Through consumption, they work through not only ideas about time and space but social and political texts about gender, class, race, and (by default) nation, texts that they then take into larger social assemblages: their homes, schools, and larger communities. Banet-Weiser argues precisely because children are denied power in other realms, “purchasing power translates into an especially important element in constructing identity and gaining visibility.”<sup>101</sup> She notes that the tension between what we see as entertainment and what we see as political activity is a false binary—children today, she states, “understand political rhetoric precisely because of their identities as

consumers.”<sup>102</sup> This is to say that children can *use* brand things (mediated things/experiences) not only as part of social life but as a way of entering into it.

The very notion that there are *children* and then there are *adults* also supports a binary that is extremely unstable, despite market segmentations. It isn't simply a matter of children growing older younger<sup>103</sup> or adults acting like children<sup>104</sup> it's that these categories are themselves assemblages and the boundaries between being (children) and becoming (adults) are always inherently fluid. Children are not “other” to the adults they become, even if their sensory lives are characterized by different kinds of intensities. It may even be a mistake to imagine that these intensities are any less singular among adults (particularly parents) than they are for children. As we see in the next chapters, Disney's theatrical assemblages are not limited in their appeal to American children or even their families, continuing to afford opportunities to be enchanted, to be moved through relations of interiority and exteriority, to code, recode, and, above all, to reassemble.

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<sup>1</sup> Sabrina Neeley and Tim Coffey, “Understanding the ‘Four-Eyed, Four-Legged’ Consumer: A Segmentation Analysis of U.S. Moms,” *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* 15.3 (2007): <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40470297>

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Cook, “The Missing Child in Consumption Theory,” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 8.2 (2008): 236, doi:10.1177/1469540508090087.

<sup>3</sup> Hill, Jennifer Ann. *How Consumer Culture Controls Our Kids: Cashing in on Conformity*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2016, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Lindstrom, “Brand Kids,” *Young Consumers* 9.1 (2008). For how early attachments can lead to lifelong brand loyalty, see also Paul M. Connell, Merrie Brucks, and Jesper H. Nielsen, “How Childhood Advertising Exposure Can Create Biased Product Evaluations That Persist into Adulthood,” *Journal of Consumer Research* (June 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Michael Dotson and Eva M. Hyatt. “A Comparison of Parents’ and Children’s Knowledge of Brands and Advertising Slogans in the United States: Implications for Consumer Socialization.” *Journal of Marketing Communications* 6 (4) (2000) 219–30, 223. doi:10.1080/135272600750036346.

<sup>6</sup> Russell N Laczniak and Kay M. Palan. “Under the Influence.” *Marketing Research* 16 (1) (2004) 34–39 <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bah&AN=13128391&site=ehost-live>.

<sup>7</sup> See Martin Lindstrom and Patricia Seybold, *Brandchild: Remarkable insights into the minds of today's global kids and their relationships with brands*, London: Kogan Page Ltd, 2003), 193.

<sup>8</sup> Celia Lury, *Brands: The Logos of the Global Economy*, (New York: Routledge, 2004,) 17.

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<sup>9</sup> Lash Scott and Celia Lury, *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 25.

<sup>10</sup> This term was coined by Henry Jenkins. See Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006),

<sup>11</sup> Although Cerniglia and Mitchell (K. Cerniglia and L. Mitchell, “The Business of Children in Disney’s Theater,” in *Entertaining Children: The Participation of Youth in the Entertainment Industry*, eds. G. Arrighi and V. Emeljanow, [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014]) and Stacy Wolf, (“Not Only on Broadway: Disney JR. And Disney KIDS Across the USA,” in *The Disney Musical on Stage and Screen: Critical Approaches from ‘Snow White’ to ‘Frozen,’* ed. George Rodosthenous, [New York: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017) have produced studies featuring Disney productions for school-age children, there are currently no studies, at least that I am aware of, of brand theatre (Disney or otherwise) for preschoolers.

<sup>12</sup> See Henry Giroux, *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010.)

<sup>13</sup> Maurya Wickstrom, *Performing Consumers: Global Capital and Its Theatrical Seductions* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 17.

<sup>14</sup> Wickstrom, *Performing Consumers*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Langer notes that this emergence of “childhood development” shares a discursive preoccupation with the notion of “developing” markets. See Beryl Langer “The Business of Branded Enchantment: Ambivalence and Disjuncture in the Global Children’s Culture Industry.” *Journal of Consumer Culture* 4, no. 2 (July 2004): 251–77. doi:10.1177/1469540504043685.

<sup>16</sup> Wickstrom, “Performing Consumers,” 4.

<sup>17</sup> Lauren Berlant, and Jordan Greenwald. “Affect in the End Times: A Conversation with Lauren Berlant.” *Qui Parle* 20, no. 2 (2012): 71–89, 77. doi:10.5250/quiparle.20.2.0071.

<sup>18</sup> See Ian Phau, and K.C. Lau (2001). “Brand Personality and Consumer Self-Expression:” Single or Dual Carriageway? *Journal of Brand Management*, 8(6), 428–444. doi:10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540042

<sup>19</sup> See G. V. Johar, J Sengupta & J.L. Aaker. “Two Roads to Updating Brand Personality Impressions: Trait Versus Evaluative Inferencing.” *Journal of Marketing Research*, 42(4), (2005) 458–469. doi:10.1509/jmkr.2005.42.4.458

<sup>20</sup> Both shows -- *Meeting Mickey* and *Disney Jr. Live on Stage!* – have, as of November 2018, effectively closed in all locations. This said, there are variants of both shows running in each location. Since I was not able to see the new versions, I do not reference them here. This said, the closures (and subsequent updates) point to the ways in which park shows are finite performances that also persist through refreshed iterations for new properties, audiences and technologies.

<sup>21</sup> Full versions of the show are uploaded to YouTube by guests and bloggers. Disney does not forbid guests from videotaping and uploading live park shows. For Meeting Mickey see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEJB11Zdj> or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5rFhbIbfjw> For Disney Jr Live on Stage see [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJIs7c\\_8mm4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJIs7c_8mm4) or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSpp2YsEDLM>.

<sup>22</sup> Donald Crafton, *Shadow of a Mouse: Performance, Belief, and World-making in Animation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Nicholas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930–1960* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 165.

<sup>24</sup> The development of children as a leisure market emerged, as Viviana Zelizer argues, from the changing value of children from the 1870s through this period in the 1930s when children were no longer used for labor and became recategorized as “emotionally” valuable, which is to say increasingly *priceless*. Viviana Zelizer, *Pricing the Priceless Child* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,) 1994.

<sup>25</sup> Nicholas Sammond, Neal Gabler, and Richard deCordova all note that at their height the chapters numbered over 800, with over a million kids enrolled, which was more than the national Girl and Boy Scout membership combined.

<sup>26</sup> Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, 168.

- <sup>27</sup> See Sammond, 146; also Crafton, *Shadow of a Mouse*, 225.
- <sup>28</sup> In Dade Hayes, *Anytime Playdate: Inside the Preschool Entertainment Boom, Or, How Television Became My Baby's Best Friend* (New York: Free, 2008), 121.
- <sup>29</sup> DeCordova, Richard. "The Mickey in Macy's Window: Childhood, Consumerism, and Disney Animation." In *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom*, edited by Eric Smoodin. 2013-214. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 210.
- <sup>30</sup> See Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004), 63.
- <sup>31</sup> Richard deCordova, 210.
- <sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Segran, "How Disney grew its \$3 billion Mickey Mouse business—by selling to adults," *Fast Company*, April 1, 2019, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90324660/how-disney-grew-its-3-billion-mickey-mouse-business-by-selling-to-adults>.
- <sup>33</sup> Sammond, "Babes in Tomorrowland," 366.
- <sup>34</sup> Marc Graser, "Disney Brands Generate Record \$40.9 Billion from Licensed Merchandise in 2013," *Variety.com*, June 17, 2014, <https://variety.com/2014/biz/news/disney-brands-generate-record-40-9-billion-from-licensed-merchandise-in-2013-1201221813/>.
- <sup>35</sup> Peggy Orenstein, "What's Wrong with Cinderella?" *New York Times Magazine*, December 24, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/24/magazine/24princess.t.html>.
- <sup>36</sup> Segran, "How Disney grew."
- <sup>37</sup> Sartin, 172.
- <sup>38</sup> Robert Neuman, "Disneyland's Main Street, USA, and Its Sources in Hollywood, USA," *Journal of American Culture* 31.1 (2008): 83–97, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/2073179?accountid=10226>.
- <sup>39</sup> Neuman, "Disneyland's Main Street," 88.
- <sup>40</sup> See Francaviglia, Richard V. "Main Street U.S.A.: A Comparison/Contrast of Streetscapes in Disneyland and Walt Disney World." *Journal of Popular Culture* 15, no. 1 (Summer, 1981): 141. <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/1297349791?accountid=10226>.
- Karal Ann Marling, "Imagineering the Disney Theme Parks," in *The Architecture of Reassurance*, ed. Karal Ann Marling, (Paris: Flammarion, 1997).
- Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power From Detroit to Disney World*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.)
- <sup>41</sup> Characters never appear, however, in more than one place at a time, in order to preserve the illusion that there is only one Mickey or one Princess Elsa.
- <sup>42</sup> The handlers are also present to ensure that the characters behave: unlike the unruly costumed characters in Times Square, Disney "cast members" face serious penalties and dismissal for inappropriate or even unfriendly conduct.
- <sup>43</sup> *Inside the Mouse* is credited to The Project on Disney, the members of which are Jane Kuenz, Karen Klugman, Shelton Waldrep, and Susan Willis. The Project on Disney, *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 4.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> Bob Sehlinger and Len Testa, *The Unofficial Guide to Walt Disney World: 2016*, (Birmingham, AL: Keen Communications, 2015), 415.
- <sup>46</sup> John Hench and Peggy Van Pelt, *Designing Disney: Imagineering and the Art of the Show*, (New York: Disney Editions, 2003), 90.
- <sup>47</sup> Zoie Matthews, "Life Inside the Mickey Suit (Yep, it gets hot in there)," *LA Magazine*, October 27, 2017. <https://www.lamag.com/mag-features/being-mickey/>
- <sup>48</sup> Jocelyn Sears, "Behind the Magic: 15 Secrets of Disney Park Characters," *Mental Floss*, June 16, 2015, <http://mentalfloss.com/article/65048/behind-magic-15-secrets-disney-park-characters>.
- <sup>49</sup> Scott Bukatman, *The Poetics of Slumberland: Animated Spirits and the Animating Spirit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 13.

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- <sup>50</sup> In Hench and Van Pelt, *Designing Disney*, 90.
- <sup>51</sup> Emphasis added. In Hench and Van Pelt, 91.
- <sup>52</sup> Walt Disney died before the opening of Epcot, which is to say before the other ten parks that bear his name were built.
- <sup>53</sup> Sartin, Hank. 1998 Dissertation. "Drawing on Hollywood: Warner Bros. Cartoons and Hollywood, 1930-1960." Order No. 9832178, The University of Chicago, 179. <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/304467385?accountid=10226>
- <sup>54</sup> In Crafton "Shadow of a Mouse," 86. Crafton makes this statement in relationship to a different animated character, noting "Popeye doesn't own his character; he *is* Popeye."
- <sup>55</sup> Jocelyn Sears, "Behind the Magic: 15 Secrets of Disney Park Characters," *Mental Floss*, June 16, 2015, <http://mentalfloss.com/article/65048/behind-magic-15-secrets-disney-park-characters>.
- <sup>56</sup> In Hayes, *Anytime Playdate*, 84. It does seem that children under three can have trouble separately reality/fantasy, for instance, as Flavell et al have suggested, understanding the nature of video representation, which is why my focus here begins with kids above 3 years of age. John H. Flavell, Eleanor R. Flavell, Frances L. Green, and Jon E. Korfmacher; "Do Young Children Think of Television Images as Pictures or Real Objects?" *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 34.4 (1990): 399–419.
- <sup>57</sup> Matthew Reason, "'Did You Watch the Man or Did You Watch the Goose?': Children's Responses to Puppets in Live Theatre," *New Theatre Quarterly* 24.04 (2008): 337, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1017/S0266464X0800048>
- <sup>58</sup> Zamir, "Puppets," *Critical Inquiry* 36.3, (2010): 405.
- <sup>59</sup> Zamir, "Puppets," 396.
- <sup>60</sup> Hayes, *Anytime Playdate*, 117.
- <sup>61</sup> Zamir, "Puppets," 396.
- <sup>62</sup> From notes from field visit, February 17, 2016.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>64</sup> Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Total Work of Art: From Bayreuth to Cyberspace*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 129.
- <sup>65</sup> Although Minnie and Mickey may be stars, fur performers are at a disadvantage—they are paid less, are injured more often, and because of their headpieces, suffer the heat more intensely. One has to imagine that the audio-animatronic headpiece is especially heavy, warm, and may even experience feedback or electronic buzzing, although I certainly couldn't tell in the encounter if any of these conditions were actual.
- <sup>66</sup> Referencing Christopher Finch in Stephen Jay Gould, "Mickey Mouse Meets Konrad Lorenz," in *A Mickey Mouse Reader*, ed. Garry Apgar (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, [1979] 2014), 208.
- <sup>67</sup> Gould, "Mickey Mouse Meets Konrad Lorenz," 208, 209.
- <sup>68</sup> "Regulated Rodent" (excerpt from TIME, February 16, 1931) in *Mickey Mouse Reader*, ed. Garry Apgar, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014.), 22.
- <sup>69</sup> Norman M. Klein, *Seven Minutes: The Life and Death of the American Animated Cartoon* (London: Verso, 1993), 75.
- <sup>70</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, *On Disney*, ed. Jay Leyda, trans. Alan Upchurch (London: Methuen, 1988), 33.
- <sup>71</sup> Sartin, "Drawing on Hollywood" 193.
- <sup>72</sup> As Robert Brockway notes, Mickey shot his last film, called *The Simple Things*, in 1954. See Brockway, "The Masks of Mickey Mouse," in *A Mickey Mouse Reader*, ed. Garry Apgar, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014.), 225.
- <sup>73</sup> Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 60.
- <sup>74</sup> Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 75.
- <sup>75</sup> Ngai, 63.



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- <sup>76</sup> Ngai, 108. Here Ngai points to the ways in which a cute toy becomes all the more cute when it's squeezed or "deformed" in some way.
- <sup>77</sup> Joshua Paul Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object: Desire, Domestication and Agency" in *The Aesthetics and Affects of Cuteness*, eds. Joshua Paul Dale, Julia Goggin, Julia Leyda, and Anthony P. McIntyre, (New York Routledge, 2017), 3.
- <sup>78</sup> Dale, *The Appeal of the Cute Object*, 36.
- <sup>79</sup> Dale, 40.
- <sup>80</sup> Dale, 40.
- <sup>81</sup> Dale, 46.
- <sup>82</sup> Dale, 139.
- <sup>83</sup> Gary Sherman, and Jonathan Haidt. "Cuteness and Disgust: The Humanizing and Dehumanizing Effects of Emotion." *Emotion Review* 3, no. 3 (July 2011): 245–51, 248.  
doi:[10.1177/1754073911402396](https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073911402396).
- <sup>84</sup> Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories*, 87.
- <sup>85</sup> See Bryant Jennings and Daniel R. Anderson, *Children's Understanding of Television: Research on Attention and Comprehension* (New York: Academic, 1983).
- <sup>86</sup> Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), 50–51.
- <sup>87</sup> This anxiety was, at least at the time, somewhat inflated for this particular demographic segment: Common Sense Media reported that media use was actually trending down in 2013 from 2011 for children zero through eight, perhaps because of the American Pediatric Association's warnings about limiting screen time to under two hours. This said, the 2017 Common Sense media report shows that screen use has tripled from 2013–2017, with children under eight logging roughly forty-eight minutes a day, mostly on mobile devices. <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/research/the-common-sense-census-media-use-by-kids-age-zero-to-eight-2017>
- <sup>88</sup> Hulshof, Ana, Lyn Pemberton, and Richard Griffiths. "Design Principles for Preschool Children's Interactive TV." *Universal Access in the Information Society* 12, no. 1 (03, 2013): 21-35, 21.  
doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1007/s10209-011-0263-7>.  
<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/1301271746?accountid=10226>.
- <sup>89</sup> Casey is a gender neutral character name so that the host can be either female or male.
- <sup>90</sup> "Theme Song from Sofia the First," performed by Ariel Winter. Written by John Kavanaugh and Craig Gerber for "Sofia the First: Once Upon a Princess," *Disney Junior* (released November 12, 2018).
- <sup>91</sup> Elizabeth A. Harris and Tanzina Vega, "Race in Toyland: A Nonwhite Doll Crosses Over," *New York Times*, July 26, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/27/business/a-disney-doctor-speaks-of-identity-to-little-girls.html>
- <sup>92</sup> Kurt Kowalski, "The Emergence of Ethnic and Racial Attitudes in Preschool-Aged Children," *Journal of Social Psychology* 143.6 (2003): 677.
- <sup>93</sup> These attitudes are not always correlated in ways that we might imagine. For instance, as Birgitte Simpson shows, children do not necessarily adopt their parents' views, but their perceptions of their parents' views matter. Diversity in the child's social context (neighborhood, school) is correlated with more negative perceptions, suggesting that children who live in more segregated contexts with parents who do not talk about race (which is common) may be more likely to embrace a character like Doc.
- <sup>94</sup> Peter J. Lafreniere and Jean E. Dumas, "Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation in Children Ages 3 to 6 Years: The Short Form (SCBE-30)," *Psychological Assessment* 8.4 (1996).
- <sup>95</sup> See Harvard School of Public Health, "Television Watching and 'Sit Time,'" <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/obesity-prevention-source/obesity-causes/television-and-sedentary-behavior-and-obesity/>
- <sup>96</sup> See Philip D. Levine and Melissa S. Kearney, "Early Childhood Education by MOOC: Lessons from Sesame Street," National Bureau of Economic Research, June 2015; see also Jennings Bryant and Daniel R. Anderson, *Children's Understanding of Television: Research on Attention and Comprehension* (New York: Academic, 1983).

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<sup>97</sup> See Deborah L. Linebarger, Anjelika Z. Kosanic, Charles R. Greenwood, and Nii Sai Doku; “Effects of Viewing the Television Program Between the Lions on the Emergent Literacy Skills of Young Children;” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 96.2 (2004), <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1037/0022-0663.96.2.297>

See also Marie-Louise Mares and Emory Woodard, “Positive Effects of Television on Children's Social Interactions: A Meta-Analysis,” in *Mass media effects research: advances through meta-analysis* / edited by Raymond W. Preiss ... [et al.] (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007.)

<sup>98</sup> Ostrov, Jamie M., Douglas A. Gentile, and Nicki R. Crick. 2006. “Media Exposure, Aggression and Prosocial Behavior During Early Childhood: A Longitudinal Study.” *Social Development* 15 (4): 612–27. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9507.2006.00360.x.

<sup>99</sup> Margaret Werry. “Nintendo Museum: Intercultural Pedagogy, Neoliberal Citizenship, and a Theatre without Actors,” in *Neoliberalism and Global Theatres: Performance Permutations*, eds. Lara D. Nielsen and Patricia A. Ybarra (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 27.

<sup>100</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Kids Rule! Nickelodeon and Consumer Citizens*, (Durham, NC and London, Duke University Press, 2007), 11.

<sup>101</sup> Banet-Weiser, “Kids Rule!”, 75.

<sup>102</sup> Banet-Weiser, “Kids Rule!”, 11.

<sup>103</sup> See Juliet Schor, *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture* (New York: Scribner, 2004).

<sup>104</sup> See Benjamin R. Barber, *Consumed: how markets corrupt children, infantilize adults and swallow citizens whole*. (New York: Norton, 2007); see also Tyler Bickford. “Tween Intimacy and the Problem of Public Life in Children’s Media: “Having It All” on the Disney Channel’s Hannah Montana.” *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly* 43.1 (2015): 66-82. doi:10.1353/wsq.2015.0022

## Chapter 2: Disney's Broadway Assemblages

It all started with a theatre critic. In 1991, in the *New York Times Year in the Arts* theatre roundup, Frank Rich accorded “best Broadway musical score” to Disney’s animated film feature, *Beauty and the Beast*. He called it “The Hit That Got Away”—a tip of the hat, perhaps, to the score’s lyricist, Howard Ashman, who had just died of AIDS.<sup>1</sup> Rich’s gesture was of course a snub of the year’s theatrical offerings, but it was enough to give Michael Eisner, then CEO of Disney, the impulse to take *Beauty and the Beast* to Broadway.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Andrew Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh megamusicals<sup>3</sup> of the 1980s had proven, with their global distribution networks, that Broadway could be big business, Eisner was initially quite cautious: having headed a failed theatrical division at Paramount, he was well aware of the potential risks. He decided to go to Broadway without outside investors as a way of maintaining control, creating a new division, Disney Theatrical Productions (henceforth DTP).<sup>4</sup>

The industry response to DTP was openly hostile. As Alex Witchel noted in the *New York Times*, the “sniping” was about money—“and power. And control. And expertise.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, although Disney was effectively new to the Great White Way, the studio had the advantage of having produced, as Eisner himself noted, “more live theatre than all of Broadway.”<sup>6</sup> But concerns about the studio’s “expertise” had more to do with resentment of Disney’s significant “arsenal,” as Witchel described it, “of special effects and its “Press-a-Button” world of computer controlled theatrical wizardry.”<sup>7</sup>

To be sure, the arrival of the corporation on Broadway signaled a new and significant reinvestment in the American musical spectacular, promising lavish sets and

costumes, to say nothing of Disney's signature "imagineering." By the time the show opened in April of 1994, after an out-of-town tryout in Houston, it was the most expensive Broadway production ever produced. (DTP maintained that costs came in under \$12 million although rumors swirled that the numbers were closer to \$16–19 million.<sup>8</sup>) But for all its ready money, pyrotechnics, and technical bells and whistles, *Beast* was fairly standard if souped-up musical theatre fare. That the production was conventional was hardly surprising: Disney had rebuilt its brand in the 1990s on the production of traditional (if animated) film musicals. Steve Nelson argues that musical theatre was itself in such a slump at the time that Disney had simply "gained the territory by default"<sup>9</sup>—something Rich's *Times* roundup "award" made plain. Although advance sales were low and the initial critical reception rather tepid, *Beauty and the Beast* defied expectations: the show was the "event" of the season. Nominated for nine Tonys, the show grossed \$35 million its first year, a number that would swell in the final tally, after nine years on Broadway, to over \$400 million.<sup>10</sup> The *Beast* had arrived on Broadway.

This chapter focuses on theatrical assemblages produced by DTP for the Broadway market. Tracing the emergence of Disney on Broadway as a dynamic process, I attempt here a kind of mapping of the company's use of Broadway as a localized platform. As part of this mapping, I look both at how Disney crafts its productions to expand and consolidate the boundaries of the overall brand assemblage, as well as the ways in which consumers participate in the striation of these boundaries. Understanding how corporate theatrical assemblages come together helps us to understand molecular assemblages (meaning specific theatrical productions) in relationship to molar strata and to see the ways in which theatrical assemblages code and recode (virtual) pasts and presents to generate new materialities and intensities. I

focus especially on how Disney's American musical assemblages both enfold and unfold political and national space (through the mobilization of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality) in order to speak to, through, and with consumer audiences.

The chapter works in three parts, beginning with a study of Disney's presence within the market assemblage of Times Square/Broadway. As Manuel DeLanda argues, markets are real places in time and space, but they are also reified spaces full of actants and actions that are both intended and unintended.<sup>11</sup> This is especially true of Broadway which is both a local and coordinated global marketplace not simply of (theatrical) commodities but a repertory of activities, events and processes. I look not only at how Disney entered the Broadway scene, but at the ways in which Disney entities affected the larger assemblage of Broadway itself as a brand. I then turn to a discussion of two Disney musicals, both produced on Broadway after the turn of the millennium—*Newsies* and *Aladdin*. The two musicals share a set of features: they are both based on films first released in 1992, share the same composer (Alan Menken), and feature rags-to-riches narratives that turn around questions of sincerity, freedom, and empowerment. Both musicals respond to consumer claims for visibility, indeed citizenship, within neo-liberal economies. My readings examine the processes by which these theatrical assemblages came together, paying attention to the ways in which the "original" properties were theatrically reassembled in order to promote both persistence (of the media property) *and* audience interactivity. All theatre comes from something, but Disney's theatrical assemblages in particular circulate cultural references (both within and outside the brand) as a way of materializing difference, of de- and reterritorializing time and space. I am however less interested in production histories than I am in the ways in which casting decisions, storytelling elements, design features (choreographic, scenic, and musical), and audience engagement work as

networked processes of decoding and recoding cultural flows as well as of sorting/classifying and bonding.

I argue here that Disney's American musical assemblages enfold and unfold political and national space through the articulation and overcoding of social formations like class, race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. My reading of *Newsies* highlights the performance of labor unrest, class consciousness, and collective feeling within the brand assemblage. This section explores the affective intensities brought to the property through the de- and recoding of political space. I also consider ways in which a multiplicity of temporalities and virtual spatialities were made coterminous within the property, particularly through the co-emergence of technology (social media in particular) as a node/mode of expression within the assemblage itself. As media scholar Henry Jenkins notes in *Convergence Culture*, consumption is now "a collective process."<sup>12</sup> According to Jenkins, given the many competing media platforms and markets (notwithstanding the mergers of many of media conglomerates), new consumers are more socially connected; they are interested in interacting with other consumers. New media consumers are more than just passive viewers: they are "noisy" and "public." This section examines how Disney mediates its new media publics by capitalizing on and encouraging trending interests -- working to "loop" the consumer back into the larger brand assemblage<sup>13</sup>-- as well as how consumers use brand publics<sup>14</sup> as platforms for individual expression and social engagement.

My reading of *Aladdin* focuses on the meanings of racial and sexual "diversity" to the brand platform, exploring the ways in which *Aladdin's* Orientalisms expand and contract existing ethno-racial assemblages as part of a bid to naturalize (mostly) non-Oriental others within national brandscapes. Disney's theatrical assemblages are performances that not only (re)produce "iterative performances of social

differentiation,"<sup>15</sup> but performances that "generate presence" and, more importantly, that "*manifest* absence and Otherness."<sup>16</sup> And while I argue here that the (re)production and performance of social differences is generative for the overall brand assemblage, working to accommodate difference as a way of consolidating brand equity (and the continuity of the brand itself), these performances are nonetheless fractious, ambivalent, and, most importantly, in a constant state of reassembly.

### *Disney, Times Square, and Broadway*

Disney on Broadway is a tale of overlapping spaces, commercial (re)districting, reassembled heritage sites, and a series of lucky breaks (including one given in the early '90s to a relatively unknown female theatre director named Julie Taymor.) Before the early '90s, The Times Square Redevelopment Project courted the company, hoping Disney would bring a sanitizing gloss to the project's effort to reclaim the area as a cleaned-up entertainment district. Disney would work as a magnet or anchor, giving other corporate investors the necessary confidence to participate. The studio initially demurred, but with the success of *Beauty and the Beast*, Eisner began to reconsider the company's New York presence. Producing *Beauty and the Beast*, Eisner had discovered how difficult it was to find a theater large enough to produce a full-scale spectacular (many of the larger theaters were already occupied by Mackintosh productions). In 1992, Eisner negotiated the restoration of the New Amsterdam Theatre—once home to the Ziegfeld Follies—securing a \$21 million low-interest loan from the city.<sup>17</sup>

For Disney critics, including long-time Broadway producers who had historically been denied any in-kind concessions from the city, the city-funded purchase amounted to a literal turf war over what the very character and soul of Broadway would be. In "Disney's Time Square," written in 1998, John Bell

sounded what was a common complaint—that a Disney theater would erode the historic (and civic) character of the Square, turning the whole of Times Square into one of its theme parks, with Disney faithful making pilgrimages to the site. Bell predicted that the presence of Disney would render Times Square a “temporary Disney consumer community.” “This is a different type of community,” he argued, “and a different type of theatre than the community attracted to and the theatre produced by the New Amsterdam in its heyday in the 1920s, when the Ziegfeld Follies played inside the theatre.”<sup>18</sup>

Disney had no intention of claiming or theming Times Square as its own,<sup>19</sup> nor did it have the ability to do so with the purchase of a single theatre. But Bell was right to feel that there was a new kind of community coming into formation. As Steve Nelson notes, although many Broadway productions had drifted away from mainstream popular culture, Times Square was itself predominantly a tourist destination, one that was already operating as a nostalgic version of itself.<sup>20</sup> Disney’s presence merely amplified the nostalgia factor, expanding the tourist base to include more families. This said, the success of Disney’s landmark production of *Lion King*, which opened at the New Amsterdam in 1997, shifted the terms of production on Broadway. With inventive, life-size animal puppets by Julie Taymor and Michael Curry, an intricately arranged and newly Africanized musical score (with contributions by composer Lebo M) and choreography by African American choreographer Garth Fagan—the production both delivered and utterly reinterpreted the property within a set of highly theatrical idioms. The critical reception of the production was, on the whole, positive. Even Ben Brantley of *The New York Times* gave a cagey, but glowing review. He pronounced the opening of the musical “transporting magic,” giving full kudos to Julie Taymor, whom he described as a “maverick artist” and “bohemian iconoclast.” “Unlike *Beast*,” Brantley



wrote, "*Lion King* is an important work."<sup>21</sup> The production won six Tonys, including Best Musical and Best Director for Julie Taymor, who became the first woman to win in that category.<sup>22</sup> The production is still running on Broadway today; there are also iterations currently running in eleven countries on six continents. Taken together, the resident productions (including Broadway) and tours have generated in excess of \$6 billion.<sup>23</sup> As Gordon Cox wrote in *Variety* in 2015, the worldwide "haul...makes the Disney produced show the top box office title in any medium, ever."<sup>24</sup> "*Lion King*," Cox argues, "laid the groundwork" for the coming "blockbuster era" on Broadway.<sup>25</sup> The production not only validated Broadway as a commercially viable platform for brand development, it also helped to re-establish the American musical as Broadway's signature brand. After years of being dominated by British imports (aka the Lloyd Webber mega-musical), Broadway was reinscribed as an American/brand exportable.

After the success of *Lion King*, virtually all the major studios began to eye the Great White Way. Universal Studios created a theatrical division, partnering to produce *Wicked*—one of the most financially rewarding investments, according to Cox, "in Universal history."<sup>26</sup> Universal has since produced a range of properties from *Billy Elliott* to *Porgy and Bess*. DreamWorks revamped the family-friendly *Shrek*. MGM brought, among others, *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*, *Rocky*, and *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*. Warner Brothers produced *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and more recently, *Beetlejuice*. 20th Century Fox and Sony Pictures have also partnered with established producers to bring properties from their catalogue. The uptick in shows on Broadway based on films over the past twenty years is simply a reflection of the rise of studio producers. For corporate producers, developing theatrical properties is relatively inexpensive (in comparison to development in film), making Broadway a viable and potentially lucrative platform. In addition to operating as a brand token within a

synergistic platform, Broadway offers studios an opportunity to refresh old properties, trading on nostalgic affiliations for older generations all the while building new audiences.

In 1998, just seven years after he had inadvertently motivated Disney to take on Broadway, Frank Rich wrote that the appearance of these corporate actors heralded “perhaps the most momentous systemic change since the rise of Off Broadway and the regional theater movement in the 1950s.”<sup>27</sup> Pointing to the “synergistic cross product plugging onstage of a gag [in *Lion King*] promoting *Beauty and the Beast*,” Rich argued that a corporatized theatre “overrun by cartoon characters and scripted by marketers” had begun to threaten “quality of life” of theatre itself.<sup>28</sup> Although it does seem to me, as David Savran has argued, that the hand wringing about the “quality of life” of the theatre often has to do with the perceived obligation on the part of the *New York Times* theatre critics (Rich included) to hold the line between Hollywood and Broadway, lest the theatre’s “middlebrow” status be laid (too) bare;<sup>29</sup> Disney clearly took “middlebrow” into the realm of explicit consumption. For Rich, Disney on Broadway represented a theatre reduced to the status of television, a coordinated media device for the explicit sale of branded commodities.

In her book *Performing Consumers*, Maurya Wickstrom presents a more complicated variation on this argument, arguing that theatrical idioms in *Lion King*, for example, were used to both deflect and elevate the brand, setting it metaphorically outside the realm of commodification. She argues that in *Lion King*, commodity fetishism operates in a “high art key.” African/black bodies are marked as primitive forms “capable of the wonder of mimesis,” of transformation through “diverse forms.” These bodies are then “dominated” through their transformation into commodity

objects that live in a rarified “authentic” or “authenticated” high modern art form that positions itself as outside or above market exchange.<sup>30</sup>

Both of these arguments depend on the notion that theatrical space itself can elude market exchange, which is to say that they do not take into account the larger social-material assemblage of Broadway as itself a market economy related to other market assemblages. But more importantly for my purposes here, these arguments also see brands through an extremely limited lens. As Celia Lury writes, following Maurizio Lazzarato, proposes, “brands are not so much producers of goods but rather producers of *worlds in which goods exist*.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, “consumption,” Lazzarato writes, “cannot simply be reduced to buying or consuming (‘destroying’) a service or product...but above everything it means belonging to a world, adhering to a universe.”<sup>32</sup> This is to say Disney is less a multi-modal media producer than it is a *marketing* company whose interest is in creating virtual worlds through which consumers can identify and expand their own life-worlds.<sup>33</sup> Each virtual world emerges out of a media device (a film, a show) but becomes, through consumer association, part of a larger social assemblage—one that contains other goods but also by association the life-worlds of the consumer. For Disney, Broadway is a spectacular site of address and recognition of consumer identities and lived intensities—the surface and surfeit of ordinary affects experienced by consumer.<sup>34</sup> The cross-plugging Frank Rich decried in *Lion King* is, in fact, *coy*. It’s a giggle, or, as Rich says himself, it’s a *gag*. There are cross-plugging moments in virtually all Disney shows, but the cross-plugging, indeed the use of Broadway as a brand platform within the larger ecosystem itself, is a kind of molecular iteration designed to network the particular show to the larger assemblage, to point not just to its reiterative circularity but also to its self-consciousness -- its cultural stickiness within market flows – all the while affirming its *flexibility*.

Like *Lion King*, *Aladdin* features a cross-plugging moment. In the middle of its showstopper, *Never Had a Friend Like Me*, Genie, played by James Monroe Iglehart in the original Broadway cast, serves up a lounge-singer style mashup medley of Disney show tunes from *The Little Mermaid*, *Pocahontas*, and *Beauty and the Beast*. The moment always gets a laugh from the audience, in part because so many audience members recognize the songs. But the laughter also has to do with the fact that Genie is a large African American man virtuosically rendering Disney Princess arias. In this moment, the brand addresses its faithful, but it also trades on its identity as a Genie-like deliverer of communal (if common) goods to a diverse population. That the moment is playful, indeed silly, speaks to the brand's latitudes: the songs are for everyone to sing (not just aspiring princesses), in any number of reassemblages. To be sure, part of what keeps this moment afloat is Iglehart's charisma, commitment and sheer talent. But brand assemblages keep properties alive by keeping up with the times, by pinning them to what's current, by finding ways to improvise, by building alliances that are often winking or coy, by explicitly performing practices of de- and reterritorialization. Above all, brand assemblages attempt to *forge relations* with and among constituents. These relations are of course about commodities but they are also about much more than commoditizing goods (the theatre included).

For all the fears of a Times Square takeover (and the incipient death of non-corporate theatre), the Disney footprint in Times Square today, some twenty-five years later, is relatively small. The Disney store is only one among a tremendous number of big-box chains. As of this writing, Disney has three shows running on Broadway: *The Lion King*, *Aladdin*, and *Frozen*, but the company still only owns The New Amsterdam. As David Savran argues, there is also "not much evidence," that the "megamusical" "wave washed away more modest, esoteric and progressive products," on Broadway.<sup>35</sup>

The same can be said for the current season in which Broadway offerings included off-beat plays by Taylor Mac and Lucas Hnath. Concerns about a Disney theme park–controlled environment are belied by the ubiquity (and unruliness) of street performers in knockoff, off-brand walk-around character costumes (Disney and non-Disney), to say nothing of their near-naked counterparts, who also pose for pictures, lit by the ambient glow of the Disney store’s outdoor video screen. This is not to deny the corporation’s presence or its influence in bringing a larger corporate profile to the square, but merely to say that Times Square is its own assemblage, one that is not entirely unlike the one that emerged during the time of the Ziegfeld Follies but that is still changing, still becoming, still finding and defining the limits of its own civic boundaries.

*Reassembling Newsies: (The Musical).*

Like most Disney Broadway musicals, *Newsies: The Musical* is based on a film of the same name, although it has the distinction of being based on a live-action (not animated) feature. The show, which opened at the Nederlander Theatre on March 29, 2012, is an exception in other ways too: the film on which it was based was a terrible flop, there was a twenty-year lag between the film and any stage version, and the production was a success on Broadway despite never having been intended for a Broadway market. It is also the only Disney Broadway musical set in America (if a somewhat distanced turn-of-the-nineteenth-century New York) and the most politically inflected, staging an outright drama of labor unrest and class conflict.

*Newsies* (in both its film and theatrical versions) tells the story of the 1899 New York City newsboy strike. At the center of the Disney version is the figure of Jack Kelly. Based very loosely on one of the strike organizers, Kid Blink, Jack is a ragtag dreamer who galvanizes his fellow newsboys in a series of standoffs against press barons Joseph

Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst over the increased price of newsboy bundles. The newsboy protests are cast in rousing David-and-Goliath terms, with Pulitzer standing in for Goliath, although the true villain of *Newsies* is Snyder, a corrupt social service agent who locks up unwitting street kids. The boys struggle in their contest against greedy corporations and bad government agents until, with a little help from a sympathetic journalist, they write, print, and distribute their own circular, turning the tide of public opinion in their favor. With public sympathy behind them, Jack successfully negotiates not just a rollback of the increased price but a buyback of all unsold papers. (This is a sunnier version of actual events—the historical newsboys were only conceded the buyback.) At the end of the film, Governor Teddy Roosevelt descends—a *deus ex machina*—on the scene. Gratefully acknowledging Jack’s contributions in bringing the plight of working children to public attention, he gives Pulitzer a public slap on the wrist, then makes the closing gesture of condemning Snyder, sending him off in a paddy wagon.<sup>36</sup> With social services out of the picture, the kids are now finally free, we are left to imagine, to go back to work.

That Disney produced a Broadway musical about a labor strike against a tight-fisted media giant is less strange than it might first seem. *Newsies* showcases two familiar Disney figures: the orphan and the spunky working-class kid. Disney films tend to orphan characters as a matter of course—this dramaturgical practice serves to highlight the resourcefulness of its orphaned characters, but more importantly, it helps affirm the intact middle-class family as a kind of achievable utopia. Working-class kids have also long served, as Karen Sánchez-Eppler notes, as foils for their upwardly mobile middle-class counterparts, teaching them about the value of both leisure/fun/freedom *and* labor. *Newsies* draws specifically on the recycled stereotype of the newsboy: good-natured, quick-witted, a “little businessman” enjoying the

purported freedoms of street life. A fixture of nineteenth century literary production, newsboys were most prominently featured in Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick* series, where their ingenuity and work ethic won them middle-class respectability (if not actual riches). Turn-of-the-century newsboys were, as Sanchez Eppler argues, well aware of their literary alter egos: many of them read Alger's dime novels. And they often played into expectations, contributing to the durability of this stereotype, despite the fact that, as Sánchez-Eppler notes, "very few if any children actually prospered through street trading."<sup>37</sup>

For Disney, the newsie is a tidy addition to its repertory of cheerful and conscientious laborers, a company led, from the studio's very first film, *Snow White*, by dwarf coal mine workers who sing "Hi Ho Hi Ho/It's off to work we go!" and a princess who confronts the drudgery of cleaning up after said dwarves with a "smile and a song."<sup>38</sup> A "whistle while you work" ethos is ingrained in all Disney park employees, who are all dubbed "cast members" rather than workers, whether they play characters or turn over hotel room sheets. *Newsies* restyles the actual labor of hawking newspapers, or, rather more quaintly, "papes," as pure performance—as exuberant displays of singing and dancing, displays that only become more exuberant as the kids go on strike. More importantly, the film continually plays on the newsboy-as-merchant stereotype to position the newsies as emergent capitalists, rather than mere workers, a move that also helps to sell the show's variation on the nineteenth-century aspirational narrative, that "poverty," as Sánchez-Eppler notes, "like childhood, is a stage that can be outgrown."<sup>39</sup>

For all its orphan musical and fresh-faced street boy appeal, when the film was first released in the early '90s, it was a spectacular failure. Produced on a budget of \$15 million, it earned not even a third of its cost at the box office.<sup>40</sup> Critics almost universally

panned the film. It was nominated for five Razzies (Golden Raspberry Awards), which honor the worst films of the year, ultimately winning in the category of “worst song.” Roger Ebert described the plot as “warmed-over Horatio Alger.”<sup>41</sup> In her review for the *New York Times*, “They Sing, They Dance, They Go on Strike,” Janet Maslin pronounced *Newsies* “pointless,” “contrived,” and “dull to children.” She also condemned the film’s “fairy tale view of labor relations.”<sup>42</sup>

To some extent, the failure of the film had to do, as implied in the title of Maslin’s review, with its format. The project began life as a historical drama, but Jeffrey Katzenberg (then–studio head) wanted to transfer the studio’s successes with animated musicals to live action. So *Newsies* went from historical drama to movie musical, with stirring songs by Alan Menken and Jack Feldman and energetic choreography by Kenny Ortega<sup>43</sup> punctuating the newsboys’ labor struggles. It was the early ‘90s, and a live-action movie musical not based on an existing musical (like *Annie*) was unusual, making the film an easy target for critics, but *Newsies* also falters in its execution: it is, in the end, half-after-school-special-historical-drama and half-musical.

And yet, the film proved enormously popular with older kids and teens over time. Because Disney played the film in reruns (in part to fill programming gaps in the very early days of the Disney Channel), kids watched it on TV. The widespread use of VCRs also made it possible to purchase the film for home viewing (and to watch it over and over again.) Kids took the kid-power politics of the film seriously. And they especially loved the choral songs and dances, performing them in their communities: at camps, in after-school drama programs, and high schools. A cult following blossomed. When Menken and Thomas Schumacher, the head of DTP, went to speak at colleges, students would ask them, “When are you going to do *Newsies*?” And when polls went



out to regional theaters, asking which properties from the catalogue they were most interested in producing, respondents replied, over and over again, *Newsies*.<sup>44</sup>

In response to this demand, DTP tried, over the years, to create a stage version they could license to high schools, colleges, and regional theaters. But they couldn't figure out how to turn the movie musical into an actual musical until 2010 when the actor and playwright Harvey Fierstein volunteered to repackage it.<sup>45</sup> DTP then hired Jeff Calhoun, who had directed the hugely successful, straight-to-licensing *High School Musical* stage production. The creative team worked to build a regional showcase. The Paper Mill Playhouse signed on as a co-producer.

Fierstein's theatrical version is much more of a conventional musical than the original film. His book is also smarter, a little darker and just a hint sassier. Against the backdrop of the 2008 fiscal crisis and the emerging Occupy Wall Street movement, the production also leaned into a sharper political focus. Even though the show was ultimately destined for (re)performance at high schools and colleges, the production reassembled around questions, however sentimentalized, of social unrest and claims of corporate bad faith. In nearly every aspect, with the exception of Jess Goldstein's charming and beautifully styled costumes, the production team tapped into a rising tide of anger about income inequality and working-class resentment. Fierstein's book, Menken and Feldman's new songs and lyrics, the musical orchestration, Christopher Gattelli's choreography, the casting, and lighting and projection design all thrummed with a new transgressive intensity. Tobias Ost's imposing set, made of three three-story high mobile towers of steel scaffolding, gave this Disney-in-Times-Square production a gritty, tenement-like atmosphere—a territorializing gesture made possible perhaps only by the reality of a cleaned-up Times Square.

Perhaps the most impactful change to *Newsies* as a regional/Broadway property was the way it was cast. In the film, the newsboys are played by *boys*, ranging in age from about ten to sixteen. (Christian Bale, seventeen at the time he played Jack Kelly, came in at the very oldest end of the spectrum.) Together the original newsies look like middle-class kids on a backlot set, the kind of kids who might, in the tradition of the newsboy, have their own paper routes. Their demands for child/worker rights are offset by their period costumes and their cheerfully pitched songs and their general demeanor of compliance as they perform unison choreography. With their carefully culled accents—their “dese”s and “dem”s—and their quaint anachronistic speech (“Let’s soak ‘em!”), their complaints come off as charming, even cute. By contrast, almost all the newsies in the Paper Mill/Broadway production are unmistakably men, with the exception of the ten-year-old Les, played impishly by two child actors (in rotation) and, perhaps, the sympathetic orphan, Crutchie, metonymically and diminutively named for the disability that both defines and, in this case, infantilizes him (his historical counterpart was “Crutch Morris”). Theatre, of course, doesn’t require the kind of naturalism of film. Still, this casting choice was likely determined by the economics of regional theatre/Broadway, where it is possible to cast child actors, but where child labor laws restrict the amount of rehearsal and performance time they can be available (hence the need for doubles). Older boys also do not require added-expense wranglers (to manage the performers and their parents). Of course, young adults are better trained, easier to direct (at least in theory), and more capable of sustaining the kind of choreographic and vocal demands characteristic of a long run.

Turning the newsboys into men had implications for both the affective force of the show and its narrative. To begin with, aging up the boys significantly impacted the way the show moved, making dance a primary mode of spectacular and collective

address. Christopher Gattelli's choreography highlights the virtuosity of the individual performers, but depends primarily on the energy and synchronicity of the corps and their ability to expand the *duration* of a given musical phrase or movement. In the number "Seize the Day," dancer after dancer leaps, slides, pirouettes, tumbles, backflips, cartwheels—hurling themselves across the stage time and again. Chronicling the moment when the newsies realize they will have to band together and go on strike, the dance sequences not only punctuate the music and lyrics, they convey a kind of athletic masculine energy and solidarity. In his review of the Broadway production, Ben Brantley describes the formations as "phalanxes" of dancers, and indeed an implied militarism weaves in and out of the song, which has both a light, lyric choral variation and a more percussive call and response structure that culminates in the boys repeatedly chanting, "STRIKE!" This section is then followed by an extended dance sequence in which the boys tear apart newspaper pages (albeit quite precisely), dance with them underfoot, only to finally crumple them and cast them into the audience. Although the choreographic displays in "Seize the Day" do feel at times, as Brantley wrote, like kids (Brantley says "toddlers") "on a sugar high"—they also have, as Brantley concedes himself, a kind of "relentlessness." He writes that the dances have "enough raw vitality to command attention and even stir the blood...if they knew when to quit."<sup>46</sup> But as Aaron C. Thomas writes in his essay, "Dancing Toward Masculinity: Newsies, Gender and Desire"<sup>47</sup> (and as Brantley essentially infers), not quitting is the point. Of course, in a show where virtually all the spectacularity is in the singing and dancing, it makes sense to err on the side of sheer excess, but the full-throttled display of adult male energy dancing in formation seemingly ad infinitum is unambiguous. The choral dances have a kind of bodily intensity and affective sweep not in the original, making a clear argument for the force of collective labor (and collective empowerment).

