

Disneyland

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The month of October 1954 marked a watershed for television production in Hollywood. Alongside those marginal movie industry figures who had labored to wring profits from television production during the late 1940s and early 1950s, there appeared a new breed of established producers attracted by television's explosive growth following the end of the FCC's station application freeze in 1952.¹ Early in the month, Columbia Pictures became the first major studio to produce episodic TV series when its TV subsidiary, Screen Gems, debuted *Father Knows Best* on CBS and *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin* on ABC. Within three days in late October, two of the film industry's top independent producers, David O. Selznick and Walt Disney, joined the migration to prime time. Selznick, producer of *Gone With the Wind* (1939), made Hollywood's most auspicious debut with a program broadcast simultaneously on all four existing networks, a two-hour spectacular titled *Light's Diamond Jubilee*. Selznick was soon joined by fellow independent producer Walt Disney, whose premiere television series, *Disneyland*, entered ABC's regular Wednesday-night schedule on the twenty-seventh of October. Disney had forged a reputation as the cinema's maestro of family entertainment; now his *Disneyland* series promised to deliver what *Time* described as "the true touch of enchantment" to American homes.² Unlike their predecessors in television, these were established members of the movie industry who diversified into TV production without leav-

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ing movies behind. The first to link production for the two media, these producers sparked the full-scale integration of movie and TV production in Hollywood during the second half of the 1950s.

As the recipient of nearly two dozen Academy Awards for his studio's cartoon animation, Walt Disney was one of Hollywood's most acclaimed independent producers and certainly, along with Selznick, the most celebrated Hollywood producer to enter television by 1954. Disney possessed the independent producer's belief in television as an alternative to the movie industry's restrictive studio system, but his conception of television's role in a new Hollywood was more sweeping than that of colleagues who saw the electronic medium as nothing more than a new market for traditional film production. Unlike virtually every other telefilm producer in Hollywood, Disney harbored no illusions about dominating TV production; his modest production plans initially encompassed only the *Disneyland* series. Still, Disney was the first Hollywood executive during the 1950s to envision a future built on television's technical achievements—the scope of its signal, the access it provided to the American home. For Disney network television arrived as an invitation to reinvent the movie business, to explore horizons beyond the realm of filmmaking.

Disney later admitted that he was “never much interested” in radio, but television, with its ability to display the visual appeal of Disney products, was another matter entirely. The studio aired its first television program on NBC during December 1950. Sponsored by Coca-Cola, “One Hour in Wonderland” was set in a Disney Christmas party and featured excerpts promoting the studio's upcoming theatrical release, *Alice in Wonderland* (1951). In 1951 Disney produced its second hour-long program for NBC, a special sponsored by Johnson and Johnson. Disney's subsequent plans for a television series started with a seemingly outlandish demand: To obtain the first Disney TV series, a network would have to purchase the series and agree to invest at least \$500,000 for a one-third share in the studio's most ambitious project, the Disneyland amusement park planned for construction in suburban Los Angeles. NBC and CBS balked at these terms, but ABC, mired in third place, decided to accept.³ In uniting the TV program and the amusement park under a single name, Disney made one of the most influential commercial decisions in post-war American culture. Expanding upon the lucrative character merchandising market that the studio had joined in the early 1930s, Disney now planned to create an all-encompassing consumer environment that he described as “total merchandising.” Products aimed at baby boom families and stamped with the Disney imprint—movies, amusement park rides, books, comic books, clothing, toys, TV programs, and more—would weave a vast, commercial web, a tangle of advertising and entertainment in which each Disney product—from the movie *Snow White* to a ride on Disneyland's Matterhorn—promoted all Disney products. And television was the beacon that would draw the American public to the domain of Disney. “We wanted to start off running,” Walt later recalled. “The investment was going to be too big to wait for a slow buildup. We needed terrific initial impact and television seemed the answer.”⁴

Television served a crucial role in Disney's plans for creating an economic and cultural phenomenon that exceeded the boundaries of any single communications medium. By raising capital through the ABC investment and raising consciousness through its depiction of the park's construction, television's figurative representation of Disneyland actually called the amusement park into existence, making it possible for the first time to unite the disparate realms of the Disney empire. With the home as its primary site of exhibition, television gave Disney unparalleled access to a family audience that he already had cultivated more effectively than any Hollywood producer in the studio era. As a result of the post-war baby boom, Disney's target audience of children between the ages of five and fourteen grew from 22 million in 1940 to 35 million in 1960.⁵ Television provided the surest route to this lucrative market.

As a text, the *Disneyland* television program also marked a rite of passage for the Disney studio. Its broadcast signaled the studio's transition from the pre-war culture of motion pictures to a post-war culture in which Disney's movies were subsumed into an increasingly integrated leisure market that also included television, recorded music, theme parks, tourism, and consumer merchandise. By depicting the new amusement park as another of Walt's fantasies brought to life by the skilled craftsmen at the Disney studio, the *Disneyland* TV program gave a recognizable symbolic form to Disney's elaborate economic transformation, mediating it for the American public by defining it as another of the Disney studio's marvels. It is only a slight exaggeration, therefore, to claim that Disney mounted an entertainment empire on the cornerstone of this first television series.

