### YOU'RE ON STAGE AT DISNEY WORLD:

#### AN ANALYSIS OF MAIN STREET, USA IN THE MAGIC KINGDOM

by

#### MARISA N. SCALERA

(Under the Direction of Henry Methvin)

#### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the image and physical characteristics of Main Street, USA in the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World, Florida. The first chapter explores the questions: What thematic roles does Main Street, USA play within the Magic Kingdom, within our collective national consciousness, and across the world? The second chapter asks: How does the visitor relate to Main Street, USA? How do these interactions change throughout the course of a day? The third chapter asks: What are the defining physical characteristics of Main Street, USA? How do these characteristics influence the experience of the visitor? All three chapters use the metaphor of a show that takes place daily on the Main Street, USA stage and in which visitors are both audience and actors. Through this examination both reader and author will gain a better understanding of the composition of Main Street, USA and insight into this undeniable design force.

INDEX WORDS: Magic Kingdom; Disney World; Theme Parks – Florida; American

Architecture; 20<sup>th</sup> Century Architecture

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
LIST OF	FIGURES	vi
INTROD	UCTION: YOU'RE ON STAGE AT DISNEY WORLD	1
СНАРТЕ	ER	
1	READINGS OF MAIN STREET, USA	4
	The Symbolic Midwestern Main Street	4
	A Reproduction of the Symbolic Landscape	7
	An Unreal, Real, or Hyperreal Landscape	10
	A Stage	11
	An Introduction to the Magic Kingdom	13
	An Enrichment of the Quotidian	14
	An American Archetype	16
	Conclusions	18
2	INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE CAST AND SET	20
	The Actors	20
	The Show	21
	9 a.m. – 12 p.m.: A Stage Set and a Funnel	21
	12 p.m. – 2 p.m.: A Destination	23
	2 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.: A Stage for a Parade	24
	3:30 p.m. – 5 p.m.: A Commercial Center	25

5 p.m. – 7 p.m.: A Festival	25
7 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.: An Electrical Parade	26
Conclusions	27
3 PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SET	35
Orthogonal Layout as an Outline of the Plot	35
Themed Architecture	44
Reduced Scale	49
Forced Perspective	53
Color Palette	57
Visual Magnets	59
Efficient Pedestrian Circulation	63
Visual Games Embedded in the Details	68
Sounds	70
Smells	74
Conclusions	77
BIBLIOGRAPHY	80

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1: Main Street, USA in the Magic Kingdom, in 2002	8
Figure 2.1: A Stage Set	28
Figure 2.2: A Funnel	29
Figure 2.3: A Destination	30
Figure 2.4: A Stage for a Parade	31
Figure 2.5: A Retail Hub.	32
Figure 2.6: A Festival	33
Figure 2.7: An Electrical Parade	34
Figure 3.1: Main Street, USA at the Magic Kingdom in Walt Disney World, Florida	36
Figure 3.2: Town Square in the Magic Kingdom	38
Figure 3.3: Intersection of Center and Main Streets in the Magic Kingdom	40
Figure 3.4: Vendors and Musicians at the Intersection of Center and Main Streets	40
Figure 3.5: Shadow Studies	41
Figure 3.6: The Plaza	43
Figure 3.7: Themed Architecture	45
Figure 3.8: Victorian Second Empire Style Prototypes for Main Street, USA	
Architecture	47
Figure 3.9: Victorian Stick Style Prototypes for Main Street, USA Architecture	48
Figure 3.10: Spanish Eclectic Style Prototype for Main Street, USA Architecture	50

Figure 3.11: City Hall in the Magic Kingdom	52
Figure 3.12: Forced Perspective	55
Figure 3.13: Forced Perspective	56
Figure 3.14: Color Palette	58
Figure 3.15: Visual Magnets	62
Figure 3.16: Site Furniture on Sidewalk	64
Figure 3.17: Transitional Space	66
Figure 3.18: Circulation Possibilities	67
Figure 3.19: "Hidden Mickeys"	69
Figure 3.20: Key to Map of Sounds	72
Figure 3.21: Map of Sounds	73
Figure 3.22: Key to Map of Smells	75
Figure 3 23: Man of Smells	76