Of course, the dances occur in the context of a larger soundtrack—one that was overcoded to feel explicitly political. During the song, “The World Will Know,” a play on the name of Pulitzer’s publication *The World*, the newsboys band together to challenge the price increase. On hearing the news, Jack refuses to pay for a bundle and encourages the others to do the same. His refusal quickly becomes coded as an organized labor protest. “We’re a union just by saying so,” Kelly proclaims while the newsies figuratively and literally fall into (a dance) line. For the 2012 production, Menken and Feldman added a verse to the song, in which the boys’ defiance of their big bosses is shot through with both the rhetoric of workers’ rights and the dark threat of violence. “Pulitzer may own *The World*, but he don’t own us,” they sing:

And the World will know we been keepin’ score  
Either they gives us our rights or we give them a war.  
So the World says No, so the kids do too!  
Try to walk all over us, we’ll stomp all over you.  
Can they kick us out? Take away our vote?  
Will we let em stuff this crock of garbage down our throat?  
No!<sup>48</sup>

The language of rights, connected to voting, and the expression of conflict between working-class kids and their corporate oppressors in explicitly political terms delivers a surge of political feeling that is further amplified by the (re)orchestration of the music. Danny Troob’s arrangement in the musical swaps out the brighter, brassier and more upbeat sound of the original, substituting strings (with an occasional, angular electric guitar) and a more percussion-heavy sound. An insistent downbeat drives an accelerated tempo. And although the choral orchestration starts in essentially the same way as the original, the harmonies are more complex. The overall effect is that both the timbre and tone of the song are angrier, deeper, and more discordant.

Individual characters and the overall narrative were also reconfigured to reflect a more outraged, discordant tone. In Fierstein’s version Jack Kelly is an outright leading

man—a blue-collar dreamboat and a sensitive artist (he draws and paints) who wears his class resentment on his sleeve. Whereas Christian Bale evinces a pouty sense of privation and orphan abandonment, Jeremy Jordan is defiant. At the top of the show he announces,

These streets sucked the life outta my old man. Years of rotten jobs. Stomped on by bosses. When they finally broke him, they tossed him to the curb like yesterday's paper. Well, they ain't gonna do that to me!<sup>49</sup>

Fierstein also intensified the narrative's class drama by dropping Jack's budding love interest, Sarah, the barely middle-class, domestically inclined, and wan sister of his friend Davey, in favor of a young woman who is at once a working and society girl: Katherine Plumber. (Katherine, in fact, replaces both Sarah and the sympathetic journalist played in the film by Bill Pullman.) Katherine is a young reporter, trying desperately to prove that she can cover something more interesting than society news. Aside from giving the show a much-anticipated newsgirl (while keeping its teen-throb chorus intact), the addition of Katherine's character gave the show a much stronger, more politically charged romantic arc because Plumber is actually a (blue-collar) pseudonym—a cover for Katherine's real identity as the daughter of the newsboys' nemesis: Joseph Pulitzer. The meeting/mating of Jack Kelly and Katherine Pulitzer added a new frisson and proto-feminist intersection to the class drama, with Pulitzer Sr. working overtime to try to keep both Jack and his daughter in their proper places.

Virtually all the reviews took note of the musical's new populist spin, mostly (aside from Brantley) without irony. In his review of the Paper Mill production, David Rooney of the *New York Times* wrote:

In its call to arms, its refusal to back down to big business, its fight for basic human dignity and its skepticism toward politics, the show also has themes that resonate in our new depression. It's not Clifford Odets, but an

adorable pro-union, up-with-the-downtrodden musical seems worth singing about.<sup>50</sup>

Michael Sommers argued in his *Variety* review that the show's "strong pro-union message will thrill some as much as it irks others," attending to the potential divisiveness of the show's messaging in the wake of the Occupy Wall street movement and the national conversation about income inequality.<sup>51</sup> And in a spirited review, Cassie Tongue of *The Guardian* proclaimed the filmed version of the musical, "A Powerful and Surprising Call to Arms in the Age of Trump."

*Newsies* is a call to arms for the exploited and oppressed, urging grassroots action to organize and agitate for change... Fierstein's book is big-hearted and unabashedly political, a rallying cry from the working class writ large through Alan Menken's anthemic, urgent score, and galvanized by Jack Feldman's inspiring, angry and resolute lyrics about fists in the air and youth carrying the banner for freedom.<sup>52</sup>

As David Rooney wrote in his review of the Broadway production for *The Hollywood Reporter*, a "a rose-colored Occupy Wall Street fantasy," was "no small irony coming from the biggest corporate presence on Broadway."<sup>53</sup> And yet, assembling cultural materials in order to speak to and through them, to capitalize on them, and to unfold them *as part of the brand* is precisely what brand assemblages do. As the marketing scholar and guru Douglas Holt notes, gestures of social reconciliation are common to what he calls iconic brands. Holt argues that iconic brands identify and smooth over cultural conflicts, linking these conflicts to what he calls "identity myths." These identity myths are set inside distanced, imaginary, and often populist worlds "that stitch back together otherwise damaging tears in the cultural fabric of the nation."<sup>54</sup> This kind of suturing is of course not true repair. Rather, the seams point to the intersections between contradictory political expressions by identifying (and proximally fulfilling) the desire for social change. As Sarah Banet-Weiser notes, brands are "structured by ambivalence."<sup>55</sup> This ambivalence is itself productive, offering ways of recoding

political feeling through reiterative enfolding. Audiences are invited into a kind of complicity with the brand assemblage to explore social change within the framework of its larger, networked political assemblage (neoliberal capitalism). But as Banet-Weiser notes, branded political cultures are hedged so as not to actually threaten corporate interests.

Indeed, political feeling and the language of entitlement in *Newsies* are explicitly recoded as generational resentment. Labor rights are expressed as the sense that young people, as an identity group, are oppressed, that they deserve a fairer stake, that they are smarter and better equipped to handle the prevailing age. As one newsie says to another in response to kindly but ineffectual advice on the part of the Jewish deli owner, “Why do old people talk?” To which the other responds, “To proves they’s still alive.”<sup>56</sup> Even in its mostly politically heavy-handed song, “Once and For All,” in which the newsboys’ strike is aligned with the plight of working children and laborers everywhere, and the boys sing together, “This is for guys sweatin’ blood in the shops/ while the bosses and cops look away/ Armies of guys who are sick of the lies, g’tting’ ready to rise to the call,” the music and lyrics ultimately resolve in a single voice rising in a generational challenge: “There’s a change coming once and for all/ You’re getting too old, too weak to be holdin’ on/ A new world is gunning for you/ and Joe we is, too/ til’ once and for all you’re gone!”<sup>57</sup>

In this way, the production spoke most directly to millennials—the generation of kids who grew up with the film—politicizing their social position as a new generation of up-and-comers set against the rapacious corporations and corrupt government agents *not giving them their due*. In a change from the original, Fierstein’s version even goes so far as to define the second generation/heirs of the media giants as underdogs, trying to get out from under the thumb of their elders. When the boys need a press to

print their circular, Katherine gets them access to the one stored in her father's basement. The janitor gave her the keys, she tells the boys. "The janitor hasn't had a raise in twenty years," she says, "he's with us 500 percent." Then, "Just think," she muses, "while my father snores blissfully in his bed, we will be using his very own press to bring him down."<sup>58</sup> Her friends, Darcy and Bill, also show up to help the boys work the press. When Jack learns that Darcy is the heir to the Tribune, he looks at Bill and says, "And I suppose you're the son of William Randolph Hearst," to which Bill responds, "And proud to be part of your revolution!"<sup>59</sup> In *Newsies*, the revolution is complete when Jack's romance with Katherine and his acceptance of a white-collar job (as a political cartoonist) at the paper position him to fully shed the pretense of his "orphan" status to become the surrogate scion of Pulitzer (in the show Katherine is presented as Pulitzer's only child). In a twenty-first-century revision of the Broadway trope in which a small-town girl makes it in the big city and marries up,<sup>60</sup> the big city girl helps a poor, but media-savvy boy get a leg up into the 1 percent. (Their individual job promotions give the sense that they are, however, "equals" of a kind.)

Disney itself may be a giant media conglomerate with a track record of tight-fisted labor practices and negotiation tactics (including, even, on Broadway)<sup>61</sup> but the inclusion of labor/class anxiety or ambivalence speaks to the complicated domain of affect as its own kind of capital accumulation and force. What the show offers is what Lauren Berlant calls "ambient citizenship"—an immediate sense of "political binding" experienced as something "overheard, encountered indirectly and unsystematically, through a kind of communication more akin to gossip than to cultivated rationality."<sup>62</sup> This is a kind of *feeling* political, rather than a reasoned political position, a way of trading in labor politics for a feel-good narrative that argues that to really win you have to join 'em.



To be sure, branded politics are what Banet-Weiser calls “safe politics,” politics that “do not actually reimagine corporate power.”<sup>63</sup> She argues that these politics are generally connected to movements that have already made it into the mainstream (they are not anti-corporate or fringe movements). To some extent, political brand cultures themselves act as filters of concern, defining which politics become most visible. Banet-Weiser calls this a contrasting process, in which non-branded politics become decoded in favor of those adopted by brand networks. Within polarized political landscapes, defining “safe politics” and defining striated space is, however, not necessarily simple. Campaigns that thrive on controversy—like Nike’s ads featuring the African American quarterback and activist Colin Kaepernick<sup>64</sup>—point to the kinds of issues brands can encounter when they try to enfold contested political space. Disney tends to work carefully within these kinds of spaces, in part because an apolitical “family friendliness” is at the heart of the brand. Still, testing the boundaries of a brand assemblage is a way of building homogeneity *out of heterogeneity*, a way of consolidating brand identity. This is to say that establishing the boundaries of the assemblage is not just a way of assembling but of building culture. The meaning of the brand becomes structured by the kinds of conversations it can have with its constituents, in accordance with the kinds of social interactivity it can enfold. Within this culture not all constituents will of course assume the same meanings. Moreover, consumer ambivalence carries productive potential not only for the brand, but for consumers themselves, who can use brand politics as platforms for the construction of, as Banet-Weiser argues, a “politically virtuous self,” or as a way to participate in larger brand publics or social formations.

I do not to say that brand politics are forms of democratic participation, and yet brand politics and publics offer insight into the distribution of agency within brand assemblages, particularly within digitized networks today. Indeed, as we will see in the

following section, the story of audiences and *Newsies* goes beyond a story of what Jodi Dean calls “communicative capitalism”—of feedback loops or cultural exchange between consumers and companies. Digital networks, data caches, and technological platforms also play a role in structuring the interactivity between corporate producers and their audiences, in diffracting affective social relations, and delivering new forms of liveness and public engagement among consumers.

*Brand/Consumer Publics: On Fans(ies), Interactive Audiences, and media(ted) platforms.*

Without the internet, the theatrical version of *Newsies* would never have made it to production, let alone Broadway. The release of the 1992 film coincided with the beginnings of dial-up internet access; throughout the '90s, fans began to find each other online. There have, of course, always been fans: fan clubs, fan gatherings, fan conventions. But online communities, as Kristina Busse, Karen Hellekson, and Henry Jenkins have all noted, have moved increasingly beyond celebratory or affirmative fandom into *transformational* fandom. Early groups of *Newsies* fans built and gathered together in interactive community spaces that creatively explored and extended the lives of historical and imagined characters as a way of reflecting on their own. One site, created by Maria Hanton, built a set of virtual “orphan” lodging houses. Although the site started with characters in the film, the number of characters soon swelled to 637. Newsgirls were quickly added to the scene (they were also present in the time period). Virtual sites were based on actual neighborhoods and included a surprising degree of historical accuracy.<sup>65</sup> Participants researched available amenities and social practices found at the turn of the century, setting up theaters, libraries, markets, and even opium dens. They communicated with each other about *Newsies* and also, as these things go,

about their personal lives, going so far as to arrange an old-school fan meetup in New York at the statue of Horace Greeley that was featured in the film.

A robust fanfiction community also developed around *Newsies*. Although it is impossible to quantify with any accuracy, various sites like Archive of Our Own and Wattpad and [fanfiction.net](http://fanfiction.net) hosted thousands of prompt-fills and grabbles (100–500 word-long works), as well as longer fictional entries (some of them the length of novels). Kids wrote about the *Newsies* characters, often setting them in alternative universes (AUs). Most often, these AUs were simply contemporary settings—with titles like “21st century Newsies high school” or “Camp York” (named for a sleepaway camp).<sup>66</sup> In these spaces, kids and teens not only uploaded what they wrote, they collaborated on stories, emailing each other frequently, commenting on each other’s work and encouraging each other to continue writing. Building detailed characters from mere sketches in the film, audiences explored the film’s themes of labor and generational conflict, as well as more intimate questions of bullying, social isolation, anxieties about sexuality, and their futures. These forums became places for kids and teens to reflect on their own lives, through a consumer-based, Disneyfied vision of individual subjectivity and popular sentimentalism. As one writer for the online lodging house told the *Times*, “I’ve learned a great deal about not only myself as a person, but also how to really, truly write from the heart.”<sup>67</sup>

Functioning as what Lauren Berlant calls “intimate publics”—where “communication *feels* intimate” (emphasis mine) these virtual sites drew on the sentimental identification with, as Berlant notes, “stories of survival tactics and of what it has meant to survive or not.”<sup>68</sup> This is to say that the survival narratives of working-class kids were put to work to answer middle-class anxieties about identity and entitlements. As another member of the virtual lodging house noted, “The fight to find

food and keep clothes on your back, it's a very raw existence, and something about it just got to me. Like I have all these things, but what if I didn't?"<sup>69</sup> As Berlant has noted, sentimentalism is most often a female genre, often identified (derisively) as part of *women's culture*. Not surprisingly, the majority of "fansies" were middle-class, white teen girls—drawn by what blogger Sarah Marshall calls the film's "Playboy grotto" of teen boys, but also, more importantly, by its sentimentalism, its sense of injury / alienation, survival, and renewal. But the *Newsies*' fan base also cut across gender lines, and, furthermore, into queer publics. As Sarah Marshall notes, in her essay about *Newsies* fandom, the film inspired "a lot of gay erotica," female and male.<sup>70</sup> In its evocation of the life of boys living and working together, the film depicts a world of boys unafraid to take care of each other. Although it is impossible to quantify the number of writers, a search through the archives of fanfiction sites finds hundreds of "slash" stories—stories that feature boy / boy or girl / girl narratives—some of them quite tame and some of them flagged as openly bi-trans-transgressive.<sup>71</sup> These works attest to the ways in which fandom can be subversive—an explicit sexual queering of popular culture. To some extent this queering drew on the queerness of musical theatre as a genre,<sup>72</sup> to the phenomenon of boys singing and dancing together. But as Aaron C. Thomas notes, the relationship of the dancing male body in *Newsies* is only part of the story. Thomas argues that the dancing male body in *Newsies* articulated a "new masculinity" decoupled from sexuality, and that *Newsies* found ways to "expand the range of possibilities of acceptable gender performance for boys and girls."<sup>73</sup> Indeed, what's surprising about *Newsies* slash fiction is how fluid it is: these stories afforded opportunities for adolescents to try on and discard multiple identities. But perhaps because they were written predominantly by adolescents, even the most transgressive returned to a sense of longing for the restitution of the (orphaned / traumatized)

child/citizen to the protections of, at the very least, of the brand public itself. As Berlant argues,

in mass society, what counts as collectivity has been a loosely organized, market-structured, juxtapolitical sphere of people attached to each other by a sense that there is a common emotional world available to those individuals who have been marked by the historical burden of being harshly treated in a generic way and who have more than survived social negativity by making an aesthetic and spiritual scene that generates relief from the political.<sup>74</sup>

Although intimate publics are infused with affective, sentimental (juxtapolitical) feeling, they are also ultimately deterritorialized, depoliticized spaces. In *Newsies* fan sites, and particularly fanfiction, boys and girls who felt socially dispossessed found ways to connect through a kind of role play that articulated and at the same time relieved participants of their incipient *political* identities in favor of ones they could delimit inside their *Newsies*-inspired, historically inflected and bounded alternative universes.

These affects and the time in which they were experienced (adolescence, young adulthood) were then wrapped up *in the property itself*, which is how fan identities and performances could be tapped nearly twenty years later when Disney decided to reassemble *Newsies*. As soon as it was announced, the Paper Mill show sold out almost immediately. Fansies, as they were soon identified, traveled to see the show, encouraging others to do the same.<sup>75</sup> When David Rooney's positive review at the *New York Times* and the availability of a smaller Broadway house—The Nederlander—began to make a limited Broadway run look like a possibility, Disney marketing executives moved swiftly to gauge and build on interest generated by the fansies. DTP had only just hired a digital content manager, Greg V. Josken, who created Facebook and Twitter accounts—followers quickly hit the 100K mark. *Newsies* even trended on Twitter the day that the cast did their first live chat.<sup>76</sup> The production team created “bumpers,” which were memes attached to production images released on social media channels to

be circulated by the fans.<sup>77</sup> The marketing division also provided “backstage access” through a YouTube vlog managed by cast member Andrew Keenan-Bolger, who played the role of Crutchie. Keenan-Bolger was already a social media pro before he joined the cast of *Newsies*—he had already created a Twitter hashtag #SIP (Saturday Intermission Pics) in which actors in Broadway and Broadway touring shows posted pictures of backstage candid (and antics) between shows, a social media stunt that (as he had hoped) helped trend various shows online. Keenan-Bolger became the designated Social Media Captain for the show.<sup>78</sup> According to Ken Cerniglia, the show’s dramaturg, Keenan-Bolger’s vlog offered

a genuine look behind the scenes in a way no other Broadway production had before... Memes, GIFS, and tweets began to make the rounds online, growing the fansies to hundreds of thousands... Together, these tools allowed *Newsies* to become more than a musical, but a living breathing community that developed its own place in today’s culture.<sup>79</sup>

So crucial was this “community” to the life of the production that the studio effectively said, “let the fans tell us when they’ve had enough.”<sup>80</sup>

The show ran for two and a half years, recouping within nine months, faster than any other Disney Theatrical production, offsetting losses on two recent ventures, *The Little Mermaid* and *Tarzan*.<sup>81</sup> Disney could have continued running it, but the studio didn’t want to take away from the national tour,<sup>82</sup> which ran for an additional two years in sixty-five cities. Across the country, the Disney production was seen by over 2.7 million people. Regional shows began the summer of 2017, licensed through Music Theatre International—with packages that include directorial and choreographic notes as well as stage manager’s books and, even, virtual stage management software.<sup>83</sup> In September of 2016, the show was put back together with a cast of forty (rather than twenty-eight), including some of the original Broadway leads, and filmed at the Pantages Theatre in Los Angeles. The film was then given a three-day limited release in

movie theatres across the country. In an irony that could not have been lost on the producers, the film version of the Broadway musical earned \$3.7 million, out-earning the original film by over a million dollars in just three days. The film then became available for digital streaming on the 25th anniversary of the original film.<sup>84</sup>

On the day of the taping, before the curtain rose, Thomas Schumacher told the audience, “This show only exists because of what we affectionately call the *fansies*.” His pronouncement was followed by a “roar in the audience.”<sup>85</sup> In being recruited and accepting their positions as marketers for the show, fansies had performed their intimate/public identities as fans, but also their control of private and public media devices—of media itself. They were fansies who became newsies. Over time, media citizenship on the part of the audience became part of the story of the production—of its arrival on Broadway and of its triumph.<sup>86</sup> The fans themselves became a news phenomenon, a media headline, which, as the show itself proposes, is exactly how you know you have arrived. As the character Race says, on learning that the newsboy strike has made it to the front page (above the fold): “I’m Famous!... [W]hen you’re famous, the world is your oyster... When you’re famous, *you don’t need money*.”<sup>87</sup>

In this moment, *Newsies* tells a particular kind of brand story: that affiliation with a brand/media space can bring you into public life, into a space in which money effectively dematerializes as a currency, a place where no one needs money. To some extent, this calculation points to the fan-assemblage economy which has historically operated as part of what Karen Hellekson identifies as a gift economy—in which creative labor is intentionally designated as a labor of love and not for sale.<sup>88</sup> This economy is of course fraught. Disney is famously (indeed aggressively) protective of copyright infringement, but communities that have added to the Disney archive without challenging or contesting Disney’s ownership claims, have long functioned as

sites of consent (on both sides) where the surplus labor of fans circulates in a somewhat open-ended commercial/ not-commercial space.<sup>89</sup> And yet, digital production has shifted the terms of both production and consumption away from the kind of gift economy created by fan communities into a new attentional economy/ assemblage within which immaterial (and often free) labor operates quite differently.

In her article, “Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy,” Tiziana Terranova argues that we can no longer make a “fixed distinction between production and consumption, labor and culture,” and that the new digital economy is, rather, a “specific mechanism of internal ‘capture’ of larger pools of social and cultural knowledge.”<sup>90</sup> She speaks of the “outernet” and forms of cultural and technical labor that have previously had no classification as labor, of immaterial labor that is rewriting forms of sociality. She argues that there is no cause-and-effect to track; digital economies, she writes, “have developed in relation to the expansion of cultural industries and are part of a process of economic experimentation with the creation of monetary value out of knowledge/ culture/ affect.”<sup>91</sup> So much free/ surplus labor today—in chat rooms, texts, Instagram accounts—circulates within flows of monetized exchange. This kind of “captured” labor has extraordinary value for the brand. Private fan/ websites and social media channels function as listening platforms for the brand. If online conversations are sizable, they can help studios flag which properties have the best chance of appealing to audiences. Indeed, through the aughts, social media platforms became vehicles for the recirculation of *Newsies* songs, with individuals and groups broadcasting their own renditions of *Newsies* numbers on social media channels. As Thomas Schumacher noted, DTP “knew that the audience wanted *Newsies* to be performed [on stage] because if you went to YouTube [or] Facebook, people were endlessly performing numbers from the film.”<sup>92</sup>



But beyond the surveys, and scouting YouTube and other fan sites to seeing what's trending, the corporation (like all corporations today) profiles consumers through the near constant collection of analytics and meta-data.<sup>93</sup> Profiling goes beyond any specific show, well beyond the analysis of demographic (or even consumer) data, or even what is called sentiment and opinion analysis (which account for positive and negative consumer reactions), but to the analysis of what social trends or affects more generally drive consumer behavior. Like other brands, Disney uses a research platform called ForSight, built by Crimson Hexagon,<sup>94</sup> a data analytics firm that indexes what is called the API (application programming interface) or (colloquially) the "full firehose" of resellable data from all the major social media channels.<sup>95</sup> Through ForSight, Disney can track affective interests and personal commitments as they relate to their own properties and marketing campaigns against *all existing API streams*. In operation since 2010, Crimson Hexagon also has a historical data library of over 850 billion public posts (mostly through Twitter and Instagram)—which allows brands to track trends over time. Because they have hour-by-hour analysis, brands also have access to real-time feedback on any marketing campaigns and strategies to see whether (and how) they have gained traction.<sup>96</sup>

Data caches and live algorithms have not only made tracking and commoditizing of personal information (and identities) possible, but have become their own processes of gathering, which is to say territorializing, digital space and social life. As John Law argues, these kinds of assemblages have increasingly come to organize social life.<sup>97</sup> Personalized filters on platforms like Facebook, together with the use of bots (both legal and illegal), have created a new Latourian "parliament of things,"<sup>98</sup> human and non-human, fueling content restriction and digital containment, to say nothing of targeted disinformation campaigns. These issues are of course beyond the scope of this study.

My hope here is only to point to the ways in which the platforms themselves have become part of the liveness of brands, indeed part of the “personalized” liveliness with which they “converse” with consumers—both with and without consent. Disney of course is not Facebook with its own dedicated news feeds, and yet when the company launches Disney+ -- its own “organic” streaming platform -- (breaking with other platforms like Netflix), consumers will be living in the equivalent of a digital gated community—this is especially true for children since the “adult” content will be funneled, at least initially, through Hulu.<sup>99</sup>

Given the use of the digital platforms and networks in political contexts like election interference, it’s easy to see these intersecting networks as absurdly, overwhelmingly powerful.<sup>100</sup> And yet, while international regulation and oversight are more than overdue, it’s also important to recognize, as Marres and Gerlitz argue, that metadata caches and “issues mapping” lend themselves to “specific forms of analysis”<sup>101</sup>—and that all acts of territorialization are also acts of deterritorialization, with each cache linked to other data sources and to multiple forms of social relations and interactions. For brands, as Henry Jenkins argues, digital publics are increasingly characterized by *decreased brand performativity*. Brand strategists differentiate between what they call brand communities and brand *publics*—publics are “pseudo-public spaces” that are mediated by a media device (eg. a media property, a show) in which “multiple perspectives” are shared and the “primary driver is publicity.”<sup>102</sup>

Fans are part of brand communities, but a participant in a brand public who promotes/tweets or retweets a given media device/show is *performing a public self* rather than interacting with a community. Attachments to brand publics are, as a consequence, transient: they tend to ebb and flow as other trends take over. Overall, participants in publics tend to have what Jenkins identifies as “declining loyalty to

networks or media.”<sup>103</sup> As Adam Arvidsson argues, “the autonomous nature” of what is effectively “a collective production process” in which “consumers create symbolic and affective wealth around brands...causes legitimacy problems” related to copyright. “The more consumers are encouraged to make brands enter their lives,” he writes, “the more difficult it is to legitimize the exclusive property over the branded context of action that trade mark law seeks to protect.”<sup>104</sup> Younger consumers in particular understand that they are part of creating the brand itself. They see corporations as accountable to the public, often more so than government. Under threat of boycott or bad publicity, brands can be persuaded to stop selling or stop endorsing products (or people). They can also be pressured to acknowledge or even promote social movements. As the #MeToo movement began trending, Disney, which takes its corporate responsiveness profile as a point of pride/sale, moved quickly and preemptively to put John Lasseter, the high-profile head of Pixar and consumer products, on immediate leave for his reputation of being “too huggy.”<sup>105</sup>

The concept of political freedom (individual and group) within brand assemblages is of course extremely unstable. In the end, participants in brand publics today are not unlike the historical newsboys. One of the most popular songs in Newsies is called “Carrying The Banner” (referenced in Cassie Tongue’s *Guardian* review, as “carrying the banner for freedom”). *The Banner* is the name of the newspaper the newsboys write themselves. It’s part of a free press in the sense that it’s not controlled by anyone but the boys, although the paper depends on their free labor, both to produce and distribute it. The publicity from the (free) paper earns them only what they want in the immediate—the leverage to negotiate with the bosses—but not what they actually *need*, which is protection from exploitation (unpaid labor) or the right *not* to

work or the right to leisure uncoupled from consumption practices defined by capitalist interests.

And yet, it's worth remembering that in addition to their work distributing the news, the historical newsboys found ways to diffract the powers that constrained them. They were, in fact, avid theatergoers and, more importantly, theatre producers.<sup>106</sup> In 1874, the newsboy-run Grand Duke Theatre at Five Points ran into, of all things, a licensing issue with The Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents. Granshaw argues that the licensing suit, *which the newsboys won*, highlighted the ways in which working-class children used the theatre to mediate and repatriate images about working-class life; they created shows that reflected their own values, particularly that of community support (rather than narratives focused on individuals).<sup>107</sup> They were often inspired by the popular theatre of the day. They riffed on routines, pulping cultural references. They even raised money to support, among others, professional performers and their families.<sup>108</sup> As Granshaw notes they adapted the middle-class theatrical conventions of the day in order to articulate and enact their own alternative communities and realities. This is simply to say that theatrical assemblages are constantly in the process of being de- and reterritorialized and that theatrical production *as an assemblage* is itself a constant, emergent process of reiterative enfolding: the circulatory references produced by the historical newsboys are part of *Newsies*, just as *Newsies* will become part of the circulatory networks that belong not only to Disney but no doubt to other interactive and alternative networks.

### *Reassembling Aladdin(s)*

If the film version of *Newsies* was the year's misfire for Disney, *Aladdin* was its runaway hit. The tale of an orphan "street rat" who falls for the Sultan's daughter and, with a

little help from his friends (and some spectacular enchantments), wins her heart and her father's throne, *Aladdin* was the highest-grossing film of 1992, with a worldwide box office take of \$500 million.<sup>109</sup> Featuring high-tech computer animation wizardry,<sup>110</sup> and a high-profile (and high-octane) performance by Robin Williams in the shape-shifting role of Genie,<sup>111</sup> *Aladdin* helped define what would eventually become known as the era of the Disney Renaissance in animation—a ten-year period (from 1989–1999)<sup>112</sup> of aesthetic innovation and commercial success.

This period was also characterized by a new investment in diversified storytelling. *Aladdin* was in fact the first Disney animated film in 25 years, since the release of *The Jungle Book* in 1967, to feature a nonwhite setting and characters, and the film marked the beginning of a spate of films (*Pocahontas*, *Mulan*, *The Princess and the Frog*, *Tarzan*) invested in diversifying the kinds of stories Disney told. “Diversity,” as Shalini Shankar notes, is a “corporate-friendly,”<sup>113</sup> rather “cheerful term that acknowledges difference but none of the inequalities that underpin it.”<sup>114</sup> Diversity for brands is about brand identification and extension: brands index and, as Shankar argues, *produce* ethnoracial assemblages in order to speak to existing consumers and to open new markets. Diversity is, however, not synonymous with inclusion. This is to say that brand diversity is often unrelated to political culture—a politics, for instance, of anti-racism. Indeed, set in fictional Agrabah, *Aladdin* had very little to do with accurate (or fair) representation of the Arab region or with an address to potential Arab markets. In fact, its representations were so nakedly racist that it was the one “diverse” Disney Renaissance film to be welcomed by a genuine furor of protest.

Released in the wake of the first Gulf war, a war that was itself televised and broadcast as a media event from its very inception, *Aladdin* almost immediately raised the ire of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. A controversy quickly

erupted over the film's anti-Arab messaging and its roster of what film scholar Jack Shaheen calls "reel bad Arabs": scimitar-wielding palace "guards," menacing cops with big noses, and a terrifying villain in Jafar, named early in the film as a "dark man with a dark purpose."<sup>115</sup> The film was also populated by stock comic characters straight from a "Hollywood Eastern"<sup>116</sup> playbook: pushy merchants, goofy entertainers, snake charmers, and a stockpile of royal female attendants dressed as harem dancers. Before the film opened, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee wrote to Corporate Communications to complain that the film traded in racist stereotypes. Beyond the caricatures, the ADC contended that the lead characters' features were Anglicized, while the bad or undifferentiated (crowd) characters were overtly racialized. Even Roger Ebert was prompted to say:

Most of the Arab characters have exaggerated facial characteristics - hooked noses, glowering brows, thick lips - but Aladdin and the princess look like white American teenagers. Wouldn't it be reasonable that if all the characters in this movie come from the same genetic stock, they should resemble one another?<sup>117</sup>

The question of vocal performance also came into question. Although all the voice actors were white Americans, the two young leads, Aladdin and Jasmine, sounded like young, white American teenagers, while the "bad" characters were assigned "foreign" accents that ranged from British to what can only be described as vaguely Arab.

The PR swirl surrounding the film was sizable enough to push Disney to make a tiny concession, on one front. For the home video release, they excised two overtly racist lines from the opening song, which begins:

Oh, I come from a land  
From a faraway place  
Where the caravan camels roam  
Where they cut off your ear  
If they don't like your face  
It's barbaric, but hey, it's home.<sup>118</sup>

The two lines referring to mutilation were replaced with “where the sands are immense / and the heat is intense.”<sup>119</sup> Disney kept “It’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home.” A *NY Times* editorial countered with an article entitled, “*It’s Racist, but hey, it’s Disney.*” “To characterize an entire region with this sort of tongue-in-cheek bigotry,” the editorial argued, “especially in a movie aimed at children, borders on the barbaric.”<sup>120</sup> Indeed, the substituted lyrics were little more than an obligatory PR band-aid, in which a single racist event within the film (a set of lyrics) were metonymically substituted for the film’s overall racism.

At the time, Arab Americans were not enough of a national (or international) target market to warrant deeper concern. It was also easy enough to dismiss the film’s representations as mere entertainment—a cartoon at that—a sentiment echoed in the *Times*’ (ironic) “but hey, it’s Disney.” But more importantly, *Aladdin* was based on a long history of performed stereotypes and caricature, of trade Orientalisms that were themselves components of a larger Orientalist assemblage. Spinning its yarn out of two tales from Antoine Galland’s *Arabian Nights* (*Aladdin* and *Ali Baba*), two *Thief of Bag(h)dad* movies, and a series of Bob Hope and Bing Crosby buddy movies, the film referenced the global (re)circulation of *Aladdin* as performance commodity and *cultural process*, around which questions of not only race but ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and national identity continue to coalesce.

Indeed, the controversy did little to blight the film’s success, which the studio spun into new iterations. A made-for-TV animated *Aladdin* series was put in the pipeline, as was a sequel. The parks added flying carpet rides. In 2003, a theatrical Broadway-style show was put in at Disneyland’s sister park, California Adventure, in a

dedicated 2000-seat theater. Billed a “musical spectacular,” the show was a first for in-park entertainment. At forty-four minutes, *Aladdin: The Musical Spectacular* was twice as long as any theatrical show the parks had produced (other than dinner theatre shows). DTP brought in the noted opera director, Francesca Zambello, to direct. Chad Beguelin whittled the film script into a condensed and largely faithful, if somewhat more theatre-friendly version. Lead actors were hired out of New York, to give the show an “authentic” Broadway sound. The production team hired standup comedians for the part of Genie, who would often improvise jokes that would reference cultural events or celebrity gossip (eg. Brittany Spears or Taylor Swift jokes) or a specific audience (eg. a dentists’ convention), giving the show a gloss of being *au courant* if not exactly fresh.<sup>121</sup> Even against the backdrop of the post-9/11 wars,<sup>122</sup> the show was extremely popular, running for thirteen years, for a total of almost 15,000 performances. After the park show was shuttered, Disney extended its run by transferring and reassembling elements to the Cruise Lines, which also have 2000-seat theaters. *Aladdin Jr.* and *AladdinKIDS* scripts—for middle and elementary schoolers respectively—went into licensing. In 2005, after years of fielding requests from high schools and regional theaters across the country for a full-length theatrical version that could be licensed, DTP went back to Chad Beguelin, as well as to Alan Menken, who had written the original score, to create the musical that, by way of a regional production in Seattle and an out-of-town tryout in Toronto, eventually landed on Broadway, opening at the New Amsterdam, on March 20, 2014.

In this section, I explore the (re)circulation and operation of ethnoracial assemblages within *Aladdin: The Musical*. My reading is limited to the Broadway production, although I address shifts in the production from Toronto to New York. I also reference changes within the Broadway production itself (mostly in casting) from



2014–2018. Although, as in all assemblage readings, I start very much in the middle of representations, I begin with the context of Orientalist spectacle in US consumer culture in order to highlight the ways in which the production translates and updates cosmopolitan longing, particularly through new forms of technological/commodity spectacle. I then turn to the ways in which the production harnesses Orientalist desire to represent and affectively express new forms of (consumer) embodiment, including female/feminist, queer, and bromantic embodiments. The final third considers the explicit evocation of race, highlighting the ways in which racial and ethnic representation are used within the brand assemblage not only to index difference but to work through labor and consumer demands within a racialized capitalist landscape. This section also explores the ways in which stage “Orientals” function as a kind of contrasting device, naturalizing non-Oriental others through the performative absenting or “othering” “Orientals.”

In Edward Said’s seminal work, *Orientalism*, he argues that Orientalist knowledge systems were imbricated in imperial projects/power, notably over and against the Islamic world.<sup>123</sup> In a Saidian mode, Alan Nadel writes that set in the context of US policy in the Middle East post-WWII, particularly in relationship to conflicts with Iran and Iraq, *Aladdin* dramatizes anxieties about the shifting global order, perhaps most deeply about the possibility of a nuclear-armed Muslim Middle-East. He notes that beyond the stereotypes of Arab duplicity, the film’s representation of the princess Jasmine as repressed by Islamic law and culture offered a pretext for neoliberal Westernization, indeed occupation, and the control of the “nuclear” Genie.<sup>124</sup> The Orientalizing effects in the film perform a kind of choreography of containment—reconciling both desires and anxieties—a familiar dance of Islamophilia/Islamophobia. I do not dispute Nadel’s argument, although I have doubts about the film’s intervention

in geo-political contexts that justified the war. To my mind, the film's preoccupations are much more domestically inflected, which is to say related to domestic politics but also to domestic markets, to the middle-class American home. After all, *Aladdin* is part of a genealogical assemblage of *Arabian Nights* costumers<sup>125</sup>—of which it is now the best known—whose Orientalist designs have long been an unveiled attempt to sell merchandise. This is not to say that these designs are not informed by configurations, as Said puts it, of knowledge and power, or perhaps more accurately knowledge *as* power. It's more a question of the kind of configurations at play, which, I think, are more variously informed than a straight reading of film-as-occupation. In *Aladdin: The Musical*, Orientalist desire is capacious and emergent: a desire for commodities, for spectacle, for leisure (or relief from the work of leisure), for (colonial) power (or relief from the sphere of power), for the exotic, for the mysterious, for sexual transgression or renewed gender identities, and perhaps above all for *theatricality*—the sumptuous costume, the Maharajah's parade through quaint streets, the fortune teller's crystal ball, the souk merchant's banter, the dances of the harem girl/belly dancer, the snake charmer's spells, the performative Genie embedded in the enchanted lamp.

In her book *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790–1935*, historian Susan Nance chronicles what she calls the longstanding “American love affair with the *Arabian Nights*” and the ways in which stories from the *Nights* were part of a global creative and performative practice. Arguing that the *Nights* provided a stage on which Americans could “play Eastern”—first in print media, then as tourists, and finally as consumers of goods for the home and body—Nance affirms that the circulation, interpolation, and performance of *Arabian Nights* stories helped to advance and endorse the individuated “commodity self,” one that was consonant with capitalist

promises of “contented and abundant consumption” and self-expression, even self-realization.<sup>126</sup>

From the turn of the century, even as US immigration policy excluded Asian Americans from entering the country, Americans consumed all manner of “Oriental” items and experiences. Historian William Leach notes that the *Nights* functioned as one of the first synergistic consumer platforms for American department stores, commercial theaters, and early advertisers. From women’s cozy corners replete with ottomans and Persian rugs, to costume balls, where the ultra-rich dressed as rajahs or harem dancers, to department store displays and fashion shows, to commercial theatre productions and films, “American business purveyed the orientalist message,” he writes, to create a “new national dream life for men and women.”<sup>127</sup> This new national dream, set against the backdrop of American thrift, industry, and puritanism, introduced a compensatory narrative to smooth anxieties about hedonism, luxury, leisure, and the allure of spectacle.

In 1911, roughly a hundred years before Disney brought *Aladdin* to Broadway, a stage version of Robert Hitchens’ novel *The Garden of Allah* opened, complete with a sandstorm (that engulfed part of the audience), animals, and pageantry. During the show’s run, actors from the Broadway production were dispatched to Wanamakers department store to walk the floors in their turbans and robes, marking the space as one suggestive not only of consumer desire and unlimited goods, but a new kind of theatricalized consumer embodiment, one that affiliated the shopper with both a new kind of Aladdin-like man—rugged, adventure-seeking, and athletic—and a new kind of Jasmine-like woman—sensual, self-determined, and even spiritual.

Of course, *Aladdin* had itself long been source material for theatrical entertainments, particularly in England. As Marina Warner notes in *Stranger Magic*, “the story of *Aladdin* on stage outstrips even its near rivals in popularity. *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* runs closest, with *Mother Goose*, next.”<sup>128</sup> She notes that the popularity of *Aladdin* meant that “the story became the handle to almost any amalgam of orientalisng showmanship.”<sup>129</sup> Warner attributes the story’s popularity as dramatic fare to its “opportunity for spectacle on a lavish scale—transformation scenes, trapdoor appearances and disappearances, flying, explosions, vanishings in puffs of smoke.”<sup>130</sup> To some extent, the point of the Oriental mode or genre in the theatre was the spectacle itself—the fun, then, as now, of the pyrotechnics, the optical tricks, and in particular, the flying.

In *Aladdin: The Musical*, this stage tradition of spectacularity is woven together with the American Orientalist consumer narrative of individual expression and renewed embodiment through cosmopolitan purchase and domestication. This de- and reterritorialization is perhaps best illustrated in the Broadway production’s most technically spectacular effect, its coup de théâtre: the flying carpet. In the film, the carpet was an animated and anthropomorphized object with a rather coy, charming personality, enhanced by CAPS technology. The magic carpet (also known as just “Carpet”) was above all an aid to Aladdin, a kind of demure Oriental servant with magical properties. But because Carpet could fly, it had the power, too, to transform its users—showing them, as made explicit in the song Aladdin and Jasmine sing together during their carpet ride through the skies, “A Whole New World.” In the California Adventure production, Aladdin and Jasmine sat on a carpet rigged with visible cables; stage fog rolled in beneath them, while miniaturized iconic symbols of foreign travel (the Eiffel Tower, The Forbidden City palace) drifted past. (In Seattle, the carpet was

even less spectacular. It was, according to director Casey Nicholaw, little more than “a mattress on a stick.”<sup>131</sup>) On Broadway, the carpet ride is the production’s spectacular showpiece. It’s what a *Toronto Star* critic called the show’s “big money moment.”<sup>132</sup> Indeed, the carpet really appears, quite magically, without any rigging at all, to fly, if at very low speed. A cross between a carpet-like platform, an immersive ride, and an illusionist’s trick, the flying carpet moment is pure Disney, as is its safely guarded NDA-protected technical wizardry. (The only public disclosure of how the carpet works is that it was imagineered by Jim Steinmeyer, Disney’s theatrical illusion designer and produced by a company in Pennsylvania, TAIT Towers, that produces stage effects for rock concerts.<sup>133</sup>)

The carpet ride synecdochally references the show itself—an “Oriental” commodity good, both a spectacular leisure good and transformative object, offers animated mobility and a panoptic view of the world “out there.” As Warner argues, the carpet has the ability to “define a space,” often for “a higher purpose” and can also “transform something that is outside into something domestic.”<sup>134</sup> In other words, you can lay down a carpet anywhere and be at prayer, or perhaps more conveniently, just at home. What Disney’s technological magic carpet accomplishes, as the two leads rise above the audience, suspended against a black backdrop full of twinkly stars, is to give both exotic/magical *and* domestic status to the outside world—navigating not only its principal characters but its audience through a “whole new world” without ever leaving the comfort(s) of Disney/The New Amsterdam. “Don’t you dare close your eyes,” sings Aladdin, acknowledging Jasmine’s anxiety about the world “outside her palace walls.” As he takes her on a high-flying carpet tour of the world’s great destinations, she looks out in wonder. There are, she sings, “a hundred thousand things to see”—the world is a virtually infinite set of goods. This outlook gives her a new

perspective on her own identity. “I’m like a shooting star,” she sings, “I’ve come so far/I can’t go back to where I used to be.”<sup>135</sup> And yet, of course, the carpet brings them home, safely, essentially unchanged, although Jasmine has become more open to Aladdin’s romantic interest, and, as a consequence, more committed to her right for individual choice (defined as her right to choose the husband who will take her father’s place as her guardian and political ruler).

This push-pull of the spectacular Oriental rug, which domesticates even as it indexes cosmopolitan longing, speaks to the ways in which exotic Oriental commodities are experienced bodily and as a kind of affective suturing. They are technologies of renewed embodiment and feeling (including love) and, even, of cosmopolitan identity and membership. This is particularly true of Jasmine herself—who is represented at once as a trapped bird in a gilded Islamist cage and a passionate, sexually liberated New Woman. The New Woman is of course related to old Orientalist tropes. From the 1910s and ’20s, the Orientalist mode, especially, as Gaylyn Studlar notes, “orientalism infused aesthetic dancing,”<sup>136</sup> played into male fantasies but also especially targeted female consumers. As Studlar, Sumiko Higashi, and Mari Yoshihara<sup>137</sup> have all argued, through the twentieth century, Orientalist iconography and choreography were spectacular and performative opportunities for women to consume “a textual economy of libidinal excess”<sup>138</sup> that delivered a sense of social freedom. In Courtney Reed’s twenty-first-century performance of Jasmine, Orientalist excess (displayed in the sumptuousness of her clothing, particularly her sexualized belly dancer look), is a marker for twenty-first-century feminist freedom where sexually provocative clothing reads a feminist empowerment. This Arabian-inflected freedom is still markedly less free than the one telegraphed just a few blocks away in Disney’s “Norwegian” / white feminist anthem, *Frozen*, in which the princess Elsa rules on her own (and without a

male love interest) and, in a first for Disney princesses, finally gets to wear Western style pants.<sup>139</sup>

Questions of Orientalist display and female sexuality / empowerment are in fact far less nuanced and complicated in *Aladdin* than investigations of male sexual embodiment. Both Sean Griffin and Joseph Boone have written about Orientalist homoerotics in *Aladdin*, which they both ascribe to the openly gay writer and lyricist, Howard Ashman.<sup>140</sup> Ashman was a huge figure at Disney. He was crucial to the success of *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast*—for which he managed to complete work just before he died of AIDS in 1991. *Aladdin* was, in fact, Ashman's brain child. He had played the character of Aladdin in a high school production and it had stayed with him. In 1984, he submitted a treatment to Disney, one that Katzenberg turned down for, among other reasons, being "too Arab." Ashman's original treatment featured a much younger Aladdin—fifteen years old—with a group of hard-scrabble friends and (as in Galland's *Arabian Nights*) not one but two genies (a genie of the ring and a genie of the lamp) who appear magically, delivering untold riches, access to the Caliph's daughter, and a passport to the wider world. Ashman undercut the fairy tale (and its received exoticism) in a number of ways: Aladdin's down and out mother is a crank, the princess is irredeemably vain and spoiled, and Aladdin realizes that his heart, anyway, is with Abby, the tomboy who is part of his crew. The treatment is shot through with an ironic and somewhat daffy humor, reminiscent of Ashman's work in *Little Shop of Horrors*. Ashman was also directly inspired by the Bing Crosby and Bob Hope (and Dorothy Lamour) *Road To...* comedies of the 1940s. A set of seven comedies, these films were bromance travel / adventure narratives (all shot on Hollywood backlots) in which Crosby and Hope would find themselves in a series of sticky situations and work their way out of them. Along the way, they would get in some gags, sing, dance a little, and

compete for the attention of a deadpan Dorothy Lamour, who was equal parts vixen and straightman. Ashman's treatment conjures *Road to Morocco* (1942), not simply because of its setting, but because of its tone—*Road to Morocco* is very much a spoof of the immensely popular *Arabian Nights*-inspired films of the '20s and '30s—and also because of its bromantic mode, in which the getting the girl is really all about being, finally, (with) one of the boys.