Unlike many who groped for a response to the dramatic changes that swept the movie industry following World War II, Walt Disney and his brother Roy answered uncertainty with a calculated plan for diversification. Biographer Richard Schickel has suggested that the Disneys addressed the unstable post-war conditions more aggressively than other Hollywood leaders because their company had suffered misfortunes during the early 1940s, when virtually everyone else in Hollywood had prospered. During the late 1930s, Disney had stood for a moment at the pinnacle of the movie industry. Although an independent producer who worked outside the security of the major studios, Disney took extraordinary financial risks that ultimately paid off in the critical and financial success of *Snow White* (1937), which trailed only Selznick's *Gone With the Wind* as one of the two most profitable Hollywood movies of the 1930s.⁶ But Disney's good fortunes lasted only briefly. Following *Snow White*, Disney nearly buried his studio beneath ambitious plans for expansion. With box-office disappointments like the costly animated feature *Fantasia* (1940), the closing of foreign markets due to the war, and over-investment in new studio facilities, Disney faced burdensome corporate debts that weighed even more heavily once banks shut off credit to the studio in 1940. Disney raised funds reluctantly by offering stock to the public, but only government contracts to produce educational cartoons kept the studio active during the war. “The only good thing about the situation,” according to Schickel, “was that the problems that were later

to plague the rest of the industry had been met by Disney at a time when the government could help out and when the general buoyancy of the industry could at least keep him afloat. The result, of course, was a head start in gathering know-how to meet the crisis that was coming—a head start in planning for diversification first of the company's motion picture products, then of its overall activities."⁷

Plagued by adversity during the 1940s, Walt and Roy Disney entered the 1950s with a plan to transform the Disney studio from an independent producer of feature films and cartoon short-subjects into a diversified leisure and entertainment corporation. Instead of retrenching, as others had, the Disneys fortified their company through a careful process of diversification. Beginning in 1953, the company implemented a series of changes designed to redefine its role in Hollywood. Disney established its own theatrical distribution subsidiary, Buena Vista, in order to end its reliance on major studio distribution. The studio also ceased production on its by-then unprofitable cartoon short subjects, cut back on expensive animated features, and began to concentrate on nature documentaries and live-action movies following the success of *Treasure Island* (1950) and *Robin Hood* (1952).⁸ Blueprints for Disneyland and ideas about television production took shape during this period of corporate transition.

As Disney's schemes for expansion pointed toward television, the ABC-TV network eagerly cultivated ties with the motion picture industry.⁹ Hollywood-produced television series became the cornerstone in ABC's plans for differentiating itself from NBC and CBS. As the third-place network, ABC elected to build its audience in direct opposition to the established networks. While the other networks touted their established stars or experimented with expensive spectacles and the possibility of attracting viewers with unique video events, ABC remained committed to the traditional strategy of programming familiar weekly series that defined television viewing as a consistent feature in the family's domestic routine. Robert Weitman, the network's vice-president in charge of programming, emphasized the importance of habitual viewing in ABC's programming strategies. "The answer seems to be in established patterns of viewing," he explained. "People are annoyed when their favorite show is pre-empted, even for a super-special spectacular." Leonard Goldenson, who had spent decades in the business of movie distribution and exhibition, recognized the similarities between television viewing and the experience of moviegoing during the studio era. "The real strength and vitality of television," he claimed, "is in your regular week-in and week-out programs. The strength of motion pictures was always the habit of going to motion pictures on a regular basis, and that habit was, in part, taken away from motion pictures by television."¹⁰ ABC's programming strategy was built on the belief that television's fundamental appeal was less its ability to deliver exotic events, than its promise of a familiar cultural experience.

As a result, ABC's regularly scheduled series would serve as the basis for network counter-programming, the principal tactic in the network's

assault on CBS and NBC. Rather than compete against an established series or live event with a program of similar appeal, ABC hoped to offer alternative programming in order to attract segments of the audience not being served by the other networks. The network would construct and project a specific identity by treating its schedule as the expression of a unique relation to the broadcast audience. "Whatever the audience is not watching at any given time makes for new possibilities," Goldenson noted. "We are not trying to take away audiences from CBS and NBC. . . . We are trying to carve our own network character, to create new audiences."¹¹ This tactic was based on a related aspect of ABC's programming philosophy—its attention to audience demographics. Governed by the belief that "a network can't be all things to all people," ABC chose to target "the youthful families" with children, a section of the audience whose numbers had increased rapidly since World War II. "We're after a specific audience," claimed Goldenson, "the young housewife—one cut above the teenager—with two to four kids, who has to buy the clothing, the food, the soaps, the home remedies." As this statement implies, ABC chose to align itself with small-ticket advertisers, those selling the type of products that young families might be more likely to need and afford. Goldenson justified ABC's entire programming strategy when he remarked, "We're in the Woolworth's business, not in Tiffany's. Last year Tiffany made only \$30,000."¹²

Anxious to acquire Hollywood programming that appealed to a family audience, ABC gambled on Disney by committing \$2 million for a fifty-two-week series (with a seven-year renewal option) and by purchasing a 35 percent share in the park for \$500,000. Without even a prospective format to present to advertisers, ABC invoked the Disney reputation alone to sell the program under a joint-sponsorship package to American Motors, the American Dairy Association, and Derby Food. Sponsorship of the season's twenty original episodes was sold at \$65,000 per episode, and the network time was billed to advertisers at \$70,000 per hour. During the late 1950s, when ABC's ratings and advertising revenue finally approached the levels of NBC and CBS, Leonard Goldenson consistently referred to the Disney deal as the network's "turning point." Indeed, *Disneyland* attracted nearly half of ABC's advertising billings during 1954, the final year during which the network operated at a loss.¹³

