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Summer B 2001
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Disney and its Discontents

Texts (Goering's)

Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan, eds., *Deconstructing Disney*

Carl Hiaasen, *Team Rodent*

The Project on Disney, *Inside the Mouse: Work and Play at Disney World*

Andrew Ross, *The Celebration Chronicles*

Eric Smoodin, ed., *Disney Discourse: Producing the Magic Kingdom*

and a coursepacket from Xerographic (927 NW 13th Street)

This summer seminar will focus on Disney -- the man, the legend, the corporation, the ideology, the magic kingdom/evil empire, the global phenomenon. And on its discontents, as Disney seems synonymous with late capitalism and cultural imperialism. Disney's reach and worth are staggering. The corporation owns not only Walt Disney Pictures and the ABC television network but also the film companies of Touchstone, Hollywood, Caravan, Miramax, Henson, and Merchant Ivory Productions (not to mention seven theme park complexes and other worldwide ventures). Obviously there are many Disneys, and we'll do our best to sort through them ideologically and experientially.

I have some general goals, which we'll no doubt modify: 1) to profile (rather than survey) the substantial body of scholarship on Disney, both on its own and in relation to various scholarly enterprises, chiefly cultural studies and film studies; 2) to think more critically about what kind of work we might want to pursue next, and why; 3) to examine the particular implications Disney has for children's media/culture -- and vice versa; and 4) to have fun, and to think about pleasure. Put another way, we'll look at Disney, but we'll also look at Disney discourse past, present, and future, in an effort to better understand academic practice as well as "popular" consumption. And obviously I'd like for you to make the course work for you. While the assignments are Disney-specific, I encourage you to link our explorations to your own interests and concerns. This is a seminar and I look forward to your participation.

After thinking more generally about the directions of and tensions within Disney studies, we'll turn our attention to the Disney culture/corporate machine, then to the film canon and theme parks, and finally to Celebration, Disney's planned town (adjacent to WDW). Our focus will be vaguely chronological but also circular and (I hope) repetitive, as befits any authentic Disney ride. Speaking of which, we will make two official field trips, one to the theme park of our choice, and one to Celebration (which is free). I consider these trips to be a course requirement, so let me know if that's a problem. We'll

work out the details in class. I plan to make at least one visit to the Animal Kingdom, the newest park at WDW, and would welcome company. (I understand that admission is steep and summer budgets are tight.) I'm also going to screen films on four Wednesday nights at my apartment; I thought it would be fun to watch some of the Disney productions together. Attendance is optional, but please see these films if you can, as we'll be talking about them. Normally I'd show at least one in class, but we have so few meetings that I want to concentrate on the readings.

The brevity of a summer term makes it difficult to conduct a graduate seminar. Nevertheless we will plunge ahead. I ask that you do as much of the reading as is feasible, and that each week you try to develop questions and observations as if you were planning to teach this material yourself. I may ask you to begin discussion, so please come prepared and ready to roll.

Assignments. Required are attendance and active participation (25%), one 5-pp. paper (25%) and a seminar paper of 15-20 pp. (50%).

The short paper will develop a "close reading" of any local genre, aspect, or form of Disney -- any that you like -- with some engagement with the critical issues at hand. In other words, your paper should describe this Disney subject vis-à-vis the claims made in the criticism, perhaps taking up an issue or question that engages you, such as the problem of pleasure, or the gender politics of Disney film, or globalization. Your "text" might be a film, a book, a toy, a game, a website, or a theme-park ride/area/experience. In other words, pick a Disney form and try to explain it with a little help from scholarly friends. This paper may be anecdotal, but please use at least one critical source. I'd like these papers to be turned in within the first several weeks of class; the final deadline is July 31. I've made the deadline this late to allow you to write on theme park texts, but if you're planning to do something else, I'd recommend that you turn it in sooner, as the final essay will be due less than two weeks later.

The seminar essay will develop a more sustained treatment of a Disney-related topic. It may grow up out of the short paper but only if that's advantageous to you. Any approach is fine, provided that the essay is well-developed, reasonably thorough, and sufficiently researched. Let me know if you'd like some help.

Reading Schedule

July/August

- 3 Introductions; Disney confessions.
- 5 Hiaasen, *Team Rodent*; Sid Dobrin's interview with Hiaasen; Smoodin, "How to Read Walt Disney"; "The Problem with Pleasure" (in *Inside the Mouse*).

- 10 Giroux, “Revitalizing” and “Teaching”; Buckingham, “Children as Consumers”; “Introduction: Duckology” from *Deconstructing Disney*; Dorfman and Mattelart, “From the Noble Savage”; Peter and Rochelle Schweizer, “The Lyin’ King.”
- 12 Smoodin, sections entitled “A Disney Archaeology” and “National Production” (all selections).
- 17 *Deconstructing Disney*, Chs. 1-3. Bell, Haas, and Sells, “Introduction,” and Jeffords, “The Curse of Masculinity.”
- 19 Smoodin, section entitled “The Global Reach” (all selections except Yoshimoto).
- 24 Disney Project, *Inside the Mouse*. Read as much as you can; priority goes to “The Family Vacation,” “Story Time,” “Working at the Rat,” “The Alternative Ride” and “Public Use/Private State.”
- 26 Cont.; Yoshimoto, “Images of Empire” (in Smoodin).
Field trip this week: WDW, date/details to be arranged.
- 31 *Deconstructing Disney*, Chs. 4-6. Wood, “Domesticating Dreams.” **Short paper due.**
- 2 *Deconstructing Disney*, Ch. 7; Griffin, “Mickey Mouse -- Always Gay” and “You’ve Never Had a Friend Like Me.”
- 7 Field trip: Celebration. Ross, *Celebration Chronicles*.
- 9 Cont.; Eisner, “Reinventing” and “Cocooning and Connecting.” Wrap-up.

Seminar essay due **Monday, August 13.**

Film Schedule (all on Wednesday; all at 7 p.m. at my house unless otherwise arranged).

July 11 double feature: *Snow White* (1937) and *Fantasia* (1940)
 July 18 *The Three Caballeros* (1945)
 August 1 *Mary Poppins* (1964)
 August 8 *Toy Story 2* (2000)

I live in Covered Bridge Apartments, #264, just off NW 23rd Blvd. From campus, go north on NW 13th street, then turn left onto 23 Blvd (Taco Bell’s on the corner). At the first light, turn right into the complex. Go under the famed bridge, then left, then left into the first parking lot on the left. Building 11; phone is 337-1735. Some snacks will be provided but feel free to supplement.

Also feel free to host your own additional screenings.