Griffin and Boone argue that the *Arabian Nights* stories had special significance in gay culture, derived in part from Richard Burton's translation. This interest was especially evident in the '60s—in Jack Smith's performance art work and also Pier Pasolini's film. Griffin argues that, like Jack Smith, of whom Ashman was aware, Ashman was particularly interested in queering and camping the stories. Although the Disney film ultimately moved away from Ashman's treatment to a more conventional, heteronormative romantic adventure, there are elements of a gay sensibility throughout the film. Robin Williams's genie is of course masterfully queer: he's a whirlwind of transformational identities, some of them quite explicitly gay (like his gay tailor). There is also the shirtless Aladdin as a gay camp figure—something the Broadway production plays up on more than one occasion. (At one point, Genie pointedly sasses Aladdin as “Mr. I-wear-a-vest-with-no-shirt.”) And then there is the figure of Jafar played by Jonathan Freedman (who is also in the Broadway production). Andreas Deja, an openly gay animator, who was the lead animator for Jafar, has said that he thought of Jafar as a gay man for both his “theatricality” and “elegance.”<sup>141</sup> (Deja's point of view also helps explain why he styled his villain somewhat after Nancy Reagan).<sup>142</sup>

As Akash Nikolas wrote in a 2014 article in *The Atlantic*, most Disney movies are in some way pro-gay.<sup>143</sup> They are based on “impossible loves” (a mermaid for a human, the love of a girl by a “beast,” a poor orphan for a rich girl/ princess) and often feature



gender-non-conforming characters (who are almost always going up against their out-of-date fathers). Nikolas writes, “queer kids can uniquely identify with Disney protagonists, who are usually outcasts set apart from society by some innate desire.”<sup>144</sup> For Ashman, *Aladdin* was a story about a boy coming into self-acceptance after trying to dissemble being someone he is not. Beyond Ashman, many of *Aladdin*’s production team members were also openly gay, including DTP president Thomas Schumacher, who shepherded the property through its Broadway incarnation, as well as the production’s director-choreographer Casey Nicholaw, and writer Chad Beguelin who told *Out Magazine* that the show was, for him, about “accepting your truth and being free.”<sup>145</sup> For gay audiences, this subtext, in which a young man feels constrained in his current identity and wishes for a “whole new world,” is registered against an Orientalist backdrop in which homoerotic desire becomes both legible and permissible.

When Schumacher, Nicholaw, Beguelin, and Menken began work on the show as a full-length regional/Broadway production, they returned to Ashman’s treatment and story notes, restoring many of Ashman’s decisions and attitudes. *Aladdin*’s pals were restored, making them a gang of four. The princess was once again vain, entitled, and bratty, shifting the balance towards the show’s three bromances: *Aladdin* and his crew, *Aladdin* and Genie, and, for good measure, their blockers: Jafar and Iago. The Broadway production is often unabashed in its queer/camp sensibilities, from the script to the choreography, to even the musical arrangements. Many critics have of course commented on the relationship of gay artists and audiences to musical theatre<sup>146</sup>—a relationship that has historically been, though vibrant, often closeted. And yet, from a brand perspective, it’s interesting to note that while *Newsies* was scripted by gay icon Harvey Fierstein, there is hardly a breath of camp in the show.<sup>147</sup> Of course, *Newsies* features young, sincere men in a historical New York setting. But this is exactly my

point, the Orientalism of *Aladdin*, as a “handle” (as Warner puts it) for “orientalising showmanship,” is what opens a contemporary space for Disney to nod, even explicitly, to homoerotic consumption and theatricality. Indeed, it isn’t just the women in the chorus who are dressed as exotic dancers, the men are also explicitly on display. Like *Aladdin*, they are varying shades of dark and handsome, often shirtless or even bare-chested. Some of the men even look oiled. As the male dancers swing downstage in the opening number, Genie comments, coyly, “Even our poor people look fa-a-bulous! And everybody has a minor in dance!”<sup>148</sup> In a somewhat racy gesture (and a first for the corporation), their bare skin is actual skin, proving that Orientalism is an exotic enough of a cloak to sell sex, even a little gay sex (certainly the two million Swarovski crystals sewn into the costumes also help<sup>149</sup>).

Even though they are comic relief, *Aladdin*’s buddies—Omar, Babkak, and Kassim—represent a bromantic mode in which it’s clear that it’s really the guys who will go the distance for each other. Despite their Arab sounding names, the trio are clearly a bunch of American dudes. Indeed, their Middle Eastern setting functions only as a setup for a series of jokes, particularly a (terrible) running joke featuring puns on Middle Eastern foods. For example:

Omar: Every time I pick a pocket, I feel awful.

Babkak: Falafel? Did somebody say Falafel?

Or,

Kassim: I’m sorry we don’t know any [funeral marches]. Perhaps you could hum us a few bars?

Babkak: Hummus? Did someone say hummus?<sup>150</sup>

Their dismissive humor is reminiscent of the Crosby and Hope movies, the Orientalist bromances in which the Oriental setting often functions as a punchline, a site of exclusion, a way of binding the men together against ridiculous and inferior others.

Of course, the camp (and racist) humor is also a way of disavowing and at the same time marking the homoerotics of the bromance. Perhaps the funniest of their songs is called “High Adventure,” a comedic riff on swashbuckling three musketeer movies, written by Ashman and Menken for the original treatment. Setting off to rescue Aladdin (who has been trapped in a dungeon by Jafar), the song simultaneously undercuts and celebrates hypermasculine stereotypes. Omar is something of a cowardly lion, a set up for the other two in the trio. “Who’s up for a little high adventure?” Kassim says. “Okay, first things first we’re going to need weapons.” “Weapons?” Omar squeaks, “Couldn’t we just send a strongly worded letter?” “Seriously?” Babkak quips. In a line with an unmistakably suggestive undertone, both Kassim and Babkak urge Omar (singing) to, “Pick up that sword and strap it on.” Omar begins with a spoken rebuttal, “See, I hate weapons because,” and then cuts himself off, brandishing his sword-as-phallus with an orgiastic “THIS IS aw—e-some!” Together they sing in high camp style:

There’s high adventure in the air, guys  
Someone’s out there, guys, someone bad  
He’s got a damsel in despair, guys  
Heck, that’s not fair, guys, and I’m mad<sup>151</sup>

The song is, above all, defiantly silly. Not only in its lyrics but also in its choreography. After the stanza quoted above, the three guys “run” in place, in slow motion, while a chorus member walks by in real time. This is accompanied by the repeated question, “Are we there yet?” and its meta-theatrical punchline: “WE’RE NOT MOVING.” And although the men all handle their sword fighting with aplomb, there are plenty of jokes about near-misses of vulnerable body parts. The musical orchestration also adds to the zaniness: triangles, bells, trills, a Mariachi band flourish, an Arabic flute ostinato. The sheer self-consciousness of the music is surpassed only by the self-consciousness of the

song itself: “They’re playing music while we’re fighting!” the men sing. In the song’s recurrent gag line, “high, high high adventure,” the word *high* is sung in rising thirds, with Babkak’s tenor belting a high A flat. It’s a performative feat of singing that is equal parts triumphant and giddy, with the three men both performing and deconstructing constructions of Western hyper-masculinity in a kind of musical-comedy gag-induced high.

Part of the Orientalist gesture here is to once again naturalize camp, even explicitly gay performance. This is not to say that homo-erotic Orientalisms are in some way free of homophobic or racial prejudice. As Griffin notes, the production trades on stereotypes, although he fails to acknowledge the show’s most literal (and egregious) Orientalist depiction. As Adrienne L. McLean notes, the Orientalist fantasy of a feminized East is by nature “racist *and* homophobic,”<sup>152</sup> particularly in its construction of the Orientalist sexuality as in some way corrupt or degenerate. In the Broadway production there’s an explicit, homo-erotic charge between the unctuous Jafar and his sidekick Iago. This charge has a seamy Orientalist underside, not only because Iago is has been transformed from a wise-cracking parrot (as played by Gilbert Gottfried in the film) into an Asian man (played in the original cast by the Filipino actor, Don Darryl Rivera), but also because Rivera’s Iago is so servile: so slavishly adoring and enabling of Jafar. He is also dressed in a look that can only be described as half-geisha and half-harem boy. It’s a creepy performance sustained only through relentless amped-up goofiness and obsessive refrains of wannabe-bad-guy maniacal laughter.

The bromance that most defines the show, between Aladdin and Genie, is, however, not the same kind of meta-camp affair. To be sure, there are fun, gay inflections in the relationship. At one point, Genie asks Aladdin to hold his leg while he stretches and then says, “Okay, you better let go before this gets weird,” and Aladdin

responds, “Too late for that.”<sup>153</sup> But the Orientalist buddy relationship between the two men also draws on ethnoracial anxieties, anxieties that highlight the Orient/Orientalism as a kind of triangulating device within black/white representation.

The decision to cast Genie as African American for the Seattle/Toronto/Broadway production drew on Ashman’s original conception of the character as a Cab Calloway/Fats Waller type—a Cotton Club singer. (To be sure, the reinscription of a racialized Genie also helped distance the character from Robin Williams’s shape-shifting performance.) As Anne Duggan notes, the notion of a racialized genie was common to visual representations in Europe from the beginning of the colonial period, when images of North African and Arab peoples were increasingly circulated in colonial expositions and on consumer products.<sup>154</sup> In America, these images were also commonplace by the 1920s, and for many years Rex Ingram’s genie in Alexander Korda’s *Thief of Bagdad* (1940), a figure with which Ashman was surely familiar, was the popular culture reference for all things genie.

Once the ethnographic and racial alterity of the Genie was re-inscribed into the Broadway show as African American, this move was then transferred to other characters, including the Sultan. In the film, the Sultan is pale, small, round, and childlike—he is diminished in many ways, but for the theatrical production, Nicholaw cast Clifton Davis as a rather elegant, if essentially ineffectual, dad-figure. Supporting characters (like Jasmine’s attendants) and chorus members were then also cast as African Americans. The casting of African Americans on Broadway helps both to racially naturalize African Americans—as familiar—but also to domesticate the show itself as deeply American.

It’s important, if obvious, to note that the production negotiates black racialization quite specifically: the chorus members are servants and eroticized eye

candy, the Sultan is foolishly under the spell of his vizier and Islamic law (a gesture that seems to represent African American Islamism as a kind of stupefied, hypnotizing “spell” wrought by evil an mastermind), and Genie, for all his extraordinary power, is still quite literally a slave, something the production does not attempt to repress. For the central fact of Genie’s life *is* that for all his power, he is profoundly unfree. As Genie says of his predicament, “phenomenal cosmic power, itty bitty living space.”<sup>155</sup> His blue costume quotes both the movie’s Genie and the embroidery of livery lace. Indeed, as played by James Monroe Iglehart, who won a well-deserved Tony in the role, Genie quite openly addresses the negotiations of African Americans of both brutalization and ongoing civic engagement. After Aladdin tricks him out of a wish, Genie turns to the audience and quotes Sweet Brown, the woman who became a viral internet star when she escaped a fire and told interviewers that she didn’t have time for bronchitis. “He tricked the Genie? Ain’t nobody got time for that!”<sup>156</sup> *Ain’t nobody got time for that*, is a transgressive moment within the show, speaking specifically to the precarity of African Americans in the labor economy.

Indeed, Genie (and his African American chorus) highlight the striation of African American labor in a racially differentiated economy—particularly through the mode of performance. Genie and his cohort do much of the work of making things happen, while the white or white-washed characters fret, muse, and wonder how they will express the innermost “truth” of their romantic feelings. They also do the most spectacular performative labor, particularly in the realm of dance, in choreography that quotes a whirlwind of dance styles from obligatory Orientalist snake arms and head slides to showstopping Broadway-via-Hollywood-MGM tap numbers. From the moment he’s out of the lamp, Genie starts a round of frenzied dance moves. These moves are at once dazzling and a little funny—Iglehart is a big guy on very light feet.

And while the jokes are all meta-theatrical (“Try to keep up, kid,” he says to Aladdin at one point, “I got a production number to get to”<sup>157</sup>), they also point to a kind of racialized affect.

In her first book on aesthetics and what she calls “minor affects,” *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai argues that one of the social meanings of “animatedness” as an affect is the very tension that “animation” (both literal and figurative) produces between movement and technologization. For Ngai, “what early animation foregrounds most is the increasingly ambiguous status of human agency in the Fordist era.”<sup>158</sup> Following Rey Chow, Ngai highlights the ways in which women and racialized others have become increasingly objectified as bodies subject to technologization/ automatization, an objectification that spectacularizes their “excessive” corporeality and emotion. In this way “animatedness” is a racialized affect—“to be “animated” in American culture,” she writes, “is to be racialized in some way, even if animation’s affective connotations of vivacity or zealotry do not cover every racial or ethnic stereotype.”<sup>159</sup> Since American racial politics have always been configured within the black-white binary, the “animatedness” of the African American body, as Ngai argues, “most visibly harnesses the affective qualities of liveliness, effusiveness, spontaneity, and zeal to a disturbing racial epistemology, and makes these variants of “animatedness” function as bodily (hence self-evident) signs of the raced subjects’ naturalness or authenticities.”<sup>160</sup> In a reading of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, she identifies the ways in which, “animation turns the exaggeratedly expressive body into a spectacle for an ethnographic gaze.”<sup>161</sup>

In this way, Genie embodies the technology that produced the original character, as well as its racialized affects and effects. Genie is a busy laborer made a little zany, as Ngai argues, by the logic of Fordist, or in this case Disney, (re)production. Even Genie’s exhaustion is spectacular (and funny): after a rousing tap routine—Iglehart learned to

tap for the production—he huffs and puffs and then takes a moment, saying “walk it off, Genie, walk it off...” In this production, ain’t nobody (meaning the Genie) got time to do anything but keep going. It should be said, however, that within this apparatus of othering, structured by an apparent racial and heteronormative order, Genie also lives in a space in which one can read a kind of resistance.

In this production, Genie opens and effectively closes the show: he’s the storyteller. He’s positioned from the outset as a tourist and a consumer, mistakenly pulling out a miniature statue of liberty rather than the lamp. “Oops,” he says, “did a little pre-show shopping.”<sup>162</sup> When Aladdin finally wishes him free, after renegeing once on his promise to do so earlier, the Genie sets up Aladdin, asking him to wish for the Nile. He does, and Genie’s “NO WAY” is full-throated and jubilant. His refusal is a kind of affirmation of consumer subjectivity. Indeed, subject and brand become one when Genie’s “freedom” means that he, too, can head to Disneyworld (as evidenced by the Goofy hat he wears at the end of the show). At the matinee of the show I saw on March 17, 2018 (in which Iglehart, who had stepped into the role of Jefferson/Lafayette in *Hamilton*, had been replaced by his talented successor, Major Attaway), the biggest laugh of the day was yet another moment that celebrated black empowerment and representation *within the brand* itself. When Aladdin asks Genie if he came from the lamp, Genie responds, “I come from Wakanda,” a reference to Disney’s (via Marvel) *Black Panther*. The moment (likely improvised, though also approved) brought the house down.

Despite the contemporaneity of Genie’s scripted and improvised critiques, historical images of slavery (like the livery threads) and the anti-slavery narratives (like the *Blank Panther* reference) posit the brutality of slavery as a thing of the past, a kind of historical fact, out of which Genie nonetheless acquires a kind of, to borrow somewhat



loosely and translocate the term from Lauren Berlant, *diva citizenship*. Shankar calls this process one of *racial naturalization*, practices in which racial minorities are given (provisional) status as consumers, to “make claims of legitimacy and national belonging.”<sup>163</sup>

As with gay Orientalisms, the backdrop Orientalisms of *Aladdin* help to naturalize black dispossession and yet offer a counter-hegemonic text of (consumer) entitlements within the context of US citizenship. What’s at work here is not simply a substitution of one kind of brownscape for another, but a kind of racial geometry that uses the theatrical Orient as a way of, in fact, highlighting claims of non-Oriental others. In her 1999 article, “The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans,” Claire Jean Kim argues that Asian Americans have been racialized in relationship to other groups, notably inside the framework of black/white race relations.<sup>164</sup> Asian Americans/Orientalists live within a triangulated field, in which their presence makes visible the naturalization claims of other minorities who are deemed to be less foreign, already indigenized in some way.

Indeed, casting decisions for Disney’s theatrical *Aladdin* assemblages have in fact long reflected Disney’s anxiety about a property that might make reference to contemporary Islamic subjectivities. When Zambello directed the show at California Adventure, the principals of the original cast, meaning Aladdin and Jasmine and Genie, were all East and Southeast Asian American actors. Zambello told the cast that they were in fact “returning” to the so-called “original” setting of Galland’s *Aladdin* story—to China.<sup>165</sup> Only one actor of Middle Eastern descent was hired, and he played the villain, Jafar. The substitution/conflation of East and Southeast Asian actors for Middle Eastern ones, particularly in the context of the market in Southern California (and the popularity of Disneyland as an Asian destination site) authenticated the Orientalist

context all the while avoiding overt reference to the regional conflicts in the Middle East. For its part, the Seattle-Toronto-Broadway production featured / features exactly *no* actors of Middle Eastern descent. Although producers often say, with an air of apologetic condescension, that they are just casting the “best people” for the job and that there are just not enough actors of (fill in the blank) descent, a cast without a single actor of Middle Eastern descent, for a Broadway market no less, feels like a strategic omission. After all, every *Lion King* production has always had at least eight to twelve performers from South Africa in order to maintain the show’s “Africanized” sound.<sup>166</sup>

Indeed, when *Aladdin* opened on Broadway, the two leads, Aladdin and Jasmine, were both mixed-race actors with Western sounding names: Adam Jacobs, who played Simba in the *Lion King* and identifies as part Filipino, and Courtney Reed, who is part Vietnamese but identifies publicly as “mixed” so as to keep her casting options open.<sup>167</sup> As Shalini Shankar notes, mixed race casting provides multiple benefits for media brands. For one thing, at least in the US, mixed race actors provide a diversity platform with which any number of ethnic markets can identify. For many young brown girls in America, regardless of ethnic origin, Jasmine is as close as you can get to Disney Princess-dom. More importantly, as Shankar has noted about advertising, mixed race actors “index” diversity without having to specify race; these actors then function as what she calls a “qualisign” of neoliberal multicultural inclusion without representing those who are deemed to “threaten” the larger order.<sup>168</sup> “Diversity” as brand practice is both a product and process of whiteness, marking certain bodies as assimilable, while effectively erasing others.

This said, the current Aladdin on Broadway, is an East Asian American actor named Telly Leung. This speaks to Disney’s sense, from the park show, that they can safely substitute an East Asian American in the role and still come out even, but also

that an indexical racial difference matters to the property, so long as it doesn't explicitly reference the Islamic Middle East. Leung's Aladdin is much cleaner cut, and stiffer than Jacobs's. His profile is slimmer, and closer, I imagine, to the more boyish angle of Ashman's original character. He reads as a little more vulnerable, compared to Jacobs's sly and winking characterization. He is also clearly a straight man to the zaniness surrounding him, and his (dramatic) straightness puts him more fully in the shadow of Genie's outsized, hyperanimated performance, so much so that the resolution of his own drama (in which he gets the goods, the girl, and the Sultanship) feels like an obligatory afterthought to Genie's freedom.

There is, as well, a racialized element to his "straightness" as a performer. *Aladdin* makes the claim that Oriental identities are theatrical identities, to be discarded in favor of the "true" self. After all, Aladdin's Oriental alter-ego, Prince Ali Ababwa, who arrives at the palace in a Maharaja's parade to woo the princess in royal finery provided by that great purveyor of goods—the genie—gets summarily turned down. And it's only in disavowing Prince Ali and telling her that he was pretending to be someone he's not, that "Al" earns not only the princess's devotion but her father's approval, too. In fact, regular old "Al" is deemed so inherently worthy that Jasmine's father is even willing to discard "silly" Islamic law, because, *hey, it's Disney*. This is to say an Orientalist role is ultimately a theatrical mask you have to discard at some point—something Leung's performance as Aladdin doesn't quite seem to do. The quandry of Leung's Aladdin points to the stickiness of using "Asian" bodies to authenticate racial difference and at the same time defining these bodies as "playing Oriental" within an Orientalist backdrop. Indexicality and iconicity of course don't have to go hand in hand. Cosmopolitan consumer membership can also be contingent and one could equally make the claim that the stickiness of Leung's (not) "playing Oriental"

highlights emergent, if provisional claims for Asian American citizenship (at least onstage). Still, brand assemblages do not have to be coherent—they can give partial visibility to some, erase others, define and redefine racial markets, depending on the kind of work they really mean to do. Assemblages are also not reducible to their component parts. Leung’s East Asian American *Aladdin* is only one part of a careful rebranding of the Orient as not-really-the-Middle-East, as *a diversified fantasy of American consumer life*. In a promotional video for the Broadway production, Gregg Barnes, the show’s costume designer, notes the production team worked with the notion that Agrabah is, as Barnes says, a “fictional, fabled” environment, somewhere “on the spice trade, sort of route,” which is to say, anywhere between Europe, Africa, and Asia. (In the video, Barnes notes, “We used, really—any exotic place we wanted to go to, we did.”<sup>169</sup>) The scramble of “exotic” locations is most obviously reflected in the show’s costume and set design: there are patterns and styles that not only reference the Middle East, but Africa, East Asia, and Europe, but perhaps most importantly, Las Vegas, where so-called “exotic” dancers have long appropriated and indigenized Middle Eastern performance traditions. In many ways, the production merely reinforces the ways in which Orientalist identities have already been indigenized and reclaimed as deeply American identities. At one point, Genie says to Aladdin, referring to his fez, and says, “What are you? A Shriner?”<sup>170</sup>

In May of 2019, Disney released a live-action version of *Aladdin*. The critical reception was mixed and once again, there were casting controversies. Although the lead roles were given to mixed-race actors (Aladdin is played by the Canadian actor Mena Massoud, who is of Egyptian, Coptic Christian, and Canadian descent, while the role of Jasmine is played by Naomi Scott, who is mixed race, and of South Asian heritage) and Genie is played by the African American actor Will Smith, the vast

majority of the cast members are, in fact, Middle Eastern actors. The casting requirements have to do with genre but they also point to both the latitudes the property can take with any number of audiences (domestic, global) and the ways in which racial substitutions and representations are *produced* and maintained by the brand. Indeed, Disney's Orientalisms are a kind of magic trick, conjuring disappearance, reappearance, and, indeed, whole catalogues of racial and, above all, consumer wonderlands.

Disney's ethnoracial Orientalisms are above all flexible: the promiscuous confusion of racial substitutions performs "diversity" all the while marking the shifting boundaries of American national and indeed international space. There are *Aladdin* iterations now in London, Hamburg, Tokyo (where all the performers are Japanese), and Auckland—a multiplication trick across not simply media platforms, but across national space. Broadway is an "originating" point (of departure) but the *Aladdin* assemblage goes beyond Broadway. In these countries, the productions' individual ethnoracial assemblages both territorialize and deterritorialize national space, domesticating and contracting American national boundaries through the shifting of American cultural space. In the next chapter, I turn to the ways in which Disney's theatrical assemblages outside the US leverage national anxieties—reassembling geometries of race, nation, and consumer space.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Rich, "THE YEAR IN THE ARTS: THEATER/1991; Throw Away Those Scripts. Some of the Greatest Moments Were Wordless, New York Times, December 29, 1991. <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/29/theater/year-arts-theater-1991-throw-away-those-scripts-some-greatest-moments-were.html>.

<sup>2</sup> This story of course starts in the middle. The studio built a *Beauty and the Beast* in-park musical for Disneyland with live singers. The show was 35 minutes and in no way a full-fledged production, but it was popular with visitors and Michael Eisner himself had noted that

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if the company wanted to invest in a Broadway-style show it would start with *Beauty and the Beast*.

<sup>3</sup> For the term and its application to the Lloyd Webber/Macintosh megamusical, see Jessica Sternbach, *The Megamusical*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> DTP is a department within the Studio Entertainment Division. At the time of *Beauty and the Beast*, the department was originally called Walt Disney Productions. The company created a separate division, Hyperion, to produce *Aida* on Broadway in order to distance the production and its subject matter (suicide) from the Disney brand, but all productions on Broadway have since been produced by DTP.

<sup>5</sup> Alex Witchel, "THEATER; Is Disney the Newest Broadway Baby?" *New York Times*, April 17, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/04/17/theater/theater-is-disney-the-newest-broadway-baby.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Kantor, dir., *Broadway: The American Musical*, 6-part documentary, (PBS, 2004) [DVD].

<sup>7</sup> Witchel, "THEATER."

<sup>8</sup> Witchel, "THEATER."

<sup>9</sup> Steve Nelson, "Broadway and the Beast: Disney Comes to Times Square," *TDR* 39, no. 2 (1995): 78, doi:10.2307/1146445.

<sup>10</sup> The final tally was \$423,158,458. The show ran for a total of 5,461 performances. See Broadway League statistics, Internet Broadway Database (IBDB), "*Beauty and the Beast*," July 17, 2019, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/beauty-and-the-beast-4602#Statistics>. Also see Amy S. Osatinski, *Disney Theatrical Productions: Producing Disney Musicals the Disney Way* (London: Routledge, 2019), 32.

<sup>11</sup> Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). For DeLanda on markets see pages 14-15.

<sup>12</sup> Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>13</sup> For more on looping, see Celia Lury, *Brands: The Logos of the New Economy* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Adam Arvidsson, Alessandro Caliandro, Brand Public, *Journal of Consumer Research*, Volume 42, Issue 5, (February 2016), Pages 727-748, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1093/jcr/ucv053>

<sup>15</sup> Shalini Shankar, *Advertising Diversity: Ad Agencies and the Creation of Asian American Consumers* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 6.

<sup>16</sup> My emphasis; John Law, *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research* (International Library of Sociology, 2004), 42.

<sup>17</sup> See Osatinski, *Disney Theatrical Production*, 41.

<sup>18</sup> John Bell, "Disney's Times Square: The New American Community Theatre," *TDR* 42, no. 1 (1998): 26-33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1146643>.

<sup>19</sup> The company was already in the midst of a publicity maelstrom surrounding the proposal of "Disney's America," a kind of Colonial Williamsburg "American history" theme park in Virginia. The project was defeated by protests but likely contributed to the sense that Disney was in the midst of territorializing heritage sites.

<sup>20</sup> Nelson, "Broadway and the Beast," 75.

<sup>21</sup> Ben Brantley, "THEATER REVIEW; Cub Comes of Age: A Twice-Told Cosmic Tale," *New York Times*, November 14, 1997, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/14/movies/theater-review-cub-comes-of-age-a-twice-told-cosmic-tale.html>.

<sup>22</sup> For the impact of Taymor's work on female directors, see Barry Singer, "THEATER; The New Musical: Will Corporate Money Call The Tune?" *New York Times*, August 30, 1998.

<sup>23</sup> Gordon Cox, "How 'The Lion King' Ushered in the Era of the Blockbuster on Broadway," *Variety*, November 14, 2017, <http://variety.com/2017/voices/columns/lion-king-musical-broadway-1202613785/>.

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- <sup>24</sup> Gordon Cox, "Hollywood Broadway Studios Rushing to the Stage Despite Clashing Business Models," *Variety*, April 7, 2015. <https://variety.com/2015/legit/news/hollywood-broadway-studios-rushing-to-the-stage-despite-clashing-business-models-1201467028/>
- <sup>25</sup> Cox, "How 'The Lion King' Ushered."
- <sup>26</sup> Gordon Cox, "'Wicked' Hits \$ Billion on Broadway Faster Than Any Other Show," *Variety*, March 15, 2016, <http://variety.com/2016/legit/news/wicked-broadway-sales-1-billion-1201730349/>.
- <sup>27</sup> Frank Rich, "THEATER; A Detour in the Theater That No One Predicted," *New York Times*, October 18, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/10/18/theater/theater-a-detour-in-the-theater-that-no-one-predicted.html>.
- <sup>28</sup> Rich, "THEATER; A Detour"
- <sup>29</sup> See David Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism: Recontextualizing American Theatre*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 49-50.
- <sup>30</sup> Maurya Wickstrom, *Performing Consumers: Global Capital and its Theatrical Seductions* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 84-86.
- <sup>31</sup> In Celia Lury, *Consumer Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 102.
- <sup>32</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, "From capital-labour to capital-life," trans. Valerie Fournier, Akseli Virtanen, and Jussi Vähämäki, *ephemera* 4, no. 3 (2004), <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/capital-labour-capital-life>.
- <sup>33</sup> This notion comes from a statement by Phil Knight, the CEO of Nike, saying that "Nike is a marketing company," whose goods are "marketing tools." In Lury, *Consumer Culture*, 155.
- <sup>34</sup> The notion of ordinary affects comes from Kathleen Stewart's book of the same name in which she defines ordinary affects as immanent and intensive particularities that nonetheless shape publics. See Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
- <sup>35</sup> David Savran, "Trafficking in Transnational Brands," *Theatre Survey* 55, no 3 (2014): 336. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1017/S0040557414000337>
- <sup>36</sup> This is also a bit of revisionist history, as Roosevelt did little for working children as Governor. As president he refused to meet with Mother Jones when she brought her Children's Crusade to the White House.
- <sup>37</sup> Karen Sánchez-Eppler, "Playing at Class," *ELH* 67, no. 3 (2000): 824 [www.jstor.org/stable/30031938](http://www.jstor.org/stable/30031938).
- <sup>38</sup> David Hand, dir., *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, (Disney, 1938).
- <sup>36</sup> Sánchez-Eppler, "Playing at Class," 819.
- <sup>40</sup> For budget and box office grosses, see IMDb, "Newsies," [imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0104990/), (March 26, 2018), <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0104990/>.
- <sup>41</sup> Roger Ebert, "Newsies," [RogerEbert.com](http://www.rogerebert.com), review of NEWSIES, 1992, (March 26, 2018), <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/newsies-1992>.
- <sup>42</sup> Janet Maslin, "Review/Film; They Sing, They Dance, They Go on Strike," *New York Times*, April 8, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/04/08/movies/review-film-they-sing-they-dance-they-go-on-strike.html>.
- <sup>43</sup> Ortega also directed the film.
- <sup>44</sup> Robert Simonson, "SECOND FLOOR OF SARDI'S: A Drink With Disney Theatrical President Thomas Schumacher," [Playbill.com](http://www.playbill.com), April 28, 2013, <http://www.playbill.com/article/second-floor-of-sardis-a-drink-with-disney-theatrical-president-thomas-schumacher-com-195004>.
- <sup>45</sup> Fierstein was sitting with Alan Menken at Menken's house and they were thinking of a project they could do together. In a *New York Times* interview, Fierstein says that when he proposed *Newsies*, Menken told him "Forget about it. It doesn't work," and that he replied, "I'll do it. I'll fix it." Fierstein wrote a new book. Menken and Feldman made changes to the score, cutting and adding two songs. See Tammy LaGorge, "Get Me a Rewrite: It's a Fresh *Newsies*," *The New York Times*, Sept 9, 2011. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/11/nyregion/newsies-reimagined-by-harvey-fierstein-at-the-paper-mill-playhouse.html>

- <sup>46</sup> Ben Brantley, "Urchins With Punctuation," review of *Newsies*, *New York Times*, March 29, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/30/theater/reviews/newsies-the-musical-by-alan-menken-and-harvey-fierstein.html>.
- <sup>47</sup> See Aaron C. Thomas, "Dancing Toward Masculinity: *Newsies*, Gender and Desire," in *The Disney Musical on Stage and Screen: Critical Approaches from "Snow White" to "Frozen"*, ed. George Rodosthenous (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 155–168.
- <sup>48</sup> Jack Feldman (lyrics), "The World Will Know," in Harvey Fierstein, *Newsies* production script (unnumbered), Lincoln Center Library of the Performing Arts.
- <sup>49</sup> Harvey Fierstein (book) in Jeff Calhoun and Brett Sullivan, dirs., *Newsies*, filmed musical production, Pantages Theatre (Hollywood, CA, 2017).
- <sup>50</sup> David Rooney, "Newsboy Strike? Sing All About It," review of *Newsies*, *New York Times*, September 27, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/28/theater/reviews/newsies-the-musical-review.html>.
- <sup>51</sup> Michael Sommers, "Newsies: The Musical," review of *Newsies*, *Variety*, September 27, 2011, <http://variety.com/2011/legit/reviews/newsies-the-musical-1117946250/>.
- <sup>52</sup> Cassie Tongue, "Newsies: a powerful and surprising call to arms in the age of Trump," *The Guardian*, February 14, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/feb/14/newsies-a-powerful-and-surprising-call-to-arms-in-the-age-of-trump>.
- <sup>53</sup> David Rooney, "Newsies: Theater Review," *Hollywood Reporter*, March 29, 2012, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/newsies-review-theater-305971>.
- <sup>54</sup> Douglas B. Holt, *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Publishing, 2004), 8.
- <sup>55</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 48.
- <sup>56</sup> Harvey Fierstein, *Newsies*, production script (unnumbered), Lincoln Center Library of the Performing Arts.
- <sup>57</sup> Jack Feldman (lyrics), in Calhoun and Sullivan, *Newsies*, filmed musical production.
- <sup>58</sup> Harvey Fierstein (book), in Calhoun and Sullivan, *Newsies*.
- <sup>59</sup> Harvey Fierstein, *Newsies*, production script.
- <sup>60</sup> See John Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 57–58.
- <sup>61</sup> Judith Messina, "LABOR NEGOTIATIONS SPARK BROADWAY SCENE CHANGE:INDEPENDENT PRODUCERS GAIN," *Crain's New York Business*, May 6, 1996, [https://advance-lexis-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3SID-MMC0-0013-R3YT-00000-00&context=1516831](https://advance.lexis-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:3SID-MMC0-0013-R3YT-00000-00&context=1516831).
- <sup>62</sup> Lauren Berlant, "Affect, Noise, Silence, Protest: Ambient Citizenship," (2009)[Accessed February 12, 2018], <http://publicsphere.ssrc.org/berlant-affect-noise-silence-protest-ambient-citizenship/>.
- <sup>63</sup> Banet-Weiser, *Authentic™*, 148.
- <sup>64</sup> See Julia Creswell, Kevin Draper, and Sapna Maheshwari, "Nike Nearly Dropped Colin Kaepernick Before Embracing Him," *New York Times*, September 26, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/26/sports/nike-colin-kaepernick.html>.
- <sup>65</sup> Tara Bahrapour, "VIRTUAL NEW YORK; For Teenagers Nationwide, It's New York and It's 1904," *New York Times*, May 26, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/26/nyregion/virtual-new-york-for-teenagers-nationwide-it-s-new-york-and-it-s-1904.html>.
- <sup>66</sup> See Organization for Transformative Works, *Archive of Our Own*, *Newsies* fanfiction archive, March 2, 2018, <https://archiveofourown.org/tags/Newsies%20-%20All%20Media%20Types/works>. See also wattpad, *Newsies* Stories, *Newsies* fanfiction archive, March 12, 2018, <https://www.wattpad.com/stories/newsies/hot>.
- <sup>67</sup> In Bahrapour, "VIRTUAL NEW YORK; For Teenagers."
- <sup>68</sup> Emphasis added. Berlant, "Affect, Noise."



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<sup>69</sup> In Bahrapour, "VIRTUAL NEW YORK; For Teenagers."

<sup>70</sup> Sarah Marshall, "The Afterlife of Newsies," *The Baffler*, January 5, 2018, <https://thebaffler.com/latest/newsies-marshall>.

<sup>71</sup> See, for example, "The Queer Kid Down the Block: Chapter 13: I'm a Newsie," wattpad, June 24, 2019, <https://www.wattpad.com/621447457-the-queer-kid-down-the-block-chapter-13-i%27m-a>.

<sup>72</sup> See D.A. Miller, *Place for Us: Essay on the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); David Savran, *A Queer Sort of Materialism: Recontextualizing American Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003); Stacy Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

<sup>73</sup> Thomas "Dancing Toward Masculinity," 166.

<sup>74</sup> Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 10.

<sup>75</sup> In Ken Cerniglia, ed., *Newsies: Stories of the Unlikely Broadway Hit* (Burbank: Disney Editions, 2014).

<sup>76</sup> Osatinski, *Disney Theatrical Productions*, 149.

<sup>77</sup> Osatinski, 150.

<sup>78</sup> All Disney shows now have social media captains. I do not know how they are compensated as Equity has no guidelines. For off-Broadway shows, social media captains are uncompensated—their work is considered part of the producers "right" to media time. Captains are responsible for posting to Instagram and other social media channels.

<sup>79</sup> Cerniglia, in *Newsies: Stories*. For more on interaction between actors and fansies as well as on the production's Fan Appreciation Week, see Peter Filichia, "'Fansies' Frenzy at Newsies, Broadway Direct, September 17, 2013, <https://broadwaydirect.com/fansies-frenzy-at-newsies/>.

<sup>79</sup> This story is from Bryan Dockett, head of Domestic Sales, quoted in Cerniglia, *Newsies: Stories*, 119.

<sup>81</sup> David Rooney, "Disney's 'Newsies' Recoups in Record Time," *Hollywood Reporter*, December 20, 2012, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/disneys-newsies-broadway-recoups-record-time-405939>.

<sup>81</sup> Rooney, "Disney's 'Newsies' Recoups."

<sup>83</sup> See Stacy E. Wolf, "Not Only on Broadway: Disney JR and Disney Kids Across the USA," in *The Disney Musical on Stage and Screen*, ed. G. Rodosthenous (New York: Methuen, 2017), 133–154.

<sup>84</sup> Yvette Kojic, "Inside the Los Angeles Filming of Newsies," *Playbill.com*, February 1, 2017, <http://www.playbill.com/article/inside-the-los-angeles-filming-of-newsies>.

<sup>85</sup> Kojic, "Inside the Los Angeles."

<sup>86</sup> See Dave Quinn, "Flipping the flop: How Disney's Newsies Went from the Big-Screen to Broadway and Back Again," *People*, February 13, 2017, <https://people.com/theater/disney-newsies-from-movie-to-broadway-and-back/>; and see Carolina del Busto, "Jack Feldman on Writing Lyrics for Newsies and 'Fansies,'" *Miami New Times*, January 30, 2015, <https://www.miaminewtimes.com/arts/jack-feldman-on-writing-lyrics-for-newsies-and-fansies-6507233>.

<sup>87</sup> Emphasis added. *Newsies*, production script (no pages) accessed through Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts archives. February 2018.

<sup>88</sup> See Karen Hellekson, "A Fannish Field of Value: Online Fan Gift Culture," *Cinema Journal*, 48 (2009); and Hellekson, "Making Use of: The Gift Commerce and Fans," *Cinema Journal* 54 (Spring 2015): 125–131.

<sup>89</sup> It may be that the studio cultivates a kind of studied indifference to this kind of creative output/production so long as it remains below a certain threshold of public attention—and yet it is perhaps not insignificant that Disney bought FanLib in 2008. This, like all things related to Disney mergers/acquisitions and copyright issues, is a much larger discussion. Disney erased

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all the fanfiction materials from the site after they bought it, but this was because they were ultimately interested in the server itself rather than control over the fan archive.

<sup>90</sup> Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text* 18, no. 2 (2000): 37.

<sup>91</sup> Terranova, "Free Labor," 38.

<sup>92</sup> In The Graham Show, "THE GRAHAM SHOW Ep. 4, Finale: Thomas Schumacher, 'The Lion King, Newsies & Paying It Forward,'" YouTube, November 23, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7avMd7v0mL4>.

<sup>93</sup> See Lury, *Consumer Culture*, 136.

<sup>94</sup> This info is from a footnote in Amy S. Osatinski, *Disney Theatrical Productions: Twenty Years of Disney on Broadway* (PhD diss., University of Colorado at Boulder, 2016), 135.

<sup>95</sup> See Elizabeth Butler Breese, "When Marketers and Academics Share a Research Platform: The Story of Crimson Hexagon," *Journal of Applied Social Science* 10, no. 1 (March 2016): 6, doi:10.1177/1936724415569953.

<sup>96</sup> Breese. "When Marketers." Crimson Hexagon has since merged with Brandwatch. I do not know whether Disney continues to partner with Brandwatch.

<sup>97</sup> John Law, *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*. (Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2004)

<sup>98</sup> Bruno Latour's "parliament of things" from Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, translated by Catherine Porter, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993)

<sup>99</sup> Nathan McAlone, "Disney will dump its exclusive Netflix deal in 2019, and launch its own streaming service," *Business Insider*, August 8, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/disney-ending-exclusive-netflix-deal-in-2019-launching-rival-streaming-service-2017-8>.

<sup>100</sup> For questions on the relationship of algo-journalism and public affect, see Vian Bakir and Andrew McStay, "Fake News and The Economy of Emotions," *Digital Journalism* 6, no. 2 (2018): 154–175, doi:10.1080/21670811.2017.1345645.

<sup>101</sup> Noortje Marres and Carolin Gerlitz, "Interface Methods: Renegotiating Relations between Digital Social Research, STS and Sociology," *The Sociological Review* 64, no. 1 (February 2016): 21–46, doi:10.1111/1467-954X.12314.

<sup>102</sup> Adam Arvidsson and Alessandro Caliandro, "Brand Public," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42, no. 5 (February 1 2016).

<sup>103</sup> Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 19.

<sup>104</sup> Adam Arvidsson, "Brand Value," *Journal Of Brand Management* (serial online) 13, no. 3 (February 2006):188–192, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/232490692?accountid=10226>.

<sup>105</sup> Brooks Barnes, "John Lasseter, a Pixar Founder, Takes Leave After Missteps," *New York Times*, November 21, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/21/business/media/john-lasseter-pixar-disney-leave.html>.

<sup>106</sup> For social reformers, this theatre-going and theatre-making provided fodder for the argument that street life put children at risk of becoming social degenerates. At the very least, kids were spending their hard-earned money on a leisure activity rather than saving it. But theatrical activity was also full of dissembling, which ran counter to nineteenth-century narratives of authenticity and sincerity. In Horatio Alger's story, *Ragged Dick*, Dick gives up going to the theatre in order to be a respectable citizen.

<sup>107</sup> See Michelle Granshaw, "The mysterious victory of the newsboys: The grand duke theatre's 1874 challenge to the theatre licensing law," *Theatre Survey* 55, no. 1 (2014): 48–80, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1017/S0040557413000537>.

<sup>108</sup> On newsboy support for the widowed families of theatre professionals, see Granshaw, "The Mysterious Victory," 67.

<sup>109</sup> Travis Bean, "'Aladdin' Is Actually The Second-Most Successful Musical Ever," *Forbes*, June 19, 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/travisbean/2019/06/19/aladdin-is-actually-the->

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second-most-successful-musical-ever/#5b7825b63fb9. See also Dave McNary, "'Aladdin' Flying Past \$1 Billion at Worldwide Box Office," *Variety*, July 26, 2019, <https://variety.com/2019/film/news/aladdin-box-office-one-billion-worldwide-1203281071/>.

<sup>110</sup> With CAPS "computer aided production systems," cels were still hand drawn but once scanned could be treated for color and dimension. CAPS, Michael Eisner notes, "technologically and artistically revolutionized the archaic method by which animation movies had been made since *Snow White*, Michael Eisner, quoted in Chris Pallant, *Demystifying Disney: A History of Disney Feature Animation* (London: Continuum, 2011), 180. <https://search-ebscohost.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=3997552&site=ehost-live&scope=site1999>. For the impact of CAPS see also Pallant, 96.

<sup>111</sup> The "above-the-title" status of Robin Williams was also an industry innovation for a genre that had previously featured voice actors not given the same status as live-action actors.

<sup>112</sup> For the history of the Disney Renaissance era, see Pallant, *Demystifying Disney*, 89.

<sup>113</sup> Shankar, *Advertising Diversity*, 4.

<sup>114</sup> Shankar, x.

<sup>115</sup> Jack G. Shaheen, "Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 588 (2003): 171–193, [www.jstor.org/stable/1049860](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1049860).

<sup>116</sup> For an overview of the "Hollywood Eastern" genre see John C. Eisele, "Deconstructing the language of genre in the Hollywood Eastern," *Cinema Journal* 41, no. 4 (Summer, 2002): 68–94.

<sup>117</sup> Roger Ebert, "Aladdin," review of *Aladdin*, RogerEbert.com, November 25, 1992, <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/aladdin-1992>.

<sup>118</sup> Lyrics by Howard Ashman. Ron Clements and John Musker, dirs., *Aladdin* (Disney, 1992) [DVD].

<sup>118</sup> These were backup lyrics Ashman had written in an earlier draft—a gesture that must have anticipated backlash.

<sup>120</sup> New York Times, "It's Racist, But Hey, It's Disney," *New York Times*, July 14, 1993, <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/07/14/opinion/it-s-racist-but-hey-it-s-disney.html>.

<sup>121</sup> Author communication with Orville Mendoza, who played Genie at California Adventure. Orville Mendoza, personal communication with author, August 21, 2017.

<sup>122</sup> In some ways, it's surprising that *Aladdin* has proved so durable a property over the past twenty years, particularly through the course of the 90s and early aughts, with the rising profile of the Middle East as an "axis of evil." Indeed, as recently as 2015, a Public Policy Polling Survey discovered that thirty percent of Republicans and nineteen percent of Democrats favored bombing Agrabah, the fictional location of the film, meaning, I assume, that the mere evocation of an Arab-sounding region is, for not a few Americans, justification enough for an act of war. See Ilya Somin, "Political ignorance and bombing Agrabah," *Washington Post*, December 18, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2015/12/18/political-ignorance-and-bombing-agrabah/?utm\\_term=.607b82f4aaf2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/volokh-conspiracy/wp/2015/12/18/political-ignorance-and-bombing-agrabah/?utm_term=.607b82f4aaf2).

<sup>123</sup> See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1994.)