Although Walt Disney repeatedly assured the press that the *Disneyland* TV series would stand on its own terms as entertainment, the program served mainly to publicize Disney products. *Disneyland's* identification of the amusement park and the TV series was confirmed during the first episode when Walt informed viewers that "Disneyland the place and Disneyland the show are all the same." Both the series and the park were divided into four familiar movie industry genres: Fantasyland (animated cartoons), Adventureland (exotic action-adventure), Frontierland (Westerns), and Tomorrowland (science-fiction). Introduced by Walt himself, each week's episode represented one of the park's imaginary lands through a compilation of

sequences drawn from the studio's cartoon short-subjects, nature documentaries, animated and live-action features, or short films produced as out-right promotions for Disney movies about to enter theatrical release. *Disneyland's* format and pervasive self-promotion were unprecedented for television, but it had roots in the popular radio programs broadcast from Hollywood during the 1930s and 1940s. Hosted by actors, directors, or celebrity journalists, programs like *Hollywood Hotel* and *Lux Radio Theatre* offered musical performances or dramatizations of studio feature films, but their strongest lure was the glimpse they provided into the culture of Hollywood. Through informal chats with performers and other members of the industry, these radio programs perpetuated an image of Hollywood glamour while promoting recent studio releases.¹⁴ Disney simply adapted this format for television. As the master of ceremonies, he turned himself into a media celebrity, much as director Cecil B. DeMille earlier had ridden *Lux Radio Theatre* to national fame.¹⁵

The actual production of *Disneyland* required a minimal financial investment by the Disney studio. At a time when the typical network series featured thirty-nine new episodes each season, Disney's contract with ABC called for only twenty original episodes, with each of them repeated once, and twelve broadcast a third time during the summer. Instead of producing twenty episodes of new television programming each season, Disney viewed the deal as an opportunity to capitalize on the studio's library of films dating back to the debut of Mickey Mouse in the late 1920s. The wisdom of this format, as Richard Schickel has noted, "was that it allowed the studio to participate in TV without surrendering control of its precious film library."¹⁶ Long after many of the major studios had sold the TV rights to their films, the Disneys boasted that they still owned every film they ever made. Although it is not generally remembered, during the first three years of *Disneyland*, the studio produced only one narrative film made expressly for the series—the three-part "Davy Crockett" serial that took the nation by storm during that first season.¹⁷ More typically, the *Disneyland* TV series introduced a new generation of children to the studio's storehouse of cartoons.

Even with a program that consisted largely of recycled material, the studio admitted that it would not turn a profit from its first year in television. There were production costs in preparing the theatrical product for broadcast (editing compilation episodes or filming Walt's introductory appearances) and in producing its limited amount of original programming. But these costs generally were defrayed throughout the studio's various operations. The three hour-long episodes of the "Davy Crockett" series, for instance, cost \$600,000—more than three times the industry standard for telefilm production—and yet, during that year alone, the cost was spread over two separate network broadcasts and a theatrical release. By employing up to 80 percent of the studio's production staff, the television operation also enabled the Disney studio to meet the expense of remaining at full productivity. In addition, all costs not covered by the network's payments

were charged to the studio's promotion budget—another indication of the program's primary purpose.¹⁸

Nearly one-third of each *Disneyland* episode was devoted directly to studio promotion, but the entire series blurred any distinction between publicity and entertainment. Indeed, *Disneyland* capitalized on the unspoken recognition that commercial broadcasting had made it virtually impossible to distinguish between entertainment and advertising. One episode, "Operation Undersea," provided a behind-the-scenes glimpse at the making of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954) just one week before Disney released the film to theaters.¹⁹ This episode was later followed by "Monsters of the Deep," a nature documentary that provided another opportunity to plug the studio's most recent theatrical release. An episode titled "A Story of Dogs" preceded the release of *Lady and the Tramp* (1955), Disney's second major feature distributed to theaters during the initial TV season.

Viewers didn't mind that *Disneyland* was simply a new form of Hollywood ballyhoo, because Disney framed the program within an educational discourse, reassuring viewers that they inhabited a position of privileged knowledge that was available only through television. Amidst paternalistic fears over the pernicious influence of television, comic books, and other forms of mass culture, Disney's middle-brow didacticism was disarming. In each episode, *Disneyland* rewarded its viewers with an encyclopedic array of general information borrowed loosely from the fields of history, science, and anthropology, while also sharing more specialized knowledge about the history of the Disney studio and its filmmaking procedures. Through this specialized knowledge about the Disney studio, the *Disneyland* TV series defined a particular relationship between television and movies, one in which television served an inchoate critical function by providing commentary on Disney movies. Though produced by the studio itself, *Disneyland* nevertheless contained elements of a critical discourse on the cinema. It educated viewers to perceive continuities among Disney films, to analyze certain aspects of the production process, and to recognize the studio's body of work as a unified product of Walt's authorial vision.

