

1l Plan of celebration

Disneyzone completes the circuit of world's fairism by converting the celebration of production into the production of celebration – Michael Sorkin¹

The millennial last word in utopias will be located near Orlando, Florida ten minutes from Disney World. It should come as no surprise that Mickey Mouse has imagined this brave new world. Walt Disney has been dabbling in what dreams are made of since the opening of Main Street, USA in 1955. Forty years later, the Disney Corporation is building a new city on 10,000 acres of land. In 5 days, a parade past a theater, shops, a post office and town hall designed by Robert Venturi, Robert Stern, Aldo Rossi, Charles Moore, Philip Johnson, Michael Graves and Cesar Pelli will mark the opening of Celebration, Disney's model community.² The first homes go on sale November 18th, Mickey Mouse's

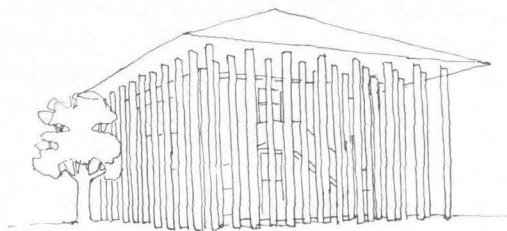


R. ROSSI

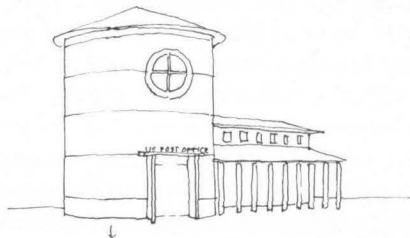


VENTURI

1al Rossi, Venturi



JOHNSON



GRAVES

1bl Johnson, Graves

birthday. The project is estimated to cost \$2.5 billion and expected to include 20,000 residents.³ More than that number have visited the Celebration preview center, the ultimate decorated shed. Potential home-buyers approach what appears to be a Colonial Revival mansion only to find that it is a life-size billboard with a real doorway leading to a prefabricated cubic space beyond. The space is filled with the trappings of an empty living room centered on a television set playing a video about Celebration. „If all goes as planned, Disney will have two Main Street USA's, one with inhabitants and one without, but both extremely profitable.“⁴

Whereas Main Street was merely a manifestation of Walt's hometown nostalgia, the overall planning of Disneyland and subsequent Disney World and their Japanese and European offspring owe much to Walt Disney's personal interest in World's Fairs and popular pedagogical models of ideal cities. Disney's theme parks are verbatim realizations of drawings that Ebenezer Howard took the trouble to mark, "Diagram only." Howard's book *To-Morrow, A Peaceful Path to Social Reform* featured the radial Central City, the Garden City and the Three Magnets diagram illustrating his Town-Country invention.⁵ The Three Magnet diagram is so central to the Disney concept that it echoes in its universal icon: the mouse ears cap. The town and country ears are conjoined at the crown of the Town-Country brain. It is probably not lost on adults that the theme park is a city of vermin or children, each with their token cap, captivated by some Pied Piper.

A deep-frozen urbanist

Celebration is not the first urban plan embarked on

by the Disney Corporation. Just before Walt Disney took his last breath – and had his body frozen for future cryogenic resurrection – his dying wish was that his successors carry on his most favored project, EPCOT or the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. Disney World was the pretense to buy swamp land and garner favorable public opinion in order to build EPCOT next to the theme park. The “Plan beyond the Plan,” EPCOT was originally intended to be the housing for the huge staff that would run Disney World. Disney announced he would build an artificial lake and use the “fill” to construct a hollow mountain that would conceal a small city “where they [the employees] can eat, rest, swim, wash, sleep and breathe fresh, relaxing air that we will pump into the mountain’s interior.” EPCOT would control its own climate, recycle its own waste, feed, preserve and save its citizens from hunger, disease and perhaps even survive nuclear war.⁶ He personally scrutinized every detail of the planning hoping to ensure that the city would be built according to his specifications, all the while researching cryogenics as a means to come back and check on the city, fixing the mistakes his successors might some day make.