<sup>124</sup> See Alan Nadel, "A Whole New (Disney) World Order: *Aladdin*, Atomic Power, and the Muslim Middle East," in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, ed. Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1997.) 184–203.

<sup>125</sup> For the term "Arabian Nights costumer," see Eisele, "Deconstructing the language," 68–94.

<sup>126</sup> Susan Nance, *How the Arabian Nights Inspired the American Dream, 1790–1935* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2009), 14–15.

<sup>127</sup> William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power and the Rise of a new American Culture* (New York: Vintage Press, 1993), 105.

<sup>128</sup> Marina Warner, *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2013), 357.

<sup>129</sup> Warner, *Stranger Magic*, 358.

<sup>130</sup> Warner, 358.

- <sup>131</sup> In Michael Lassell, *Aladdin: The Road to Broadway and Beyond* (Glendale: Disney Editions, 2017), 158.
- <sup>132</sup> Richard Ouzounian, "Aladdin's carpet ride is missing some magic: review," *The Star*, November 21, 2013, [https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/stage/2013/11/21/aladdins\\_carpet\\_ride\\_lackin\\_g\\_some\\_magic.html](https://www.thestar.com/entertainment/stage/2013/11/21/aladdins_carpet_ride_lackin_g_some_magic.html)
- <sup>133</sup> See Michael Lassell, *Aladdin: The Road to Broadway and Beyond* (Glendale: Disney Editions, 2017).
- <sup>134</sup> Warner, *Stranger Magic*, 66.
- <sup>135</sup> "A Whole New World," by Alan Menken and Tim Rice, with Courtney Reed and Adam Jacobs, *Aladdin: Original Broadway Recording*, Walt Disney Records, released June 17 2014. CD.
- <sup>136</sup> Gaylyn Studlar, "Out-Salome-ing Salome," in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, ed. Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 107.
- <sup>137</sup> In addition to Studlar, see Sumiko Higashi, *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1994); and Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East, White Women and American Orientalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- <sup>138</sup> Studlar, "Out-Salome-ing," 125.
- <sup>139</sup> In the 2019 film version Jasmine wants and effectively gains the Sultanship, suggesting the flexibility of the brand to changing cultural landscapes and latitudes.
- <sup>140</sup> See Sean Griffin, *Tinker Belles and Evil Queens: The Walt Disney Company from the Inside Out* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); and Joseph A. Boone, *Rubbing Aladdin's Lamp: Negotiating Lesbian & Gay Subjects* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- <sup>141</sup> In Griffin, *Tinker Belles*, 141.
- <sup>142</sup> Janet Maslin, "Review / Film; Disney Puts Its Magic Touch on 'Aladdin,'" *New York Times*, November 11, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/11/11/movies/review-film-disney-puts-its-magic-touch-on-aladdin.html>.
- <sup>143</sup> Nikolas also gives credit to the company for having many gay-friendly policies instituted quite early in the 1990s, before it was common for corporate America.
- <sup>144</sup> Akash Nikolas, "It's Not Just *Frozen*: Most Disney Movies Are Pro-Gay," *The Atlantic*, April 23, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2014/04/its-not-just-frozen-disney-has-always-been-subtly-pro-gay/361060/>.
- <sup>145</sup> In Stacy Lambe, "The Untold Gay Story of *Aladdin*," *Out Magazine*, March 26, 2014, <https://www.out.com/entertainment/interviews/2014/03/26/how-chad-beguelin-restored-howard-ashmans-original-gayer-aladdin>.
- <sup>146</sup> See Miller, *Place for Us*; Savran, *A Queer Sort*; Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria*.
- <sup>147</sup> Aaron C. Thomas argues that Fierstein's depiction of Medda Larkin evokes a camp Mae West, but I find this equivalence a little far-fetched (see Thomas, "Dancing Toward Masculinity," 164.) Indeed, because Medda Larkin was recast as an African American performer (Capathia Jenkins) the production draws, I think, on a different musical theatre tradition, one Daniel Dinero captures in his article on black women and excess. See Dan Dinero, "A Big Black Lady Stops the Show: Black Women and Performances of Excess in Musical Theatre," *Studies in Musical Theatre* 6, no. 1 (2012).
- <sup>148</sup> *Aladdin* production script (no page numbers available) accessed through archives at Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, November 2018.
- <sup>149</sup> Joe Kucharsky, "Costume Design for Disney's *Aladdin* on Broadway!," *Tyranny of Style*, February 18, 2014, <http://tyrannyofstyle.com/costume-design-disney-aladdin-broadway>.
- <sup>150</sup> *Aladdin* production script (no page numbers available) accessed through archives at Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, November 2018.
- <sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>152</sup> Adrienne L. McLean, "The Thousand Ways There are to Move: Camp and Oriental Dance in the Films of Jack Cole," in *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, ed. Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 132.

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- <sup>153</sup> *Aladdin* production script (no page numbers available) accessed through archives at Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, November 2018.
- <sup>154</sup> Anne Duggan, "From Genie to Efreet: Fantastic Apparitions in the Tales of The Arabian Nights," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 26, no. 1 (2015): 113–135.
- <sup>155</sup> *Aladdin* production script (no page numbers available) accessed through archives at Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, November 2018.
- <sup>156</sup> KFOR Oklahoma's News 4, "Sweet Brown on apartment fire: 'Ain't nobody got time for that!'" YouTube, April 11, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydmPh4MXT3g>. See also Kathy Dobson and Irena Knezevic on the Kimberley Wilkins memes/parodies and a longer discussion about internet virality, reductionism, and stereotyping: Kathy Dobson and Irena Knezevic, "'Ain't Nobody Got Time for that!': Framing and Stereotyping in Legacy and Social Media," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 43, no. 3 (2018): 381–397, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/2108802019?accountid=10226>, doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.22230/cjc.2018v43n3a3378>.
- <sup>157</sup> *Aladdin* production script (no page numbers available) accessed through archives at Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, November 2018.
- <sup>158</sup> Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 91.
- <sup>159</sup> Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 95.
- <sup>160</sup> Ngai, 95.
- <sup>161</sup> Ngai, 97.
- <sup>162</sup> *Aladdin* production script (no page numbers available) accessed through archives at Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, November 2018.
- <sup>163</sup> Shankar, *Advertising Diversity*, 23.
- <sup>164</sup> See Claire Jean Kim, "The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans." *Politics and Society* 27, no. 1 (Mar 01, 1999): 105, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/1683861973?accountid=10226>.
- <sup>165</sup> Conversation with cast members reported by Orville Mendoza during author communication.
- <sup>166</sup> Michael Paulson, "The 'Lion King' Effect: How a Broadway Smash Changed South African Lives," *New York Times*, November 15, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/15/theater/the-lion-king-south-africa.html>.
- <sup>167</sup> For instance, Courtney Reed had previously starred in Lin Manuel Miranda's *In the Heights*.
- <sup>168</sup> Shalini Shankar, *Advertising Diversity*, 213.
- <sup>169</sup> Disney on Broadway, "ALADDIN on Broadway: Artist Spotlight – Gregg Barnes," YouTube, June 26, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S4kngFpDO7A>.
- <sup>170</sup> *Aladdin* production script (no page numbers available) accessed through archives at Lincoln Center Library for the Performing Arts, November 2018.

### **Chapter 3: Disneyland Paris, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* and the Brand(ed) New Global Frontier**

Through an analysis of the Disneyland Paris theme parks, resort and *Disney's Buffalo Bill's Wild West* –Disney's largest and longest running theatrical assemblage– I explore how Disney configures brand experiences/exportables for new national markets.

Central to the chapter is the question of how a performative American brand geography works within transnational space. As in earlier chapters, I argue that Disney's (trans)national brand assemblages are heterogeneous, contingent and flexible, with the brand constantly reassembling forms of national(ized) geography, history / memory, and identity to produce a (global) leisure space / imaginary that is both de and reterritorialized.

The chapter is broken into thirds and while these sections appear sequentially, they represent overlapping stories and spaces. The first third chronicles the development of Euro Disney / Disneyland Paris as a brand assemblage in order to understand the ways in which transnational brand geographies not only rely on national entities (for financing, consumer access and actual space) but also depend on emergent national and transnational affiliations (for extended brand participation and equity.) The second third surveys physical performance spaces and the de and recoding of national space for participatory transnational place-branding. Finally, I turn to *Disney's Buffalo Bill's Wild West* and the representational space of the American frontier, highlighting the ways in which Disney's production performs Western American space as part of its brand(ed) new global frontier.

*Translocating the brand: from Euro Disney to Disneyland Paris.*

From the Gare de Lyon in Paris, the trip to Disneyland takes less than forty minutes on the local RER subway line. After arriving at the Marne la Vallée RER/TGV station, it's a hop and a skip (a mere 150 feet) to the entrance of Disneyland Paris. The remarkably easy trip from central Paris to Disney's terminus is grâce of the French government.

Under the terms of a master agreement negotiated in 1987, the Chirac administration<sup>1</sup> underwrote the \$600 million transportation network that facilitates the flow of tourists to what was initially called Euro Disney.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the French government provided Disney with \$400 million in utilities and services, close to \$2 billion in soft loans, and a land package offering up Marne la Vallée's sugar beet fields (roughly 4800 acres worth) at a radical discount, and a significantly reduced VAT tax on all ticket sales. For its part, Disney put up only \$250 million for 49 percent equity in the park's operating company.<sup>3</sup>

The extraordinary support of the French government led a number of critics to wonder, as Bernard Poupard wrote in the magazine *Etudes*, what could possibly have "pushed the State, the Region, the Department to offer such a red carpet to the Americans?"<sup>4</sup> The answer was relatively simple: In the midst of the deepest recession since WWII, the Euro Disney project promised an economic bump no Western European country could afford to ignore. Tokyo Disneyland had created 150,000 jobs,<sup>5</sup> with a visitor base just one third the size of Western Europe alone. In just five years Tokyo had welcomed over 60 million visitors, roughly half the entire population of Japan.<sup>6</sup> Europeans were already traveling in significant numbers to Walt Disney World in the US.<sup>7</sup> Paris was a central European hub and already a significant draw for tourists.<sup>8</sup>

But concerns about "Americanization" and the homogenizing force of American mass culture ran deep in France<sup>9</sup> and there was no better symbol for American cultural

imperialism than Disneyland. In the early '80s, the French critic Jean Baudrillard had defined Disneyland as *the* synecdochal encapsulation of American values. "The objective profile of the United States may be traced through Disneyland," he wrote. "All of its values are exalted here and in miniature and comic strip form." Disneyland represented the "real" America—an "order of the hyperreal and of simulation."<sup>10</sup> For many cultural critics in France, the arrival of this order on French soil represented, as theatre director Ariane Mnouchkine famously declared, a "cultural Chernobyl."<sup>11</sup> Even Jack Lang, the French minister of culture, pointedly declined to attend the opening day ribbon cutting. Calling the park "an enclave of the American leisure industry,"<sup>12</sup> Lang worked to estrange the park from French culture as a whole.

Given the French predilection for cultural debate, there were of course a few critics who went out of their way to extend Disney a welcome, including the handful who reframed the event as an exercise in cultural repatriation. "Hollywood is the high place not of America's cultural imperialism, but of Europe's," the writer Andre Glucksmann argued, "we are only taking back our due." "Kindly seven dwarfs," he wrote, "here you will never be invading, just coming home."<sup>13</sup> As it was, Disney's cartoon copies of the seven dwarfs had long stood side to side with their European counterparts. Among Europeans, the French were the "No 1. consumers of things Disney;" they were well acquainted with the repertory company of Disney characters, including those not conceived in Europe.<sup>14</sup> As Mary Yoko Brennan notes, well before the '80s, Mickey Mouse enjoyed a long run in France in comic book form. Over 10 million children in France read *Le Journal de Mickey* each week. Mickey in France was not quite the same as Mickey in America: he was mischievous, clever, even sly, and not especially upbeat. Still, most French children and their parents had grown up with Mickey, increasingly surrounded, like their American counterparts, with Mickey-



imprinted merchandise.<sup>15</sup> As Lainsbury notes, “so assimilated into French life was ‘Monsieur Mouse’ that many children there did not even view him as an American creation.”<sup>16</sup>

Still, the indigenization of Monsieur Mouse was one thing, an entire Disney complex in Paris quite another. In the run up to 1992 and the establishment of the European common market with the Treaty of Maastricht, concerns about “Americanization” reflected a new set of anxieties about the larger specter of globalization. With the Eurozone on the horizon, and the promise of integrated European markets, a “Euro Disney” signaled the impending rule of a single currency and a movement towards “denationalization”: the erosion of European cultural diversity and national identity in favor of an onslaught of American-style cross-marketing, consumerism, and commodity culture. Media stories about uprooted farmers and residents, to say nothing of the \$7.6 billion giveaway of national funds to a private American enterprise,<sup>17</sup> only served to heighten these anxieties.

In many ways, the park was itself a response to the emergence of what Aihwa Ong and Stephen Collier call “global assemblages”<sup>18</sup> -- new forms of techno-science, economic and political modeling, and the yielding of regulation/ governance to “expert systems.”<sup>19</sup> The park promised to be a valuable brand token as well as a significant source of revenue,<sup>20</sup> but more importantly the park represented a new foothold for Disney—for a new European headquarters, for more localized positioning, better-segmented messaging and recoded brand associations for an expanded global network.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Disney’s proposed European headquarters were not just about Europe or the eventual Euro-zone. European market penetration was calculated as increased access to other emerging markets, like the Middle East and India. Increasingly, Disney executives began to think about how to extend brand space

through assemblage networks (social, political, and, increasingly, performative economic imaginaries/ markets [eg. hedge funds]) that would extend the boundaries of its market space. Eisner realized that in order to manage an expanded brand assemblage, he would need partners: national governments of course, but also corporate alliances/ acquisitions. “I could see how I could protect (Disney) for five or six more years being alone,” Eisner argued, “but I didn’t know how I could protect it for another 20 years without some partner to compete in Europe, to get into India and China, to keep access for our children’s programs.”<sup>22</sup> As part of the company’s move into Europe, Eisner began to eye CBS as a possible broadcast partner. Eventually, Disney bought ABC in 1994 in a bid both to expand and vertically integrate extended delivery systems across global markets.

Territorializing brand space within global markets is complicated, even in markets familiar with a brand’s product base. In order to help localize the park, Disney launched an aggressive advertising campaign, years in advance of opening. The campaign was unprecedented in scale: Disney established community relations projects, corporate partnerships with twelve major companies including Renault, the Banque Nationale de Paris, and Nestlé, and sell-through agreements with companies small and large across the continent.<sup>23</sup> As the park was set to open, public poll numbers seemed to suggest that the campaign had worked: popular support in France was “upwards of 86 percent.”<sup>24</sup> Confidence in the project was in fact so high that officials were convinced they’d have to turn visitors away to prevent overcrowding. But from the very first day (April 12, 1992), the projected numbers began to slide. Park attendance was low.<sup>25</sup> Even with the adjusted VAT tax, tickets were deemed too expensive given the economic climate.<sup>26</sup> There were also social and cultural issues. Concessions had been made for French labor laws, but Disney’s corporate culture and

management practices were still perceived as too controlling.<sup>27</sup> There was rapid turnover. Reports emerged that over one thousand workers had walked off the job.<sup>28</sup> For their part, guests objected to being smiled at all the time<sup>29</sup> and they didn't care for the alcohol ban. Unlike the Japanese, Europeans didn't buy souvenirs to take home.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps most significantly, Disney misunderstood how Europeans vacation. Unlike Americans, Europeans were unwilling to spend large sums for a relatively short stay.<sup>31</sup> Paris also faced tougher conditions than Tokyo, conditions the company initially glossed: the park is twenty miles away, much further than the six miles for Tokyo, and Paris winters dictate a low season.<sup>32</sup> Media responses to the park's early troubles added to Disney's woes. Both the French and American press seized on the park's bumpy roll out. In response, the stock took a sharp tumble. It was the first high-profile crisis for the company under Eisner and in many ways a shock to the company.<sup>33</sup> The park began to hemorrhage cash, losing \$2 billion in just the first two years. Caught in a cycle of bad press,<sup>34</sup> declining stock prices, and a crippling debt structure, Eisner publicly admitted that even shuttering the park was under consideration.<sup>35</sup>

In a scene out of a Disney movie, a real-life prince rescued Euro Disney: Saudi Prince Al Waleed bin Talal stepped in with somewhere between 400–500 million recapitalization dollars.<sup>36</sup> Disney restructured debt and made alcohol available (although French officials were quick to point out that they did so on behalf of non-French visitors, particularly the Germans and British, who insisted on wine as part of their expectations of “the French experience.”)<sup>37</sup> Officials also rebranded the park: Euro Disney might have sounded romantic to Americans, but for Europeans “Euro” had become synonymous with an unpopular monetary policy.<sup>38</sup> Renamed Disneyland Paris,<sup>39</sup> the park now affirmed its affiliation with a global city, resetting it within what would become a growing network of urban-centered Disneylands: Tokyo, Hong Kong,

and Shanghai. As Saskia Sassen argues, cities have become nodes in a new “geography of centrality,”<sup>40</sup> encoded spaces of cosmopolitan belonging and global capital-infused cultural ecologies. For Peter Taylor the “world city network” comprises a kind of “metageography.”<sup>41</sup> The rebrand connected the brand to the metageography of world cities all the while overlaying its own metageographic assemblage. After all, the order of operations in the rebranding equation was Disneyland-then-Paris. Disneyland is the constant: the city changes its inflection, its particular position within the larger brand ecology. Each park is a kind of Deleuzian “self-vibrating plateau.”

Scholars of Disney’s international theme parks overwhelmingly attributed the early struggles of Euro Disney to the company’s hubris and cultural myopia. In the late ‘90s, Mary Yoko Brannen, Jonathan Matusitz, and John Van Maanen all effectively declared the park a failure in “glocalization.”<sup>42</sup> Many critics pointed to the differences between the Japanese and European consumer bases.<sup>43</sup> At the heart of their criticism is a particular vision of Japan’s relationship to America, one that is essentially uniform across all the studies of Tokyo Disneyland.<sup>44</sup> In this vision, Japan turns the tables on Western cultural hegemony. The Japanese appropriate American cultural symbols or Americana as a way of domesticating, decontextualizing (Yoshimoto), recontextualizing (Raz) or “wrapping” (Hendry) American space, effectively containing it. This transposition of discursive space is an assertion then of Japanese cultural fluency and “neo-cultural imperialism.”<sup>45</sup> Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto argues that a selective openness to foreignness contributes to the narrative of Japanese exceptionalism. “Tokyo Disneyland,” he writes, “is in fact one of the most powerful examples of contemporary Japanese nationalism.”<sup>46</sup> Aviad Raz echoes Yoshimoto. “If Disneyland is a black ship,” he argues, referring to Commodore Perry’s “black ships” that forced the re-opening of Japan to the West, “then it is the Japanese who are riding and steering it, not the

Americans.”<sup>47</sup> But even this model, I think, is too easy a binary, even if we acknowledge the *menace of mimicry* (to appropriate Homi Bhabha’s term) that might have led the Japanese to appropriate US space, and even if we think that Europe saw itself as superior to, or at least toe-to-toe with, “American” political hegemony.

In hindsight it’s easy to see that analyses of Euro Disney as Disney’s “tragic kingdom,”<sup>48</sup> as a failure in glocalization, were in fact too limited in scope. Indeed, twenty-five years later, Euro Disney /Disneyland Paris has survived not only cultural criticism, but multiple political administrations and contexts, global financial crises, and even states of emergency brought on by terrorist acts.<sup>49</sup> Disneyland Paris is currently the number one tourist site in Europe, making up 6.2 percent of tourism income in France. The largest single-site employer in France with fifteen thousand employees, and fifty-six thousand related jobs, Disney has made good on its promise to bring jobs to the region. Indeed, the French wager (on the part of the government) is almost about to pay off: against the \$79 billion in investment, Disneyland Paris has contributed \$68 billion in added value to the French economy.<sup>50</sup> In February of 2018, the company announced a \$2 billion Euro reinvestment in the park. Since the lot is only half developed, Disney plans to add attractions based on its newer acquisitions of Marvel and Star Wars properties.<sup>51</sup> The park is most popular among the French, who have made up slightly less than half the attendance numbers.<sup>52</sup> Year to year, the non-French visitor base shifts. In the early days of the park, the British used to make up close to twenty percent of visitors. Based on attendance numbers, Britons today, however, are more likely to head to Florida than to France. German attendance has fallen over the years, but gains have been made among Spanish visitors (they now account for ten percent of visitors).<sup>53</sup> There’s a steady trickle now of guests (and workers) from Eastern European countries—a phenomenon that Disney executives could not even have anticipated in 1987.<sup>54</sup> There are also North

Americans and non-Europeans who visit the park either as part of a European vacation or as a prosumer destination. Prosumers of Disney parks collect parks like tokens, with Disneylands acting as travel beacons.

Meanwhile, globalization has not proved synonymous with denationalization or cultural Americanization. Indeed, as Sassen notes, the forces of globalization have produced “far deeper imbrications in the national...than prevailing analyses allow us to recognize.”<sup>55</sup> But the question of national space is full of de- and reterritorializations that are produced through multiple relations of exteriority, relations that both implicate and exceed forms of national or neoliberal control. These relations cannot be solely be defined as forms of cultural exchange or (re)appropriation. It isn’t so much, as Ong and Collier argue, that there is an abstract global and an actual local.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, transnational spaces like Disneyland Paris are not only nodes or hubs within complex neoliberal spaces, but systems in and of themselves. These systems remap national space(s) through a rhetoric of cultural flow, but also through coordinated microprocesses (like flexible labor codes, transnational capital, appeals to cultural fantasias and stereotypes), as well as through *interactivity* with diverse actors and actants. Still, within global assemblages concepts of the “nation” often act as a communication device in order to stabilize transnational representations. In what follows I consider how Disneyland Paris themes national space, particularly American space, in order to both articulate and smooth international space, and to map its transborder assemblages as new global frontiers.

### *America(ns) in (Disneyland) Paris.*

It’s a hot day in July 2018, just outside of Paris. The French are about to win the World Cup: by the evening, men and women will be running through the streets draped in

flags, whooping, singing the *Marseillaise*. Inside Disneyland Paris's Magic Kingdom, my daughter and I work our way through one American fantasia after another: Main Street USA; Frontierland; Adventureland (American colonialism); Tomorrowland (a tribute to American technological innovation). This is our third Magic Kingdom and the experience in Paris feels just about the same as it did Anaheim and Orlando. In fact, we navigate through each "land" without once looking at a map, easily finding my daughter's favorite rides. In the course of the day, we encounter only two attractions not native to the US parks—an Alice in Wonderland Maze and a walk-through exhibit of miniature scenes from *Aladdin* called *Le Passage Enchanté d'Aladdin*. The case could be made that these attractions address British and Middle Eastern (or French Orientalist) guests, but they are small variations on themes also found in the US parks. There are of course other small differences that we notice, some more culturally inflected than others. French names are sprinkled through the park, like so much French pixie dust. Sleeping Beauty's castle (renamed *Le Château de la Belle au Bois Dormant*) is bigger and nicer than its US counterpart, with stained glass storybook windows and, much to my daughter's delight, a sublevel dragon's lair (complete with an eighty-nine-foot animatronic dragon). The iconic ride, *It's a Small World*, featuring close to 200 dolls representing children from around the world, has two unique sections: one representing North America (Canada and the US) and the other the Middle East.<sup>57</sup> (The Middle Eastern dolls sing the ride's signature too-catchy track in Arabic.) Frontierland (originally called Westernland, but then renamed Frontierland when French critics objected to Westernland's colonial implications) has a larger footprint in the Paris park. When we take the Molly Brown Riverboat, we seem to travel, in one hallucinatory ten-minute blur, all the way from Mississippi Delta to the Colorado River. Main Street is also missing, as in Tokyo Disneyland, a Hall of (American) Presidents attraction. It has

instead a little snack shop where you can buy crêpes with sugar (a DLP-specific treat), but they are so bland, we end up tossing them. Lainsbury argues that the European park is prettier, more elaborately detailed than its US counterparts, noting, for example, that Main Street is paved with red brick to evoke the cobble stone streets of New York City.<sup>58</sup> But even Eisner conceded that, “to the untrained eye, this Magic Kingdom will be very similar to Tokyo Disneyland and the Magic Kingdom in Orlando.”<sup>59</sup> Particularly for a family with children (or even one child) in tow, these kinds of details are easily lost if at all apparent.

When DLP was in an early concept phase, imagineers envisioned a *European* park with a “continental flavor and identity.”<sup>60</sup> Jean Rene Bernard, the chief negotiator for France in the negotiations, emphasized the need for an experience that “respected European and French culture” and the park’s “unique” localization.<sup>61</sup> Eisner promised “European heritage with a Kansas twist.”<sup>62</sup> As the newest park, connected to one of the world’s most elegant cities, Euro Disney would also be the most beautiful and detailed of all the parks in the Disney park eco-system. But market polls suggested that European consumers were not interested in Disney’s redacted and reassembled vision of Europe—they wanted America, or at least their idea of Disney’s America.<sup>63</sup> The decision was made to deliver “enhanced Americana” that would paradoxically lessen the cultural threat of Americanization. As Jean-Marie Gerbeaux, a spokesman for the park noted,

We don’t want to bring Europe to Europeans... Instead we are bringing a naive, simple view of America, reflecting the view of America that Europeans have. Frontierland will be much more American than it is in America. We will make the rocks much more red, because that is what we see in our minds.<sup>64</sup>

I am not sure that Frontierland in Paris is more American than it is in America (the rocks did not seem so much redder to me). In fact, both the Magic Kingdom and Walt



Disney Studios, which opened in 2002, feel like almost-exact replicas of the Orlando parks. Walt Disney Studios, to be fair, houses one notable difference. Like its sister park, Hollywood Studios, Walt Disney Studios is a paean to Hollywood (collapsed in this case with Walt Disney productions). But Walt Disney Studios also features a distinct nod to the park's larger geographic context: the *Place Rémy*—a Parisian-style square with a souvenir shop that looks like a miniaturized Musée d'Orsay, a Tuileries-style fountain, Parisian street lamps, and a *Métro* entryway sign (leading nowhere). The *Place* abuts the *Ratatouille* attraction (which features an immersive, trackless, high-tech dark ride with 4D film elements) based on the movie of the same name, and *Chez Rémy*, a French bistro named after the movie's star, who happens to be both a kitchen rat and a gourmet chef. In the square everything is in three-quarter theme park scale. The colors are exact and the detailing meticulous: the square is beautifully executed. We feel for a minute like Americans in Paris, which is to say like Americans in an American movie version of Paris (which is of course what the *Place* replicates.) As I walk over a manhole cover embossed with an ornate shield featuring the character of Rémy brandishing a kitchen spoon in place of the traditional spear, I think about the density and intensity of discursive frameworks imprinted in this one image and set inside this *place*: the set of self-reflexive exchanges, (dis)continuities and spatial circuits. In Walt Disney Studios, Mickey doubles with his rat cousin, Rémy, and we are at once in Paris and in a distinctly American space that performatively describes Paris as both part of American cinematic and global commercial space.

But then, the Parisian scene dissolves just about as quickly as we entered it. We turn the corner and head for the next attraction (set in the Great Barrier Reef) and then out of the parks into the resort area, to our hotel. If we had any question about where in themed space we are really meant to be, the resort area clarifies our metageographic

coordinates. With the exception of Hotel Disneyland—a turreted High Victorian estate house/chateau with coral siding and gambrel roofs built at the entryway of the park gates—all the hotels in the resort evoke American spaces, namely Newport, New York City, Sequoia National Park, the Southwest, the Old (Hollywood) West. Many of the Disney resorts in the US reimagine American spaces, from Fort Wilderness to the Grand Floridian, but only Disneyland Paris presents an integrated all-American theme. Not even Tokyo is so defiantly American. The hotel and commercial district turns America itself into a theme park.

The all-American theming was decided by Disney executives in conjunction with a group of consultants, including Frank Gehry and Robert Venturi, whose work *Learning from Las Vegas* is often credited for both the postmodern/pop-culture and “linguistic turn” in architecture—for creating buildings that could be easily “read” or decoded. For Eisner, creating an all-American resort area meant that guests could walk out of the park gates to their hotels without “interrupting” their read on Disney-as-America or America-as-Disney. (With 5200 rooms, Eisner argued that Euro Disney was its own destination site: you didn’t have to stay in or even visit Paris at all.<sup>65</sup>) To be sure the American theme helped to maintain the boundaries of the brand assemblage itself. As the architect Robert Stern argued, Disney “[couldn’t] pretend to be French... [I]t should maintain its identity...otherwise it would be like a bad French restaurant in Kansas City.”<sup>66</sup> (Robert A. Stern designed both The Newport Bay Club and the Hotel Cheyenne—which is more backlot Western town than mere hotel.<sup>67</sup>)

Of course, the boundaries of the brand have less to do with the (re)production of locality than one might imagine. The hotel district is a lesson in “entertainment architecture”—buildings that are themed and function as narrative spaces, spaces that are coded more for cinematographic mood or aura than geographic or historical sense.

The Hotel Sante Fe, for example, was inspired by the Wim Wenders film *Paris, Texas* and has looping trails that snake around drive-up-motel-like structures. Along the trails, designer Antoine Predock created little cinematic vignettes, shards of stories that border on the strange, indeed the paranormal: an abandoned car, a crashed spaceship. And while Michael Graves's "New York" evokes a New York skyline, the view, as Paul Goldberger writes in an architectural review for the *New York Times*, is "so abstracted" it's essentially illegible.<sup>68</sup> From the front, with its "brownstone" wash, "New York" looks quite a lot like a Ramada Inn—functional and efficient. The interiors are cheerier, if a little dizzying: Art Deco meets '70s pop art. The front desk area in the lobby feels like the set of a Joan Crawford film, but the wallpaper behind the desk is emblazoned with giant red pop art apples. Graves argues that in themed architecture, you have to be able to read it whether you are eight or sixty-eight,<sup>69</sup> but when my nine-year-old New Yorker asks me where in New York we are supposed to be, I just shrug.

During our visit, we stay the night in Newport Bay, Robert Stern's mash up of Newport, Nantucket, Cape Cod, and a cruise ship. A hulking structure of yellow clapboard with shingled gables and eleven hundred rooms, Newport Bay is the largest hotel not only in Disney but in all of Western Europe.<sup>70</sup> From the window of our room, I look out onto Lake Disney, the oblong man-made "lake" at the center of the resort district. We can see "New York" directly across from us. The Sequoia Lodge sits just to New York's right. It makes for a strange postcard—the two geographic coasts pressed into one frame, to say nothing of the architectural time collapse—and for a time I struggle to identify the spatial logic of these three American spaces surrounding a "lake" as big as an oversized fountain. Downriver, I know, is Route 66 and the "Santa Fe." Beyond the Hotel Santa Fe is the Hotel Cheyenne which takes you to "Wyoming" as a Hollywood Western stage set—complete with a Chuckwagon cafe, Noonday

Square, and Saloon. Beyond Cheyenne is Camp Davey Crockett, composed of cabins. To some extent, these are scenographic options tied to different price points. Still, Tony Baxter, a Disney executive, argues that Disney is “not...trying to recreate architecture so much as create an absolutely disarming backdrop where people’s guard is let down and they actually live these experiences.”<sup>71</sup> But what experiences are they meant to live? Are European visitors in these spaces meant to “play” at *being* Americans? Are these experiences of translocation meant to transform? Or are guests playing at being tourists in (a fake) America? Or are they playing themselves *as if* they were actors inside theatrical sets, readying for the (global cinema) camera? In the economy of self-presentation today, each location makes for the ready backdrop of an Instagram moment. Certainly, all of these experiences are interactive performance opportunities. This said, guests often make decisions based on practicalities like finances, locations, and preferred amenities. For our part, we chose the least expensive hotel that offered air conditioning (most Europeans, for their part, do not expect air conditioning) and that was in walking distance to the parks. But themed spaces do a kind of performative work whether or not you’ve selected and/or subscribed to a particular vision or experience. Looking out the window of our hotel room, I realized that the three spaces surrounding the lake shift the boundaries of American space in more than one way: they are upper-class leisure spaces and their time signatures are meant to evoke a class of visitors whose movements are fluid, where travel from Nantucket to New York to a Frank Lloyd Wright house among the sequoias is smoothed by capital and a readied service class. The view from the window performs what transnational capital can do—shrink (or shrink wrap) space for an elite (or would-be elite) cosmopolitan.

In an article for *Progressive Architecture*, Ross Miller and Philip Arcidi write that “by taking the facades of wealth, Eisner’s architects have made gawking at the rich a

new Disney attraction." "Why," they question, "are we dressing up again in the way Daniel Burnham, a hundred years ago, clad Chicago as the White City to impress visiting Europeans?"<sup>72</sup> Miller and Arcidi also argue that the architectural environments are a departure from a kind of "original innocence" embodied by Walt Disney towards a kind of ironic, postmodern "American boosterism."<sup>73</sup> But the Americanness of this space is a decoy, a way of deterritorializing American space by appealing to a transnational leisure class or at least an aspiring one. Over the years, Disney has increasingly found ways to appeal to "luxury" markets. These VIP neoliberal spaces are a kind of counterperformative: they are American and not. That these produced "American" spaces are at once "authenticated" (by maps of the supposed surroundings) and openly inauthentic (the rooms are detailed like cabins on a cruise ship) seems to me to be the point. "America" is *supposed* to be a simulation, if only to give greater reality to the park's "other" transnational context which is the *European leisure class*.

Indeed, there is something that feels self-consciously self-deprecating about Disney's de- and reterritorialization of American/transnational space. What strikes me wandering around Newport Bay is that the property is not as impressive as, for instance, The Grand Floridian in Orlando or the Wilderness Lodge in Anaheim, even though it was recently renovated and is billed as a four-star hotel. Comments on TripAdvisor threads warned that the rooms were a terrible deal, and "not to Disney standards."<sup>74</sup> But even the paint colors feel wrong. I wonder if the point was to produce a European version of an American leisure space, which is to say something slightly second class. John Hench, the great Disney imagineer, argues that what the parks sell is "reassurance": "We offer adventures in which you survive a kind of personal challenge," he notes. "A trip to Disneyland is an exercise in reassurance about oneself

and one's ability to handle the real challenges of life."<sup>75</sup> At Euro Disney /Disneyland Paris, guests get a handle on the not-too-overwhelming global frontier. You can take a swim, navigate a menu, watch TV in your home language on a national channel. You can walk the length of the United States in under twenty-five minutes. You can enter and leave and re-enter a distinct (if not particularly distinctive) and *contained* American space. At one point, Disney wondered if it had made a mistake with its Euro Disney resorts. The American style hotels were too big and too expensive. But from the vantage point of 2018, it seems clear that marking transnational brand space as American was, in fact, the most reassuring gesture Disney could make as it began expanding the brand in transnational space. In performing physical American space within French space for a class of "European" visitors, the resort site self-consciously evokes a space of transnational flows, where mass communication and global service modules make local adaptations not only easy/leisurely but playful, and entertaining (at least for some.) The experience is less one of environmental or theatrical interactivity than one of *style*—of the complex interchange of corporate-inflected signs designed to tell us that wherever we go, there we are. As Celia Lury argues, brands are themselves *boundary method objects*.<sup>76</sup> The American theming in Disneyland Paris acts as a boundary, what Lury calls a "curved space" that uses both concrete and abstracted space in order to "multiply relations" all the while "preserving the international organization of the brand."<sup>77</sup> By presenting transnational spaces as actual places that can be inhabited and can even confer select global identities, territorial brands like Disney redefine and reconstitute the neoliberal frontier.

But perhaps the best expression of Disney's use of "America" as an interactive, neoliberal frontier is its representation of the American frontier itself, which is to say of the historical Western frontier. Disney's Western frontier of course is neither

particularly historical or even Western American,<sup>78</sup> but as an assemblage Disney's frontierscape interweaves both American and European constructions of the American West since the nineteenth century. In what follows I focus on just one expression of Disney's frontierscape: *Disney's Buffalo Bill's Wild West*. Although the show opened in 1992, in many ways it's been running in some variation or other ever since Frederick Jackson Turner declared the American frontier closed, only to find that Buffalo Bill could nonetheless keep it open for (show) business.<sup>79</sup>

*Disney's 'Buffalo Bill's Wild West.' Or, How the West Was One.*

The theater for *Buffalo Bill's Wild West with Mickey and Friends!* is part of Disney Village, which is not, in fact, a village but a shopping arcade, complete with restaurants and entertainment zones. Designed by the American architect Frank Gehry, and originally named Festival Disney, the open-air promenade feels more akin to a suburban mall in New Jersey than to Benjamin's Paris arcades. Within the mall, the Buffalo Bill theatre occupies a special place of prominence, sitting at the intersection between the "Village," the train station, and the two theme parks. Two huge carved and painted figures—Buffalo Bill and Sitting Bull—perched above the theater's entryway also draw attention to the theatre. The show is its own ticketed event, running twice a night, five nights a week. Visitors can purchase seats without entering either park (where all shows are included in the entry price). This is to say that the show is its own destination, but with evening shows at 6:30 and 9:30pm, many park-goers simply add the experience (and ticket price) to the end of their day. Between \$80–\$102 for an adult and \$60–\$80 for a child (depending on your seating location) will buy you not just the show, which is billed as an "interactive" spectacular, but also a "traditional Tex-Mex" dinner, served up "frontier-style" on tin plates.

Disney runs dinner shows in all its parks, with a number of variations on the theme. There are dinners where the “show” consists of a handful of Disney characters meeting guests at their tables, where they chat, take photographs, and sign autographs, with a small event (a reading, game, or parade) for children mid-meal. There are also more elaborate dinner shows, like the Polynesian Hula/Lu’au in Orlando with a conventional stage and a story with a plot (of sorts), punctuated by spectacular displays of ethnic dance. But within Disney’s roster of theatrical productions, with or without dinner or other forms of interactivity, *Buffalo Bill’s Wild West* is unique. By far the largest of all of Disney’s theatrical productions, *BBWW* opened at the same time as the Magic Kingdom and has been running ever since. The theater is a purpose-built two thousand-seat arena with stadium seating on three sides; tables are built into the seating area. The show features sixty performers and somewhere between fifty to eighty production staff members. Boasting “exceptional realism,” the cast includes Native American performers from over five tribes across Canada and the United States, in addition to actors, rodeo performers, clowns, as well as stuntmen and -women.<sup>80</sup> Horses, bison, and long horn cattle, all native to North America, are also part of the roundup. (As in the days of Buffalo Bill, they were all sent to Paris by ship.) *BBWW* is also the only historical re-creation developed by Disney, although it is in no way a faithful re-enactment. I like to think that Buffalo Bill would certainly have understood, indeed approved. After all, Buffalo Bill sold his own show, which toured Europe from 1887–1906, as both historical re-enactment/education and “national entertainment,” always blurring the line between the two until his “national” theater eventually became not only the history of the West but of the conquest of American space, both at home and abroad.



That Disney built a re-creation of *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* exclusively for its Paris location is not as perplexing as it might first seem. In many ways Walt Disney was himself a direct successor to William Frederick "Buffalo Bill" Cody, who was the first American to build mass theatrical, interactive entertainments/environments that layered the real and the unreal, that made national spectacles from a surfeit of sellable surfaces. Walt was also quick to understand the performative value of the West for his own brand. From the early days of *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier*, Walt Disney and the Disney theme parks have had a long romance with Western iconography.<sup>81</sup> Today, the Hollywood/Old West lives on not just in Disney's many Frontierlands or its Hotel Cheyenne in Paris but also in its newer neo-frontier spaces: Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge and Pandora (based on the James Cameron film *Avatar*) where all the old Western tropes are still in play: —pioneers laboring in harsh environments or within extractive economies, trying to make good, trying to get rich. In all of these frontier stories there are indigenous figures: sometimes they are kindly or in other ways "good" (they belong to an ancient order, networked to nature and planetary consciousness), but always threatened, always teetering on extinction, and generally in need of a good white man.

The spectacle of the American West has also long been a source of fascination for Europeans. *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* spent roughly a third of its time in Europe. There were eight European tours in over fourteen countries at over five hundred venues. The shows were immensely popular. In London alone the Wild West sold over two-and-a-half million tickets. Queen Victoria herself came out of public retirement to see a command performance. She liked the show so much, she asked to see it again. Victoria was only one in a retinue of royal attendees: King Wilhelm II, Queen Isabella of Spain, the French President, and the Grand Duke Alexei of Russia all turned out for the show. John Burke even arranged for Cody and his troupe of "show Indians" to attend Pope

Leo's coronation.<sup>82</sup> Many scholars have written about the special resonance of the show's message of white imperial rule in Europe. As Western historian David Wrobel notes,

to state the obvious, the "American West" was a global frontier from the very beginning... Throughout the (19th) century, American and European observers of the United States' expansion across the continent had readily considered that march of settlement, displacement, and conquest as part of a larger story of imperialism impacting cultures and economies across the globe.<sup>83</sup>

But the "American West" also had a particular, populist brio to it—it was the dramatic story of transformation of Europeans into a new breed defined by rugged, free-ranging individualism. The word *pioneer*, after all, comes from the Old French for foot soldier,<sup>84</sup> and the historical processes responsible for (re)configuring Europeans into Americans were still underway when Cody first sailed to Europe. During a time of mass urbanization, rising immigration, and rapid industrialization, popular representations of the "cowboy" life captivated European audiences. It was Cody, in fact, who *invented* the white cowboy. Cowboys or cowhands were mostly Mexican at that time. If they were white, they were anything but clean cut. They were "overworked, underfed, poorly paid and ill educated laborer(s)" living "at the margins."<sup>85</sup> Real cowhands also had very little to do with Native Americans. But the formula worked: there were cowboys and there were *indians*. *Indians* helped to stage cowboys as set within a free, natural, and Romantic, if hard-won, past. But Cody knew that selling the past could only get you so far. In fact, as Elliott West argues, the Old West only works as advertising if you can get far enough into the past in order to sell something *modern*. And what Buffalo Bill sold, particularly in Europe, was, as West argues, "public participation in the forces of change."<sup>86</sup>

In this section I consider the relationship of Disney's *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* (with its multiple possessives) to its "original," to understand how this American "national epic"—which told the story of the white conquest of space and of how Europeans became Americans—was reassembled to tell a story of contemporary, transnational brand space. As in Buffalo Bill's productions, Disney's theatrical assemblage merges reality and fiction, performing a kind of "memory showmanship"<sup>87</sup> through which European tourists participate in "place branding" and a striation of global space. Because the Disney show focuses primarily on three figures: Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley, and Sitting Bull, I highlight the figures of the cowboy, the female sharpshooter, and the *indian* in relation to transnational space. I have borrowed the term *indian* from the Native American writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) in order to make space between the apparatus of Native American representation in the Western imaginary and indigenous performers. As Vizenor argues, *indian* helps us to mark the overcoding of native peoples as "one people" and to trace the operation of absence within *indian* representation, particularly in the constitution of the American nation.<sup>88</sup> In the very last section, I then turn to the performative agency of indigenous performer and the ways in which assemblage theory helps us to reframe indigenous performance through a more-than-representational lens, particularly in relation to Native American ontologies and immanent, affective life worlds.

*Assemblages of Buffalo Bill: Cowboys and indians in Europe.*

Our tickets say to arrive at the Buffalo Bill Theatre sixty minutes early. This gives us time to check in and to study the official lobby display, produced in association with the Cody Center of Wyoming. The display spans the length of the first hall that surrounds the arena space, and is composed of at least fifty photographs and artifacts as well as

poster boards in French and English describing everything from “Cavalry and Artillery Groups” to “Life Backstage.” (There are reproductions of Buffalo Bill show posters throughout the arena, including in the bathrooms.) The materials range from 1885–1906. The promotional materials from Disney’s website say that the show is a re-creation of the 1905 Paris show. This suggestion is also made throughout the lobby display, where all the write-ups reference 1905.

This identification with 1905 is somewhat curious. A comparison of the 1889 and 1905 Paris programs (not featured in the display but available through the Cody Center’s library) reveals that the Disney version is much closer to the 1889 show than the 1905 version. The 1889 show was in fact a huge sensation. Fresh from a triumphant turn in London, the 1889 show arrived as part of the Exposition Universelle. The show camped in Neuilly for four months. At the time, the French felt a special affection for the Americans. For one thing, the Americans had shown up for the centennial celebration of the French revolution. (As Susanne Berthier-Foglar notes, most of the monarchies of Europe shunned the Republic and their world exhibition.) With their vigor and high-tech know-how, the Americans were also an interesting new model.<sup>89</sup> In *Reports on Algeria*, de Toqueville argued that the French should look to how the Americans subdued its Native populations on the Western frontier.<sup>90</sup> For his part, Buffalo Bill acknowledged the French in quite the transnational way. As Robert Rydell and Bob Kroes note in their book *Buffalo Bill in Bologna*, Buffalo Bill had his “Cowboy Band... play the French national anthem,” and presented “several performers dressed as fur trappers” to “represent the French influence in Canada.”<sup>91</sup> When Buffalo Bill returned briefly in 1905, Paris was only one of a number of stops on his European tour. Of course, I do not imagine that historical authenticity is really the point. Sitting Bull, for instance, never went to Europe. In some ways the 1905 designation makes a kind of

hyperbolic showbiz sense: the show was certainly bigger than the one presented in 1889. Indeed, by 1905 the show was huge. The sets were composed of the huge scene paintings, live flora and fauna. (Although he could never make it in the movies, Buffalo Bill anticipated the movie industry by selling living pictures in full scenographic display.) Whereas the 1889 show featured a cast of two hundred performers, with a stable of 175 animals, by 1905 (when Buffalo Bill had to be bailed out by PT Barnum) the show had grown four-fold: eight hundred people, five hundred animals, fifty train cars. Packing and loading the trains was its own side show.<sup>92</sup> (The French and the Germans would come out with stopwatches just to understand how the Americans did it—how they could be so mobile.) The show aligned entertainment with military-industrial capacity. It was, in its own way, a spectacular display of the conquest of transnational European space. Cities were also bombarded with ads.<sup>93</sup> Both Susanne Berthier-Foglar and Emily Burns note that the mass advertising campaign both stunned and exhausted the Parisians. The public profile of the show was so high that according to Richard White, *BBWW* became a compelling ad for American immigration.<sup>94</sup> Composed of twenty-three acts, the 1905 show was in fact a testament to immigrant and transnational performance. In addition to the usual set pieces—like the attack on the Deadwood Coach— there were Japanese and Arab acts and, to what must have been French delight, a troupe of “Devlin” Zouave regiments<sup>95</sup> that had served in the American Civil War, a nod to the French Algerian Zouaves. There were also regiments from England, Hungary, and Russia. By contrast, the 1889 show, like the Disney version, did not explicitly represent international space.