Disneyland's most obvious strategy for educating viewers was its use of behind-the-scenes footage from the Disney studio. The first episode introduced the Disney studio through images of Kirk Douglas playing with his sons on the studio lot, James Mason fighting a man-made hurricane on the stage of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, animators sketching models, and musicians recording the score for a cartoon. By representing the studio as an active, self-contained creative community bustling with activity, these scenes evoke impressions of studio-era Hollywood while masking the fact that historical conditions had rendered those very images obsolete. Disney also used behind-the-scenes footage to demonstrate the elaborate process of filmmaking, particularly the intricacies of animation. Although one might think that a filmmaker like Disney would be afraid of ruining the mystery of animation by revealing how its effects are achieved, Richard Schickel has

observed that "Disney always enjoyed showing people around his studio and explaining to them exactly how the exotic process of creating an animated film proceeded." In fact, Disney originally planned for the amusement park to be located at the studio, with demonstrations of the filmmaking process as one of its major attractions.²⁰ In one feature film, *The Reluctant Dragon* (1941), Disney displayed the animation process by allowing Robert Benchley to lead moviegoers on a tour of the Disney studio. But this was a one-shot experiment that couldn't be repeated in other movies without becoming a distracting gimmick. Following in the tradition of the earlier Hollywood radio shows, therefore, Disney defined television as a companion medium to the cinema, an informational medium that could be used to reveal the process of filmmaking—since that impulse could not be indulged in the movies themselves. While Disney movies were presented as seamless narratives, television gave Disney the license to expose their seams.

Disney's willingness to display the process of filmmaking suggests that reflexivity in itself is not a radical impulse. More a disciple of Barnum than Brecht, Disney had no intention of distancing his audience from the illusion in his movies. Instead, he appealed to the audience's fascination with cinematic trickery. Disney exhibited what historian Neil Harris describes as an "American vernacular tradition" perhaps best exemplified by P. T. Barnum. Barnum's showmanship depended on his recognition that the public delights both in being fooled by a hoax and in discovering the mechanisms that make the hoax successful. Through his fanciful exhibitions, Barnum encouraged "an aesthetic of the operational, a delight in observing process and examining for literal truth."²¹ Far from being hoodwinked by Barnum's artifice, the audiences that witnessed his exhibitions took pleasure in uncovering the process by which these hoaxes were perpetrated.

Inheriting Barnum's sense of showmanship, Disney developed his own "operational aesthetic" through television, enhancing his audience's pleasure—and anticipation—by offering precious glimpses of the filmmaking process. Of course, Disney's depiction of the production process was selective; it ignored the economics of filmmaking in favor of focusing on the studio's technical accomplishments. *Disneyland* never explored such issues as labor relations at the Disney studio or the economics of merchandising that sent the largest share of profits into Walt's pockets. Instead, in what has become a cliché of "behind-the-scenes" reporting on filmmaking, *Disneyland* treated each movie as a problem to be solved by the ingenuity of Disney craftsmen. This created a secondary narrative that accompanied the movie into theaters, a story of craftsmen overcoming obstacles to produce a masterful illusion. With this strategy, viewers were given an incentive to see the completed movie, because the movie itself provided the resolution to the story of the filmmaking process as depicted on *Disneyland*.

The program also educated viewers through its attention to Disney studio history. The determination to recycle the Disney library shaped the series during its early seasons, making *Disneyland* an electronic museum devoted to the studio's artistic achievements. Before the arrival of television, Holly-

wood's history was virtually inaccessible to the general public, available only sporadically through the unpredictable re-release of studio features and short subjects. Movies themselves may have been preserved in studio vaults, but for moviegoers accustomed to an ever-changing program at local theaters, the Hollywood cinema during the studio era was much like live television—an ephemeral cultural experience in which each text inevitably dissolved into memory, swept away in the endless flow of serial production. Although much of television in the mid-1950s traded on the immediacy of live broadcast, the sale of motion pictures to broadcasters meant that television also became the unofficial archive of the American cinema, in which Hollywood's past surfaced in bits and pieces, like fragments of a dream. One of the pleasures of *Disneyland* was the chance it offered to halt the flow of mass culture by remembering relics from the Disney vaults.

Although *Disneyland* may have struck a nostalgic chord for older viewers, the program's presentation of studio history was less sentimental than reverential. Cartoons nearly forgotten were resurrected with a solemnity normally reserved for the most venerable works of art. This attitude is apparent from the first episode when Walt announces that the end of each episode will be reserved for Mickey Mouse. After leading the viewer through an elaborate description of the proposed amusement park and other studio activities, Disney stands behind a lectern and turns the pages of a massive bound volume, an illustrated chronicle of Mickey's adventures. In spite of the flurry of changes at the studio, he explains, one should not lose sight of an eternal truth: "It all started with Mickey. . . . The story of Mickey is the story of Disneyland." As he continues, the scene segues into Mickey's first appearance in the cartoon "Plane Crazy," and then dissolves to one of his most famous appearances, as the Sorcerer's Apprentice in *Fantasia*. The tone of the scene—Disney's scholarly disposition, the sight of Mickey's history contained in a stately book—implies that the Disney studio's products are not the disposable commodities of pop culture, but artifacts worthy of remembrance. Walt's role as narrator is to reactivate forgotten cartoons in the public's cultural memory by demonstrating their canonical status within the artistic history of the Disney studio. As an electronic museum, *Disneyland* invoked the cultural memory of its audience mainly to publicize new Disney products. In spite of its commercial motives, however, the series also made it possible to conceive of Hollywood as having a history worthy of consideration.