Disney did not live to see EPCOT even started; his brother Roy dismissed the project as economically unfeasible. A dietetic version was realized by Roy’s successors, at great expense, with the building of a Fuller-esque geodesic dome and a fake prototype city in the form of living exhibits. No employees were housed at EPCOT because the technology was too expensive to realize Disney’s architects’ plans, save for the costly monorail. Local newspaper men wrote of the lost opportunity: “Walt always felt there was no point in trying to reclaim slums. He felt it was better to start anew with perfectly planned cities in fresh locations – cities that would enable designers to combine urban and suburban advantages in a single plan, if anyone in this century could have pulled off a successful Utopia, it would have been Walt Disney. EPCOT would, I think have been very much like the contemporary city of three million people that Le Corbusier proposed in the Radiant City.”⁷

Fantasy into fact

The shift from the fantasy Main Street of Disney World to the real Main Street of Celebration is predicated on the failure to build EPCOT as Walt Disney envisioned it. What makes Celebration more economically viable than EPCOT are the concessions made to the perceived market: the historic “look” is to sell well. With no pretense to look high-tech, the architecture is in utter agreement with the housing industry. Celebration is to look prewar, with all the amenities of the next millennium. The 8,000 homes of Celebration are to be built

in the six Disney-approved styles: Classical, Victorian, Colonial Revival, Coastal, Mediterranean and French.

Strict covenants and city codes will maintain the appropriate appearance of Celebration; Disney security guards will augment the county’s force. Its school system will be the Harvard-designed model of progressive education initiatives. Its hospital will be part spa, nurses available by video phone and computer. Each house will come with dedicated fiber-optic communications lines developed by AT&T. “Leading edge telephony, cable TV, interactive digital multimedia and high-speed data communications services, home security link, home energy management, interactive banking, voting from home, virtual office, high-speed internet access, and total interactive linkage between residences, health care facilities, schools, community facilities and retail establishments.”⁸ Students will be able to access notes from class, download homework assignments and e-mail term papers. This system will allow citizens to vote by straw poll, gossip via e-mail, order groceries or even have their vital signs monitored at a distance.⁹

Something of a panoptic urge is satisfied in this forced modernization. As a means to monitor all cyber purchases, information traces or web-site visitation, the computer effectively serves as a constant, faceless, observer. The information super-highway, hard-wired into every home, is a perfect public space offered in isolation, featured in Celebration homes in breakfast inglenooks and stair landings. The information super-highway at Celebration also functions as another Disney sanitizer. More than a high-tech version of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, the “net” will help to redefine the institutions of the community. Just as Bentham postulated that his invention could be integrated into many social functions (hospitals, schools, military barracks) the computer will effectively convert the street into a playground for children by erasing the need to shop or communicate in person. Other inversions would include the hospital’s role as a spa and the cyber classroom, stripping the school of its primary function: socialization. Despite this emphasis on computers, the outward appearance of technology is so loathed in Celebration that even the car has been banned from the street. But for all of its retroactive pretensions, the community under the 19th century veneer is in fact predicated on the comforts and appeal of information age gadgetry carefully buried in underground cables with false pavilions housing cellular phone antennae. The city is more high-tech than EPCOT ever proposed to be. Celebration’s success stems from the cheaper dressing of its silicon innards.

The seal

The seal of Celebration features in silhouette a girl on a boy's bicycle with a dog running behind her near a large tree and picket fence. All of this is featured above nine inexplicable subterranean lines. This design may refer to Walt Disney's original conception of EPCOT which was to locate the community in a hollow mountain, a world hidden underground.¹⁰ Even in the realized versions of the theme parks, many amusement rides are partially or entirely located underground. This is why maps of Disney parks seem inadequate: in truth, as the Hermetic sages used to say, what lies beneath is equal to what lies above.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, this age-old doctrine formed the core of the *Hohlweltlehre* by an Ohio infantryman, Captain J. Cleves Symmes.¹¹ On his deathbed he announced that the earth was hollow and inhabitable within and open at the poles. Popular among many mystic societies, the Hollow Earth Theory further described telluric currents or underground energy bands that connected specific geographic points: Paris, Rennes-le-Chateau, Jerusalem. It is debatable whether or not EuroDisney is located on the telluric current and is in geophysical contact with Florida's Disney World built near Ponce de León's Fountain of Youth. Be that as it may, the nine lines under the girl and the dog should at least be interpreted as the fiber-optic and video links running underground like the plowed furrows of Romulus, mapping the walls of a future Rome. The pairing of the little girl with a boy's bicycle may be read as a graphic shorthand for the representation of both sexes in deference to women's liberation or, given the tree, an alchemic Eve; the portrayal of Celebration as Eden is merged with the American paradise of the backyard and picket fence. The bicycle is an affront to the automobile and accurately describes the desired means of transport in Celebration. It is also not without precedent in utopian fiction. The BBC cult-classic television series, "The Prisoner" of the late 1960s, used the bicycle as the seal of the ideologically oppressive town known simply as the Village. The series was filmed on location in Portmeirion, Wales, a new leisure town of blended historic styles and mock ruins designed by Clough Williams-Ellis.¹² Double agents and political dissidents were taken to the Village in order to rub out their individuality, their names being replaced by numbers, their secrets all being confessed to a faceless Number One. The Prisoner's finale concludes with a journey through caverns far underground beneath the Village.¹³