I come to the eventual conclusion that the primary reason for the use of 1905 as a reference point is the photographic power of a particular image. The 1905 show was staged in the Champs de Mars in the shadow of the Eiffel Tower, and it is this image,

from the jumbled handful of images from the sweep of *BBWW* productions—all of which were reshaped over time and localized to varying degrees—that takes the day. That the Disney show chooses to erase its transnational roots is curious and yet not particularly surprising. It's a way of reducing the complexity of the transnational past and re-casting it within a Franco-American national exchange, a way of reassembling the American/Western/global frontier for current audiences for whom transnationalism has the aura of being a new technology of self-fashioning.

Of course, most audience members at *BBWW* have not signed up for a history lesson. Spectator/diners tend to ignore the display wall altogether, walking directly towards the bar and small stage space where an American bluegrass band begins to play, accompanied by a dancing Goofy, dressed in cowboy chaps and a vest. Parents dance with their kids. There's also an area set up for photographs with a Southwestern backdrop. Guests set themselves inside the frame, flanked by giant wooden cactuses. As Patricia Limerick notes, tourists tend to know exactly what the frontier means—wherever they are from they are likely to understand the set of free-floating signifiers that represent the “American West.” Indeed, the Japanese mom and daughter and the Swedish family of four know equally how to make the appropriate gestures. Their legs are wide, their chests puffed, their hands on their hips. They look out at imaginary sunsets. The American frontier, as Limerick notes, is a “joint-stock company of the imagination.”<sup>96</sup>

In this “joint-stock” all the audience members are, irrespective of their national origins, cowboys. I say this because when we checked in, we were each given a (straw) Stetson to wear. The Stetsons, which Buffalo Bull popularized, have colored bands. The color-coded bands give the audience handlers an easy way to herd us into our sections when the time comes. Each color corresponds to a different seating area. These areas are

identified as “ranches” and have geographic and political associations. Since we have green color bands, we are part of the Green Mountain Montana section. Surrounding us on three sides are Red River Colorado, Yellow Star Texas, and Blue Moon Wyoming. These “ranches” will become important to us in the last third of the show when audience participation gets competitive, but we never learn anything about our “ranches” or their symbols/polities beyond their labels. The audience handlers and waitstaff are all costumed as cowboys as well, women and men alike. They wear Stetsons, kerchiefs, jeans, and gingham collared shirts with pockets. They direct us to our seats where our places for dinner are set, where chili and cornbread and tortilla chips are already on offer. Our dinner is billed as Tex-Mex fare—other than this abbreviated nod to a shared culinary heritage there is no other acknowledgement anywhere in the show of the Mexican border (even in the presence of a Spanish audience).

During the pre-show, the handlers kick off the participatory nature of the show: we are primed. We are enjoined to pick up our utensils and to bang the tables. We are taught to wave our hats and to shout YEE-HAW. YEE-HAW is, in fact, the catch phrase that runs through the entire evening. The Oxford Dictionary says the term arose in the 1970s, which surprises me only because the Hollywood Western’s popularity fell during this period (after the Vietnam War). William Safire says that the term is likely based on “gee” and “haw”—horseman’s commands.<sup>97</sup> In *BBWW*, YEE-HAW is our common language: YEE-HAW is how the handlers capture our attention and keep us present, how we perform our competitiveness. Wherever we are from or whatever language we may speak—YEE-HAW means that we can all ride our horses into the global sunset together.

The show starts with something of a preamble. A fictional French impresario, Auguste Durand-Ruel,<sup>98</sup> introduces us to the evening. His participation is minimal throughout the evening but his presence is important. He works to frame the show within French national space—presenting this Wild West as a gesture of Franco-American partnership and friendship. (At various intervals the French and American flags are also alternately lowered from the ceiling or projected onto the arena’s dirt surface.) Auguste periodically introduces acts, but he becomes effectively disembodied relatively early, when we hear only his voiceover explaining in French the significance of the bison hunt. The real impresario of the evening is Buffalo Bill, who enters in short order on a white horse, followed soon after by Annie Oakley.

Buffalo Bill and Annie Oakley both speak French with exaggerated American accents playing up a kind of bicultural incompetence. They are also both represented as naive, if plucky, presences. It occurs to me that in a kind of mimetic spin, they are imitating French imitations of themselves. Throughout the show, Buffalo Bill functions as little more than an announcer, although he does save the day during the very last act: a tourist theatre/audience interactive version of the famous “Attack on the Deadwood Stage.”<sup>99</sup> But until that moment, Annie Oakley is the more active Westerner, shooting her way through multiple sequences in which she snuffs the flames off candles, sets bells to ringing (her shots play the tune of the *Marseillaise*), blasts tin cans and glass bulbs, and hits one bullseye target after another. The shooting acts are carefully constructed and controlled by automation: as an audience the adults at least know that there are no live bullets.

Throughout the shooting sequences, the audience is enjoined by their section leaders (sometimes the lead waiter, sometimes the clowns/stuntmen who run between the arena floor and the stands) to shout YEE-HAW in apparent approbation. In an era of



mass shootings in America, I find the show's celebration of gun-toting somewhat surprising, at least for Disney. To be sure, the overtly theatrical nature of the shooting smooths things a little, as does Annie Oakley's performative femininity. As Frank Christiansen notes, the real Annie Oakley was in her time a powerful model of female "white dominance on the frontier,"<sup>100</sup> particularly in England and France, where she embodied not only the purity but the divine purpose of white conquest: civilization. Oakley's femininity was one without sexuality—she was always known as Miss Annie Oakley, even though she was married to Frank Butler (with whom she shared the stage). Her "tomboy" or even child-like status helped stave off any suggestion of too much civilization, of female-specific vanity, or, worse, decadence. Christiansen argues that female sharpshooters helped "return women's bodies to pastoral environs,"<sup>101</sup> even within a clearly mechanized world. In Paris in 2018 it's hard to know how much this connection still holds, but the script certainly tries to keep Annie in place as a girl and to keep up her affiliation with the land. Buffalo Bill introduces her as the Princess of the Winchester rifle, aligning her as another Disney Princess. "This little lady," he tells the audience, can shoot the spit off a bottle."<sup>102</sup> "Now Annie," he says later, "that is the kind of shooting that made Chief Sitting Bull sit up and take notice. Not bad for an Ohio farm girl." There is a hint of girl power at some point, late in the show, when Buffalo Bill says, with something of a wink in his voice, "Who says a girl can't shoot as good as man?" And Annie responds, "Well, I certainly never said it." But this was also a setup for an interactive moment with the audience in which, on the evening we saw the show, a child, a woman, and a man were all brought from the audience to try shooting at a rigged target. The child and the woman both misfired whereas the man was able to hit his target. Perhaps this was an accident of the evening, but this moment reinforced the sense that Annie might be a sure shot, but even in 2018 she is still a Little Miss. Overall,

the tone through her scenes stays light. The shooting displays are displays and not showdowns, always lit in warm, sunny glows and accompanied by bright, cheerful music. Annie Oakley's displays are exercises in a kind of female (if not feminist) pluckiness and, again, reassurance: it isn't so much that Annie is skilled or a potential killer, but that Disney magic performs the technological thrill of theatrical automation/precision.

The company of Native American and Native Canadian performers, however, are presented in the first two-thirds of the show as decidedly dangerous. The performers are given an amiable introduction: "Now from the Great Plains of North America," Buffalo Bill announces, "the stars from [*sic*] our show—the wise, the courageous, the only true Native Americans, the Indians!" But as soon as the Native performers enter, the arena darkens. In a crepuscular light, the Native performers scuttle over a set of cliffs/red rocks set at the back wall of the arena. (This set looks decidedly Southwestern, although the Native performers are all dressed as Plains *indians*). Although there were indigenous female performers in Buffalo Bill's time (paid half the rate of their male counterparts), all the Native performers in the Disney version are male and styled as warriors. To some extent this has to do with expectations based on stereotypes, in many ways defined by the original *BBWW*. Most of the Native performers traveling with Cody's troupe were Lakota Sioux. As Robert E. Bieder notes, Plains Indians became the quintessential show *indians*, both in the US and in Europe.<sup>103</sup> This image was informed by literary traditions particularly in France and Germany, but Buffalo Bill's "living picture" of Plains Indians solidified the image of the premodern, feather-dressed, "bow-and-arrow" *indian*.<sup>104</sup> Since Plains women do not wear headdresses or participate in warrior dances, their participation in the shows was less spectacular and as a consequence eventually elided. Indeed, as Christina Welch notes,

stereotypical representations of Native women continue to inscribe female Native identities within Western constructions of their “domestic” roles as girls, wives, mothers. Welch notes that within a roster of (stereotypical) performance identities given to a 2007 Smurf toy set produced by the German company, Schleich, *all* are gendered as male: “Canoe Smurf,” “Spear Smurf,” “Raindancer Smurf,” “Peace Pipe Smurf,” “Medicine Man Smurf,” “Chief Smurf” are joined by the nondescript “Native American Smurfette.”<sup>105</sup>

Of course, it’s hard to say which identities do the most performative absenting. As the male warriors enter the arena, eerie music, accompanied by rattles and the sound of wolves howling, fills the space. Holding a feathered staff, Chief Sitting Bull rides solemnly into the arena space. He speaks to Buffalo Bill and the audience in a Native language that is not translated.<sup>106</sup> Two dancers enter to the sound of drumbeats and they dance in a circle. More Native performers enter on horseback—all the horses are made to lie down in a display of the Native performers’ control of/proximity to nature. The scene has the aura of a ritual, but the frame is not ethnographic. In this space which is marked as historical, the Native performers perform a spectral version of their theatrical selves, launched a hundred years earlier by the real Buffalo Bill: one that marks them as related to nature, unintelligible, poignant perhaps, but ultimately threatening (and, as such, threatened). Towards the end of the scene, the dark cast of light shifts into a dark red light that floods the entire area—the red light does not suggest dawn but blood. The light seems to call the Native performers back towards the rocks and the performers retreat, heading out of the arena, as the music progressively darkens.

The second *indian* scene features a similarly framed buffalo hunt. The bison are released first into the arena, where they (quite charmingly) seem indifferent to the

menacing musical overtones, and the thunder and lightning cues. A single Native performer then enters the space with a torch. He lights a fire and nine other performers join him in a dance, to prepare for the hunt. They exit and return with spears—gobos ripple across the floor (the patterns suggest flora and fauna) and the performers begin to chase the bison who run obligingly in a circle. The bison are large, heavy creatures and they bow their heads as they run, movingly slowly if somewhat steadily. Once they are safely out of distance, the performers on the ground throw spears in their direction. The remaining riders circle the arena and exit.

The *indian* scenes in Disney's *BBWW* are interwoven with Annie Oakley's spectacular shooting episodes and with an extended cowboy homestead scene in which Mickey, Minnie, Goofy, and Chip 'n' Dale spill out of a covered wagon and the band from the preshow arrives. Everyone sings songs like "Oh Susannah" to the accompaniment of the banjo. There's a cookout onstage timed to occur at the same time that our servers come by with grilled chicken thighs, pork ribs, and steak. Two actors/stuntmen enter the scene playing James-gang types, but as gangsters they are pretty toothless. They engage in a comical interlude about scrounging up dinner. The interlude includes an "argument" that sets off a rally of fisticuffs and ends with a gun going off that triggers a rubber chicken to fall from the rafters. In many ways the scenes run in parallel—Annie Oakley does showbiz, cowboys do gentle humor and campfire camaraderie, and *indians* perform rituals and stalk animals.

Throughout, the production is careful not to make the *indians* the explicit attackers. In a departure from its claim(s) of historical authenticity, the shticky James-gang stuntmen substitute for the Indian attackers in the Deadwood Stage segment. In fact, they come to the aid of Buffalo Bill in helping the hapless tourists who have volunteered to ride in the coach. But taken together, the *indian* scenes reference Buffalo

Bill's *Drama of Civilization*,<sup>107</sup> a drama in which white settlers homestead and Native Americans turn from aggressors/noble savages into helpers/specters.

The show culminates in a set of rodeo games, the most participatory segment of the show. (This section is last, I am convinced, because we've been served our desserts and are no longer too involved in our dinners.) During the "rodeo games"/audience participation segment, Native performers join the ranch teams in cheering, roping, and pony express races; they also assist in a medicine ball pass game, a game that involves hurriedly passing a "medicine ball" through the ranch stands to see which group can get their ball into a tipi-framed basket as quickly as possible. Cheering for each team ostensibly changes the historical narrative of these races, which in Buffalo Bill's time set cowboys against Indians in race-inflected competitions. (The original Disney show in fact maintained the raced races until 2006, when the company decided to unify the teams under their ranches.)<sup>108</sup> And yet, there is a separate cheer introduced for the Native performers. Leaning against the railing that separates the arena floor from the stands, the clown/stuntman/audience-handler-for-our-section raises his hand to his mouth, making the Hollywood Indian war cry, the fake-ululation. I am too stunned to react, but in what feels like an instant, the Dutch boys in front of us join in, calling "woo-woo-woo-woo." No one objects as other children join in. For some reason this exchange is marked as child's play: no adults join in the "woo-woo"-ing. The clown/stuntman and scattered children revive this call and exchange throughout the games, cheering on the "ranches." *Cowboysandindians* the show declares: it's all one team, even if it really isn't.

Perhaps the faux-ululation exchanges, prompted after all by a cast member, would occur in the US, although I doubt it. There would be protests. But even my daughter with her third-grade Native American history knows enough to know that

these exchanges are fraught. The woo-woo-ing as child's play makes me wonder: Where have European children seen Native American representations? What access have they had to Native American history or culture?<sup>109</sup> Do they recognize the cry from television or movies or are they just imitating the clown? What does the cry animate for the Dutch boys who have in fact been brought to their feet, who are jumping up and down with excitement and also delight. Is this a display of identification or contempt? And why do their parents not intervene?

In her article: "Teepees and Totem Poles: Toy representations of North American Indians in European Popular Culture for Children," Christina Welch points to the ubiquity of Native American playsets in Europe. Toys depicting Native American characters and practices have been in production since 1908, since the days of Buffalo Bill's European tours. Over the twentieth century, as Welch argues, these representations have become more and not less homogeneous. Whereas Native warrior figures in the 1920s and 1930s carried guns, contemporary figurines are cast not only in resin, but in the pre-modern "bow-and-arrow" past. Sets are sold with tipis described as wigwams, with totem poles and kayaks given as accoutrements to otherwise Plains Indian sets. Welch quotes the head of a Swedish toy company (Oskar & Ellen) who notes that in Sweden children's exposure to Native Americans is limited to toy sets and to precisely two movies: Disney's *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Night at the Museum* (2006). (I would argue that most European children also have been exposed to the Disney movie *Toy Story* [and its many sequels and products] which features Woody, a popular "cowboy" character.) Although walkarounds of Mickey and Minnie and their friends Chip 'n' Dale were added to draw more families to the show, it seems to me that the Native presence in *BBWW* for children has a significant affective charge, having to do with the vivification of not only the cinematic (and erstwhile theatrical) space of the

Hollywood Western but of the commodity space of the toy set. *cowboysandindians* is a dedicated play space in which the *liveness* of *indian* performance attests to the liveliness of child's play, to the ability of the brand to deliver the felt sense that, just like Woody the cowboy in Disney's *Toy Story*, the life worlds related to a toy can be brought to real life. Why the adults do not intercede in this felt sense is of course another transnational story.

The re-creation of *BBWW* at Festival Disney was brainchild of Jean-Luc Choplin, Euro Disney's first *directeur de spectacles*. At the time he was tapped by Eisner, Choplin was head of ballet at the Paris Opera, under Rudolph Nureyev. His move to Disney shocked the Paris elite, but Choplin had grown up in public housing and felt strongly about popular theatre. Choplin stayed with Disney for eight years before eventually transforming the historic Théâtre du Châtelet, where he once again left Paris aghast by presenting (to great success) American musicals. Choplin loves musicals. His love for the American musical form informs my suspicion that the original impulse for Disney's revival of Buffalo Bill comes from his appearance in Irving Berlin's 1946 musical *Annie Get Your Gun* (written for Ethel Merman as Annie Oakley). Certainly, the figure of Buffalo Bill is commemorated in other popular contexts: Robert Altman made a movie based on Arthur Kopit's play *Indians* and Buffalo Bill was a regular character in Hollywood Westerns and on television. Still, my feeling is that the original template for Choplin's production was *Annie Get Your Gun*, simply because when you get down to it, Mickey, Minnie, and Goofy aside, there are really only three characters in Disney's show, who are central to the musical: Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley, and Sitting Bull.

When Choplin was putting together the show he didn't hire someone especially familiar with musicals or even rodeos for that matter. He hired Robert Carsen, a noted Canadian opera director whose work often has a postmodern flair. Carsen agreed to

direct under the condition that the company would let him rewrite the script. Carsen then turned to the English poet and writer Ian Butler as a writer/dramaturg and together they pored over the Buffalo Bill literature. Wary of treading into politically incorrect territory, the in-house working version of the script had included only one Native performer (to play Sitting Bull). But Carsen's research told him that a strong Native presence was essential. "Cody's audiences were astonished by native culture," Carsen argued. "That's the culture they didn't know."<sup>110</sup> Carsen persuaded Disney bring in a full company of Native performers, and then hired Native actor and choreographer Raul Trujillo to choreograph the show. He also added a Native buffalo hunt to add "grandeur" and something of a narrative thread to the show—a "journey" as he called it—so that it would be more than Disney's original medley of rodeo games and cowboy vignettes.

To be sure, "real" cowboys were also an essential feature of the show from the beginning. Carsen hired his hands from four hundred one-minute cowboy auditions tapes. Aside from HM Wynant who played Buffalo Bill, whom Carsen described as having done "more B movie westerns than you've had hot meals"<sup>111</sup>—none of the cowboys had theatre experience and had to be taught to act. Carsen had three months to rehearse the animals and actors and then only a short preview period to adjust the show to audiences. There were issues: the animals in particular were unpredictable. At times, reality would intrude on the proceedings. The bison would bang the rails, drowning out dialogue between the cowboys; horses would take extra laps, bungling the cuing; a bull charged a performer. The performers suffered injuries, in a handful of cases because of overly enthusiastic or drunk audience participants, and Carsen never figured out how to get everyone served in time to get the waitstaff "onstage" for a giant square dance.<sup>112</sup> Over time, Disney executives cut a number of Carsen's narrative scenes



in favor of more interactive rodeo games. Carsen had ceded too much time / territory to the *indians*, and the participatory element of the show was getting lost.

Like everything at Disneyland Paris, the show had a difficult rollout<sup>113</sup> but in 2014 the show welcomed its ten-millionth guest. Over the years there have been slight adjustments, but aside from the addition of character walk-arounds, and the recent excision of the bison scene has essentially been the same for the past quarter of a century.<sup>114</sup> The critical reception of the Disney show is hard to track. The production did not garner reviews in mainstream French or German newspapers. In December of 1992, Anna Kisselgoff of the New York Times gave the show (and the park) a rave review on behalf of the French, stating that “the genre scenes in the production are more than picturesque. When the cast’s real Indians perform a dance...or stand in the mist atop the cliff designed by Kevin Rupnik, the effect is everything a French devotee of westerns in Left Bank movie houses could desire.”<sup>115</sup> Kisselgoff’s review gives us a set of assumptions about French reception that are worth unpacking here, first and foremost her sense that the performances of “real Indians” authenticate the Hollywood Western (for French audiences) and that the Hollywood Western best represents a French experience / understanding of the American West. As Timothy Scheie argues, the French have borrowed and adapted the Hollywood Western since the early films of Gaston Méliès. Scheie’s work on the French Western or the “baguetti,” draws on Tim Bergfelder’s buffet-inspired assemblage of international Westerns: spaghetti, of course, sauerkraut, paella, kimchi, roast beef (English), and the hungarian goulash Western.<sup>116</sup> For any number of European audience members their understanding of the genre depends on a larger network of national and internationalized Westerns.

From Buffalo Bill’s first European tours, reception of performances of the American West across the European continent have been contingent, emergent, and,

most of all, generative. This is to say that the reception of each performance does not exist in a kind of American-defined vacuum, indeed each performance produces different kinds of *friction*<sup>117</sup> in different cultural and national contexts. Cowboys and *indians* are themselves unstable signifiers and subject to historical and cultural contexts. In Mary Yoko Brannen's study, she presents an interview with a Japanese man about cowboys—he argues that the cowboy is all about teamwork. "It's not being an individual," he says, "whenever those guys had a problem, they'd get together and figure out how to solve it. That's why the shows were so popular in Japan... We see the cowboy as a team player."<sup>118</sup>

What we see then is the production of continuity and disjuncture along (de- and re-) territorializing axes. Over the course of the twentieth century, Buffalo Bill's cowboys and *indians* have shifted in meaning, taken on different specificities and materializations, maintained and expanded their performance genealogies. In France, at the time of Buffalo Bill's European tour, for example, while there was sympathy among the French for Native peoples, the tendency was to see them as more savage than noble.<sup>119</sup> And while there was criticism of the American campaigns against Native peoples,<sup>120</sup> Buffalo Bill was for the most part, a white knight, whose whiteness declared racial purity, fortitude, and energy. Paul Reddin argues that Buffalo Bill was "accepted" among the French with "enthusiasm rarely shown a foreigner" and "the French saw the Wild West show was an object lesson in physical force, exercise and *la jeunesse*."<sup>121</sup> In *Buffalo Bill's British Wild West*, Alan Gallop argues that in quite the same vein, the British "[took] the American to their hearts for...17 years and [would] remember him fondly for generations." He was understood as a "horseman, an unerring shot" and a chivalric presence.<sup>122</sup>

As Eliza Dandridge and Sebastian Braun both argue in their studies of French *bandes dessinées* depicting Far Western space, popular representations of the American West and Native peoples in particular became a way for twentieth-century Europeans to work through the complexities of European colonialism/imperial space. In many of these representations, up to the present day, the pull of a colonial adventure narrative continues to run deep. Indeed, in an NPR broadcast, a French couple speak about their experience of the Disney Buffalo Bill show. “Despite everything,” the woman notes, “despite the massacres and all that, it makes you want to go back and live the life of an Indian or a cowboy. To have a...a...” “A big adventure,” her partner fills in. “Yes!” she affirms.<sup>123</sup> In this account, the *BBWW* show is a metonym for an almost-pastoral past, for Western adventure and European transformation, with the Native American massacres (“and all that”) simply bracketed. And yet, even this particular European adventure narrative (with its overcoding of a history from once again a white perspective) is more complicated than it might first seem.

There are so few Native Americans living in Europe and they are, after all, not seen as making claims to European territory. As Sebastian Braun argues, “European expectations do not necessitate (native) dispossession, but might imply the opposite.”<sup>124</sup> Identification with *both* cowboys and *indians*, then—to be either/or—implies a kind of ambivalence, perhaps even a refusal of the American model. To be sure, this kind of refusal could be a way, as Bill Worthen suggests, of displacing anxieties about European colonialism onto American space (as a way, perhaps, of simply discounting them).<sup>125</sup> Still, the critique of American campaigns against Native Americans and of American representation of Native peoples has a long history, especially in Germany where *Indianthusiasm* has been most (if not exclusively) prevalent on the continent. Even in the original *BBWW*, Germans, as Julie Stetler notes, tended to see the cowboy acts as

realistic but rejected the show's depictions of Native peoples as decidedly inauthentic.<sup>126</sup> Early twentieth-century German visions of Native peoples were framed by idealized literary prototypes, created by American writers like James Fenimore Cooper as well as German writers like Karl May. Stetler argues that Germans were drawn to Buffalo Bill because the shows "vivified" stock Plains Indian characters, but they tended to dismiss their theatrical counterparts as too *theatrical*.<sup>127</sup> Through the course of the twentieth century, the meaning of the *indian* in Europe has shifted with global peace and environmental movements, along with fringe movements (spiritualism/psychedelic and, as I will address later, neofascist groups). Many of these meanings have of course been informed by hobbyists. Gretchen Bataille argues that there are some eighty-five thousand hobbyists in Germany alone, where the practice has been especially well documented.<sup>128</sup> Hobbyists have established entire *indian* villages; cultural and theatrical representations are diverse if not especially wide-ranging (the focus in still these many years later on prairie nations). Surrogate indigeneity in Germany and in other parts of Europe is part of a complex, multi-generational set of historical and socio-material entanglements beyond the scope of this discussion.<sup>129</sup> Hobbyist practices are not reducible to a set of practices or to a coherent ideology. But, as Laura Graham and Glenn Penny argue in *Performing Indegeneity: Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences*, with the ascendance of American hegemony in the twentieth century, the idealized/noble *indian* was discursively enfolded into European representations of American power, signaling a kind of resistance to or defiance of US global (especially consumer) power.<sup>130</sup> In many instances, as Braun argues, European identifications with native peoples implies "resistance against American dispossession and *non-placedness*."<sup>131</sup> This resistance to *non-placedness* has taken many forms in Europe; some are extreme. Within the assemblage of European hobbyists today, some among the Far

Right (in Germany, Britain, Ireland, and the Czech Republic)<sup>132</sup> use *indians* to refashion their imagined claims to national territory as *ethnic*. These groups use the rhetoric of indigeneity not to contest American (consumer) space / Americanization but to dispossess non-white “immigrants,” building an essentialized, ethnonationalist discourse that describes Germanic or Saxon or Celtic peoples as indigenous.<sup>133</sup>

If there are complicated questions about mimetic identification in terms of European reception, the final moment of the show makes clear that the show aims to present itself within a simplified Franco-American exchange frame. The show is an opportunity to pretend and have fun *à l'américaine*, whereas the finale marks the moment to celebrate *à la française*. Auguste pulls out a bottle of champagne and the two men toast each other as the French flag is projected on the arena floor. An instrumental version of “Home on the Range” plays over the loudspeaker. “Paris has always been my favorite city,” Buffalo Bill exclaims, “and not just because of the champagne.”<sup>134</sup> Buffalo Bill then presents Auguste with his scout’s hat (“as a token of my esteem”) and Auguste holds it high above his head, walking slowly to the edge of the arena in a single spot until, in a crescendo of music and lights, he places the hat on his head. The final image of the show metonymically performs not just a French celebration but the ability of France to decide for itself to wear (if only for a moment) a Western American hat.

This final moment captures not only the way Disney disavows its colonial/neoliberal authority within French space, but also the meaning of the global brand frontier, which is not only full of easily deciphered signs but complex interplays. For many spectators the show may in fact perform a kind of drama of reassurance—one in which the borders between France and America are secure simply because they can be performatively invoked. But for others I imagine that participating in the show, quite

like in the past, is to participate, perhaps even warily, in the forces of change, to understand the frontier as a space in the making, as much a future-space as it is a past-space.

For my part, I think transnational tourists like seeing the historical border / frontier as a performative transnational imaginary—one that uses participatory (consumable) theatre as a technology for the globalized self. The more it becomes possible to see the nation (particularly the American nation) as Buffalo Bill saw and sold it—as a *theatrical invention*—the less complicated it is to move through American brand space. If the American frontier can be sold, *it can also be bought*, which is why, ultimately, the show is perfectly situated in a shopping mall. This is not to say that this purchase is simple, indeed that this history / future is for sale at all points to a significant performative function of the show itself, which is staging the very ambivalence of transnational frontiers—how to go back, how to go forward, with whom to identify. Ambivalence, argues Louis Warren, “was the defining characteristic of American sentiment on westward expansion.”<sup>135</sup> In a sense, Disney’s Buffalo Bill’s Wild West captures the ambivalence of American-style corporate global expansion—of Europeans to Americans, of Americans to Europeans, of Americans to non-white others, of Europeans to non-white others, of national to transnational villagers and vice versa, to the very notion of a branded global frontier. Indeed, for many French visitors the show’s Franco-American frame does little to redress the fact that the show is primarily in English. Of the 1,544 French reviews of the show on TripAdvisor at least two-thirds comment negatively on the fact that the show is not in French.<sup>136</sup> To some extent this reaction disavows the show as an international space—one in which English operates not simply as an American language but as the (tourist) lingua franca of the European continent. For these reviewers, the show is in France and so must be spoken in French.

English, German, and Dutch reviewers mostly discuss the cost of the show and its menu. TripAdvisor reviewers are of course a select group. They have already bought in, they speak to and for other consumers about consumables they have already consumed. In the discursive space of TripAdvisor, opinions function as transnational identities that everyone takes for granted. In these reviews there is almost no talk about what the show actually represents – its historical referents, its cultural contexts, its overcoding of western American space as global space, its insistent staging of cowboys and *indians*. Perhaps this is just as Buffalo Bill would have it –the easy overlap and enfolding of national narratives and identities within a theatrical platform, the givenness of the sense that the west is already won and one.

*On Native Assemblages and Performance Spaces*

And what of the “other” transnational villagers? The Native American performers from “Canada” and “America,” whose own nations overlap and exceed the national/geographic boundaries inscribed over them? What of the liveliness and life worlds of the men whose performances exist in temporalities separate from Western determination? Whose performance and affective worlds build on native ontologies and materialities that both cut across and are independent of non-Native assembly?

In 1884, Buffalo Bill asked the great Lakota Chief, Tatanka Iyotanka, who had led the fight against Custer in the Battle of Little Big Horn, to tour with the show. Tatanka Iyotanka (rather ingloriously translated as Sitting Bull) had his own show, but he greatly admired Annie Oakley (he even formally adopted her and gave her the name “Little Sure Shot”) and so he agreed to come along. Sitting Bull toured the US and Canada for only four months (he was never in Paris); each time he entered the arena, the audience would boo and jeer.

In a famous snapshot Buffalo Bill and Sitting Bull stand together. Sitting Bull's shoulders are squared so that he's in profile, turned slightly towards Buffalo Bill. Buffalo Bill is flush with the camera shutter: he holds a rifle that stands close to his full length. The photograph was often captioned: "Enemies in 76, Friends in 85." But the terms are clearly not equal—only Buffalo Bill has the gun and the future in hand. It was a stage friendship, as Joy Kasson notes, "honored only at the expense of surrender to white dominance and control"<sup>137</sup> and in which indigenous performers agreed to, in some way, play imitations of themselves and to re-enact their own demise. Behind the scenes, Cody was kind and solicitous to his Native performers. Together, they were show folk. But Cody also knew how much he needed them. They were integral to his success and his mission: they were living history, *the real thing*, but because they were living on borrowed time, they were also the most theatrical of acts: a vanishing act. Audiences came before and after the show just to watch them in their encampments.

For Sitting Bull, \$50 a month, with the special concession that he could keep all proceeds from any photographs, was a decent living, a great deal more, in fact, than he could earn elsewhere. Touring with the white man also gave Native performers a chance to observe closely, to "gain the knowledge" they needed, as Louis Warren argues, to have "at least some hope of protecting themselves from the worst excesses of the government."<sup>138</sup> Being a "show Indian" (a designation assigned by the Bureau but inhabited by performers) was also a way to keep Lakota culture alive in the face of a ruthless assimilation campaign—to speak in one's own language, to hand down traditional war dances, to try to "nudge," as Philip Deloria has said, "notions of Indianness to directions they found useful."<sup>139</sup> This tradition, this nexus of relations of interiority and exteriority continues to this day.



In her book, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows*, Linda Scarangella McNenly argues that despite the spectacularization of Native performance in Disney's production—as both primitive, aggressive others and as “noble savages,” Native performers negotiate their performances in ways that both challenge and step outside white inscription and stereotype. Through interviews with cast members like Kevin Dust, Kevin Mustus, Carter Yellowbird, and Ernest Rangel, Scarangella McNenly makes the case that the performers “challenge Euro Disney's power to define Nativeness,” by “evok[ing] authenticity discourses,” of their own, “in terms of traditional knowledge (of riding and dancing for example), which is an important aspect of their lived identity.”<sup>140</sup> She also notes that the question of the historical re-enactment and the reproduction of stereotypes simply isn't a question for some performers. They have learned to exist alongside these questions. The word stereotype, as Carter Yellowbird notes, doesn't have a translation in Native lexicons. Quite like Native performers who traveled with the original show, “the issue for many of these performers,” Scarangella McNenly argues, is representing themselves as best they can, as professionals and outside the context of the show and in a positive way.”<sup>141</sup> Many native performers see themselves as cultural ambassadors and despite culture shock of their own, find ways to address the new cultures they've entered. As transnational businessmen, the performers promote their own work, travel to participate in other shows in other countries, play their own music in bands, and create their own shows. Scarangella McNenly argues that Wild West shows are “contact zones”<sup>142</sup> (Pratt) in which hegemonic representations (of history and identities) coexist with expressions of native identity.

In *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of US-Indigenous Relations*, Kevin Bruyneel borrows and redefines Homi Bhabha's “third space” to argue that Native nations exist inside a “third space of sovereignty,” which “resides neither simply

inside nor outside the American political system but rather exists *on these very boundaries*, exposing both the practices and contingencies of American colonial rule."<sup>143</sup> For Bhabha the "third space" discharges the ambivalence and anxiety of colonial rule, but for Bruyneel the third space allows for a complex set of negotiations that gives indigenous actors the ability to rethink questions of political identity on their own terms. In one moment of the show, which, given that it is not mentioned in McNenly's study, I imagine developed within the evolution of the production's twenty-five-year term, two riders on horseback chase down the same clown that started the "woo-woo" chorus through the arena. The clown is wearing a feather headdress, but his Native impersonation is clearly a hack job, ridiculous. In this moment, the joke is clearly on the clown and on the trope "woo-woo" Indian itself, which is figuratively driven out of the performance space. I like to think that this moment was produced inside a "third space of sovereignty" in which the Native performers invoked a preferred performative space within the larger brandscape, one that expands its contingencies and boundaries.

Indeed, an assemblage perspective reminds us that performance topologies are overlapping and, in a Latourian sense, grounded in multiple ontologies. This is to say that indigenous performances continually create registers within their own intra- and supra-national spaces and geographic networks. Indeed, these registers typically cross divides established in Western ontologies: human/non-human (animal, material), culture/nature, time/space. This is to say that not only do these performances exceed the space of political production/corporate commodification but that they *matter* differently inside indigenous networks. I do not argue here that political or neoliberal realities are irrelevant, quite the opposite. I want only to argue for the material agency of Native performers beyond their relationship to Disney as a corporation. (McNenly's work understandably privileges the accounts of the performers in their journeys

working for Disney, rather than the Native ecologies of their performances.) Further studies investigating the kinds of Native ontologies that are at work in contemporary Wild West performances would help us reshape our understanding not only of the meaning of indigenous performance within these spaces but the very meaning of performance spaces and of trans/national flows altogether.

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<sup>1</sup> The original agreement was made by Francois Mitterand, earning him the moniker Mickeyrand. Although there was some concern that the change in administrations might hamper the closing, Chirac certified the original deal soon after he entered office.

<sup>2</sup> Beyond the 6-mile RER extension, a new TGV hub (with direct lines from Brussels, Frankfurt, and Charles de Gaulle) and supplementary highway system were included in the transportation network. See Andrew Lainsbury, *Once Upon an American Dream: The Story of Euro Disney* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 31–32.

<sup>3</sup> Again, for details on French support, see Lainsbury, *Once Upon*, 31–32.

<sup>4</sup> In Lainsbury, 32.

<sup>5</sup> Lainsbury, 33.

<sup>6</sup> John Dorst, “Miniaturising Monumentality: Theme Park Images of the American West and Confusions of Cultural Influence,” in *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American mass culture in Europe*, ed. R. Kroes and R. Rydell (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993), 262.

<sup>7</sup> In Lainsbury, 17. Lainsbury notes that “Orlando was then the third most popular travel destination for Europeans,” with 2 million a year heading for WDW / Anaheim.

<sup>8</sup> When Disney started scouting sites for the project, prospective countries across the continent rolled out their respective red carpets. It had come down to Barcelona and Paris. Barcelona had good weather, but Tokyo Disneyland had proven “weather proof” and Paris had infrastructure and a central location. Although the bulk of visitors were expected to come from France, Paris had been chosen because it was a gateway city. 109 million people were within driving distance of Paris. Germans and the Dutch could take the train. Britons could hop on puddle jumpers or, even better, come 1993, take the Chunnel. Indeed, 310 million potential visitors were within a two-hour flight range, to say nothing of the millions of tourists from all over the world who flocked to Paris every year. See Lainsbury, 21–22.

<sup>9</sup> See Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: The Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), 24–26.

<sup>11</sup> In Lainsbury, 34.

<sup>12</sup> Alan Riding, “Only the French Elite Scorn Mickey’s Debut,” *New York Times*, April 13, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/04/13/world/only-the-french-elite-scorn-mickey-s-debut.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Lainsbury, *Once Upon*, 41.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Marton, *Le Monde According to Mickey*, *New York Times*, April 12, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/04/12/archives/le-monde-according-to-mickey.html>.

<sup>15</sup> See Mary Yoko Brannen, “When Mickey Loses Face: Recontextualization, Semantic Fit, and the Semiotics of Foreignness,” *The Academy of Management Review* 29, no. 4 (2004): 593–616, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20159073>.

<sup>16</sup> Lainsbury, *Once Upon*, 22.

<sup>17</sup> For stories about farming communities in the area, see Lainsbury, 24. For a tally of public funds, Lainsbury, 31.

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<sup>18</sup> See Collier and Ong, "Global Assemblage, Anthropological Problems," in *Global assemblages: technology, politics, and ethics as anthropological problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> See, Stephen J. Collier, "Global Assemblages" *Theory, Culture & Society* 23, no. 2–3 (May 2006): 399–401, doi:10.1177/026327640602300269.

<sup>20</sup> The parks are extremely important to Disney's bottom line. As a November 2018 New York Times article by Brooks Barnes notes, park profits in the last five years are up 100 percent. Barnes's article quotes Jessica Reif, a Merrill Lynch analyst, noting that the parks "offer the highest return on investment that Disney has." Indeed, Disney is reinvesting heavily in the parks this year, more, as Barnes argues, "than...on Pixar, Marvel and Lucasfilm combined." This was an anticipated scenario but one that took some time to evolve for the brand. Brooks Barnes, "Disney Is Spending More on Theme Parks Than It Did on Pixar, Marvel and Lucasfilm Combined," *New York Times*, November 16, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/16/business/media/disney-invests-billions-in-theme-parks.html>.

<sup>21</sup> See Janis Forman, "Corporate image and the establishment of Euro Disney: Mickey Mouse and the French press," *Technical Communication Quarterly (TCQ)* 7, no. (Summer 1998):251-253 <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/215437032?pq-origsite=summon&accountid=10226>.

<sup>22</sup> In Lainsbury, *Once Upon*, 186.

<sup>23</sup> Disney poured roughly \$220 million across its divisions into targeted campaigns and community-based projects as well as pop-up shops; "charity" and goodwill events; mail campaigns; billboards; DVD and TV promo spots with segments featuring the yet-to-be-built theme park; corporate partnerships with twelve major companies. See Lainsbury, 86. Building on the "linking value" of each campaign to re-territorialize the brand in local communities and to build customer-based brand equity, Disney's early social marketing campaigns created continuity between everyday lifeworlds and brand space, increasing the network of associations among potential consumers. On linking value, see Bernard Cova, "Community and consumers: Towards a definition of the 'linking value' of product or services," *European Journal of Marketing* 31, no. 3,4 (March 1, 1997): 297, ISSN: 0309-0566.

<sup>24</sup> "Mickey Hops the Pond," *The Economist*, March 28, 1986, 75.

<sup>25</sup> There were twenty thousand visitors the first day. Projected numbers for the first year were roughly eleven to twelve million, but attendance for the two months were only 1.5 million. See Roger Cohen, "Slow Start At Europe's Disneyland," June 8, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/06/08/business/slow-start-at-europe-s-disneyland.html>. The park eventually posted numbers closer to the break-even mark at 9.5 million visitors but the shortfall and investor nervousness put the park in financial straits. See Earl P. Spencer, "Euro Disney: What Happened? What Next?" *Journal of International Marketing* 3, no. 3 (1995): 103–14, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25048611>.

<sup>26</sup> See Jonathan Matusitz, "Disneyland Paris A case analysis studying how glocalization works," *Journal of Strategic Marketing* 18, no. 3 (June 1, 2010): 223.

<sup>27</sup> See Janis Forman "Corporate image."

<sup>28</sup> The Hollywood Reporter published a story arguing that five thousand workers had left. Robert Fitzgerald wrote a rebuttal for the Wall Street Journal that admitted to one thousand workers turning over. See Lainsbury, *Once Upon*, 103.

<sup>29</sup> Carolyn Rees quoted in Forman, "Corporate image," 252.

<sup>30</sup> On the World Bazaar shopping concourse in Tokyo Disneyland and the tradition of *omiyage* (souvenir gifts) in Japan, see Brannen, "When Mickey Loses Face," 593–616.

<sup>31</sup> See Richard Taylor and Terry Stevens, "An American adventure in Europe: an analysis of the performance of Euro Disneyland (1992–1994)," *Managing Leisure* 1, no. 1 (1995): 28–42, doi: 10.1080/136067195376556.

<sup>32</sup> See Taylor and Stevens, "An American adventure," 28.

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- <sup>33</sup> In an interview with *Fortune Magazine's* John Huey, Eisner noted, "We had a generation of executives who had never been around failure." In J. Huey and J. McGowan, (1995). "EISNER EXPLAINS EVERYTHING," *Fortune* 131, no. 7 (1995): 60, <https://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login>.
- <sup>34</sup> As John Huey wrote in *Fortune Magazine*, the "culture press" in particular delighted in Euro Disney's troubles, taking it as "proof that God still prefers live ballet to the audioanimatronics of the Country Bear Playhouse." Huey and McGowan, "EISNER EXPLAINS," 62.
- <sup>35</sup> Huey and McGowan, 60.
- <sup>36</sup> See Calvin Sims, "Rich Saudi Bails Out Disney Unit," *New York Times*, June 2, 1994, <https://www.nytimes.com/1994/06/02/business/rich-saudi-bails-out-disney-unit.html>.
- <sup>37</sup> Associated Press, "Euro Disney Adding Alcohol," *New York Times*, June 12, 1993. <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/06/12/business/euro-disney-adding-alcohol.html>
- <sup>38</sup> "Europhobia WHAT'S IN A NAME? / is the Prefix 'Euro' a Commercial Asset Or a Mark of Dullness?" *The Globe and Mail*, Jun 20, 1995. <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/385110369?accountid=10226>.
- <sup>39</sup> The company later added "resort" (Disneyland Paris Resort) in 2002, but Europeans didn't buy the association so in 2009 it went back to Disneyland Paris.
- <sup>40</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Vol. Updated ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=286793&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.
- <sup>41</sup> Peter J. Taylor and Ben Derudder, *World city network: a global urban analysis*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2016).
- <sup>42</sup> Brannen, "When Mickey Loses Face," 593–616; Matusitz, "Disneyland Paris," J. Van Maanen, "Displacing Disney," *Qualitative Sociology* 15, no. 5 (1992), <https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1007/BF00989711>.
- <sup>43</sup> Brannen, "When Mickey Loses Face;" Van Maanen, "Displacing Disney,;" J. Van Maanen and A. Laurent (forthcoming), "The flow of culture," in *Organization theory and the multinational corporation*, E. Westney and S. Ghoshal eds., (London: MacMillan).
- <sup>44</sup> On Tokyo Disneyland see Aviad E. Raz, *Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999), 12; Joy Hendry, *The Orient Strikes Back A Global View of Cultural Display* (London: Bloombury, 2000); Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, "Images of Empire: Tokyo Disneyland and Japanese Cultural Imperialism," in *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom*, ed Eric Smoodin, (New York: Routledge, 1994); Brannen, "When Mickey Loses Face."
- <sup>45</sup> Yoshimoto, "Images," 197.
- <sup>46</sup> Yoshimoto, 197.
- <sup>47</sup> Raz, *Riding the Black Ship*, 12.
- <sup>48</sup> Liane Bonin, "Tragic Kingdom," *Detour Magazine* (April 1988), 69.
- <sup>49</sup> 2016 reported a net loss of \$858 million, attributed to labor rate inflation, security costs, capital reinvestments, and debt, but a full \$565 million of those losses are an "impairment fee," a charge Disney owes itself, in a corporate sleight of hand to reduce its tax load. See DLP Today, "2016 Annual Results: Disneyland Paris park attendance down 10%, revenues fall 7%," DLP Today, November 11, 2016, <https://www.dlptoday.com/2016/11/11/2016-annual-results-disneyland-paris-park-attendance-down-10-revenues-fall-7/>.
- <sup>50</sup> Disneyland Paris News, "Disneyland Paris: Europe's #1 Tourist Destination Celebrates 25 Years," Disneyland Paris News, financial results for fiscal year 2016, study on socio-economic impact published February 24, 2014, <http://disneylandparis-news.com/en/key-figures/>.
- <sup>51</sup> Part of the reinvestment has to do with the fact that the company retained 100 percent ownership of Disneyland Paris in 2017 and the overall outlook for the profitability of the park over time. The tourist market in Paris has also picked up. On the reinvestment, see Dominique Vidalon, "Walt Disney makes 2 billion euros investment in Disneyland Paris," *Reuters*, February

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27, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-disney-france-investment/walt-disney-makes-2-billion-euros-investment-in-disneyland-paris-idUSKCN1GB1NT>.

<sup>52</sup> The French are also the strongest “repeat” visitors. This may be because they are place-based constituents and the parks can be visited for day trips.

<sup>53</sup> Perhaps in part because of EU investigations into differential pricing packages for British and German guests, in which Germans were stuck with the highest tabs. See Agence France-Presse, “Taking the Mickey? Disneyland Paris accused of overcharging foreign visitors,” *The Guardian*, July 28, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/29/disneyland-paris-taking-the-mickey-british-german-visitors>.

<sup>54</sup> DLP Today, “Attendance breakdown reveals where 15 million Disneyland Paris visitors come from,” DLP Today, March 11, 2011, <https://www.dlptoday.com/2011/03/11/attendance-breakdown-reveals-where-15-million-disneyland-paris-visitors-come-from/>.

<sup>55</sup> Sassen, *Territory, Rights, Authority*, 1.

<sup>56</sup> Collier and Ong, “Global Assemblage,” 400.

<sup>57</sup> North American and Middle Eastern sections exist in the Small Worlds, but are styled differently in France.

<sup>58</sup> In Lainsbury, *Once Upon*, 50.

<sup>59</sup> In Steven Greenhouse, “Playing Disney in the Parisian Fields,” *New York Times*, February 17, 1991, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/02/17/business/playing-disney-in-the-parisian-fields.html>.