"Monsters of the Deep," a typical episode from the first season of *Disneyland*, demonstrates the strategies for situating new Disney movies in the context of the studio's history and production practices. The episode introduces Walt in his studio's research department. Wearing a dark tweed jacket and surrounded by books and charts, he appears professorial. Inspired by knowledge, yet free from scholastic pretension, he is television's image of an intellectual, kindly and inviting. Speaking directly to the camera, he leads the viewer through a discussion of dinosaurs, using illustrations from enormous books to punctuate his presentation. This lecture seems motivated

only by Disney's inquisitive character until the Disney sales pitch gradually seeps in. "We told the story of dinosaurs large and small in *Fantasia*," Disney reminds viewers as the screen dissolves to images from the animated feature. As Disney explains the habitat, feeding patterns, and behavior of dinosaurs, the footage from *Fantasia* becomes recontextualized, as though it were a segment from a nature documentary, a reminder that even Disney's most fantastic films have educational value. Disney segues into a report on sea monsters, asking whether giant squids have existed among the mysteries of the ocean, tracing the enigma through debates over the veracity of historical accounts. This query provides a transition to a discussion of the problems involved in creating a plausible giant squid for the Disney feature, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. From the research department, the scene dissolves to a studio soundstage where star Kirk Douglas performs a song from the movie and then guides the television viewer through a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the special effects used to stage the movie's spectacular battle sequence featuring a giant squid. Afterwards, Disney draws a line of continuity through the studio's present and past accomplishments by introducing viewers to an extended sequence from the studio's most famous scene of undersea adventure, Pinocchio's escape from the whale, Monstro, in the 1940 feature, *Pinocchio*. Even the last two sequences, so clearly intended to advertise Disney products, carry the promise of edification as they define a limited and specialized knowledge—the Disney canon, the production of Disney movies—that is directed toward enhancing the experience of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

Because the *Disneyland* TV series delivered viewers like no program in ABC history, even the program's advertisers didn't mind subsidizing Disney's opportunity for self-promotion. *Disneyland* concluded the season as the first ABC program ever to appear among the year's ten highest-rated series. It was viewed weekly in nearly 40 percent of the nation's 26 million TV households.²² The trade magazine, *Sponsor*, applauded Disney's skill at blending entertainment and salesmanship, quoting an unnamed ABC executive who quipped, "Never before have so many people made so little objection to so much selling."²³ Through its Emmy awards, the television industry affirmed its approval of Disney's venture, nominating Walt as TV's "Most Outstanding New Personality" and honoring "Operation Underseas"—an episode about the making of *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*—as TV's Best Documentary.²⁴

For the movie industry, the most telling detail in the entire Disney phenomenon was the surprising performance of the studio's feature films. By releasing its features through its own distribution company, Buena Vista, and by timing the release dates to coincide with simultaneous promotion on the television program, Disney emerged as the top-grossing independent production company of 1955. Undoubtedly aided by its exposure on the TV series, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* grossed \$8 million when it finally played in movie theaters—the largest sum ever reached by a Disney movie on its initial release. It finished the year as Hollywood's fourth highest-grossing movie

and became the first Disney movie ever to crack the list of twenty all-time top-grossing films. In addition, Disney's new animated feature, *Lady and the Tramp*, pulled in \$6.5 million—the highest figure for any of Disney's animated films since *Snow White*. Even its first feature-length True-Life Adventure, *The Vanishing Prairie* (1955), grossed a respectable \$1.8 million.²⁵

The most startling evidence of TV's marketing potential came from the studio's experience with Davy Crockett. Disney edited together the "Davy Crockett" episodes that already had aired twice on TV and released them as a feature film during the summer of 1955. *Davy Crockett: King of the Wild Frontier* may have been a typical "program oater," as *Variety* claimed, but it earned another \$2 million at the box office because it had been transformed by television into a national phenomenon.²⁶ The accompanying Crockett merchandising craze gathered steam throughout the year, ultimately surpassing the Hopalong Cassidy boom of the early 1950s. By mid-1955, as "The Ballad of Davy Crockett" climbed the pop music charts, Crockett products—including jeans, pistols, powder horns, lunch boxes, the ubiquitous coonskin caps, and much more—accounted for nearly 10 percent of all consumer purchases for children, with sales figures for Crockett merchandise estimated to exceed \$100 million by the end of the year.²⁷ Disney's apparent golden touch during 1954 and 1955 demonstrated to Hollywood that the studio had tapped into a rich promotional vein by integrating its various activities around television and the family audience.

The *Disneyland* TV program's most significant accomplishment, however, was the fanatical interest it generated in the Disneyland amusement park. Without the growth of national network television and the access it provided to the American family, Disney would not have gambled on the park. "I saw that if I was ever going to have my park," he explained, "here, at last, was a way to tell millions of people about it—with TV."²⁸ Disney needed television not simply to publicize the park, but to position it properly as a new type of suburban amusement, a bourgeois park designed to provide edifying adventures for baby-boom families instead of cheap thrills for the urban masses. To distinguish his park from such decaying relics as Luna Park at Coney Island, Disney assured the public that any amusement experienced in his park would be tempered by middle-class educational values. Disneyland wouldn't be another park trading in the temporal gratifications of the flesh, but a popular monument to human knowledge, a "permanent world's fair" built around familiar Disney characters and a number of unifying social goals, including educating the public about history and science.²⁹ The park was inextricably linked to television, because TV enabled Disney to redefine the traditional amusement park as a "theme park." With the assistance of the *Disneyland* TV series, Disney brought discipline to the unruly pleasures of the amusement park, organizing them around the unifying theme of Disney's authorial vision. By invoking cultural memories of Disney films, the TV series encouraged an impulse to re-experience texts that became one of the theme park's central attractions.