Apparently, the emergency protocol at a Disney theme park requires an injured party to go to the nearest manhole and be lowered underground to wait for the ambulance circuiting the tunnels under the park. This mitigates the chance that other park

patrons will see anyone ill as well as hiding the offending emergency vehicles which would shatter the image of paradise.

East of Eden

Celebration abounds with formal references to Eden, in both Biblical and later American revolutionary senses. Downtown Celebration faces the artificial lake that Disney envisioned for EPCOT, and across the water on a man-made peninsula sits a rustic structure on the border of a reserve for the bald eagle which is at once a sign of original wilderness and the symbol of the United States. Part primitive hut, part turn-of-the-century train station, this temple in the wilderness resembles nothing else in Celebration. It is the Community Center which in a town with no planned churches, synagogues or mosques should have a significant civic role. Wood columns rise out of the ground, and while its muddy-colored walls and rough-hewn details are not purely from Filarete or Laugier, the point is clear: this is Arcadia. The interior meeting hall is centered not on a hearth, but on a giant computer monitor, window to the world by way of the world-wide web.

The design and consecration of Celebration parallels another traditional, albeit covert, American settlement pattern, the founding of the local masonic lodge. George Washington, as a Master Mason, presided over the founding ceremony of the national capitol, designed by another Master Mason, Pierre Charles L'Enfant. A Masonic lodge is not a particular building type but a certain configuration of architectural and symbolic devices based on the Solomonic temple and the Mosaic Tabernacle in the Wilderness. The lodge requires an enveloping wall, an entry flanked by two columns (Joachim and Boaz), a font or basin of water, a checkerboard-like grid of tile, a meandering path or stair and a sanctum sanctorum, a realm within a realm through which initiates may pass.¹⁴ In many respects the design of the Community Center at Celebration supports a Masonic interpretation. The building is approached by a meandering path, is enveloped by a garden wall, includes an Olympic-sized font, and two columns mark each entry. The entire building is surrounded by a grid of square pavers turned 45 degrees at the center and along the paths. The realm within the realm, the threshold to Enlightenment is here presented as the giant computer screen, the all-seeing eye of the omniscient God.

Children's stories

The obvious architectural homogeneity despite the various approved styles, is due in large part to a

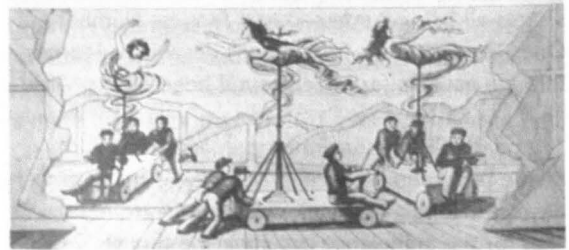
rigorous design code. The architectural styles are outlined from the general massing proportions to the window details in the Celebration Pattern Book. The book is largely a graphic codex presenting itself as a helpful guide rather than a control device. Pattern books were widely used in rural America as late as the turn of the century to introduce a semblance of architectural correctness to the hinterlands. Downtown Celebration, however, breaks with the pattern book's academic historical models in favor of Post-Modern civic and commercial buildings.

The success of Michael Graves' Swan Hotel and the Seven Dwarves caryatids in Disney World probably inspired the choice of the Post-Modern as the architecture of the urban zone of Celebration. Here, the post-modern mix of classical elements in the overblown town hall, post office, bank and cinema is used to create an undatable, universal and farcical, cartoon-like streetscape, approximating a child's image of a city with perky towers, bulging columns and a sunny palette. This is literally "technofiction" on an urban scale, if we translate "techno" accurately as meaning "child" (from the Greek tokos, "birth", not to be confused with techne, "skill", "craft" or "art"): technofiction is a child's tale, the basis of Disney and Celebration.