<sup>60</sup> In Lainsbury, *Once Upon*, 50.

<sup>61</sup> In Lainsbury, 51.

<sup>62</sup> In Riding, “Only the French.”

<sup>63</sup> In Lainsbury, *Once Upon*, 51.

<sup>64</sup> Dave Kehr, “It’s Not All Ooh-la-la Over French Disney Park,” *Chicago Tribune*, June 8, 1991, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1991-06-08-9102210003-story.html>.

<sup>65</sup> Eisner in Greenhouse, “Playing Disney.”

<sup>66</sup> In Lainsbury, *Once Upon*, 69.

<sup>67</sup> In addition to Stern, although Disney solicited design proposals from celebrity architects around the world—including Rem Koolhaas and Jean Nouvel, the latter of whom submitted a modernist design for what he called “The House of Rational Thought”—in the end, all but one of the contracts went to Americans. Michael Graves designed The New York Hotel, and Antoine Predock, a site-specific architect based in New Mexico, designed The Hotel Santa Fe. Only one European emerged from the pack: the French architect Antoine Grumbach who designed The Sequoia Lodge—a Prairie school, Frank Lloyd Wright–esque “timber” lodge nestled among cedars, pines, and Sequoias, imported, in fact, from British Columbia.

<sup>68</sup> Paul Goldberger, “ARCHITECTURE VIEW; A Curious Mix Of Versaille And Mickey Mouse,” *New York Times*, June 14, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/06/14/arts/architecture-view-a-curious-mix-of-versailles-and-mickey-mouse.html>.

<sup>69</sup> In Lainsbury, *Once Upon*, 80.

<sup>70</sup> Goldberger, “ARCHITECTURE VIEW.”

<sup>71</sup> In Lainsbury, *Once Upon*, 64.

<sup>72</sup> Ross Miller and Philip Arcidi, “Euro Disneyland and the Image of America,” *Progressive Architecture*, October 1990, 92. Business Insights: Essentials. <https://bi-gale-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/essentials/article/GALE%7CA8949034?u=columbiau&sid=summon>

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Trip Advisor, “Disney’s Newport Bay Club: Reviews,” Trip Advisor, June 17, 2018. [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel\\_Review-g1182377-d262679-Reviews-or30-Disney\\_s\\_Newport\\_Bay\\_Club-Chessy\\_Marne\\_la\\_Vallee\\_Seine\\_et\\_Marne\\_Ile\\_de\\_France.html#REVIEWS](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g1182377-d262679-Reviews-or30-Disney_s_Newport_Bay_Club-Chessy_Marne_la_Vallee_Seine_et_Marne_Ile_de_France.html#REVIEWS).

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<sup>75</sup> In Michael Steiner, "Frontierland as Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Architectural Packaging of the Mythic West," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, 48 no. 1 (1998): 11–12, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4520031>Steiner.

<sup>76</sup> Celia Lury, "Brands as Boundary Method Objects," *Brands and Brand Geographies*, ed. Andy Pike. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011), 53.

<sup>77</sup> Lury, "Brands as Boundary," 54.

<sup>78</sup> As Patricia Limerick notes, the notion of American westering by definition speaks over and excludes Native peoples, Mexicans, Asian Americans—the many people who did not in fact "go West." See Patricia Limerick, "The Adventures of the Frontier in the Twentieth Century," in *The Frontier in American Culture* ed. James R. Grossman. (Oakland: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>79</sup> In the Buffalo Bill annals, Buffalo Bill often takes the (historical) stage with Frederick Jackson Turner. (See: Limerick, "The adventures"; Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: the myth of the frontier in 20<sup>th</sup> century America*, (New York: HarperPerennial, 1993); Michael Steiner, "Frontierland as Tomorrowland,"; Richard White, "Buffalo Bill and Frederick Jackson Turner," in *The Frontier in American Culture*. Also see Rosemarie K. Bank on the meaning(s) of this pairing: "Representing History: Performing the Columbian Exposition." *Theatre Journal* 54, no. 4 (2002): 589-606. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25069139>. They were both present at the 1893 at the Columbian Exposition.) The two men did not meet (there was both actual and metaphorical distance between the lecture hall and the performance arena). But for many historians both Buffalo Bill and Turner presented the same conclusion: the frontier was closed --the great Western adventure was over. For Turner, there was simply no more land. For Buffalo Bill, the hunter-cum-scout-cum-military-hero has conquered the land, with the gun as his "aid to civilization." Still the success of Buffalo Bill's shows as both historical record and theatre proved that the frontier was above all an interactive, dynamic space that marked not only national but transnational space.

<sup>80</sup> Disneyland Paris Press News, "'Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show...with Mickey & Friends!' celebrates the 10 millionth spectator!," DisneylandParis.com, December 29, 2014, <https://news.disneylandparis.com/en/2014/12/29/buffalo-bills-wild-west-show-with-mickey-friends-10-millionth-spectator/>.

<sup>81</sup> Douglas Brode traces Walt Disney's interest in frontier stories to as early as 1935. In his chapter on Native American representation, Brode argues that Disney's attitudes towards Native peoples was, in fact, radical in its day—leaning towards sympathetic portraits that balanced Native perspectives against their white counterparts. He argues that in instances when depictions were caricatured (as in *Peter Pan*), these caricatures applied equally to white characters (like Captain Hook). See Douglas Brode, *Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

<sup>82</sup> See Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America: William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005).

<sup>83</sup> David Wrobel, "Prologue," *The Popular Frontier: Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Transnational Mass Culture* (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>84</sup> In Elliott West, "Selling the Myth: Western Images in Advertising," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 46, no. 2 (1996): 36–49, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4519878>.

<sup>85</sup> Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 233–35.

<sup>86</sup> West, "Selling the Myth," 45.

<sup>87</sup> Joy S. Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West: Celebrity, Memory and Popular History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 130.

<sup>88</sup> See Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

<sup>89</sup> Susanne Berthier-Foglar, "The 1889 World Exhibition in Paris: The French, the Age of Machines, and the Wild West," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 31 no. 2 (2009): 129–142, doi:10.1080/08905490902981929.

<sup>90</sup> In Wrobel, "Prologue," 7.

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<sup>91</sup> Robert Rydell and Bob Kroes, *Buffalo Bill in Bologna: The Americanization of the World, 1869–1922* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>92</sup> See Julia Simone Stetler, “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West in Germany A Transnational History,” (PhD diss, Las Vegas: University of Nevada, 2012), 275.

<http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/1038377069?accountid=10226>.

<sup>93</sup> For the 1905 tour over three hundred thousand broadsheets were printed. See Stetler, “Buffalo Bill’s Wild,” 275.

<sup>94</sup> Richard White, “Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill,” in *The Frontier in American Culture*, James R. Grossman, ed. University of California Press, 1994. Proquest Ebook Central. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/columbia/detail.action?docID=2233337>, 29.

<sup>95</sup> Named for the businessman George Devlin who knew a performance opportunity when he saw one.

<sup>96</sup> Limerick, “The Adventures,” 94.

<sup>97</sup> William Safire, “THE AWAY WE LIVE NOW: 1-06-02: ON LANGUAGE; Yee-Haw,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 6, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/01/06/magazine/the-way-we-live-now-1-06-02-on-language-yee-haw.html>.

<sup>98</sup> Kisselgoff states that Durand-Ruel was the “impresario who presented the real Buffalo Bill” but I find no evidence of this in the historical record. See Anna Kisselgoff, “CULTURAL VIEW; at Euro Disney, Mickey Mouse Takes a Back Seat,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1992, <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/12/06/arts/cultural-view-at-euro-disney-mickey-mouse-takes-a-back-seat.html>. (Her statement is echoed in a few Disney blogspots but nowhere else.) My guess is that the creators collapsed the names of Auguste Renoir and his famous art dealer Paul Durand-Ruel, but I have no evidence for this conjecture.

<sup>99</sup> The Deadwood stage-coach attack was one of the most popular set pieces in Buffalo Bill’s show. Deadwood referenced a gold-mining town and the attackers were *indians* on horseback in pursuit of both the stagecoach’s treasure and its extractor-shepherds. Warren argues that just as stage coaches were disappearing from the frontier, the Deadwood stage coach attack staged a nostalgic turn from the past towards a future inscribed as white (won through hardiness, technological savvy and racial superiority.) He notes that the coach was “the object of near spiritual veneration for the audience.” (In Warren, *Buffalo Bill’s America*, 228). The coach’s status had to do with its story but also with its immersive theatrical possibility. Each night audience members were chosen to ride in the coach. (The Disney show maintains this feature). Local and state officials (and even royals) rode in the coach, which Warren argues “validated” both the show --and its story of popular conquest of the frontier by cowboys and farmers -- as “high culture.” (In Warren, 228.)

<sup>100</sup> Frank Christianson, “American Theses,” in *The Popular Frontier: Buffalo Bill’s Wild West and Transnational Mass Culture*, ed. Frank Christianson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017).

<sup>101</sup> Christianson, “American Theses,” 122.

<sup>102</sup> Production script as transcribed from personal video footage July 13, 2018.

<sup>103</sup> See Robert E. Bieder, “Marketing the American Indian in Europe: Context, Commodification, and Reception,” in *Cultural transmissions and receptions: American mass culture in Europe*, eds. R. Kroes, R.W. Rydell, and D.F.J. Bosscher (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993).

<sup>104</sup> Indeed, when the German impresario Haegenback, famous for his ethnographic shows, brought a group from the Bella Coola nation, they were dismissed as Asian rather than authentically “Indian.”

<sup>105</sup> Cristina Welch, “Teepees and Totem Poles: Toy representations of North American Indians in European Popular Culture for Children,” in *Tribal fantasies: Native Americans in the European imaginary, 1900-2010*, eds. James Mackay and David Stirrup, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 111.

<sup>106</sup> At this point English is the lingua franca of the show and is not translated into French. The decision not to translate “Sitting Bull’s” invocation may have to do with a kind of “othering” of



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Native language but it may also have to do with a choice on the part of the Native performers not to have the invocation translated into English.

<sup>107</sup> For the 1886–87 season, Salsbury and Cody brought in Steele MacKaye, a noted playwright and director, to give narrative dimension and the proper pomp needed to elevate Buffalo Bill's show from mere combination to historical pageant. *Buffalo Bill's Wild West* was then staged in epochs related to the conquest of the West and called *The Drama of Civilization*. The epochs were meticulously detailed in Buffalo Bill's ever-expanding programs. But from the "Primeval Forest" to "The Prairie" to "The Cattle Ranch" to "The Mining Camp," the story was essentially the same: white men took their guns into new territories and quieted them. It was a story of progress and at the same time a nostalgia machine, one that inverted the past, representing Indians as aggressors and white settlers as victims (see Richard White, "Buffalo Bill and Frederick Jackson Turner,") wiping the slate clean. *The Drama of Civilization* gave audiences a way of thinking about national identity: a way of working through questions about conquest and the challenges of mass urban and industrial life, of beginning the "creative assembly," as Philip DeLoria argues, of an "unassemblable" American identity. Philip DeLoria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 11.

<sup>108</sup> See Linda Scarangella McNenly, *Native Performers in Wild West Shows*, (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 2012), 146.

<sup>109</sup> This is not by any measure to say that American children have access to fair or good representation in the media or even in schools, merely to make the point that European children are likely to have less access (to either historical or contemporary) representation. Sweden, of course, is quite different from Germany, a national context I address later in the chapter.

<sup>110</sup> K. Whyte, "THE CARSEN SHOW," *Saturday Night* 108, 48-52+ (1993): 02, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/222343475?accountid=10226>.

<sup>111</sup> In Whyte, "THE CARSEN SHOW"

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> See Kisselgoff, "CULTURAL VIEW."

<sup>114</sup> There were changes made to the show in November 2018 mostly having to do with upgrades to the production's technological aspects. The bison were also cut from the show for reasons I have not been able to determine. See Brittani Tuttle, "Buffalos to be replaced in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show at Disneyland Paris," *Attractions Magazine*, August 13, 2018, <https://attractionsmagazine.com/buffalo-bills-replaced-disneyland-paris/>.

<sup>115</sup> Kisselgoff, "CULTURAL VIEW."

<sup>116</sup> Timothy Scheie, "Chez nous on the range: language, genre and the vernacular French Western (1956–61)," *Screen* 57, no. 3 (Autumn 2016): 316–35, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1093/screen/hjw029>.

<sup>117</sup> After Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.)

<sup>118</sup> In Brannen, "When Mickey Loses Face," 608.

<sup>119</sup> The tradition of the noble savage in France of course extends well before Buffalo Bill's arrival as evinced in the work of Montaigne, Rousseau, and Voltaire among others. For de Toqueville, though, as Eliza Dandridge argues, there was a tendency to see Native peoples as defeated or degraded versions of themselves. Eliza Bourque Dandridge, "Cowboys and Indians in Africa: The Far West, French Algeria, and the Comics Western in France," (PhD diss, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/1934094339?accountid=10226>.

<sup>120</sup> See Susanne Berthier-Foglar, "The 1889 World Exhibition," 130.

<sup>121</sup> Paul Reddin, *Wild West Shows* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 99, 101.

<sup>122</sup> Alan Gallop, *Buffalo Bill's British Wild West*, (Cheltenham, The History Press, 2009), xi.

<sup>123</sup> Studio 360, "American Icons: Buffalo Bill's Wild West," WNYC, NPR Broadcast, July 15, 2011, <https://www.wnyc.org/story/96255-american-icons-buffalo-bills-wild-west/>.

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<sup>124</sup> Sebastian Braun, "Ethnographic Novels: American Indians in Francophone Comics," in *Tribal fantasies: Native Americans in the European imaginary, 1900–2010*, eds. James Mackay and David Stirrup (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 55.

<sup>125</sup> This suggestion was made by Professor Worthen in a committee chapter meeting in November of 2018.

<sup>126</sup> Stetler, "Buffalo Bill's Wild," 59.

<sup>127</sup> Stetler, "Buffalo Bill's Wild," 249.

<sup>128</sup> Gretchen M. Bataille, *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), <https://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=71099&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>129</sup> Katrin Sieg argues that hobbyist Indianism performs a kind of ethnic drag, one that seeks to relieve Germans of the specter of the Holocaust, resolving post-war guilt. See Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002) And yet, hobbyist practices are not reducible to a set of practices or to a coherent ideology. For Glenn Penny, the very term "hobby" is inappropriate, as is the notion that German hobbyists are simply, using Vine DeLoria's term, "playing Indian." Penny argues that the hobbyists engage in serious study, in practical ethnology. "Revering and studying groups of American Indians, learning from their culture and history, and harnessing that knowledge to reposition themselves in their own societies and cultures is not the same," he writes, "as wanting to be American Indian." (See Glenn Penny "Not Playing Indian: Surrogate Indigeneity and the German Hobbyist Scene" in H. Glenn Penny and Laura R. Graham, "Performing Indigeneity: Emergent Identity, Self Determination and Sovereignty" in *Performing Indigeneity: Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), <https://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=867519&site=ehost-live&scope=site.197>.)

Although Penny mobilizes a useful question posed by Jolene Rickard about what exactly it is that we find so funny about Germans/Westerners dressed up as *indians* (especially now that Western dress has become unpinned from Western European culture), the question of Native American representation in the context of globalization certainly goes beyond questions of sincerity.

<sup>130</sup> H. Glenn Penny and Laura R. Graham, "Performing Indigeneity: Emergent Identity, Self Determination and Sovereignty" in *Performing Indigeneity: Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), <https://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e025xna&AN=867519&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>131</sup> Braun, "Ethnographic Novels," 55.

<sup>132</sup> See Penny and Graham, *Performing Indigeneity*.

<sup>133</sup> These claims of course are not new. Hitler himself was a Karl May/Old Shatterhand fan (as well as a proponent of American-style eradication movements). On the use of Nazi iconography and Winnetou as well as the appropriation of indigeneity by neofascist movements in Europe and Britain, see Padraig Kirwan and David Stirrup, "I'm Indiginous I'm Indiginous," in *Tribal fantasies: Native Americans in the European imaginary, 1900–2010*, eds. James Mackay and David Stirrup (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 63. Many hobbyists in Germany have long participated in a national discourse in which Germanic peoples are described as having originated as forest-dwelling warriors and as such are uniquely identified with Native Americans. These groups tend to reference Tacitus's *Germania* as a kind of ur-text. See Sieg, *Ethnic Drag*, Penny "Not Playing" and Stirrup "Introduction" in *Tribal Fantasies*.

<sup>134</sup> Production script as transcribed from personal video footage July 13, 2018.

<sup>135</sup> Warren, *Buffalo Bill's America*, 203.

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<sup>136</sup> [https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g226865-d1918962-Reviews-Buffalo\\_Bill\\_s\\_Wild\\_West\\_Show\\_with\\_Mickey\\_Friends-Marne\\_la\\_Vallee\\_Seine\\_et\\_Marne\\_.html#REVIEWS](https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g226865-d1918962-Reviews-Buffalo_Bill_s_Wild_West_Show_with_Mickey_Friends-Marne_la_Vallee_Seine_et_Marne_.html#REVIEWS)

<sup>137</sup> Kasson, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West*, 130.

<sup>138</sup> Louis Warren, *Buffalo Bill's Wild West, William Cody and the Wild West Show* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 360. Also see LG Moses, *Wild West Shows and the images of American Indians 1883–1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

<sup>139</sup> Philip DeLoria, *Playing Indian*, 8.

<sup>140</sup> McNenly, *Native Performers*, 150.

<sup>141</sup> McNenly, 152.

<sup>142</sup> After Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992) in McNenly, x.

<sup>143</sup> Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of US-Indigenous Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2007), xviii.

## Chapter 4: Disney's Animal Kingdom and the Performance of Conservation

"Jambo!" the driver of our "Kilimanjaro Safaris" vehicle exclaims. "Welcome to the Harambe Wildlife Preserve!" *Jambo* is Swahili for hello and *harambe*, our driver explains, as we settle into our seats, is Swahili for working together, caring and protecting. "Harambe" is, in fact, the Kenyan motto, engraved on its official coat of arms. But we are not in Kenya, or Tanzania for that matter. We are over eight thousand miles away from Mt. Kilimanjaro—in Central Florida, at Disney's Animal Kingdom. The fourth and largest of Disney's theme parks, Animal Kingdom opened on Earth Day (April 22), 1998. Like the Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom is a theme park based on Disney properties. But unlike the Magic Kingdom or Hollywood Studios or even Epcot, the "park" is more than a theme park—it is also an animal conservation and wildlife research center, which is to say a zoo, one that is at the forefront of contemporary conservation performance.

This chapter considers the performance of animal conservation within Disney's brand assemblage. While previous academic studies of Animal Kingdom have addressed questions of authenticity, hyper-reality, narrativity, and environmentality,<sup>1</sup> my focus here has to do with how the company mediatizes, stages, and conserves animals and animal habitats. As such, I pay special attention to the development of Disney's conservation aesthetic and ethic from the early days of the studio, particularly in *Bambi* and the *True Life Adventure* nature documentaries series. I then address the application of this aesthetic to Animal Kingdom's live animal assemblages, considering how the park works as a themed zoological site, and the ways in which Disney balances animal display, conservation discourses, and consumer performance. Throughout, I look at how genre, spectacle and affect impact the space of animal performance (and its

reception) and the ways in which immersive, theatricalized animal encounter both sustains and disrupts the aesthetics and ethics of capture / conservation.

At five hundred acres, the park is vast and its attractions numerous—there are thrill rides, arcades, puppet musicals, animatronic shows, 4-D movies, dinosaur “excavations,” and night-time spectaculars. There are also offsite, related attractions housed in the Animal Kingdom hotels, where you can see animals loping past your window at most hours of the day, or have dinner with a “Savanna expert.”<sup>2</sup> The scope of this study is however quite limited. I am concerned only with animals in the park—primarily those featured in the Kilimanjaro Safari ride. I keep a narrow focus in order to keep my eye trained on the performance of animal conservation, and to afford a shift in perspective towards the end of the chapter—one that tries to address questions of animal agency (including affective affordances) and animal performativity. In this section I consider how the “animal turn” in theory helps us tackle questions about zoological representation and performance, which are ultimately questions about our responsibility to animals in spaces that are both encultured and (ostensibly) “wild.” What does it mean to spectate / consume / conserve / save wildlife? How can thinking animal performances, even ones capitalized within a brand economy, give us an opportunity to question what Cary Wolfe calls “zoontologies”—the very divide we have set between human and non-human animals.

*Animated Nature: Animals, Animality, and the Cinematic Conservation of Wild Nature*

Animals and representations of the natural world have been a hallmark of Disney properties since the studio’s inception. “I only hope we never lose sight of one thing,” Walt Disney once said, “that it was all started by a mouse.”<sup>3</sup> Mickey, of course, was no true mouse. He steered ships, drove a car, kept a pet dog, went fishing. From *Mickey*

*Mouse* shorts to *Silly Symphonies*, early Disney animation depended on representations of anthropomorphized animals—mostly from the barnyard—participating in human behaviors in distinctly human settings.<sup>4</sup> Barnyard animals were a familiar feature of American life at the time (Walt Disney had himself grown up on a farm), but the “barnyard” was also code: representational license for bodily / bawdy humor. As Paul Wells argues, the early animated shorts offered carnivalesque visions of animality, often set against an urban, machine-driven landscape. Mickey in particular presented what Wells calls a mode of “philosophic inquiry”—a way of questioning social mores and modern life.<sup>5</sup> But if Mickey started out as an unruly and disruptive human-animal, he was, as outlined in Chapter 1, quickly disciplined by the public and duly domesticated according to conservative mores.<sup>6</sup>

As the studio moved into feature-length films, Disney continued to take the “barnyard” out of the animal, pressing animal identity into a new kind of service. In *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Cinderella*, animals were represented primarily as companion-helpers, although they also made highly theatrical appearances as the sinister / wild / beastly familiars of villains. As Megan Condis notes in her article, “She was a Beautiful Girl and All the Animals Loved Her,” animal companions in these films often behaved like “happy servants” (think of *Cinderella*’s mice and bird friends stitching together her ballgown) whose dedicated labor not only illustrated the worthiness of their masters, but helped to restore the natural rights of their orphaned / socially transgressed heroines.<sup>7</sup>

And yet, as David Whitley notes in *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation*, the early features articulated a complex interplay between humans and animals—what Whitley calls a “flow of sympathy.”<sup>8</sup> To be sure, this sympathetic accord is played out in a decidedly pastoral key. Relations between animals themselves are, for the most part,

harmonious. Humans act as guardians and protectors of the peaceable kingdom. For Whitley, Cinderella is “shepherdess” to dependent animals: she exercises care and affection, maintaining both natural and domestic order.<sup>9</sup> In return, the natural environment as a whole stays alert to human interests and claims—pumpkins turn into coaches, mice become coachmen. In the early Disney fairy tales, Nature is where civil order is made perfect.

In 1937, Disney began work on *Bambi*. Based on the 1923 novel, *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*<sup>10</sup> by Austrian writer Felix Salten, *Bambi* put a new kind of “wild” animal at the center of Disney animation. *Bambi* took Disney into the woodlands—a wilderness he represented as a spectacular, pristine space. As Whitley argues, if *Cinderella* is Arcadia, then *Bambi* is a forest Eden, at least until “Man” enters the scene.<sup>11</sup> That humans enter the scene in *Bambi* is a manner of speaking—they do not, in fact, appear onscreen at all, but their actions shape the drama. Humans undo the peaceful order of the animal kingdom. Hunters kill Bambi’s mother; they also leave a campfire unattended, kindling a wildfire that engulfs the woods.

The trauma imposed on Nature by human incursion reflected a distinctly American, nineteenth-century notion of wilderness. As William Cronon argues in *The Trouble with Wilderness*, “our presence” in Nature “represents its fall.”<sup>12</sup> In *Bambi*, as soon as humans enter the forest, the forest is despoiled of its sacred character, indeed, the natural world all but collapses. This state of collapse is of course evanescent—Nature in its abundance regenerates and by the end of the film, *Bambi* is grown and the forest/animal kingdom restored. Destruction and regrowth are made part of the natural cycle.<sup>13</sup> But the enduring trauma of violence in *Bambi* (particularly for young viewers) made its message clear: the sublime, edenic forest, together with all the animals who made the forest their home, occupied a distinctly separate space, one that was

vulnerable to human willfulness and negligence, and therefore in need of explicit preservation and care. In this way, *Bambi* was the first articulation of a conservation ethos as part of Disney's brand<sup>14</sup>—one that would become central to the company's public profile and its place in managing environmental affect and behavior. For years after the film's release, the figure of young Bambi was used to warn campers of the danger of forest fires.<sup>15</sup>

*Bambi's* conservation messaging was heightened by the film's realism: the richness of the biodiversity on display, the careful rendering of each species. Disney had hired a wildlife artist to teach his animators how to draw animal locomotion. He had also worked assiduously to find real-world models for the animators, bringing animals onto the lot, sending animators to the zoo. Understanding that captivity had an impact on behavior, he had even purchased 16mm footage of animals in the wild in order to capture "natural" movement and behavior.<sup>16</sup> In *Bambi*, animal characters scampered convincingly through the forest, the sunlight moved through the trees, the wind carried the crackling fire through the landscape.

Even the landscape had its own hyper-real specificity, a specificity that was, significantly, national in character. Disney had modeled the forest primarily on East Coast woodlands but also referred, as Whitley argues, to an explicitly national space: Yosemite.<sup>17</sup> Identifying Edenic space with the space of an iconic national wilderness affirmed wilderness as a sacred national frontier. As Cronon argues, this wilderness represented America's "original state"—cleared of Natives, it was unpeopled, virgin land, now entrusted to its true custodians: an uncontaminated past with the full promise (and weight) of the future.<sup>18</sup>

The reception of *Bambi* at the time of release was mixed. As historian Gregg Mitman notes, some critics wondered whether there was a point to such verisimilitude



given the genre. Why not just abandon the cartoon cel for the camera?<sup>19</sup> For Disney, this question of the value of verisimilitude in animation (given the high cost in labor) went beyond aesthetics: *Bambi* stumbled at the box office, driving the company into debt.<sup>20</sup> Post-war *Bambi* would of course find its footing, and its success would go on to represent the company's commitment to naturalism and Nature. But in the interval, what *Bambi* did for Disney was spark an interest in wildlife film not only as a model for animation but as a potential platform for a new, less expensive, defiantly realistic mode of animal representation: the wildlife documentary.

During the war, under a government mandate, Disney produced wartime documentaries. At the war's end, burdened by *Bambi* debt, the studio created an Education and Industrials Division, creating films for corporations like General Motors and AT&T.<sup>21</sup> In 1946, hoping to revive in-studio development, Disney commissioned Alfred and Edna Milotte, naturalist photographers who had been active on the wildlife lecture circuit, to shoot 16mm footage in what Disney considered America's last frontier: Alaska.<sup>22</sup> Out of the close to a hundred thousand feet of footage shot by the Milottes, Disney's interest was piqued by scenes of seals on Pribilof Island.<sup>23</sup> The subsequent film created from this footage, *Seal Island*, was an unexpected success. Directed by James Algar, who had served as an animator for *Snow White* and a sequence director for *Bambi*, and narrated by Winston Hibbler, *Seal Island* did well at the box office and won the 1949 Academy award for Best Short Subject.<sup>24</sup> *Seal Island* became the first of a series of nature documentaries called *True Life Adventures*. The series included a total of ten shorts and four full features over a period of twelve years from 1948–1960. As Jonathan Burt argues, because the documentaries were so much less expensive to produce, given the labor-intensive nature of cel animation, *True Life Adventures* gave the studio "new lease on commercial life."<sup>25</sup> Beyond the financials, the *TLA* series helped

Disney control content for double-bill lineups.<sup>26</sup> The *TLA* also burnished Walt Disney's image, established by *Bambi*, as an early conservationist. The Wilderness Society celebrated him. The Audubon Society awarded him a medal.<sup>27</sup> Religious groups called him a modern-day Saint Francis.<sup>28</sup> Mitman argues that Disney was "just the ally conservationists needed":<sup>29</sup> he democratized Nature as recreation/leisure without subjecting represented natural space to the invasion of throngs of middle-class tourists.<sup>30</sup>

The title card for *Seal Island* and subsequent films in the series emphasized the "naturalness" of the filmed environments—their untouched, sublime character.<sup>31</sup> "These films," the title cards read, "are photographed in their natural settings and are completely authentic, unstaged and unrehearsed."<sup>32</sup> Of course, the same dramaturgical principles and strategies Disney applied to animated sequences were used in the *TLA*. "Once we have the basic footage," James Algar noted,

we use the same technique to be found in Disney cartoons. We look for personality, and we do this for a reason. If audiences can identify themselves with the seeming personality of an animal, they can sympathize with it and understand its problems better.<sup>33</sup>

The line between editing footage to induce the audience to care and actual (con)scripting of animal was extremely fuzzy. Perhaps the most famously egregious of these stagings occurs in *White Wilderness* (1958). Ostensibly a film about wildlife in Alaska, *White Wilderness* features a scene in which a group of lemmings "commit mass suicide."<sup>34</sup> For this scene, camera crews stationed in (landlocked) Alberta, purchased lemmings from local Native people. The lemmings were taken to the edge of a river, spun off a kind of turntable and filmed plummeting into the river, which was then doctored in post-production to look like the sea.<sup>35</sup> In a disembodied voice-of-God performance that would come to define the genre, Hibbler narrates the action thus:

They've become victims of an obsession -- a one-track thought: Move on! Move on! [...] This is the last chance they have to turn back. Yet over they go, casting themselves out bodily into space.<sup>36</sup>

The scene ended with a shot of scores of dead lemmings, floating in the water, which represented the reality that many lemmings did, in fact, die because of the filming.

The ways in which the *TLA* depended on both a discourse of authenticity and explicitly staged, overwritten animal performances had an enduring legacy on environmental filmmaking. For, as Mitman, Tobias, and Derek Bousé all argue, with *TLA*, Disney effectively invented the genre of the blue-chip animal documentary.<sup>37</sup> Blue-chip documentaries refer to films that typically feature what are called charismatic megafauna (typically large-size mammals), spectacular landscapes (seen through composite frames and close angle shots), voiceover narration, scripting (including fast-forwarding time), and emotionally evocative scoring of some sort.<sup>38</sup> Crucially, these documentaries adhere to what we can think of as the *Bambi* principle: all humans are off screen.<sup>39</sup> (Bousé makes the argument that all white people are off screen.)<sup>40</sup> The effect of humans on animals is sometimes dramatized, but on the whole we discover animals in their "natural state"—a state that is explicitly identified as atemporal, ahistorical, and apolitical. The representation of an out-of-time nature is of course a mimetic rendering of human power over animals/wilderness, but also over our own (human) destiny. For in this unexpected, spectacular state of Nature, the voice-of-God narrates stories about our own true natures—our genomic, biological connection to family systems, to gender performances, to social regimes that issue national and racial taxonomies.

The storytelling practices of the *TLA*/emerging blue-chip documentary were of course related to larger discursive forces in which, as Donna Haraway argues in *Primate Visions*, natural history and science became platforms to at once construct and illustrate

our place in the world. Haraway's account of Carl Akeley's Hall of Africa in the Museum of Natural History, points to the obsessive realism of Akeley's taxidermy displays, displays that suspended the animal in an eternal time/space. The capture and display of animals as out of time worked to naturalize the many ways in which they were segregated and classified according to various social agendas. Akeley installed his Hall of Africa (a Hall of Africa Disney in many ways tried to replicate at Epcot in the early 1980s, with Alex Haley as its ambassador) just ten years before *Seal Island* and the launch of the *TLA* series. In his book, *Film and the Moral Vision of Nature*, Ronald Tobias notes that the Akeley's Hall was a "showroom for the physically exceptional: no wounded, old or dead in this eugenic rendering of paradise."<sup>41</sup> Indeed, both Akeley's and Disney's "documentary" displays not only conserved the wild animal through technical media, but transmuted it into a new state of virtual vitality.<sup>42</sup>

For Akira Mizuta Lippit, this representational zombie state—the state of being both perfectly undead, is characteristic of modernity and its reproductive apparatuses. Building on John Berger's text *Why Look at Animals*, which argues that just at the time that animals begin to disappear from our daily lives, they start to make spectral appearances in zoos and in films, Lippit argues that the phantasmic animal in zoomorphic representation is always already endangered. That the animal is endangered is a feature, he argues, but not a product of modernity. For Lippit the radical alterity of the animal within Western philosophy is based on the presumption that because it has no language, it has no consciousness of death, justifying the exclusion of the (undying) animal. And yet, because the animal is/was always on the threshold of language, "on the verge" (paraphrasing Giorgio Agamben) "of words."<sup>43</sup> "What flows from the animal," Lippit argues,

touches language without entering it, dissolving memory, like the unconscious, into a timeless present. The animal is magnetic because it draws the world-building subject toward an impossible convergence with the limits of world, toward a metaphysics of metaphor.<sup>44</sup>

The animetaphor (following Jacques Derrida) marks then a limit-text in our own subjectivity where the metaphor collapses on itself and the animal is both undead/undying and (possibly) dead meat. Lippit makes the case that animals exist as part of an economy of fascination/rupture. In this way they are a kind of “predecessor” to photography (and film): they are a kind of Barthesian punctum in the flow of subjectivity.<sup>45</sup> But the animal comes into a new kind of habitat in the twentieth century, entering techno-space. Lippit tracks the relationship of the animal and technology, from the (loco)motion-studies of Muybridge’s zoopraxiscope to Edison’s electrocuted elephant—in which animal/electricity become one—where the animal is transferred into what Lippit calls a “vast mauseloeum for animal being.”<sup>46</sup> In the “cryptic topography” of the cinema, he writes, animals and the reproductive media converge, forming a Deleuzian rhizome.<sup>47</sup>

In this crypto-tech assemblage, Disney’s animals were made to move, hustled along and printed, over and over again until their cinematic movement took on a truth of its own. When actual animals took their place alongside their animated counterparts not only were they part of a technological topography in which they be could encrypted, but they were readied for a kind of mass consumption of the cinema as a commodity. The dead lemmings were their own kind of Pied Piper—viewers were meant to follow these little voles off the cliff, follow them hurtling their little bodies into (virtual) outer space, with both voles and their human audience under the spell not of Nature, but of the cinema itself.

The lemmings were to be consumed as entertainment, but their unqualified status as Nature and as natural/biological informants helped to turn virtual environmental space (anti-urban, potentially anti-consumer) into consumer space. Cinematically conserved and consumed animals also helped to shape representational space as an alliance between commodity consumption, nature conservation, and, importantly, education. Although we take the edu-tainment alliance as a given within the blue-chip genre, Disney did not set out to be an educator. He started making wildlife films specifically to get out of making the kind of infomercials he had created for the government and General Electric. But the market for animal documentaries was initially quite nebulous. Disney had to twist the arm of his distributors at RKO just to secure a two-week broadcast of *Seal Island* at the movie theaters.<sup>48</sup> Even after the film's success, he worked to cultivate a new marketing base. He turned to schools, developing curricula for middle and high school, with summaries and sample questions.<sup>49</sup> Targeting children as his market audience made the rollout of Disney-branded animal merchandise even easier. (Teddy Bears—named after Teddy Roosevelt who starred in one of the very first safari documentaries in 1910<sup>50</sup>—were already popular totems for children.) Each aspect of the *TLA* marketing chain authorized the other, with everything predicated on the figure of the animal made to speak in Disney's voice. In many ways, *TLA* marked the beginning of film/entertainment companies taking responsibility for the (re)production of knowledge about the natural world and enfolded educational practices related to this knowledge into the brand assemblage. *TLA* also marked the beginning of corporations using animal identity as both icons *and* time signatures in order to promote themselves as knowledge-keepers and, as such, advocates for the future of the planet.

Indeed, as Tobias argues, over the span of its twelve-year run, “TLA became the chief cultural access point for seeing and knowing nature for...78 million baby boomers.”<sup>51</sup> Tobias argues that for all the inaccuracies and staging practices (or perhaps because of them), “many of the young people who grew up with Disney’s nature in all its forms—cartoons, animated features, and wildlife fantasies became active members in preservationist and conservationist movements.”<sup>52</sup> This generation of individuals who grew up inside a conservationist movement defined by technologies of suspension and consumption underwritten by Disney would come to play an especially important role in (re)producing Disney’s Nature assemblage towards the end of the millennium. When Michael Eisner, who co-founded the Environmental Media Association (EMA), came to Disney in 1984, he explicitly returned the company to animations of nature. The ‘90s of course marked a new moment in the environmental movement—and yet with films like *The Lion King*, *Pocahontas*, and *Tarzan*, Eisner produced a next wave of nature-inspired films that would serve as platforms for a renewed commitment to both zoological and environmental conservation.

But Eisner’s most significant contribution to Disney’s conservation platform was the development of Animal Kingdom, announced in 1995, the largest of all its theme park properties worldwide. As both Mitman and Christian Moran (in *True Life Adventures: A History of Disney’s Nature Documentaries*) argue, the park is a direct descendent of the TLA series.<sup>53</sup> This kind of self-referencing is entirely self-conscious on the part of the company, which depends on cross-pollinating and cross-referencing elements of its brand ecosystem for the purposes of, indeed, commodity conservation and regeneration. Indeed, Animal Kingdom has since become part of a platform to promote the next generation of TLA documentaries, the Disneynature documentaries. Launched about a decade into Animal Kingdom’s run (sixty years after the release of

*Seal Island*), these documentaries are the new blue-chip features, combining truly stunning cinematography with deeply anthropomorphized narratives of animal behavior.<sup>54</sup> The documentaries are a highly profitable arm of the brand and together with Animal Kingdom and the Disney Conservation Fund, function as part of a network of relationships that use “Nature” to raise and redistribute capital both within the brand assemblage and the larger Conservation economy.

It should be said that the bid to use live animals within a theme park setting was not a new proposition for Disney. As early as the 1950s, Walt Disney had proposed using live animals for Disneyland attractions, but decided that they were too much trouble. After all, animatronic animals in the Jungle Cruise could be counted on for a laugh or for an on-cue fright. With enough attention to detail and the right cinematic setting, they were the animals, in any case, that audiences had come to expect from the movies: fearsome, dramatic, poignant, and ready to serve as narratives sensitive to the needs and wishes of their human controllers. Critics have tended to scoff at Disney’s puppeted, animatronic animals, but just *staging* actual animals, even without special performance imperatives, is an extremely complicated task. Conditioned by circus, cinema (both animated and wildlife films), and animatronic performances, audiences expect, if not entertainment, (inter)activity from live animals. Lions may sleep twenty hours a day, but visitors don’t want to pay to watch a lion sleep. At the same time, over the past half century, zoos have had to deal with increasing levels of discomfort on the part of visitors with the genealogies of animal performance and the sheer fact of captivity. Animals can’t be boring, but they also can’t appear to be controlled or even captive. For zoos, this has meant selling a vision of the wild animal that has increasingly relied in fact on Disneyization.<sup>55</sup> As James Beardsworth and Alan Bryman argue in their article “The Wild Animal in Late Modernity: The Case of the Disneyization of Zoos,” in



order to reflect a more “caring,” if still scopophilic relationship to animals, the world wide zoo industry turned to Disney performance principles: theming, a performance focus on affective labor, integrated consumption networks and merchandising.<sup>56</sup>

Themed animal displays often depend on an exotic “elsewhere.” Beardsworth and Bryman make the point that “Africa” is an especially popular motif in theming.<sup>57</sup> To some extent “African” theming has to do with the fact that many charismatic megafauna make their home in the African savannah, but like Akeley’s Hall, these so-called African pavilions elide the animals, their fake “natural habitats” and colonial master narratives. These narratives, in which animals and racial others are ultimately classified as the white man’s burden, have been increasingly elided with conservation stories in which Western zoos continue to assume custodial duties for African wildlife. But theming doesn’t necessarily involve such explicit cultural framing. Beardsworth and Bryman note that theming often means what they call the “quasification” of natural environments<sup>58</sup>—environments that are staged to reflect the animal’s “natural” habitat or simply to look “natural.” Jane Desmond calls these environments “in fake situ”—“faked organic realisms”<sup>59</sup> that place the animal in theatrical settings that depend on very specific cultural narratives about Nature, narratives that suppress the notion that there is any culture at work at all.

But even theming has its limits, particularly against ethical claims against what are, in effect, animal prisons. Taking the bars off the cages, something Hagenback achieved in European displays as early as 1907,<sup>60</sup> is only half the work of justifying capture and captivity, no matter how nice, well-themed, or quasified the cage. Zoos have had to sell themselves as places where increasingly endangered animals can be conserved by teams of dedicated professionals and, by association, consumers. The affective work of this kind of marketing takes a page from the *Bambi/TLA* handbook in

which cinematic capture and consumption practices become aligned with conservation discourses, promoting animal performances as at once natural/national science and history demonstrations (education) and as rescue operations: performative pleas for species preservation.

When the company embarked on its project to represent real animals in Animal Kingdom, Disney understood the challenges. The park would entertain, but it would emphatically not be a circus. It would display animals for viewing, but it would not be a zoo. This is to say that the animals would perform live but, as in the *TLA* documentaries, they would not *appear* to be performing. Moreover, Animal Kingdom would use science and “research” to perform best-practice caretaking and to instill a greater affiliation with animals and, by default, earth, making it more than a mere animal educational center. In the faux African-inflected language of the early advertising campaign, the park was billed NAHTAZU.

Of course, to display live animals in any real capacity, you have to operate as a zoo; you have to be accredited as part of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), which represents over four hundred member entities and a thriving international industry boasting over seven hundred million visitors a year.<sup>61</sup> As Disney prepared to become part of the zoo business the company put together an advisory board, composed of conservation and zoo management elites: representatives from AZA, the ASPCA, Conservation International, the Atlanta Zoo, the Bronx Wildlife Conservation Society and, to bring things fully into the Disney “Circle of Life,”<sup>62</sup> the American Museum of Natural History.<sup>63</sup> The board argued that before Disney could even break ground, it needed to establish a significant presence in the conservation world. “This... idea,” Melody Malmberg writes,

would become the Disney Wildlife Conservation Fund. Helping the conservation world with badly needed funding would help legitimize the project in the profession as well as with animal rights activists, emphasizing, as Rick Barongi put it that ‘we are not just displaying the animals for entertainment. We have a real commitment to conservation and education.’<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, since 1995, the Disney Conservation Fund (DCF) has worked as the philanthropic arm of Animal Kingdom. It has given \$75 million in grants (some of which are grants for eco-heroes) and established the company’s rhetorical environmentalism.<sup>65</sup> But what the Disney’s Conservation Fund achieved right off the bat was to give the company the kind of muscle that it needed to start working within the zoo economy. Because wild animals can’t be purchased, the zoo industry runs within a barter economy. Once you set up shop, you work out trades with dealers who help identify available animals. There is a lot of tit for tat—exchanges, donations, loans. Zoos with the capacity to house breeding programs are at an advantage, not only because can they expand their own stock, but because loans can be paid off in the form of offspring.<sup>66</sup> “Conservation” funds can also determine what kinds of animals you can stage and in what ways. There are, for example, long queues for almost all highly charismatic animals—animals that have become charismatic either through their long-standing affiliations/likenesses to humans or simply because they have been identified as especially vulnerable/endangered/conservation-worthy.<sup>67</sup> But the longest waits are for primates, particularly females. Without female primates, you can’t have a family group and primate family groups dramatize the (politically conservative) story of who we are. But there are ways around the queue. In an interview, Rick Barongi, who as head of animal programs for the park was responsible for curating 1000+ animals, notes:

There were 20 zoos in front of us waiting for female gorillas... I told the gorilla planning group that I was going to look for the gorillas myself, that we couldn't wait in line. It sounds arrogant, but I knew that on opening day we needed a family of gorillas out there. I worked directly with the Lincoln Park Zoo, because I knew they had enough gorillas that they could give us a whole family. We worked out a deal with them. You don't buy gorillas, you don't pay for them. Instead, we offered to form a gorilla conservation fund with them and sponsor a project and that's what we did in return for the gorillas. The other zoos were mad at that because they said now we were offering money for gorillas. In a sense, they were right, but my question was, 'Why didn't you do the same thing, give more money for gorilla conservation.'<sup>68</sup>

Read in one way: conservation always justifies the use of conservation dollars. But the reverse is also true. Conservation dollars are themselves a way of justifying zoo conservation practices (captive). Using a rhetorical/marketing strategy as a commodity currency (and vice versa) meant, among other things, that Disney emerged as a major player in the world of conservation and zoo management. Although Disney strong-armed its way into animal acquisition, taking such a clear role in animal conservation also raised the profile of the conservation organizations on its advisory board. Beyond the trades, there were other forms of brand(ed) alliance—public partnerships (like with the Nature Conservancy) and coordinated campaigns. Whatever the trade-offs, the perceived net gain to these organizations was best articulated by Michael Hutchins, head of conservation for the AZA: “[Disney] can make conservation a household word.”<sup>69</sup>

The NAHTAZU theme was built on a fairly transparent performance imperative: the company would out-theme and out-manuever the already Disneyized zoos. Before the park opened, Eisner stated that he hoped “the park would do for zoos what the motion picture had done for the stage play.”<sup>70</sup> To be sure, the NAHTAZU theme pointed to aspects of the park that had to do with openly fake or at least unreal animals—Camp Minnie and Mickey would feature walk-arounds of animated

characters, Dinoland would feature extinct animals. (Camp Minnie and Mickey has since been replaced by Avatarland which stars the neo-indigenous other-worldly Na'vi from James Cameron's *Avatar*.) The imagineers also created Conservation Station, a dedicated education and conservation awareness area, designed to highlight the company's (historical and ongoing) commitment to conservation education and programming, and to give a kind of special "backstage pass" into daily operations and animal care. At Conservation Station, trainers and animal care experts would give talks, but presentations and displays would also promote conservation actions like recycling programs or visits to National Parks.<sup>71</sup> But most of all, NAHTAZU had to do with the reality of the animals displayed in the park. They were emphatically *real*, particularly in relationship to their admittedly not-real counterparts, and so they would be made to look as real, free, indeed as *wild* as possible. GO WILD! the early ads exhorted, the echo of the prelapsarian wild tucked into the action-adventure packaging of the original Jungle Cruise. NAHTAZU meant an African-inflected wildlife documentary-cinema-theatre—a cinematic animal theatre that would thrill, educate, and inspire. And because they were live animals, these animals could be made to solicit concern, care, and even *real love for the real world*—a love that would no doubt circulate back to the entity making the ongoing existence of this world a theme park reality, but that might even harness the power of the individual consumer to save the planet itself.