Just as it hooked American television viewers with the serialized story of Davy Crockett, the *Disneyland* TV series also bound up its audience in the ongoing story of what came to be mythologized as "Walt's dream." The seriality of *Disneyland*—and its direct relationship to the creation and continued development of the park—was crucial to the program's success. Before Disney, prime-time series were episodic; narrative conflicts were introduced and resolved in the course of a single episode. Open-ended serials were confined to daytime's soap opera genre. Disney certainly wasn't concerned about issues of TV narrative, but the *Disneyland* series demonstrated an incipient understanding of the appeal of serial narrative for network television. The success of the three-part "Davy Crockett" serial was attributable at least in part to its ability to engage viewers in an ongoing narrative. Similarly, with Walt as on-screen narrator, the *Disneyland* series, in effect, narrated the construction of Disney's amusement park, making the project a matter of continued concern for the show's viewers by creating a story out of the construction process and certifying it as the crowning achievement of an American entrepreneurial genius in a league with Thomas Edison and Henry Ford.

No less than three entire episodes, and portions of others, were devoted to the process of conceiving, building, and inaugurating the park. As the climax of the construction process, viewers witnessed the park's opening ceremonies on July 17, 1955, in a live, two-hour broadcast hosted by Art Linkletter, Robert Cummings, and Ronald Reagan. It was only appropriate that the first amusement park created by television should be introduced in a ceremony designed explicitly for television as a media event.³⁰ The first season of *Disneyland* was a unique type of television text, an open-ended series in which the episodes built toward a final resolution, staged as a television spectacular. By constructing a story around the events of the park's development, and by creating an analogy between the TV program and the park, the Disney organization provided a narrative framework for the experience of Disneyland.

The series represented the transition from the movie studio to the theme park by treating the park as the studio's most ambitious production. In the first episode, "The Disneyland Story," Walt introduces viewers to the park as an idea, shifting constantly between a huge map of the park, a scale-model replica, and stock footage that invokes each of the park's imaginary lands. The first season of *Disneyland*, he explains, will enable viewers "to see and share with us the experience of building this dream into a reality." The second construction episode, "A Progress Report," initiates the journey from the studio to the park as Walt takes a helicopter flight from his office to the new location. This episode also begins the process of identifying Disneyland with the culture of the automobile and the superhighway. Although the transition to the construction site could be managed by a straight cut or a dissolve, the helicopter flight instead laboriously tracks the highway that a typical traveler would follow to reach the park. With Walt providing commentary, the flight depicts both a literal and figurative pas-

sage from Hollywood to Disneyland, tracing a path from the Disney studio in Burbank, over the heart of Hollywood, down the Hollywood Freeway, connecting to the Santa Ana Freeway, and finally reaching the Disneyland exit in Anaheim—"a spot chosen by traffic experts as the most accessible spot in Southern California." Once at the construction site, the labor of construction is depicted through fast-motion photography. Accompanied by ragtime music, the scurrying workers driving bulldozers, digging ditches, and planting trees seem like animated figures; their labor takes on a cartoonish quality. In keeping with the tradition of the program's behind-the-scenes footage, Walt pauses to demonstrate how the technical feat of time-lapse photography works, but never addresses the actual labor of the workers whose activities are represented.

The third episode picks up the construction after the park's major structures have been built, as the various rides and special effects are being installed. Again, the series demonstrates how these devices, such as authentic-looking mechanical crocodiles, were designed and created at the Disney studio. This episode establishes a continuity between motion picture production and the creation of the park, demonstrating studio activities that have been reoriented to service the park. The underwater monorail employed to move the submarine in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* has become the basis for the Disneyland monorail train; the stage where Davy Crockett recently fought the battle of the Alamo is now the site of construction for the park's authentic Mississippi River steamboat; the sculptors and technicians who created the squid in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* are now making a mechanical zoo for the park. Once these devices are loaded onto trucks, they are transported to the park. As voice-over commentary reviews the route, viewers again follow the highway from the studio to the park, making the journey at ground level this time.

Television made the entire Disney operation more enticing by fashioning it as a narrative experience which the family TV audience could enhance—and actually perform—by visiting the park. Here again Disney shrewdly perceived television's ability to link diverse cultural practices that intersected in the domestic sphere of the home. In effect, Walt identified the program with the park in order to create an inhabitable text, one that would never be complete for a television-viewing family until they had taken full advantage of the postwar boom in automobile travel and tourism to make a pilgrimage to the park itself. A trip to Disneyland—using the conceptual map provided by the program—offered the family viewer a chance to perform in the Disneyland narrative, to provide unity and closure through personal experience, to witness the "aura" to which television's reproductive apparatus only could allude.