Whereas Charles Fourier chose Versailles, symbol of autocracy and privilege, as the shell in which to situate his reformed society, Walt Disney took the trappings of the midway as material to improve upon. Finding the quintessentially American small town fairs and circuses too seedy, he was looking for a safer, softer, cleaner place for parents to take their children. The hygienic inversion of a city, begun in the Disney theme parks, is finally completed in Celebration. Thus, Disney's city planning parallels his transformation of an ignoble household pest, in Michael Sorkin's apt expression, into "a hairless, sexless and harmless" Mickey Mouse.¹⁵



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Utopia/uchronia

The best recognized image in a Disney theme park is the fairy tale castle, featuring theatrically-lit



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grottoes with mechanized cupids, mermaid automata and swan boats, based on the castle of Neuschwanstein commissioned by Bavaria's King Ludwig II.¹⁶ Not to be outdone, Disney recreated not only the castle, but the subterranean follies as well. Each Disney theme park contains a version of Neuschwanstein, called the Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty Castle, despite the fact that the EuroDisney castle is minutes away from real castles.

As is well known, Disney's Sleeping Beauty was named Princess Aurora after the goddess of dawn, Eos, who was sister of Helios and charioteer of the sun. Eos and Ares were caught in flagranti by Ares' lover Aphrodite who then cursed Eos to have a constant longing for young mortal men.¹⁷ Perhaps it is mere coincidence that Disney boasts its own Captain Eo, alias Michael Jackson, still the permanent 3-D cinema feature at Disney World. Newspapers report that Jackson, the King of Pop, wishes to purchase a 15th century French castle, because it looks like the Sleeping Beauty Castle of Disney - which is itself a replica of King Ludwig's replica of a Wagnerian fiction.¹⁸

In his own artwork, Jackson has portrayed himself as Mickey Mouse¹⁹ but even in real life, his reconstruction of his appearance is not unlike the "hairless, sexless and harmless" development of Mickey Mouse. The erasure of obvious signs of aging, race or sex, lends Jackson that timeless/placeless quality that makes him universally popular

and one of the few humans allowed in the Disney pantheon of characters. The stripping of specificity from Jackson's face may also be construed an effort to replicate either the image of his mentor, Diana Ross, or his sister Janet. Tabloid accounts in the mid-eighties recounted Jackson's sleeping in a hyperbaric chamber to preserve his youth, a preventive alternative to the cryogenic methods preferred by Disney.²⁰ The glorification of children and of eternal youth is as central to Jackson as it is to the Disney experience. Celebration capitalizes on the cult of childhood that Disney supports, garnering favor with adults through their offspring. However, The opposite case was illustrated in the adventure film "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang" where children were banned from the city and imprisoned under a castle, shot on location at Neuschwanstein.

The eternal image

Celebration communicates its role as a millennial utopia chiefly through images; this is little surprising given that images are the favored medium of Disney. However, the connection between image and reality is convoluted. Celebration may claim a share of "reality" because it is a replica of a replica, EPCOT. Echoing the dark forebodings of Guy Debord's Society of the Spectacle, Jean Baudrillard writes that "Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the 'real' country... It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle. The imaginary of Disneyland is neither true nor false, it is a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp."²¹

EPCOT was a utopian plan from its inception but it was encased in the shell of the 1939 New York World's Fair. It failed because unlike a temporary world's fair, its mission was to showcase the future in the present constantly. Celebration, conversely, is a city of the future masquerading as the past. From this point of view, there is no substantive difference between the style of EPCOT and the style of Celebration: both project popular imagery without content.

The first building to be completed in Celebration is an office complex designed by Aldo Rossi and housing the Disney company that is to oversee the development of Celebration. The centerpiece to his complex is a steep pyramid emblazoned with the carved words "Celebration Place."²² Another pyramid decorates the dollar bill, that of the Great Seal of the United States. This pyramid is capped by a glowing eye and emblazoned with Novus Ordo Seclorum, New Order of the Ages; above the eye it reads Annuit Coeptis, He favors our undertaking. The base of the pyramid is marked with 1776 which is not only the year of the Revolution but also of

the founding of the Illuminati.²³ While a few secret societies, including the masons and the Rosicrucians, claim a role in the design of the seal, the pyramid's replication at Celebration Place confers its meaning regardless of esoteric associations. This utopia emulates all others by stages. Through the replication of the pyramid, Celebration is the culmi-

nation of every American utopia and projects the imagery of each.

Verfasser:

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Notes

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