*NAHTAZU? Conservation Performances and a Carnival of the Animals*<sup>72</sup>

It is perhaps not a surprise that much of the NAHTAZU styling in Animal Kingdom is, in fact, traditional, Disneyized zoo fare on a bigger production budget. Visitors entering the park pass through "Discovery Island"—a verdant area surrounded by a man-made riverway. Discovery Island works as a hub—visitors pass through it to get to the other

“lands”—and each pathway is dotted with animal enclosures common to contemporary zoo displays. Open displays feature flightless birds, iguanas, prairie dogs, and the like, while caged ones feature marsupials or small mammals like tamarins. Environmental features like rock formations and waterfalls dignify the enclosures. Dense foliage also provides both atmosphere and protection from the sun. Not all of this foliage, of course, is real. Discovery Island is home to the giant “Tree of Life”—the Animal Kingdom equivalent of Sleeping Beauty’s Castle. At 145 feet, the Tree of life is at once shade cover, art installation, command center, and theatre. Made of steel, carved foam, plaster, and fiberglass, the tree boasts more than 8,000 branches and 102,000 plastic (Kynar) leaves.<sup>73</sup> During the day, you have to get fairly close to understand that it’s not really a tree—close enough to take in the pictures of the 325 animals skillfully etched into the bark.<sup>74</sup> Trimmed with over 4,000 fiber optics, the tree is at its most spectacular at night, illuminating pathways and displays—a beacon of light attesting, if not to the knowledge of the universal tree, to Disney’s knowledge and command of the natural (and faux natural) world.<sup>75</sup>

Beyond Discovery Island, imagineers created two destination sites, representing animal “homelands.” If you face the Tree of the Life, you can turn left to be en route to “Africa;” go right and you’re headed toward “Asia.” These geographic designations are, like all Disney geography, imagined and depend largely on a kind of metonymic magic. A colonial, coastal “East Africa” is “Africa” and a Lonely Planet tourist’s “Southeast Asia” is “Asia.” All the signs are in English. Animals are housed / “homed” wherever is most convenient for performance purposes: for example, there are Asian elephants in Africa but not in Asia. These spaces are less geographically bound than they are, as Scott Hermanson argues, neo-colonial, eco-tourist time-warps.<sup>76</sup> If Avatarland is Tomorrowland, then Africa and Asia are Frontierland and

Adventureland, which is to say neo-imperial borderlands, places Americans can go (over and over again) to clear, subdue, and memorialize exotic foreign territory.

Both Africa and Asia have extensive walk-through, conventional zoo exhibits featuring “native” species—these exhibits are called Pangani Forest Trail and the Maharajah Jungle Trek, respectively. Docent-like cast members answer questions (and keep foot traffic moving) as guests participate in self-guided tours through the curated collections. The walk-throughs culminate in star-turns by two groups of gorillas (an adolescent group and Rick Barongi’s Lincoln Park family group) in Africa and a set of Sumatran tigers in Asia. In Africa, the gorillas provide a gentle they-are-us message, while in Asia, the Sumatran tigers remind us of our potency. The tigers are the “apex” of predators, the display explains, deadly, but now, because of poaching and habitat destruction, close to dead. The implication is clear: only we are powerful enough to save them.

Asia was built after Africa—it’s smaller and feels a little like a poor continental cousin.<sup>77</sup> Africa, by contrast, is home to the bustling Safari Village. Safari Village depicts a tourists’ Africa, one already built to cater to the Western adventurer.<sup>78</sup> With its marketplace musicians, clad in traditional costumes, its shops full of trinkets and restaurants, Africa/Safari Village/Harambe is an explicit tourist zone set in tourist time—which is to say in some state of arrested development on the part of the “locals.” Although the buildings are all newly thatched (with thatch imported directly from South Africa and hired a team of thirteen Zulu craftsmen), they are all adorned with faux distressed facades and weather-beaten signs calling to tourists in jaunty pidgin English: “Wanjohi Refreshment, Best Choice for Thirst, Yes.”<sup>79</sup> In Safari Village, tourists are offered both a quaint reprieve from and affirmation of the exigencies of modern (Western) life. But the most important feature of Safari Village is the Harambe Wildlife

Preserve, which houses the park's signature ride and fullest expression of its NAHTAZU theming: the Kilimanjaro Safari. Practically the whole of The Magic Kingdom (in any of its Anaheim, Orlando, or Paris iterations) fits into the preserve, which displays over one thousand animals, representing over two hundred species of animals in a variety of what appear to be completely open ranges, where they appear free to roam.<sup>80</sup> Moreover all the megafauna are gathered together in one ride: from hippos, rhinos, and alligators, to giraffes, elephants, and even lions (with plenty of antelope, wildebeest, and flamingos for variety and color). When the imagineers built the park, it was assumed that some 90 percent of visitors would participate in the safari ride.<sup>81</sup>

The concept of an open-air safari through an African savanna had been used at zoos before, most notably at the San Diego Zoo, where visitors board trams that circle large enclosures simulating "African" and "Asian" animalscapes. But in many ways Disney was able to start with the concept of a safari and then to decide how to, quite literally, lay the ground in order to make the setting itself look, as much as possible, like an East African safari landscape and to make the landscape both as inclusive (of animals) and spectacular as possible. The entire 125-acre area was drained.<sup>82</sup> Existing flora and fauna were transplanted or (in the case of flora) simply sterilized.<sup>83</sup> Paul Comstock, the head of landscape design, determined which local plants and trees could work as doubles—like oaks for acacias<sup>84</sup>—but then imported plants and seedlings from all over the globe.<sup>85</sup> All told, there were four million plants (of which roughly seven hundred thousand were shrubs),<sup>86</sup> bedded into the soil, performing what Comstock has called a kind of "improvisational landscape jazz."<sup>87</sup> The goal of the plant performance was explicitly not to feed the animals—there would be no way to keep up if the animals



effectively ate the set each day and so designers planned from the outset to put browse and other kinds of feed into designated pockets and sleeves.

Landscaping was used not only to hide food sleeves, but to keep fencing and turnbacks out of visitor sightlines. But the landscaping went beyond plant (and tree) performance. Landscapers built steep slopes, ha-ha walls and other kinds of terracing (a berm provides an elevated platform that keeps many animal care/keeper areas out of view), bomas (circular animal enclosures) disguised by tree trunks, and moats.<sup>88</sup> These landscaping elements worked as caging features without revealing the conditions of confinement. At the same time, these set design elements created a sweeping, cinematic view of the horizon line in the savannah area, offering visitors a spectacular sense of openness and expansiveness. As Paul Comstock declared, “landscape is the set, it is the show.”<sup>89</sup>

Although animals have the option of being on- or offstage (or of finding onstage hiding spots), the “onstage” areas afforded to the animals are quite narrow, trimmed to the path of the vehicles,<sup>90</sup> or deliberately cramped. “Fins” in the hippo and rhino ponds keep the animals centered in their ponds. For those with more room to maneuver, there are landscaped inducements to stay in view like elevated platforms set above the eyeline of the tourists (which some animals prefer). The lion platforms have extra features: air conditioning on hot days and heat on cooler days.<sup>91</sup> Strategically placed feeders dressed as termite mounds and fake baobab trees with hidden lazy susans dole out intermittent treats.<sup>92</sup> To be fair, as any pet owner knows, captive animals often need to be incentivized to be active, which is necessary for health. Animals with low enrichment environments can also get hit with a reproductive tax.<sup>93</sup> Hiding browse here and there and creating feeders with random timers helps animals stay active and

maintain their reproductive viability. (This is also to the benefit of the keepers in question of course.)

Imagineers used landscaping features not only to keep animals both captive and in view, but to keep them separated, all the while creating the illusion of togetherness. Hippos and rhinos are separated, for instance, by double dry moats, but the road between them is flooded to make them look as though they are in one area. In some areas there are visible cattle guards that keep hooved animals out from wandering into territory occupied by their natural predators. When we took the ride in 2018, a child asked about the cattle guards. Our guide responded by saying, somewhat elliptically, “It keeps them safe in their area. Like that animals that live over here won’t go...accidentally where the hippos are and get really hurt.”<sup>94</sup> What she didn’t say is that the guards are essentially decorative, since the vehicles, whizzing by every thirty seconds, also act as their own kind of barrier.<sup>95</sup> Males and females are often separated before they are even allowed on set. For example, the Harambe Wildlife Preserve features only male crocodiles.<sup>96</sup> Separation of sexes and species fulfills the representational injunctions at virtually all North American zoos against animal sex and animal conflict/death. Here the lion looks as though he just might lay down with the lamb. (This is a manner of speaking, of course, there are no domestic animals in the savanna). In this way, the landscape/theatre of Kilimanjaro Safaris, recalls not only the wildlife safari, but also the private pleasure garden. As Yi Fu Tuan notes about Disneyland, Disney gardens refer to the princely pleasure garden (c. 1500–1800), which (re)produced an earthly paradise, wherein the “animals are larger than life and look like huggable cherubim...and can all live in close proximity, offer one another, if not intimate friendship, then wonder and excitement without risk of bodily harm.”<sup>97</sup>

Having built a safari adventure in which guests could board at any time and animals would always be in sight, ready for photo capture at automatic shutter speeds, imagineers endeavored too to keep “other” humans/tourists out of sight. In order to avoid the dreaded, unsightly safari traffic jams they encountered in East Africa, where brief, unbidden animal appearances would bring dozens of small safari jeeps to a standstill, the company opted for larger vehicles with tracking technology to keep all vehicles at timed intervals.<sup>98</sup> The effect is really one of a private (princely) garden at least for each vehicle—a performance of clearance, reset every thirty seconds to remake the open frontier.

Significantly, when Kilimanjaro Safaris opened it was conceived not just as an open-air animal viewing ride, like the one in the San Diego Zoo, but as an immersive conservation-themed drama, complete with villainous elephant poachers. Like all E ticket rides, the storytelling for Kilimanjaro Safaris started in queue.<sup>99</sup> The original in-queue storytelling presented carefully framed shots on overhead TV screens of elephants roaming the savannah, of a game warden next to a helicopter, and even shots of poached elephants.<sup>100</sup> The in-queue messaging prepared audiences for their roles in an upcoming drama: the rescue of a baby elephant, named “Little Red,” who gets separated from his mother, “Big Red,” and captured by poachers. Indeed, soon after guests were welcomed to their “two-week safari,” driver/guides warned visitors about the potential presence and threat of poachers in the reserve. About one third of the way into the ride, as guests emerged from a “forest” area and into the open “savannah,” the voice an African warden named Wilson came crackling through the vehicle’s radio. From his (narratively described) panoptic position in an overhead helicopter, Warden Wilson confirmed the threat of poachers. Addressing the vehicle as Simba One (after the title character of *The Lion King*), Warden Wilson provided periodic and increasingly

urgent updates about movements of the poachers. The voice of Wilson was pre-recorded, but the guides were live, improvising their answers, with rejoinders like, “Thanks, Wilson” or “Oh no!” The story kicked into high gear in the last three minutes, with the occupants of “Simba One” asked to assist in the warden’s rescue operation. At this point, the vehicle sped up, lurching “off-road” through a bumpy course. This last segment required some acting on the part of the guides. During one ride we took in 2012, our driver exclaimed, “Oh no, this gate has been smashed!” communicating at once worry and a slight weariness. Later, upon seeing the warden’s camp, dressed as if it had been subject to a raid, he let out a small cry, “Maybe we are too late!” In very early versions of the ride, before the park officially opened, visitors were in fact “too late.” A final tableau revealed Big Red’s carcass, stripped of tusks and bloodied. Little Red (represented by an animatronic elephant, whose tail we saw peeking out of the back of the warden’s jeep) had been rescued and the poachers, represented by two animatronic humans with their hands up, duly caught. But the lesson was clear: poaching is a terrible tale. This version, which spared the child but not the mother, was deemed too frightening and gruesome a conclusion to the ride so Disney pulled the carcass, opting in the end to let everyone go home feeling that, rescue mission accomplished, the Garden would go on undisturbed.

Although academic critics of the Kilimanjaro Safaris (Hermanson, Rutherford, Scott, Willis) have different interpretations about the reality or unreality of the safari, ultimately they make variations on roughly the same claim—that the ride sells a neocolonial ecotourist experience, where tourist elites collect animal sightings/signs as part of an exchange in which animals function as totems, as commodity fetishes, that work to reassure the tourist that ecotourism (particularly as underwritten by Disney) is itself, as Rutherford notes, “an appropriate way to save nature.”<sup>101</sup>

Certainly, there is no question that the safari references the genre of the African safari (itself cross-referenced within natural history, literature, and film/TV) to evoke what Willis calls a “Third World Never Never Land”<sup>102</sup> in which plants, animals, and even certain people perform as land/scape. Indeed, in this particular Third World Never Never Land, the sun is high (even if it rains the safari vehicles are roofed), the natural backdrop is lush, the animals are hale and hearty, and the natives, with the exception of a few identifiably bad eggs, are mostly happy and solicitous. “Don’t forget,” we were told upon exiting our 2018 ride, “someone in Africa loves you!”<sup>103</sup>

While criminal wildlife trafficking *is* a serious global conservation issue, it’s not hard to see the special narrative appeal of poachers: they are easy scapegoats. In the Disney ecosystem they fit in tidily as Cruella de Vil–like villains who wrest hapless (but scrappy) babies from their devoted parents. The bad poachers in Kilimanjaro Safaris also create positive space for “good natives” who can be “close to nature,” and, like Warden Wilson, work on our behalf to preserve the safety (and familial identities) of the elephants. Moreover, the poacher’s participation in an explicitly *illegal* ivory trade (conveniently deemed as culturally senseless) also creates another binary<sup>104</sup>—setting apart a banned commodity practice from the commodification of elephants for our viewing entertainment. I do not suggest here that these practices are the same, only that one works to free the neoliberal tourist consumer of any doubt as to the sanctity of their viewing position. Driven by a sense of largesse (and potentially a need to reconnect to “Nature”), neoliberal tourists can “help” the natives secure land and land assets (like animals) which are then defined as common property, if not common ground.

While the binary between bad poachers and good natives/consumers may work, at least superficially, to deflect anxieties about overt racism or neocolonialism, it also actively works to obscure the reality of human-elephant conflicts both in Africa and

Asia. Elephants in the wild cover vast amounts of territory as they forage. Habitat destruction, due to environmental degradation, and shifting human migration patterns, has reduced the size of elephant territories, prompting crop raids and other incursions into human settlements. An elephant crop raid can devastate an entire village, not to mention the fact that elephants are exceptionally dangerous to humans—according to the World Wildlife Fund, elephants kill roughly one hundred people a year in India, with over 200 reported deaths in Kenya alone since 2010. Retaliatory killings of elephants are common.<sup>105</sup> This reality of course counters Disney’s representational investments in the transformation of elephant charisma from dangerous to endangered. From pink elephants to *Dumbo* (recently released in a CGI/live action version)—Disney’s cinematically electrified elephants are, unlike Edison’s Topsy, cute and sensitive. Although it is true, as Rosaleen Duffy argues in *Interactive Elephants: Nature, Tourism and Neoliberalism*, that elephants have complex emotional attachments with other elephants and humans (relationships to mahouts are often lifelong), in the Disney ecosystem, elephants only become (justifiably) enraged with their keepers when you separate them from their babies.<sup>106</sup>

In very basic terms, as Scott Hermanson asserts, the ride “provide[s] little context for understanding poaching,”<sup>107</sup> but this is hardly the point. In the end, the ride’s conservation narrative is a dramatic rationale for ongoing conservation management. The presence of real, endangered animals authorizes conservation discourses: the animals in the “reserve” exist precisely because they have been conserved by Disney/zooos as institutions. Indeed, as explicitly threatened animals, they are part our *last reserve*. The choice of elephants as lead characters in this drama is significant not only because of their role in Disney’s bestiary—but as a designated ambassador/flagship species, the elephants in this drama (including the animatronic

elephant) act as stand-ins for all animals, as synecdochal representations of biodiversity itself. Together, the animal ambassador and the spectator / tourist perform as agents not only of species conservation, but as benevolent guarantors of the “environment” as a whole.

This said, the representational contexts in which the animals are made to dis/appear are in fact more complicated than they might first seem. On the whole, the park’s critics take the glossy cinematic surface of the Third World Never Never Land, together with the dramatic conservation narrative, for a kind of singular truth, easily dismissed as “fake” or “hyper-real” or lacking in credibility in some essential way and yet, at the same time, overwhelmingly powerful in their impact (indeed, for Rutherford, in their governmentality). In their dismissals, many critics assume a certain kind of reception: that “most” riders believe the story / contexts and / or mistake real / faked organisms or simply don’t care to make the distinction. Relaying an exchange at the top of the ride, *New York Times* reviewer Mireya Navarro writes that, in response to the driver’s question— “Is this everybody’s first visit to Africa?”— “eight rows of camera-ready adventurers [responded]... Yeeeeess! ... as if they did not know the difference.”<sup>108</sup>

Of course, all eight rows knew the difference between visiting Africa and visiting “Africa.” Navarro’s attitude towards the riders is of course something of a pose—a way of conveying a bit of *New York Times* loftiness. But the *as if* is important here—more than is quite signaled by Navarro: accepting a role on a safari ride, or performing a genre expectation, is, after all, not the same thing as accepting the part-for-the-whole. In fact, the safari-in-Florida explicitly signals a doubly framed experience: at once elite *and* democratic. As Andrew J.P. Flack argues in his article about the first auto safari in Leeds, England (opened in 1966), for over half a century, auto safaris in Britain and the US have repackaged narratives about African exoticism, dangerous / endangered

animals, and home/lands.<sup>109</sup> They were in their heyday in the '70s when they represented not only the hazy specter of a fading empire, but a way of performing “exotic” experiences at home, precisely because they were in your home space.<sup>110</sup> Pretending that you’re on an African safari, which for even the most affluent is a once-if-ever-in-a-lifetime experience, is also a way of saying, as Flack argues about the automobile safaris in Leeds, “better than Africa.”<sup>111</sup> There is of course a nostalgic, neocolonial element to this sentiment, the assumption that it’s better to sit comfortably in the seat of the Empire than to have to rough it in the wild/savage outposts, but the *theatricality* of this gesture should not be underestimated.

In her article on Animal Kingdom for *Theatre Topics*, Shelly R. Scott assumes that even if riders *can* tell the difference between what’s real and what’s fake, these registers aren’t particularly meaningful, again, for “most spectators”: “Observations of visitor reactions to the ride,” she writes, “convince me that most spectators appreciate the obviously fake tableau of an animatronic baby elephant as much as they appreciate the imported grasses and animals.”<sup>112</sup> Scott’s concern has to do with Disney’s manipulation of hyper-reality and authenticity discourses. Still, it’s hard to know how Scott might have been able to assess appreciation, for “most” of the people on a thirty-two-passenger vehicle. In the two rounds of rides I took in 2012, I did not come away with the sense that visitors “appreciated” the live and animatronic animals equally. Certainly, children and adults alike may think of an animatronic animal as a kind of marvel, made perhaps even more marvelous for their ability, within faked organic realisms, to appear almost-real. But in the specific case of the tableau, all we see of the animatronic animal is the baby elephant’s tail peeking out of a jeep—hardly a feat of animatronic engineering.<sup>113</sup> By the time we see the tableau, more importantly, the ride is bumpy and the vehicle moving at clip. The ride is essentially over. “Sorry we had to cut



your two-week safari short," one of our 2012 drivers announced as we drove by, the final tableau little more than a visual coda, an obligatory, blurred wave goodbye.

For Scott, Disney's hyper real representations effectively coopt authenticity discourses—confusing the hyperreal with the "really real." In her article, Scott argues that the hybridized display of virtual and live menageries inform a narrative of dominance, in which "the corporation has played God," with the implication that "Disney has created the animals in the park as well."<sup>114</sup> But at the very least, riders' reception of the drama has to do with how audience members engage with genre expectations: theatrical and cinematic.

As Jane Desmond argues in *Staging Tourism*, all in-fake-situ displays perform "complicated ideological work...as two poles of the nature/culture division are brought together under the oscillating sign of the real/not real."<sup>115</sup> Some of the pleasure of the safari is the "oscillating sign" itself—the balance of real and not real, which certainly goes beyond the question of animatronic vs. actual animal for most visitors (over a certain age) who must, after all, understand that the Kilimanjaro Safari is a Disney-managed journey through a glorified zoo. As Hermanson argues, Animal Kingdom "looks just like it does on TV"<sup>116</sup>—which is to say in some version (*Mutual of Omaha*, *National Geographic*, *Planet Earth*, or, indeed, *Disneynature*) of the blue-chip TLA documentary and this is part of what makes it interesting: how well it holds up as both live theatre *and* cinema.

The balance of the real/not real also has to do with the fact that "safari goers" actively participate in the work of making nature into culture (and vice versa), which is to say the work of keeping the sign *in play*, particularly within the conventions of the blue-chip documentary. Flack argues that automobility in the safari park itself forms a kind of "human-automobile assemblage, in which the cybernetic human, recalling

Donna Haraway's cyborg," moves through the "beastscape" (defined as both African and animal).<sup>117</sup> The romance of the beastscape depends on the "quasi private" space of the vehicle/cyborg which is slowed to the pace of leisure but also secured in modernity. Automobility also takes what is ostensibly a physical encounter with animals and transforms it into a cinematic one. The vehicle itself acts not only as a barrier but like a camera, turning the landscape into a passing spectacle, moving at eight miles an hour. From this perspective, the animals are made to look just as they do in wildlife documentaries, undisturbed by the human/cyborg. *But the vehicle is only a wide-angle pan.* Most tourists have their own cameras, and the shutter frames act as *punctums*, or their video settings create personalized montages, reordered assemblages. With the advent of the selfie, the point of the camera shot is not simply to capture but to be part of the *cinematic* frame, to perform ones' proximity to or inclusion within the real/not real landscape, to establish its resonance to individual photo-identity and the performance of that identity.

Through the act of "safari" photography, tourists enact individual conservation identities—collecting, curating, preserving, "protecting," or "caring for" animals not only on site, but in their cameras/memory drives and photo/social media streams, which is to say in their own personalized digital archives. In these individual archives, the animal *and* human are reproduced in the state of reproductive suspension, as Lippit argues, of taxonomic undeath, a state that guarantees that, poachers or no, the animals (human and nonhuman) are themselves forever undying. The performance of conservation in Kilimanjaro Safaris is an immersive, participatory drama of cinematic conservation and reassurance, not only that the animals can be conserved, but that we can in some way capture and mediate our relationship to animals and nature for future preservation. And yet, this is not to say that this drama of reassurance is especially

reassuring or that it flattens all animal performances, (retro)fitting them to the narrative on offer, or, even, that reassurance is the primary affective motor of this drama.

Indeed, in 2012, Disney decided to drop the poaching narrative altogether. The wardens' campground, the tableau, and the animatronic baby elephant were all cleared to make room for a zebra area. (This area was still under construction as of a year ago.) This change was made without much fanfare. It is hard to know exactly what initiated the change—although, over the years, many of the narrative elements had been gradually scaled back. Perhaps the poaching narrative was burdensome as a double frame—the point of the peaceable garden is that it's peaceable and you don't have to think about predation. Or perhaps increased anxiety about climate change and actual extinction events make theatrical anxiety excessive and even a traditional resolution is not especially reassuring. Or perhaps, as I suspect, the story elements became tiresome for repeat visitors, making the ride itself seem more predictable than it might otherwise be on a day-to-day or month-to-month basis. An adventure is hardly adventuresome if you're already familiar with the script.

Without the poaching story, the safari became what it mostly already was, a guided photo-capture conservation safari, but there was a noticeable shift in genre (from perilous adventure to gentle educational-science mission) and tone. When we boarded our vehicle in 2018, our driver was a middle-aged white woman (our previous drivers had all been young white men). She wore the safari uniform: khaki shirt, shorts, and a multi-pocketed vest. She sported no makeup, her blonde hair pulled back in a simple ponytail. From where we sat, I couldn't see her nametag—all Disney cast members wear them (placed above the heart<sup>118</sup>)—which means I couldn't identify her hometown,<sup>119</sup> but she had the look and affect of a suburban American mom, comfortable driving a tribe of kids to soccer practice in an oversized SUV. Her tone was

informal, chatty, often exuberant. Speaking in a gentle, nonstop patter, her voice amplified by a headset microphone run through an onboard speaker system, she welcomed us to our photo safari and then directed our attention to the animals, flora, and passing sights (“Look, a termite mound!”<sup>120</sup>). As she drove through the site, she enthusiastically recited factoids (“Rhinos can run up to thirty-five miles an hour!”<sup>121</sup>), took questions, and managed guest behavior (“sit, sit, sit!”).

In our previous rides, the driver-guides “acted” their parts in the narrative drama, but their performances as animal docents were relatively flat, or matter-of-fact. They explicated facts about the animals on display, affecting what Sianne Ngai might call a performance of the “merely interesting.” By contrast, our 2018 driver-guide found all facts to be occasions to gush. In place of the “step-away from boring”<sup>122</sup> was a kind of new gestalt, full of ooohs and aaahs, and all kinds of amplified emotional inflection, but perhaps most especially a celebration of the cuteness of animals of every kind. This celebration began early in our journey:

Oooh I see some animals up on this hill comin’... They are called Greater Kudu, really pretty antelope. It will be on my right once we get to them. They are so pretty. Kudu males have horns, only reason I know these girls are girls. Aren’t they cute, too? You’re going to hear me say that a lot.<sup>123</sup>

Although there’s a diminutive gendering at work here, the term cute was applied to just about every kind of animal and landscape feature, irrespective of sex difference: Greater Kudu, elephants, antelope, wildebeests (who were “cute and nifty”), termite mounds, crocodiles, and African wild dogs. Of course, some animals were merely cute but others were dangerous and cute, which somehow had the effect of underscoring how cute they were:

Alright for those who really wanted to see them—YAY, thank you so much, there on the left are the Nile crocodiles, aren’t they adorable. They are cold-blooded animals. They are so cute.<sup>124</sup>

And:

On the left hand, friends, these are adorable African wild dogs. They are also known as painted dogs. They are cute, aren't they? And they are fluffy and adorable and super dangerous. It's the most unfair combination of all time right there. They will actually work as a pack [...] They will take turns running their prey till it drops of exhaustion, till it literally falls over. It is very successful and kinda terrifying to think about, but they are cute!<sup>125</sup>

As Susan Willis notes in her article, "Disney's Bestiary," driver-guides have some autonomy in how they conduct their individual ride, in part so that they can make adjustments based on the whereabouts and conduct of different animals (and guests). Some guides are jokier than others, some emphasize learning, and some, like our 2018 guide, work in a more emotional key. Guides do not have special experience in animal education and receive only two weeks of training.<sup>126</sup> It's hard to know how much of our guide's specific performance was shaped by corporate direction: Was she told to emphasize her love or regard for the animals? Was this a policy, an interpretation of a policy, or just happenstance? Something about the obsessiveness of the refrain felt individual, but conferring cuteness onto crocodiles also unfolds a new imperative in conservation politics, working towards the inclusion of charismatic non-mammals. Harnessing animal cuteness also reflects the increasing use of animal signs and life forms in public affect: something we see in the colonization of the internet by cute animals<sup>127</sup> and the conscription of animals as emotional resources, particularly in the use of emotional support animals, which can range from dogs to peacocks.<sup>128</sup> But perhaps most importantly, Animal Kingdom is the only theme park built on an affective stance: a celebration of the human "love" of animals,<sup>129</sup> which makes our driver's "cute overload" messaging feel very much in alignment with the park's mission.

As argued in Chapter 1, the aesthetic of cuteness speaks to both a (consumer) demand for care and to prosocial interactivity. Here I return to Joshua Paul Dale's argument, based on contemporary studies in psychology, that cuteness proceeds from an affective register "that is fundamentally benign rather than adversarial."<sup>130</sup> Dale notes that the "physical response triggered by cute: disarms the subject and imposes an imperative against harming the cute object."<sup>131</sup> This response, then, is fundamentally cathartic, "the purpose of which is to avoid the negative outcome...that would accrue if this excess affect were discharged in harmful fashion onto the body of a living being."<sup>132</sup> Cuteness then has a different kind of conservation ethic built into it, an imperative against harm for the benefit of species survival.

Perceived animal cuteness (cute relief) also has the capacity to elicit a more significant response, of trying to engender or at least perform the fantasy of interspecies affect. I do not say that cuteness is an exercise in mutual inclusion, only that cuteness is yet another platform within the assemblage's conservation messaging—one that transfers an array of affiliative bonds between the consumer and the commodified animal body into a branded performance of care and protection, and, more importantly, play. Indeed, in their article, "Cuteness and Disgust: The Humanizing and Dehumanizing Effects of Emotion," Sherman and Haidt argue that as a form of what they call hyper-mentalizing, "cuteness is as likely to trigger a childlike state as it is a parental one."<sup>133</sup>

Although the use of cute affect invites consumers to play with (in addition to playing at or to) animals, the new (poacher free) Kilimanjaro Safaris continues to take overt conservation messaging quite seriously. Throughout our twenty-six-minute journey, the most explicitly scripted moments had to do with manifest (or manifesto-like) conservation messages. Early in the ride, our driver-guide spoke directly about the

threat of real-life poachers and the dangers they pose to certain animals, rhinos and elephants in particular. Without the dramatic angle of the story, her comments admitted a little more context: “These poor guys are poached by awful, awful people for the ivory of their tusks,” she lamented, “but they are also shot and killed by farmers who don’t really have a choice, you know, they have to protect their crops... These guys are 1400 pounds: it’s hard to tell them no.”<sup>134</sup> Despite the admission of violence and conflict, the overall conservation messaging takes a positive tone. In the new narrative, there are no problems that a corporate conservation giant can’t solve with a little know-how and ingenuity. Disney, we were told, figured out just how to tell a 1400-pound elephant “no”: by conscripting bees. Elephants, our guide cheerfully explained, hate bees and can warn other elephants about the presence of bees, and so the Conservation Fund gives money to a project that uses beehives as a “natural” form of “electrified” fencing.<sup>135</sup>

Towards the end of the ride, our driver delivered a final conservation message, a send-off, reminding us not only that Disney conserves animals but that many animals owe their very existence to conservation efforts (and by implication Disney):

Now we got to see several animals that we can still see due to conservation of course, without that many animals we saw today would only be in movies and books now.<sup>136</sup>

There is no mention, of course, of the ways in which movies and books (but movies in particular) frame our experience of the conserved animals, of the ways in which the animals, and our wish to conserve them at all, operate as part of the brand. Or a sense of how and why the animals (are made to) perform as conservation ambassadors. In its place is an invitation to participate in the site as a learning site, as a place to gather information and to use that information as a platform for individual, local, conservation actions:

And while I am proud of being part of a giant organization, not all conservation is huge. There are tiny little things that can be done every day by any person and those make the biggest differences for the world. I hope as you're going along today, you're having fun but you're also pausing to read the plaques, the signs everywhere. There is just a mountain of information. Lots of cool facts out there. Maybe you'll even see something that looks like fun to try at home in your own backyard because even backyard conservation means survival for something, and all the animals matter. It's kinda neat to think about but the animals we just saw were somebody's backyard animals.<sup>137</sup>

Collapsing wildlife with the notion of the “backyard” concludes the ride with a kind of folksy spin—a way of tying in wilderness with domestic space. The aim here is to encourage guests/potential eco-citizens to make the leap between seeing conserved animals in the zoo to conserving and care-taking at home, but the collapse between wilderness and the backyard also exposes an issue conservation scholars are beginning address: that there is, in reality, little difference between in-situ (the wild) and ex-situ sites (the zoo/the backyard), at least in terms of their relationship to human impact.

As Irus Braverman argues in her article, “Conservation without nature: the trouble with in situ versus ex situ conservation,” in- and ex-situ are interdependent terms that have established imaginary geographies—with (ex-situ) captivity propagating the notion that there is still a(n in-situ) wild. This is to say that the open safari replica in Disney’s Animal Kingdom sells the illusion of a pristine, African veldt, where lions continue to roam free. The trouble, as Peter Dollinger (Secretariat of the Alpine Zoo) notes in an interview with Braverman, is that between fencing, birth control, and culling “in South Africa...there is no single wild lion. The idea of freedom is a human idea.”<sup>138</sup> Braverman argues that the very categories of in- and ex-situ—produced by the zoo’s close relationship to natural history and the museum through conjoined classificatory, representational, and management systems—underwrite conservation ethics. There are two natures: one nature theoretically free and the other



carefully managed whenever this freedom is threatened. But in reality, “wild nature,” as Braverman writes, “is a simulacrum of the institution of captivity.”<sup>139</sup>

When it comes to Nature, it isn’t so much a question of reality, or hyper reality or exactly how authentic authenticity discourses really are. Today, a reproduced nature determines what and how “free” nature is managed. To the extent that the institution of captivity depends increasingly on either Disneyized or explicit Disney versions of nature/wildlife, we begin to see that wild nature is part of a Baudrillardian order of Disney simulations. To make matters worse, the vast majority of animals are *not* conserved, not by Disney, not, by any measure, by most zoos. Zoo displays skew heavily towards the representation of mammals and they put enormous resources behind a select group of animal “ambassadors.”<sup>140</sup> These few, like elephants, are said to represent other animals and habitats, but the reality is that funding often doesn’t extend beyond the flagship animal itself.<sup>141</sup> As Joseph Keulartz argues the “captivity for conservation” argument is often expressed as the “Noah’s Ark” principle.<sup>142</sup> (Early imagineer drafts of Animal Kingdom conceptualized the park as Noah’s Ark.) But the trouble with this model is that conservation practices already look a lot more like, as the *NY Times* journalist Leslie Kaufman has noted, “Schindler’s list” than Noah’s ark.<sup>143</sup>

Because conservation modeling in and of itself proposes an unspoiled nature that, as Cronon notes, exists outside of us,<sup>144</sup> and conservation aesthetics are so much informed by the (cinematically already) preserved animal, it’s easy to see that most conservation performances aren’t particularly persuasive, at least as inspirations for conservation actions. Even a study conducted by Disney staff concluded as much. In 2004, three collaborators, Jackie Ogden, Lynn Dierking, Leslie Adelman, all of whom worked for Disney’s Animal Kingdom, published an article in the journal *Conservation Action*, analyzing the impact of park attendance/participatory performance on

conservation actions. Pro-conservation behaviors were taken from a national survey conducted in 1996 with behaviors ranging from time spent in nature to visiting zoos and learning about wildlife to avoiding pesticides in one's backyard to donating money or time to green causes. The study's three hundred participants were a somewhat self-selecting group; certainly, they were already the zoo-going type—over half had already visited a zoo in the past year.<sup>145</sup> Participants were given a mean conservation score before entering the park and upon exit, with a three-month telephone follow-up for roughly 25 percent of respondents. "In all cases," the authors note,

the discernible changes were not as significant as hypothesized. And in the case of the majority of guests visiting short term impact was minimal. Changes in guests' intentions to get involved in conservation related activities did not persist over time.<sup>146</sup>

The lack of performance impact on guests is attributed in the study to the fact that most guests entered that the park put them in a "preparation" stage (based on Prochaska's "stages of change") rather than an action or engagement stage and that in the absence of further "reinforcing experiences" visitors simply returned to "baseline levels" of engagement.<sup>147</sup>

Questions of stages of consumer readiness aside, the study repeats the basic conservation algorithm calculated by virtually all zoos. The conservation corporation offers performances that delight, amaze, and instruct. Through these performances, the affected and enlightened corporate citizen is induced to take on good (civic) behavior. This is not a closed loop—corporations also have to meet the demands of ethical consumption/green consumer/animal welfare movements. But in the language of the conservation agencies and organizations, the animal is there at the discretion of the corporation, serving as a kind of communicative commodity to help individual

consumers perform/perfect their ethical selves, as well as to help constitute a responsible, green-performing public.

It's not hard to see where this shift in responsibility leaves us. It is also perhaps too obvious to state that the translation of conservation performance into measurable conservation actions/outcomes is not really the point of corporate conservation performance. Even non-profit zoos only give a small percentage of their proceeds to true conservation work.<sup>148</sup> Conservation performances work as a set of rhetorical and performative gestures addressed to the neo-liberal consumer/citizen. They are performances of at once of preservation, discursive animal encryption and, perhaps most importantly, futurity. Together, the performances of animal conservation *and* citizen-building offer a vision of a biopolitical future in which the charismatic animal and the consumer co-constitute their cultural and physical geographies, however contained. Conservation performances also work to curate and aestheticize affective intensities, capitalizing on human emotions and animal materiality, redeeming a (once and future) bond between humans and animals against any current material losses (both in animal life, or in goods purchased by the consumer at the Disney register).

What we see then is a reassembling of neoliberal "activism" into the brand assemblage. The corporation uses conservation to spur performance initiatives—these performances can be performances of danger/endangerment/vulnerability, guilt, play, or reassurance. There are even forced consumer performances (in addition to forced animal ones): purchases above a threshold have add-a-dollar requirements, where the company bills the consumer an extra dollar to add to its own Conservation Fund.<sup>149</sup> But at the end of the day, it's up to the consumer to *act*.

The trouble with these initiatives is that consumers understand the company's meta-performance, which is that of conservation as a mode of consumption. This

principle is perhaps best expressed in what is called the “Nemo Effect.” After the release of *Finding Nemo* (2003), a film that was about the potentially devastating impact of taking fish out of their natural habitats, consumer demand for clownfish tripled.<sup>150</sup> The impact on clownfish populations was considerable—as was the impact on the coral reef beds and the many aquatic species they harbored. (Poisons are used to stun the reefs, making it easier to capture fish. Needless to say these poisons kill coral, vastly altering aquatic eco-systems.<sup>151</sup>) When the sequel to *Finding Nemo*, *Finding Dory* was released in 2016, the company created a preview in which the film’s star, Ellen DeGeneres, made a point of saying that wild animals should live in the wild and not in private aquariums. (The film was also a conservation drama about sea animals trying to escape from an aquarium and return “home.”) But the Nemo Effect remains in place for the Blue Tang/Dory, whose populations also suffer from the fact that they cannot be bred in captivity.<sup>152</sup> The Nemo/Dory Effect is thus *species threat*—brought on by conservation meta-performances that ask the consumer to care and preserve animals by consuming their cinematic/wild doubles.

*Towards Animal Performances in Animal Kingdom.*

There is still the question of *animal* performance to consider, the question of whether, within Disney’s conservation performance, animals have any agency at all inside surveillance spaces and photo/graphic display.<sup>153</sup> Willis argues that, by default, the animals on view are reduced to “elements of decor.”<sup>154</sup> Willis, Rutherford, and Scott all argue from a theoretical position informed by John Berger and others that describes animal viewing, particularly within zoological representation, as inherently an act of dominance, an act, as Brian Massumi notes, of sovereignty over animals.

There is no question that zoo animal/performers in particular are entangled in representations and projections that, as Una Chaudhuri argues, amount to nothing less than an “epistemological crisis” of “interspecies performance,”<sup>155</sup> a crisis that in Disney’s case has clear bio-social effects. Still, I wonder whether Willis, Rutherford, and Scott all fall into the camp of further (if unintentionally) denigrating the animal performers themselves. Scott quotes Bob Mullan and Gary Marvin’s *Zoo Culture*, in which they argue “animals quite obviously cannot and do not represent themselves either to themselves or to other animals, and they certainly do not represent themselves to human viewers.”<sup>156</sup> This is of course a categorical statement trying to get at the cultural production of nature, but it also reproduces questions of otherness and alterity that once again put nature on one side of a divide and (human) culture on the other.

The very question of animal representation has come under some scrutiny, particularly with what is often described as the “animal turn” in theory. For many, this turn is marked by Derrida’s essay, “The Animal That Therefore I Am,” in which he considers the philosophical implications of the animal/human divide. (In a kind of philosophical primal scene, Derrida finds himself, naked and ashamed, under the gaze of his cat.) Derrida’s essay works to upend the Western philosophical tradition itself, in which the human is defined largely in terms of *the animal that (therefore) we are not*. In his article “Performing the Open: Actors, Animals, Philosophers,” Martin Puchner argues that Derrida “attack[s] the dividing line” itself—throwing into question the very ‘question of the animal.’<sup>157</sup> Puchner identifies Derrida as part of an anti-humanist philosophical project, one that is also articulated by Deleuze and Guattari, Cary Wolfe, and Giorgio Agamben. Without assuming that animals can represent themselves *in human terms*, this project nonetheless moves towards a philosophy/ethics and what Puchner identifies as a poesis of the animal.<sup>158</sup> Drawing on Agamben’s notion of the

“anthropological machine”—that works to exclude (defined as “always already a capturing”<sup>159</sup>) and to exempt (from law / rights)—Puchner argues for “negative mimesis,” in which the animal *as subject* begins to take the stage.

Part of what I ask here is whether we might find “negative mimesis,” gaps in a performance archive and repertory, even in some of the places we might least expect them. The old adage for actors, as Nicolas Ridout notes in his book *Stage Fright*, is never to work with children and animals. As Ridout argues, this dictum has something to do with the fact that animals are out of place onstage. They are, as he says, “not part of the tradition”<sup>160</sup> and, as such, uncanny.<sup>161</sup> The conceit of Kilimanjaro Safaris is based on this presumption and everything is staged to make animal performances look like “natural behavior,” which is to say like non-staged performances or not-theatre.

But, of course, the safari ride is theatre—in part because the line between “natural behavior” and performance behavior is impossible to draw. To some extent this has to do with the widespread use of operant conditioning in training zoo animals.<sup>162</sup> Operant conditioning is predicated on the notion that an animal will only perform something it knows how or effectively wants to do—meaning some kind of theoretically “natural” behavior. These actions are reinforced both by a system of rewards (typically food) and also by the human-animal interactions through which the animal is entrained. Animal Kingdom works extremely hard to hide these interactions, but both humans *and* animals shape the nature of these interactions and performances.

Midway through our ride in 2018, several giraffes stepped into the roadway. Giraffe crossings are a relatively common occurrence during the ride, and Kilimanjaro Safaris has a set of practices and processes it engages to deal with the performance issues raised. These kinds of performative misfires are often considered performance gold—audiences love animal mistakes or “bloopers,” at least up to a point. As Susan

Davis argues in her book *Spectacular Nature*, oppositional behaviors in particular—obstructing a path, refusal to comply with a command—are often scripted into animal shows precisely to give the suggestion that the animals have more freedom than they actually do.<sup>163</sup> But these misfires have to be executed within a relatively short timeline. Having been immobilized by a set of wandering giraffes, the passengers in our vehicle cycled through the various stages: delight (extra time with the animals), boredom (having stopped, the landscape was no longer spectacular), and anxiety (when and how was the problem going to be fixed, so that everyone could go on with their day). In some sense, we were, like the animals around us, held captive, at least momentarily. The guide vamped: she told stories, reassured us that this was relatively normal (“It’s usually a three-minute thing”), asked animal trivia questions (“Anyone know how many vertebrae giraffe have?”), reframed the experience as a special experience, at least until the time ballooned and it became a special *ordeal*. Some members of our audience party contributed suggestions: “Can you honk?” asked one. “Can they [meaning someone in charge] throw them an apple?” asked another. These suggestions were met with an ethos of maternal care towards both humans and the animals, with a reminder that the animals could go further off their performance tracks. To the question about honking, our guide gently reprimanded the guest: “We don’t honk. We don’t honk. That’s mean. We don’t want to. Besides if we startle them they might attack, we don’t want that either.”<sup>164</sup> Meanwhile, the question of feeding tore a hole in a whole set of representations: “It’s not good to use food to entice ‘em out,” our guide first noted, “because then they’ll learn that’s how they get food,” but then she backtracked, not wanting to imply, I think, that the giraffes weren’t well fed or that they were (or could be) controlled by food.

That's my guess, I don't know. They are on the spoiled side. They have their own personal chefs; they don't have to go very far for food. So these guys are in the lap of luxury. These guys are really decadent.<sup>165</sup>

In just six minutes, the giraffes went from being cinematic landscape theatre to being potentially wild animals to being “indulged” performers. In the end, an “animal program” person (as described by our guide) scooted over in a golf cart. Exiting the golf cart, the person picked up something from the ground (browse perhaps?) and walked at an angle, at some distance from the giraffes. They lumbered slowly in his direction and away from the road. They did not seem skittish or frightened. This interaction was treated as a conclusion to what our guide jokingly referred to as “Giraffegate 2018.” But what was striking was the quality of the interaction, which was entirely wordless: a set of physical cues between a trainer ambulating through a described space and the giraffes. The notion that these animals are tame is of course a fiction, but in this performative misfire, the animals’ training and relationships became visible. Perhaps the trainer had more than browse to offer, but it didn’t seem so. The animals seemed simply to respond to the trainer’s presence and the promise of (already available) food and to move towards him. In this moment, as sometimes happens in the theatre, no matter how cinematic the frame, the representational apparatus is laid bare. The animal is suddenly an animal onstage—out of place and no longer out of time, but part of how time is made.

All animals at Animal Kingdom are trained. They are not allowed on set if they can’t respond to their specific call that returns them to their overnight station where they are monitored and cared for.<sup>166</sup> Both their training and their inability to be completely trained afford them some degree of autonomy. They can escape the crowds if they really want to. (They can’t go far, but they can find hiding spots.) Or they can



figure out how to stay the traffic a little. Ostriches are known to chase the jeeps (they can outrun the jeeps at about a rate of 5:1 if they really want to).<sup>167</sup> “These are not shy retiring animals,” our guide explained. Most of the animals at DAK were born into captivity—it is the only life they know.<sup>168</sup> How do they performatively experience captivity? In what ways are they aware of performance? Certainly, the notion that animals are not aware of the pretense of performance has come under greater and greater pressure. In “The Animal that Therefore I Am,” Derrida enters into an extended dialogue with Lacan, whose affirmation of the animal’s incapacity for second-order pretense (its inability to “pretend to pretend”<sup>169</sup>) he takes as an affront (both to the animal and the human). It seems difficult,” he argues,

to identify or determine a limit, that is to say, an invisible threshold between pretense and pretense of pretense of pretense [...]. Lacan does not invoke here any ethological knowledge [...] or any experience, observation or personal attestation that would be worthy of credence. The status of the affirmation [...] is that of simple dogma [...]. A symptomology can and must conclude with the possibility, for every pretense, of being pretense of pretense, and for every pretense of pretense being a simple pretense.<sup>170</sup>

At the very least, as Ridout notes, the presence of the animal in theatre means “that which is shown is theorised,” meaning (for Ridout), the theatre, but also the very question of what it means to dissemble/deceive, which is to say to be constructed as a “human” in relationship to the purportedly non-dissembling animal, to the animal’s *dansité* (as Derrida labels Lacan’s labeling).<sup>171</sup>

In his book *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*, Brian Massumi argues for the *vitality affect* of the animal, noting that spectatorship is “a relation” rather than a “one way street”<sup>172</sup>—both because of and despite the overlay of identificatory projections. As the “anthro-form” visits the zoo—s/he experiences what Massumi calls a reprojection, in “the form of the observed animal...anamorphoses onto the human viewer,

wallpapering it with an animal motif."<sup>173</sup> And yet, even within "spectacle-spectator complexes"<sup>174</sup> (of which the zoo, for Massumi, is the most "abject") the "ludic," open-endedness," of this relation emerges, barring sentimentalisms. He argues for the reception of the (unsentimental) child to the vitality affect of the animal—the child's ability to infer "tigritude" or a "becomings-serpentesque." "Children," he writes, "do not just catch sight of a tiger form. They have an intuitively aesthetic vision of the tigrisque as a dynamic form of life. It is this they transpose when they play animal."<sup>175</sup> For Massumi, these transpositions are potentially revolutionary: "becomings-animal," he argues, "claw, bite, and sting away at the situations of normopathic and sociopathic life, in a way that only gestures that do not denote what they would denote are capable."<sup>176</sup>

I am not certain that I share Massumi's assumptions about children as a category and I wonder whether only the child is capable of becomings-animal or (re)*animation* (and whether s/he is necessarily excluded from what Massumi calls conformal power.) As Peta Tait argues in her book *Wild and Dangerous Animals*, trainers have long depended on the emotions of animals—shared within a number of affective affordances—to generate compliance.<sup>177</sup> Animal performances (even zoological performances) depend on animal performers, trainers, and spectators all participating in improvisatory, aleatory, playful, and vitally affective relations, indeed *affective compositions* (as Massumi calls them), in which the possibility for (a) zoological "play" remains open.