In a sense, Disney succeeded by exploiting the quest for authentic experience that has become central to the culture of modernity. In fact, tourism, as Dean MacCannell suggests, is based on the modern quest for authenticity, the belief that authentic experience exists somewhere outside the realm of daily experience in industrial society.³¹ While Walter Benjamin predicted

that mass reproduction would diminish the aura surrounding works of art, Disney seems to have recognized that the mass media instead only intensify the desire for authenticity by invoking a sublime, unmediated experience that is forever absent, just beyond the grasp of a hand reaching for the television dial. As a tourist attraction, Disneyland became the destination of an exotic journey anchored firmly by the family home, which served not only as the origin and terminus of the journey, but also as the site of the television set that would confirm the social meaning of the vacation experience. A father visiting the park expressed something of this sentiment. "Disneyland may be just another damned amusement park," he explained, "but to my kids it's the Taj Mahal, Niagara Falls, Sherwood Forest, and Davy Crockett all rolled into one. After years of sitting in front of the television set, the youngsters are sure it's a fairyland before they ever get there."³² Television defined Disneyland as a national amusement park, not a park of local or regional interest like previous amusement parks, but a destination for a nation of television viewers. In the first six months alone, one million paying customers passed through the gates at Disneyland; 43 percent arrived from out of state. After the first full year of operation the park had grossed \$10 million, one-third of the company's revenue for the year, and more than any Disney feature had ever grossed during its initial release.³³

Disney's integration of television into the studio's expansive marketing schemes identified television as a worthy investment for Hollywood's major studios. Events leading up to Disney's debut may have suggested to executives of the major studios that they reconsider television production, but only Columbia, through its Screen Gems subsidiary, had acted decisively before Disney's triumph during the 1954–55 TV season. Disney's video success made it apparent that television had become the dominant national advertising medium by the mid-1950s. Providing a channel to an ever-expanding family audience, television could become the most effective marketing tool ever imagined by the movie industry. By following Disney's example and forming alliances with television networks, rather than with advertisers, the studios could ensure their access to the medium without surrendering autonomy to television's traditionally powerful sponsors.

Disney expanded his role in television during Fall 1955 with the premiere of *The Mickey Mouse Club* in ABC's weekday afternoon schedule. With this new program and the ongoing *Disneyland* series, Disney continued to use television mainly as an opportunity for studio publicity. Besides producing a sequel to "Davy Crockett," for instance, Disney created no original programming for *Disneyland* until the 1957–58 season. Disney's concept of "total merchandising" continued to shape the type of text that his company produced for television. Whereas traditional notions of textuality assume that a text is singular, unified, and autonomous, with a structure that draws the viewer inward, Disney's television texts were, from the outset, fragmented, propelled by a centrifugal force that guided the viewer away from the immediate textual experience toward a more pervasive sense of textuality, one that encouraged the consumption of further Disney texts, fur-

ther Disney products, further Disney experiences. *Disneyland* drew the attention of viewers to the TV text only to disperse it outward, toward Disney products.³⁴

Television made possible Disney's vision of "total merchandising" because it gave him the ability to integrate apparently isolated segments of the national commercial culture that developed after the war. In this sense, the entire Disneyland phenomenon may have been the first harbinger of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's prediction for the apotheosis of the television age, the moment when "the thinly veiled identity of all industrial culture products can come triumphantly out into the open, derisively fulfilling the Wagnerian dream of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*—the fusion of all the arts in one work."³⁵ By offering the first glimpse of a new Hollywood—in which television profitably obscured conventional distinctions among the media—Disney provided the impulse for the major studios to enter television and a blueprint for the future development of the media industries.

Notes

1. For an account of the post-1952 boom in new television stations, television advertising revenue, and television set ownership, see J. Fred MacDonald, *One Nation Under Television: The Rise and Decline of Network TV* (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 59–62.
2. "This Week in Review," *Time*, 8 November 1954, 95.
3. Katherine and Richard Greene, *The Man Behind the Magic: The Story of Walt Disney* (New York: Viking, 1991), 119; Frank Orme, "Disney: 'How Old Is a Child?'" *Television* (December 1954): 37; "Disney 'Not Yet Ready' for TV," *Variety* (23 May 1951): 5; "Disney's 7-Year ABC-TV Deal," *Variety* (21 February 1954): 41.
4. "The Wide World of Walt Disney," *Newsweek* (31 December 1962): 49–51; "The Mouse That Turned to Gold," *Business Week* (9 July 1955): 74. The origins of Disney's character merchandising are described in "The Mighty Mouse," *Time* (25 October 1948): 96–98. For a more detailed discussion of the Disney corporation's use of character merchandising in relation to other TV producers of the early 1950s, see "He'll Double as a Top-Notch Salesman," *Business Week* (21 March 1953): 43–44.
5. John McDonald, "Now the Bankers Come to Disney," *Fortune* (May 1966): 141.
6. During its initial release, *Snow White* grossed \$8 million and became the first movie to exceed \$5 million at the box-office. *Gone With the Wind* grossed over \$20 million in its first year of release. Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 229; Ronald Haver, *David O. Selznick's Hollywood* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1980), 309.
7. Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 28.
8. McDonald, "Now the Bankers Come to Disney," 141, 224; Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 308–16; "Disney's Live-Action Profits," *Business Week* (24 July 1965): 78.
9. For a more detailed description of the history of ABC-TV's relations with the motion picture industry during this period, see Christopher Anderson, *Hollywood TV* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994).

10. "The Spectaculars: An Interim Report," *Sponsor* (15 November 1954): 31; "Twenty-Five Years Wiser About Show Business, Goldenson Finds TV the Biggest Star," *Broadcasting* (14 July 1958): 84.
11. Herman Land, "ABC: An Evaluation," *Television Magazine* (December 1957): 94.
12. *Ibid.*, 93; "The abc of ABC," 17; "The TV Fan Who Runs a Network," *Sponsor* (15 June 1957): 45. It should be noted that ABC did not possess demographic ratings that would have enabled the network to determine the success of its programming strategy.
13. "Peaches and Cream at ABC-TV," *Variety*, 16 June 1954, 25; "The abc of ABC," 17; Klan, "ABC-Paramount Moves In," 242; Albert R. Kroeger, "Miracle Worker of West 66th Street," *Television* (February 1961): 66; "Corporate Health, Gains in Radio-TV Theme of AB-UPT Stockholders Meeting," *Broadcasting-Telecasting* (21 May 1956): 64; Frank Orme, "TV's Most Important Show," *Television* (June 1955): 32.
14. See Michele Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting: From Radio to Cable* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990), pp. 63-72; 78-112.
15. Walt also recognized that the Disney empire needed an identifiable author to crystallize the company's identity for the public, to "personify the product," as *Business Week* once noted. The naming of an author became an issue within the company as far back as the 1920s, when Walt convinced Roy to change the name of the company they had co-founded from Disney Brothers Productions to Walt Disney Productions. Consequently, as the studio expanded in 1953, Walt began to assume a more public persona, hosting the TV program and identifying himself with all things Disney, while diminishing Roy's identity. In 1953—against Roy's opposition—Walt formed Retlaw Enterprises (Walter spelled backwards), a private company which completely controlled merchandising rights to the name Walt Disney. In return for licensing the name to Walt Disney Productions, Retlaw received 5 percent of the income from all corporate merchandise. Since the Disney name was imprinted on everything associated with the company, Retlaw immediately generated enormous wealth for Walt. See John Taylor, *Storming the Magic Kingdom: Wall Street, the Raiders, and the Battle for Disney* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 7, 10.
16. Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 20.
17. "Disneyland Repeats Getting Bigger Audiences Than First Time Around," *Variety* (20 April 1955): 32. A complete filmography of Disney television programs through 1967 appears in Leonard Maltin, *The Disney Films*, second edition (New York: Crown Publishers, 1984), 321-26. For an examination of the Disneyland-inspired Davy Crockett phenomenon that swept through American culture beginning in 1954, see Margaret Jane King, *The Davy Crockett Craze: A Case Study in Popular Culture* (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Hawaii, 1976).
18. Orme, "How Old Is a Child?" 37, 72.
19. Critics within both the movie and television industries sarcastically referred to this episode as "The Long, Long Trailer," after the Lucille Ball-Desi Arnaz film of the same title. See "A Wonderful World: Growing Impact of the Disney Art," *Newsweek* (18 April 1955): 62-63.
20. Schickel, *Disney Version*, 152; "Tinker Bell, Mary Poppins, Cold Cash," *Newsweek* (12 July 1965): 74.
21. Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 79.

22. Tim Brooks and Earle Marsh, *The Complete Directory to Prime Time Network TV Shows*, Third Edition (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), 1031. *Disneyland* remained among the top fifteen programs through 1957, and then fell from the top twenty until it shifted to NBC—and color broadcasts—in 1961.
23. Charles Sinclair, "Should Hollywood get it for free?" *Sponsor* (8 August 1955): 102.
24. Maltin, *The Disney Films*, 315.
25. "Disney Parlays Romp Home," *Variety* (30 November 1955): 3; "All-Time Top Grossing Films," *Variety* (4 January 1956): 84. At the time, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* was the nineteenth highest-grossing film of all time.
26. *Ibid.*
27. "The Wild Frontier," *Time* (23 May 1955): 92. Unfortunately for Disney, the studio could not control licensing of Crockett products, because it did not possess exclusive rights to the name or character of Davy Crockett. Since the mid-nineteenth century companies had used the Crockett name on products from chewing tobacco to whiskey. The Disney studio never again made this mistake. See also "U.S. Again Subdued by Davy," *Life* (25 April 1955): 27; "Mr. Crockett is a Dead Shot As a Salesman," *New York Times*, 1 June 1955, 38.
28. Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 313.
29. "Father Goose," *Time* (27 December 1954): 42; "Tinker Bell, Mary Poppins, Cold Cash," 74.
30. For an account of the opening ceremonies, see Bob Chandler, "Disneyland As 2-Headed Child of TV & Hollywood Shoots for \$18 Mil B.O.," *Variety* (20 July 1955): 2. Chandler observes that the inauguration of Disneyland marked the "integration and interdependence of all phases of show biz."
31. Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 159.
32. "How To Make a Buck," *Time* (29 July 1957): 76.
33. *Ibid.*, Schickel, *The Disney Version*, 316.
34. Michele Hilmes describes the use of this strategy in the Hollywood-produced radio program, *Lux Radio Theater*. See Hilmes, *Hollywood and Broadcasting*, 108-10.
35. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1987), 124.