I do not seek here to justify captivity in any way—particularly as part of brand development. Or to say that these animals should be entrained, should be made to perform. I do not know whether even conservation (understood simply as species preservation) justifies keeping animals in captivity at all. Foremost is the question of the

impact of captivity on animals, on animal welfare. And yet, this is not hardly an uncomplicated question, as studies by Geoffrey R Hosey and others have shown. Goats respond differently than pigs.<sup>178</sup> Groups of adolescent gorillas are more stressed out by crowds than family groups.<sup>179</sup> And then again there is the question of whether captive animals are really so different from their wild/mimetic doubles. As Monika Firby argues in an interview with Irus Braverman, in the *Anthropocene*, it's really a question of degrees of human responsibility.<sup>180</sup>

Still, thinking about the complexities of animal performance as performance begins to help us understand why conservation performances matter so much to Disney's Animal Kingdom/zoo in general—they are essentially all that separate the zoo from the circus. On their decision to hand raise a polar bear abandoned at birth by its mother, and to then market the budding media star (Knut, the abandoned polar bear cub, shared the cover of *Vanity Fair* with Leonardo DiCaprio), a handler at the Berlin Zoo noted, "Of course we need the money...but we are a zoo not a circus."<sup>181</sup> But the very existence of Knut reflects a complex network of zoological representations. Animals in zoos, particularly flagship animals, cannot be left to die (to say nothing of animals that are culled), even if Nature would have it so. The question of animal harm is also extremely complicated—as is the question of what it means for these animals to live "natural" lives in quasified "natural settings," no matter how "organic" their fake in-situ settings. Polar bears live in spaces that are one millionth of the space that they require.<sup>182</sup> And yet, the very fact that these animals need so much space (and that their habitats are dwindling) mean that they need to be conserved in order to survive as a species.<sup>183</sup> And then there is the question of commodification and corporate performance demands, even for non-profit entities. The relationship between baby Knut and his devoted keeper/surrogate mother delivered an extra \$8 million to the zoo.<sup>184</sup> At

the height of his stardom, the Berlin Zoo sold stuffed Knut doubles, Knut t-shirts, Knut key chains. These commodities are written off as by-products of a (greater) conservation story: the story of humans as not just custodians but dedicated caregivers to a single numinous/charismatic creature, and as such, ordained ministers (and merchandisers) of the natural world. But Knut, who died at four-and-a-half of encephalitis in 2011, was very much like a circus animal, hand raised and imprinted by a performance imperative. Like all viral media stars, he was described as “a psychopath addicted to human attention”<sup>185</sup>—the trouble being that he soon grew too big to play with his keeper.<sup>186</sup>

In some ways the erasure of animals in the circus and the emphasis on “conservation” performances on the part of the neoliberal zoo consumer have let us off the hook—by ending animal performances in the circus we have imagined an end to animal performance itself. We can also imagine that every decision to use a reusable bag or to add a dollar to a purchase (in what’s called willingness-to-pay or WTP initiatives) or to “adopt” an endangered animal contributes to “saving” the planet. Considering theatrical animal performances bring us back to a painful reality: can we do the difficult work of thinking about animals as performers without anthropomorphizing? In moments of negative mimesis, can we see behind the kind of spectatorship that occludes animal suffering (the old animal, the sick animal, the animal made homeless by our own negligence or greed)? Could we even, in a re-consideration of our inherited sense of dominance, of dominion, of the line between the human and the animal, begin to look towards the vast, hidden sacrificial economy of animals consumed as food? Can animal presence, theatrical performance, and performativity, even in conditions of cinematic capture deliver a deeper understanding of human natures, of the kind of nature we have produced?

What animal theatre has the capacity to do is to remind us that animals are more than undying rhizomatic specters, they are matter—and through affect, they are energy. This materiality, this energy can in fact be used to inspire lasting conservation behaviors. While Disney found that conservation messaging had no impact on visitors, staff who interact with animals, even informally or through training sessions with animal staff, do adopt and maintain conservation behaviors.<sup>187</sup> Interactivity does seem to change how people think about their responsibilities to animal life.<sup>188</sup> To assume that animals play no part in these interactions seems somehow yet another act of arrogance. This is, to be clear, not to say that animal performance has to do with us or is in any way on our terms. But here I turn once again to Dale's work on cuteness, because he makes the claim that far from animals becoming cuter because of domestication (the notion that we have *selected* them for cuteness), animal cuteness has to do, much as with toddlers, with an expression of the social interests of the animals towards humans. This is to say that cuteness is a form of animal agency—a balance of phenomenal, creative, and performative markers.<sup>189</sup> Dale's work is with Siberian wild dogs and his claims are restricted to a small number of mammals (indeed within the range of animals, the number is infinitesimally small). But his work reminds us that seeing animal representation exclusively in terms of our own dominance is to commit to a particular set of blinders.

To begin to think of animal presence and enactment as *subjective*, we would need a very different kind of zoo, or for that matter, a different kind of NAHTAZU, one with an emphasis on a very different kind of conservation performance. And yet, it's not clear, at least to me, that the answer is to get rid of zoos entirely—there may be yet a space for zoos to make good on their promise as early spaces of social reform (of humans).<sup>190</sup> The number of zoos holding animals is small and the number of animals

held at zoos even smaller. (William Conway, head of the Bronx Zoo, notes that all the world's zoo animals would fit into Brooklyn—indeed, the Bronx is too big.<sup>191</sup>) And yet, some 700 million people visit zoos every year.<sup>192</sup> In the US, roughly 181 million people visit American zoos (more, as the AZA website notes, than all major league sports events combined).<sup>193</sup> In 2018, 12.5 million people visited Animal Kingdom alone.<sup>194</sup> For many people, zoos are the only spaces where they encounter non-domesticated animals. Most zoo attendees are middle-class women and children, with average incomes between \$50–\$75,000 a year.<sup>195</sup> However we think about it, childhood and zoos are tied in the American imagination. The AZA notes that roughly 94 percent of survey respondents believed that zoos and aquariums “teach children about animals and the habitats they depend on.”<sup>196</sup> Conservation performances matter. The number of animals at Disney's Animal Kingdom may be just over one thousand, but the significance of Disney in the conservation world and as a producer of representations of the natural world also cannot be discounted. In an article for the journal *Public Understanding of Science*, A.C. Juillard-Prevot and S. Clayton measure societal exposure to biodiversity in terms of how Nature is represented over the course of seventy years of Disney movies.<sup>197</sup> At the very least, we need to think deeply about the network of performances circulated and the ways in which conservation discourses mediate a consumer / consumed version of animal life and animal habitats. We also need to think about how theatrical registers (including spectacle but also improvisation, presence / affect, performative misfires and animal enactments) work within and against this network assemblage and how we might begin to move towards a new kind of new aesthetics of collectivized vulnerability (our own) and care—new forms, indeed, of *harambe*.

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<sup>1</sup> The studies referred to here are Scott Hermanson, "Truer than Life: Disney's Animal Kingdom," in *Rethinking Disney: Private Control, Public Dimension*, ed. Mike Budd and Max H. Kirsch, Middletown (Wesleyan University Press, 2005), 199-227; Shelly R. Scott, "Theorizing Performances of the Animal Human Relationship" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 2006); Shelly R. Scott, "Conserving, Consuming and Improving on Nature at Disney's Animal Kingdom," *Theatre Topics* 17, no. 2 (09, 2007): 111-127; Susan Willis, "Disney's Bestiary," in *Rethinking Disney*, 53-71; Stephanie Rutherford, *Governing the Wild: Ecotours of Power*, (Minneapolis: University of

<sup>2</sup> From the February 2018 Recreation Calendar (program of activities) distributed at Animal Kingdom Lodge.

<sup>3</sup> This quotation appears on Disney Transport buses (displayed on TV screens) at WDW, which is where I first encountered it, and appears in Melody Malmberg, *The Making of Disney's Animal Kingdom Theme Park* (Hyperion: New York, 1998), 9.

<sup>4</sup> On conservatism in Disney nature films see chapter 13 in See Ronald Tobias, *Film and the Moral Vision of Nature: Theodore Roosevelt to Walt Disney* (East Lansing: Michigan University State Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Paul Wells, *The Animated Bestiary* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 136.

<sup>6</sup> See Tobias, *Film and the Moral*, 184.

<sup>7</sup> Megan Condis, "She was a Beautiful Girl and All the Animals Loved Her: Race, The Disney Princesses and their Animal Friends," *Gender Forum* 55 (2015).

<sup>8</sup> David Whitley, *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 24.

<sup>9</sup> Whitley, *The Idea*, 36.

<sup>10</sup> Published in the US in 1928.

<sup>11</sup> Whitley, 61.

<sup>12</sup> William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon. (New York: WW Norton & Co., 1995), 11, [https://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Cronon Trouble with Wilderness 1995.pdf](https://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Cronon%20Trouble%20with%20Wilderness%201995.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Whitley argues that there is a "double vision" here—that the forest is "both devastated and regenerating" (Whitley, *The Idea*, 73). He argues that ultimately one has to consider the weight of the loss of Bambi's mother in approaching how fully reconstructed the world of the forest has become.

<sup>14</sup> Whitley traces the development of the "idea of conservation" in *Bambi* but has his own sense of what this means both for the film and for the development of ideas of nature in Disney films.

<sup>15</sup> In Whitley, 72 (from David Ingram).

<sup>16</sup> On naturalistic practices, see Gregg Mitman, *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife on Film* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998), 111-12.

<sup>17</sup> Whitley on Yosemite, *The Idea*, 65.

<sup>18</sup> See Cronon, "Trouble with Wilderness," 23-25.

<sup>19</sup> Reviewer quoted in Mitman, *Reel Nature*, 112.

<sup>20</sup> The film was short \$400,000. The shortfall had to do, in part, with timing. It was 1942, post-Pearl Harbor and the country was at war, setting a new global frontier. The war also made it impossible to distribute the film in Europe. But the real issue was that the animated features were labor intensive and, as such, incredibly expensive. See Mitman, 112.

<sup>21</sup> See Mitman, 112. Also Steve Mannheim, *Disney and the Quest for Community* (London: Routledge, 2002), 79.

<sup>22</sup> In Mitman, 112.

<sup>23</sup> In Mitman, 112.

<sup>24</sup> In Mitman, 112.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Burt, *Animals in Film* (London: Reaktion, 2002), 150.

<sup>26</sup> In Mitman, *Reel Nature*, 113.

<sup>27</sup> In Mitman, 123.

<sup>28</sup> In Tobias, *Film and the Moral*, 184.

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<sup>29</sup> Mitman, *Reel Nature*, 123.

<sup>30</sup> Mitman, 124.

<sup>31</sup> In *Seal Island*, the seal scenes were shot during a trip the Milottes had taken when they accompanied the US Fish and Wildlife service on an annual run to hunt the seals for fur, but the edited Disney film focused on the animals pre-slaughter (animal murder, even in *Bambi*, is an offscreen event).

<sup>32</sup> In Mitman, 110.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Tobias, *Film and the Moral*, 190.

<sup>34</sup> Although lemmings will disperse if their numbers exceed their resources and are known to cross rivers, they are not compelled to rush headlong into the sea to die. It is not known how this urban myth developed or why Disney reproduced it.

<sup>35</sup> Riley Woodford, "Lemming Suicide Myth: Disney Film Faked Bogus Behavior," Alaska Fish & Wildlife News, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, September 2003, [https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildlifeneews.view\\_article&articles\\_id=56](https://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildlifeneews.view_article&articles_id=56).

<sup>36</sup> In Woodford, "Lemming Suicide."

<sup>37</sup> See especially Derek Bousé, *Wildlife Films* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Mitman also makes the connection between *Bambi* and representations of a pristine nature separate from humans. See Mitman, *Reel Nature*, 114.

<sup>40</sup> Bousé, *Wildlife Films*, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Tobias, *Film and the Moral*, 175.

<sup>42</sup> In his chapter "Nature the Film," Tobias also touches on the connection I explore here between Akeley and Disney, noting in the chapter's last sentence that Akeley's "diaroma, in the moment of its deliverance, would be quickly overshadowed by a man named Walt Disney." Tobias, 180.

<sup>43</sup> In Akira Mizuta Lippit, *The Electric Animal*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 166.

<sup>44</sup> Lippit, *The Electric Animal*, 166.

<sup>45</sup> Lippit, 183.

<sup>46</sup> Lippit, 187.

<sup>47</sup> Lippit, 184.

<sup>48</sup> In Mitman, *Reel Nature*, 113.

<sup>49</sup> See Tobias, *Film and the Moral*, 191.

<sup>50</sup> [Theodore Roosevelt Digital Library, Theodore Roosevelt in Africa, Library of Congress Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Dickinson State University, https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o284579](https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o284579).

<sup>51</sup> Tobias, *Film and the Moral*, 190.

<sup>52</sup> Tobias, 191.

<sup>53</sup> See Mitman, *Reel Nature*, 3; and Christian Moran, *True Life Adventures: A History of Disney's Nature Documentaries* (Theme Park Press, 2017), 109.

<sup>54</sup> Indeed, the anthropomorphism in the new Disney nature docs is a step above the TLA. The voice-of-God/Science narration is still present, but voiceover narration now flips between registers, alternating between God/Science and individual/subjective points of view. The animal points of view are often laced with humor in order to be more kid and family friendly—comedian Tina Fey narrated *Monkey Kingdom* in 2015, while the 2019 *Penguins* features Ed Helms as a somewhat hapless everyman Adélie penguin. In some sense, the success of Disney as an imprint has given the company even greater representational license. At the same time, marketing initiatives continue to feed the company's reputation as a conservation agent, with the company promising a "donation" to wildlife conservation for every ticket sold.

<sup>55</sup> There's a distinction between the disnification of animals (a principle outlined by Steve Baker, related to animal iconography and identity. Baker argues that disnification of animals mimetically renders animals (stupid)—and Disneyization (a concept introduced by Alan



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Bryman) outlines a set of organizational principles established at the Disney parks and “diffused” into other social arenas.

<sup>56</sup> See Alan Bryman and James Beardsworth, “The Wild Animal in Late Modernity: The Case of the Disneyization of Zoos,” *Tourist Studies* 1 no. 1 (2001): 91 for an outline of Disney principles and zoos.

<sup>57</sup> Bryman and Beardsworth reference Malamud’s 1998 book *Reading Zoos* here. Jane Desmond also makes this point in her book *Staging Tourism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

<sup>58</sup> Bryman and Beardsworth, “The Wild Animal,” 87. The authors note that the “principal resting place of the quasified animal is the natural history museum.”

<sup>59</sup> Desmond, *Staging Tourism*, 164.

<sup>60</sup> See Nigel Rothfels, *Savages and Beasts: The Birth of the Modern Zoo* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2002).

<sup>61</sup> WAZA, “About WAZA,” World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, January 26, 2018, <https://www.waza.org/about-waza/>.

<sup>62</sup> This reference is to the song “Circle of Life” in Disney’s *The Lion King*—one of the primary Disney properties cross-platformed in Animal Kingdom and particularly in Kilimanjaro Safaris.

<sup>63</sup> On advisory board members, see Chuck Schmidt, *Disney’s Animal Kingdom: An Unofficial History* (Theme Park Press, 2018), 14–18; and as well as Malmberg, *Making of Disney’s*, 32.

<sup>64</sup> Malmberg, 33.

<sup>65</sup> The Walt Disney Company, “Environment,” accessed January 27, 2018, <https://www.thewaltdisneycompany.com/environment/>.

<sup>66</sup> See Malmberg, *Making of Disney’s*, 147.

<sup>67</sup> Ironically, charisma can work against actual protection. As Courchamp et al. argue in *The Paradoxical Extinction of the Most Charismatic Animals*, charismatic animals have such a high publicity profile that the public often assumes that they aren’t really endangered, making fundraising difficult. F Courchamp, I Jaric, C Albert, Y Meinard, WJ Ripple, G Chapron *The Paradoxical Extinction of the Most Charismatic Animals*, *PLoS Biol* 16 no. 4 (2018) e200399, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pbio.2003997>

<sup>68</sup> Schmidt, *Disney’s Animal Kingdom*, 39.

<sup>69</sup> Christine Shenot, “The Captivity Question,” Orlando Sentinel, December 10, 1995, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/os-xpm-1995-12-10-9512100738-story.html>.

<sup>70</sup> In Moran, *True Life Adventure*, 110.

<sup>71</sup> Originally named Preservation Station, Conservation Station has undergone a number of branding challenges since it opened. According to Rick Barongi, conservation replaced “preservation” because it implies greater action on the part of the producer/consumer. The area was then named “Rafiki’s Planet Watch”—tying in the character of Rafiki from *The Lion King*, a mandrill monkey and kind of elder statesman. The rebranding didn’t take—and the area once again became Conservation Station. The area is reached by a train—hence its designation as a station—or a way-station. It’s an out-of-the-way park excursion and requires a dedicated visit. It is most popular for families with small children for whom the educational draw is less important than the steam train ride to the station and/or the children’s petting zoo (or as it is called in Disney speak, “Affection Station”).

<sup>72</sup> With apologies to Saint-Saëns and emphasis here on *carnivality*—the performed consumption of animal flesh.

<sup>73</sup> Art Thomas, “Animal Magnetism,” *Theatre Crafts International* 32 no. 9 (October 1998): 60.

<sup>74</sup> In Schmidt, *Disney’s Animal Kingdom*, 26.

<sup>75</sup> In Thomas, “Animal Magnetism,” 60.

<sup>76</sup> See Hermanson, “Truer than Life,” 209.

<sup>77</sup> In addition to the Majarajah Jungle Trek, there’s a bird show called *Flights of Wonder*, but Asia compensates by having not one but two thrill rides—a white water rafting ride with a conservation narrative about deforestation, renegade (bad) corporations, and environmental tourism, in which tourists are rewarded as “conservationists” just for getting on the ride, and a Space-Mountain like Mt. Everest ride featuring a Yeti encounter.

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- <sup>78</sup> When the imagineers traveled to Kenya, Tanzania, and Zanzibar on research trips, the discovered that the safari industry there had already been Disneyized. They resolved to best the locals, who had tried to play, after all, at Disney's own game. See Schmidt, *Disney's Animal Kingdom*, 20.
- <sup>79</sup> From personal photograph/record.
- <sup>80</sup> In Schmidt, 47.
- <sup>81</sup> In Schmidt, 31.
- <sup>82</sup> The site is a former cow pasture and fireworks testing site. Realizing that they could drain the run off into nearby wetlands, engineers laid in sixty miles of drainage in order to be able to control the soil. See Thomas, "Animal Magnetism," 59.
- <sup>83</sup> See Thomas, 59–60.
- <sup>84</sup> Schmidt, *Disney's Animal Kingdom*, 41.
- <sup>85</sup> Thomas, "Animal Magnetism," 61.
- <sup>86</sup> Malmberg, *Making of Disney's*, 84.
- <sup>87</sup> In Thomas, 61. Ahead of the arrival of the animals, the landscape was given a year to perform/grow. There was a Darwinian element to this "jazz." "In five years," Comstock noted, the designers would simply see what would "win."
- <sup>88</sup> A ha-ha wall is a landscaping wall that creates a barrier all the while preserving the sense that the area is open or not enclosed. Landscaping features detailed in Malmberg, *Making of Disney's*, 108–109.
- <sup>89</sup> Comstock in Thomas, "Animal Magnetism," 61.
- <sup>90</sup> Malmberg, *Making of Disney's*, 108. See also Barongi on hidden acacia leaves in Schmidt, *Disney's Animal Kingdom*, 75.
- <sup>91</sup> Malmberg, 108.
- <sup>92</sup> Schmidt, *Disney's Animal Kingdom*, 75.
- <sup>93</sup> See Janine L. Brown, Stephen Paris, Natalia Prado-Oviedo, Cheryl L. Meehan, Jennifer N. Hogan, Kari A. Morfeld, and Kathy Carlstead. "Reproductive Health Assessment of Female Elephants in North American Zoos and Association of Husbandry Practices with Reproductive Dysfunction in African Elephants (*Loxodonta Africana*)." *PLoS ONE* 11, no. 7 (07, 2016). doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1371/journal.pone.0145673>. <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/1808705155?accountid=10226>.
- <sup>94</sup> Transcript from personal video from site visit: February 19, 2018.
- <sup>95</sup> See Malmberg, *Making of Disney's*, 108.
- <sup>96</sup> Malmberg, 108.
- <sup>97</sup> Yi Fu Tuan, "Disneyland: Its Place in World Culture," in *Designing Disney's Theme Parks: The Architecture of Reassurance*, ed. Karal Ann Marling, (Paris: Flammarion, 1998), 192.
- <sup>98</sup> Schmidt, *Disney's Animal Kingdom*, 73.
- <sup>99</sup> This is as much about immersion as it is distraction since waits can range anywhere from 15 to 240 minutes.
- <sup>100</sup> In queue there are also signs posted along the route, setting the scene. Some signs prime guests to identify species, captioned with a fun fact ("Warthog: a warthog can run up to 30MPH"), and some come with faux, almost jokey travel advisories ("Do not ask your driver to leave the motorable tracks, as this causes harm to the vegetation and scenery") as a way of setting the larger scene of the wildlife reserve.
- <sup>101</sup> Rutherford makes this comment (as does Hermanson) in relationship to Kali River Rapids but her critique of Kilimanjaro Safaris infers this reading. Rutherford, *Governing the Wild*, 92.
- <sup>102</sup> Willis, "Disney's Bestiary," 59.
- <sup>103</sup> Personal note/transcript from video taken on field visit, Thursday February 15, 2018.
- <sup>104</sup> Hermanson makes the point about illegal/legal in relationship to the Kali Rivers rafting ride—a point that Rutherford also expands. Hermanson, "Truer than Life," and Rutherford, *Governing the Wild*.

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- <sup>105</sup> WWF, "Battles over ever decreasing land," World Wide Fund for Nature, March 6, 2018, [http://wwf.panda.org/knowledge\\_hub/ endangered\\_species/elephants/human\\_elephant\\_conflict.cfm](http://wwf.panda.org/knowledge_hub/ endangered_species/elephants/human_elephant_conflict.cfm).
- <sup>106</sup> Despite their long performance history, even trained elephants remain dangerous to humans. As Duffy notes, mahouts are trampled each year. See Rosaleen Duffy, "Interactive Elephants," *Annals of Tourism Research* 44, (January 2014), 88–101.
- <sup>107</sup> Hermanson, "Truer than Life," 213.
- <sup>108</sup> Mireya Navarro, "New Disney Kingdom Comes With Real-Life Obstacles," *New York Times*, April 16, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/04/16/us/new-disney-kingdom-comes-with-real-life-obstacles.html>.
- <sup>109</sup> See Andrew J.P. Flack, "Lions loose on a gentleman's lawn: animality, authenticity and automobility in the emergence of the English safari park," *Journal of Historical Geography* 54 (2016): 38–49.
- <sup>110</sup> Flack, "Lions loose," 42.
- <sup>111</sup> Flack, 41. Rutherford explores the notion of "better than Africa," although not in relationship to Flack and on separate grounds. Rutherford, *Governing the Wild*, 67.
- <sup>112</sup> Shelly R. Scott, "Conserving, Consuming, and Improving on Nature at Disney's Animal Kingdom." *Theatre Topics* 17, no. 2 (09, 2007): 111-127, 122. <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/218660703?accountid=10226>.
- <sup>113</sup> On one 2012 ride, a mother in our group pointed to the tableau in order to clarify that it represented a resolution to the drama. "See, there's the baby," she said. Even though her comment performed the kind of enthusiasm that parents sometimes manufacture in these situations, this was less a value judgment than a way of filling in for something that wasn't necessarily obvious, particularly to a young child. The mother was explaining, in the end, that the "story"—to whatever extent the child had been paying attention to it—had come to its inevitable conclusion.
- <sup>114</sup> Scott, "Theorizing Performances."
- <sup>115</sup> Desmond, *Staging Tourism*, 178.
- <sup>116</sup> Hermanson, "Truer than Life," 206.
- <sup>117</sup> Flack, "Lions loose," 40.
- <sup>118</sup> Marilyn Sotto (costume designer), quoted in Malmberg, *Making of Disney's*, 155.
- <sup>119</sup> Nametags identify employees by first name and hometown (city, state or city, country if they are foreign workers).
- <sup>120</sup> Personal note / transcript.
- <sup>121</sup> How fast an animal runs is a recurring theme in the presentation of facts. I do wonder whether this has some reference to the speed of the vehicle—as if the human-automotive assemblage is in constant conversation with its "natural" competitors.
- <sup>122</sup> Sianne Ngai. *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).
- <sup>123</sup> Personal note / transcript from personal video of field visit: February 15, 2018.
- <sup>124</sup> Personal note / transcript.
- <sup>125</sup> Personal note / transcript.
- <sup>126</sup> I asked our 2018 guide how she had come to the job, and in our conversation, she relayed that the training period was two weeks.
- <sup>127</sup> Joshua Paul Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object: Desire, Domestication and Agency" in *The Aesthetics and Affects of Cuteness*, eds. Joshua Paul Dale, Julia Goggin, Julia Leyda, and Anthony P. McIntyre, (New York Routledge, 2017), 10.
- <sup>128</sup> BBC, "'Emotional support peacock' barred from United Airlines plane," *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-42880690>.
- <sup>129</sup> In Malmberg, *Making of Disney's*, 12.

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- <sup>130</sup> Joshua Paul Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object: Desire, Domestication and Agency" in *The Aesthetics and Affects of Cuteness*, eds. Joshua Paul Dale, Julia Goggin, Julia Leyda, and Anthony P. McIntyre, (New York Routledge, 2017), 36.
- <sup>131</sup> Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object," 40.
- <sup>132</sup> Dale, 40.
- <sup>133</sup> Gary Sherman and Jonathan Haidt, "Cuteness and Disgust: The Humanizing and Dehumanizing Effects of Emotion," Sherman, Gary D., and Jonathan Haidt. "Cuteness and Disgust: The Humanizing and Dehumanizing Effects of Emotion." *Emotion Review* 3, no. 3 (July 2011): 245–51. doi:10.1177/1754073911402396.
- <sup>134</sup> Personal note / transcript.
- <sup>135</sup> Elephants and Bees Project, "disney-worldwide-conservation-fund2," Save the Elephants, February 12, 2018, <http://elephantsandbees.com/disney-worldwide-conservation-fund2/>.
- <sup>136</sup> Personal note / transcript.
- <sup>137</sup> Personal note / transcript.
- <sup>138</sup> In Irus Braverman, "Conservation without Nature: The Trouble with in situ and ex situ," *Geoforum* 51 (2014): 54.
- <sup>139</sup> Braverman, "Conservation without Nature," 54.
- <sup>140</sup> See Jozef Keulartz, "Captivity for Conservation? Zoos at a Crossroads," *Journal of Agricultural Environmental Ethics* 28 (2015): 347.
- <sup>141</sup> See B Clucas, K McHugh, T Caro "Flagship species on covers of US conservation and nature magazines," *Biodiversity and Conservation* 17, no. 6 (2008):1517–28, doi: [10.1007/s10531-008-9361-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-008-9361-0). For possible negative effects of flagship models on "sibling" species, see also Leo Douglas and Gary Winkel, "The Flipside of the Flagship", *Biodiversity and Conservation* 23 (2014): 979, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10531-014-0647-0>
- <sup>142</sup> See Keulartz, "Captivity for Conservation?"
- <sup>143</sup> Leslie Kaufman, "To Save Some Species, Zoos Must Let Others Die," *New York Times*, May 27, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/28/science/zoos-bitter-choice-to-save-some-species-letting-others-die.html>.
- <sup>144</sup> On relationship of human/nature dualism in relationship to conservation, see Cronon, "Trouble with Wilderness," 12.
- <sup>145</sup> L.D. Dierking, L.M. Adelman, and J. Ogden, "Using a Behavior Change Model to Document the Impact of Visits to Disney's Animal Kingdom: A Study Investigating Intended Conservation Action," *Curator* 47, no. 3 (2004): 322–343, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1111/j.2151-6952.2004.tb00128.x>.
- <sup>146</sup> Dierking, Adelman, and Ogden, "Using a Behavior," 322.
- <sup>147</sup> Dierking, Adelman, and Ogden, 322.
- <sup>148</sup> Markus Gussett and Gerald Dick set the number for contributions by zoos (97 percent in North America and Europe) at \$350 million. This number is based on the top ten wildlife conservation organizations (including the Bronx Zoo, but excluding the DCF). DCF funding can be averaged at \$3 million a year—for an organization with gross revenues of roughly \$50 billion a year (5 net) for the past ten years. This would put DCF funding at .0006 percent of annual net gains. See Gussett and Dick, "The Global Reach of Zoos and Aquariums in Visitor Numbers and Conservation Expenditures," Vol 30: 5. *Zoo Biology*, 566-569. 2011. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1002/zoo.20369>
- <sup>149</sup> Malmberg, *The Making of Disney's*, 170.
- <sup>150</sup> E.R. Bush, S.E. Baker, and D.W. Macdonald, "Global trade in exotic pets 2006–2012," *Conservation Biology* 28 (2014): 663–676. See also, D.L. Yong, S.D. Fam, S. Lum. "Reel conservation: can big screen animations save tropical biodiversity," *Tropical Conservation Science* 4 (2011): 244–253, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2016/05/10/the-finding-nemo-effect-is-plundering-wild-clown-fish-stocks\\_a\\_21374786/](https://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2016/05/10/the-finding-nemo-effect-is-plundering-wild-clown-fish-stocks_a_21374786/).
- <sup>151</sup> Bush et al, "Global trade."
- <sup>152</sup> Since the first film's release, clownfish have become locally extinct in several places across southeast Asia. See T.M. Andrews, "'Finding nemo' wasn't so entertaining for real clownfish."

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now conservationists worry about 'finding dory,' *Washington Post*, May 18, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2016/05/18/finding-nemo-wasnt-so-entertaining-for-real-clownfish-now-conservationists-worry-about-finding-dory/?noredirect=on>

<sup>153</sup> See Malmberg, *The Making of Disney's*, 148, 170-171.

<sup>154</sup> Willis, "Disney's Bestiary," 60.

<sup>155</sup> Una Chaudhuri and Holly Hughes, *Animal Acts* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 7.

<sup>156</sup> Bob Mullan and Gary Marvin, *Zoo Culture* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>157</sup> Martin Puchner, "Performing the Open: Actors, Animals, Philosophers," *TDR* (1988-) 51, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 21-32, 22. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4492733>.

<sup>158</sup> Puchner, "Performing the Open."

<sup>159</sup> Quoted in Puchner, 23.

<sup>160</sup> Nicholas Ridout, *Stage Fright, Animals, and Other Theatrical Problems*. (Cambridge, UK. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 97.

<sup>161</sup> Ridout relies here on Michael Peterson's argument. See Michael Peterson, "The Animal Apparatus From a Theory of Animal Acting to an Ethics of Animal Acts," *TDR*, 51:1 (Spring 2007), 46.

<sup>162</sup> See Susan Davis for an extended look at how parks use operant conditioning (Davis looks at sea world). Susan Davis, *Spectacular Nature: Corporate Culture and the Sea World Experience*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). As Davis argues, training and learned behaviors stem largely from a circus tradition (see p. 172) and depend on both learnable behaviors on the part of captive animals as well as a set of (shifting, often not entirely articulated) species-specific codes (about the animals in question but also about humans.) See Davis, 178.

<sup>163</sup> See Davis, 191.

<sup>164</sup> Personal note / transcript.

<sup>165</sup> Personal note / transcript.

<sup>166</sup> See Schmidt, *Disney's Animal Kingdom*.

<sup>167</sup> Our guide relayed this information about ostriches, which is also supported by videos.

<sup>168</sup> See Malmberg, *The Making of Disney's*, 48-52.

<sup>169</sup> Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 129.

<sup>170</sup> Derrida, 133.

<sup>171</sup> See Ridout, *Stage Fright*, 102.

<sup>172</sup> Brian Massumi, *What Animals Teach Us About Politics*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 75. <https://doi-org.exproxy.cul.columbia.edu/10.1215/9780822376057>

<sup>173</sup> Massumi, "What Animals," 82.

<sup>174</sup> Massumi takes this phrase from Raymond Ruyer in *La Genèse des Formes Vivantes*, (Paris: Flammarion, 1958), 207. See also Massumi, 76.

<sup>175</sup> Massumi, 84.

<sup>176</sup> Massumi, 87.

<sup>177</sup> Peta Tait, *Wild and Dangerous Performances: Animals, Emotions, Circus*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

<sup>178</sup> See Alexandra Farrand, Geoff Hosey, Hannah Buchanan-Smith, "The Visitor Effect in Petting Zoo-housed Animals," *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, Vol 151. (February 2014) 116-127. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2013.11.012>

<sup>179</sup> See Geoff Hosey, "How Does the Zoo Environment Affect the Behavior of Primates?" *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 90:20 (February 2005), 107-129. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2004.08.015>

<sup>180</sup> In Braverman, "Conservation without Nature," 54.

<sup>181</sup> In Nicholas Kulish, "Knut, His 15 Long Past, Has Issues," *New York Times*, April 30, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/30/world/europe/30knut.html>.

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- <sup>182</sup> Clubb, Ros and Georgia Mason. "Captivity Effects on Wide-Ranging Carnivores." *Nature* 425, no. 6957 (Oct 02, 2003): 473-4, <http://ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/docview/204510091?accountid=10226>.
- <sup>183</sup> Clubb and Mason, "Captivity Effects," 2003.
- <sup>184</sup> Kulish, "Knut."
- <sup>185</sup> Kulish, "Knut."
- <sup>186</sup> Kulish, "Knut." The death of Knut is explained in Kulish's *NY Times* article—he suffered from a rare autoimmune disorder found in humans (previously unknown in non-human animals). In death, as in life, Knut continues to be used to raise awareness, both for extinction events and for the condition that killed him. See Emmarie Huetteman, "Death of Knut the Polar Bear Is explained at Last," *New York Times*, August 28, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/29/world/europe/death-of-knut-the-polar-bear-is-explained-at-last.html>.
- <sup>187</sup> Amy Groff, Donna Lockhart, Jacqueline Ogden, and Lynn D. Dierking, "An exploratory investigation of the effect of working in an environmentally themed facility on the conservation related knowledge, attitudes and behavior," *Environmental Education Research* 11, no. 3 (July 2005): 371–387.
- <sup>188</sup> Charlotte E. Hacker and Lance Miller, "Zoo Visitor Perceptions, Attitudes and Conservation Intentions After Viewing African Elephants at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park" *Zoo Biology*, 35, No. 4 (July 2016) 355.
- <sup>189</sup> Dale, "The Appeal of the Cute Object", 47.
- <sup>190</sup> On early spaces of social reform, see Desmond, *Staging Tourism*.
- <sup>191</sup> William Conway, "Buying time for wild animals with zoos," *Zoo Biology* 30 (2011): 4.
- <sup>192</sup> WAZA, home page, World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, February 12, 2018, <https://www.waza.org>.
- <sup>193</sup> AZA, "Visitor Demographics," Association of Zoos & Aquariums, February 12, 2018, <https://www.aza.org/partnerships-visitor-demographics>.
- <sup>194</sup> Gabrielle Russon, "Disney's Animal Kingdom attendance soars 15 percent as theme parks rebound, report says," *Orlando Sentinel*, May 17, 2018, <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/business/tourism/os-bz-theme-park-attendance-20180517-story.html>.
- <sup>195</sup> AZA, "Visitor Demographics."
- <sup>196</sup> AZA, "Visitor Demographics."
- <sup>197</sup> A.C. Juillard-Prevot and S. Clayton, "Historical evidence for nature disconnection in a 70-year time series of Disney animated films," *Public Understanding of Science* 24, no. 6 (2015): 672–680, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963662513519042>.

## Conclusion:

As Rita Felski notes in her essay, “Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame and the Lower Middle Class,” there’s a confessional streak running through the academy these days. We turn over our identity cards, reveal our investments, make a show of how and in what ways we are authorized to speak. I am not, in fact, opposed to this trend. I tend to want to guard my privacy, but on the whole, I think some amount of confession is healthy and reminds us that no amount of hiding behind well-reasoned arguments conceals that the fact that we are, in the end, people with specific points of access/entry and particular attachments.

I want to say that I had no particular sense of “Disney” growing up and no conscious attachments. My father, when referring to anything he found substandard, would issue the declaration: *This is a Mickey Mouse operation*. I remember my confusion when he said he was taking us to Disney World in Florida. I was eight or nine. We drove from Toronto and it took us days. The journey felt less like a pilgrimage than a manifestation of both our geographic and cultural distance from the site. Both my parents were immigrants and I grew up feeling only provisionally North American. I have only one photograph from our visit. We are all sitting -- my parents, my brother and I -- in front of a fountain in a faux-Bavarian *platz*, part of the Germany pavilion in the World Showcase section of Epcot. We are all smiling in the photo, including my father. My father was born and raised outside of Stuttgart: he emigrated to Canada at 18. I could say that this image speaks to our cultural entanglements, our sense of what it meant to come to America and to find ourselves represented, as mini-nations, inside American consumer space (we had, after all, walked past the Japan pavilion, which

represented my mother's home country, probably only some minutes before). I could say that the photo captures my father's delight in discovering that Mickey Mouse was in fact no small operation, that the theme park performed what he loved most — a hyper-managed orderliness marked as both the process and product of North American industry. But I don't remember anything about the visit itself at all.

It really wasn't until I became a parent and suddenly found my home awash in Disney products that I began to think about what Baudrillard calls the "calculus of objects" that had entered my home. Branded goods, Baudrillard argues are part of a

chain of signifiers... drawing the consumer into a series of more complex motivations... [O]bjects are always arranged to mark out directive paths, to orient the purchasing impulse towards *networks* of objects in order to captivate that impulse and bring it... to the limits of its economic potential. Clothing, machines and toiletries thus constitute object *pathways*, which establish inertial constraints in the consumer: he will move *logically* from one to another. "1

I was, at the time of this small invasion, a well-educated woman living in brownstone Brooklyn: I knew that I was supposed to find a way to throw off the trails of these objects pathways or they would inevitably constrain my daughter. But the notion that these objects could actually overdetermine behavior seemed to me unthinkingly categorical. I also could not shake the sense that there was something deeply classist about the general sense that mass produced objects were somehow *inherently* derelict. Nothing seemed to speak more clearly about the power of the market than the desire of those at the very top to be seen as transcending the market altogether. In the age of mechanical/digital reproduction, the aura of authenticity glows brightest around the off-spring of the well-to-do. My daughter clearly *loved* some of these objects, often with a devotion that blindsided me. An Elmo pencil case, a Cinderella wand, a stuffed white cat named Marie from *The Aristocats* – she did not want to live without them.



I read the manifestos – the ones that seem specifically written to chastise parents. Peggy Orenstein’s *Cinderella Ate My Daughter*. Henry Giroux’s *Disney and the End of Innocence*. The arguments outlined were forceful, but the narrative of Disney domination still didn’t add up. My daughter wanted the Minnie app advertised on the Minnie yogurt, but not the yogurt itself. She wanted to call herself Aurora but rejected the Sleeping Beauty story (she hated to nap). Most importantly, she and her friends seemed focused on fashioning their own assemblages out of the Disney materials rather than intent on following any particular script. The manifestos also seemed not only to ignore the agency of children as individuals, but as a consumer group. The dynamic reciprocity of consumer space among the children in our orbit couldn’t have been clearer: the objects, the TV shows, the passing fashion trends – these were all occasions to be sociable and to participate in a kind of bottom-up recoding of popular culture.

Still, it was hard not to be alarmed. While I was busy reading, the objects in our apartment seemed to multiply *exponentially*. Each new object also seemed chattier than the last, and more deeply imbricated in a criss-cross of ever-unfolding product channels and networks. Where *did* one thing start and end? To what end(s)? I was never naïve to the endgame, which is, of course, the accumulation of corporate profits. I also knew that it was my job to protect my daughter from corporate predation. At the same time, I truly did not know what to make of the expressive details of consumer life, the dramaturgy of kid consumerism, the self-fashioning, the assemblies of children and, indeed, of adults engaged in creative call-and-response, the constant (occasionally mind-numbing) re-circulations of Deleuzian *repetition with difference*?

When we visited the Disney World, the park’s inherent theatricality put everything into what felt initially like a clearer focus. Everything in a theme park is simply part of a live show. Spectator / participants occupy the front stage together with

thousands of other “cast members” / employees. At Disney World there were also hundreds of shows-within-the-show. There were parades, panoramic story-rides, melodramas, character encounters, water shows, ethnic dance demos, Broadway style shows, kid shows, animal shows, variety shows -- the list seemed endless. Theatre, it was clear, was Disney’s primary field of operations. Or at least *a* primary field of operations. It seemed to me that if I could read these shows, if I could read them as I would any Greek tragedy or postdramatic theatre piece, I could somehow unpack the exact ways in which consumer culture structured the civic and affective lives of consumers.

I also hoped that if I read these productions in the same spirit of thick description as Fjellman’s *Vinyl Leaves*, I could show the part-for-the-whole and the whole-in-the-part. Perhaps the trouble is that I am not, like Fjellman, a trained anthropologist. As is likely quite clear, I often defaulted to reading the shows in the way consumer culture is often read – politically. I do not think that political (or political economy) readings are entirely misguided, particularly in the context of mass entertainment in the era of late capital. Theatre assemblages are necessarily embedded in larger socio-material conditions. And yet, I also do not believe, having spent the past five years thinking about Disney theatre, that these readings are entirely sufficient. Throughout the dissertation I turned to aesthetic theorists like Sianne Ngai to try to find an expanded vocabulary, one that would make sense of the kinds of expressive connections people have in relationship to popular culture. These theories – of coolness, cuteness, animatedness, zaniness – and their periodization as the aesthetics of late capital -- also come up against particular limits, most of which have to do with the notion that we, privileged moderns that we are, have given up most of our ghosts, and are left only with a kind of self-conscious, affected affect. I remain both haunted and encouraged by

Latour's assertion that we have never been modern. Perhaps if we follow our enchantments, our strange and idiosyncratic identifications with objects, with animals, with enchantment itself – we can find a way to re-inhabit the planet before we destroy it.

I came to assemblage theory through Celia Lury's work on brand assemblages, which is what led to my interest in assemblage theory as an overall, applied framework. I am of course aware that I perform a kind of heresy here. I understand the irony of using Deleuze and Guattari's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* as an affirmative framework for some of the most capitalist and schizophrenic cultural products anywhere, ever. Massumi writes that it's not so much a question with Deleuze and Guattari of, "Is it true? But, Does it work?"<sup>2</sup> To my mind, assemblage theory helps us see how the machine is put together and how it runs at different speeds in different places with different components. Understanding how *repetition with difference* works in Disney theatre as an act of de and reterritorialization helps us get closer to the ways in which brands build identities: to the ways in which difference is used to generate persistence and the extent to which heterogeneity matters to the creation of homogeneity. My argument here is really that brand theatre is a localized, expressive, experiential and collaborative site of de and reterritorialization — one that is extremely flexible (playful even), despite being a coordinated brand interface.

This said, I think the strongest argument the dissertation makes is in the way each study pays attention to how commercial theatre gets assembled: all the random decisions, the strange alliances, the surprises and chance happenings, the political contingencies, the quirks of character, the data packaging, all the ineffables of collaboration and process. Before I came back to graduate school, I spent a good ten years in the theatre as an actor, working mostly on new plays in Off-Broadway and

regional theatres. From these years, I developed a sense that even in top-down institutions, theatre often gets de and recoded from the ground up. Interpretation itself always gives actors and directors and designers and audiences agentic capacities – even as communal roles are taken up. This isn't to say that everyone is equal – only that everyone and, indeed, every *thing* is part of each theatre experience.

But perhaps what this dissertation reveals most clearly is the difficulty of writing about mass or popular theatre. How do you talk about the reception of a show *millions* of people across the globe have seen? How do you write about the plenitude of responses that are at once individual and in some sense collective, or, at the very least, assembled? How do you think about a theatre piece that is a live reproduction of a television show with mass global distribution? How do you think about characters that are not only characters in stories/shows but ambassadors for a worldwide network of hundreds of thousands of individual consumer products and experiences? The answer, I think, is not one that assumes totalities. The totality of brand networks and branding is an illusion. As Raymond Williams says, “There are in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses.”<sup>3</sup> This isn't to say, again, that the field is equal --that the politics of inclusion and exclusion do not underwrite brand management, brand development and brand extension. But networks, I have come to understand, are irreducibly complex systems. It may be that only a truly polyvocal text, one based on ethnographic analysis with a true diversity of respondents can begin to give us a real sense of what this kind of theatre means. I like to think of this work as, simply, a gentle nudge in that direction.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Baudrillard. *Consumer Society: Structures and Myths*, Revised Ed. (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 45.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Massumi. *A User's guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, Swerve Ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 8.

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<sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams. "Culture is Ordinary" (1958) in *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*. (London: Verso, 1989), 11

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## **Conclusion**

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