#### INTRODUCTION

#### YOU'RE ON STAGE AT DISNEY WORLD<sup>1</sup>

In chatting with acquaintances about my thesis topic, I unwittingly uncovered an enormous range of emotions pertaining to Disney's worlds and, in particular, to the Magic Kingdom. The reactions varied from remembrances of childhood wonder and glee, to disgust, to intrigue, to barely veiled hatred. Very few people with whom I have spoken have shown indifference to the Magic Kingdom. I believe that my acquaintances are not exceptions but demonstrate the rule itself and that Disney and his Kingdom have left their mark, for good or ill, upon a generation of our culture. A quote by Karal Ann Marling confirms this hypothesis: "Something in the Disney parks, if not Disneyism as such, brings out not necessarily the best or the worst but so often the most in people – it strips them bare, reduces them to babble or prompts curses and slurs" (Marling 203).

The influence of the Disney parks upon our culture stretches beyond their power to elicit a strong emotion and into the realm of design. The Disney parks are forerunners in amusement and have become the prototype for a new form of American amusement, the theme park. Additionally, and perhaps of much greater interest, is the leap that their influence takes beyond amusement design and into the 'real world,' particularly into commercial centers throughout the nation. Small historic towns model the rehabilitation of their downtowns on Main Street, USA in the Magic Kingdom. Town planners and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The title of this thesis references a 1950's employee handbook entitled "You're on Stage at Disneyland."

even mall developers journey to Main Street, USA for design ideas before embarking on new ventures.

Because of its widespread influence, most Americans, even if they have never made the pilgrimage to Orlando or Los Angeles, can visualize the too ornate Victorian Main Street with an Americanized version of a European castle rising behind it. This thesis explores the image and the place in greater depth: what is Main Street, USA, and how is it consciously and subconsciously read by its visitors. To answer this question, what is Main Street, USA, I have divided it into three sub-questions. Answers to each of the sub-questions form the three chapters of the thesis.

The first chapter explores the questions: What are some of the scholarly 'readings' of Main Street, USA? What thematic roles does Main Street, USA play within the Magic Kingdom, within our collective national consciousness, and across the world? In this chapter, I examine the Midwestern Main Street as a symbolic American landscape, the reproduction of that symbolic landscape in the Magic Kingdom, the reality, unreality, or hyper-reality of the reproduced landscape, and Main Street, USA as a stage, an introduction to the Magic Kingdom, a landscape stage set, and an American archetype.

The second chapter explores the questions: How does the visitor relate to Main Street, USA? How do these interactions change throughout the course of a day? This chapter outlines the changing roles of Main Street, USA: stage set, funnel, destination, stage for a parade, commercial center, festival, and electrical parade.

The third chapter asks the question: What are the defining physical characteristics of Main Street, USA? How do these characteristics influence the experience of the visitor? It examines the orthogonal layout, the themed architecture, the reduced scale, the

forced perspective, the color palette, the visual magnets, the pedestrian circulation, the visual games, the sounds and the smells peculiar to Main Street, USA.

This thesis uses the metaphor of a show that takes place daily on the Main Street, USA stage and in which visitors are both audience and actors. (The appropriateness of this metaphor is discussed in Chapter 1.) Each of the three chapters explores one component of the show. Chapter 1 introduces the theme and setting. Chapter 2 introduces the cast and describes how the interactions between actors and stage set give a plot to the show. Chapter 3 examines the physical stage set in greater detail.

Through an examination of these three components (theme, cast, and set), both reader and author will gain a better understanding of the composition of Main Street, USA in the Magic Kingdom. Perhaps this understanding will give insight to some of today's design trends and aid the designer in choosing which elements of Main Street, USA are applicable to new designs in the 'real world' and which elements are better left on the Disney World stage.

#### CHAPTER 1

## READINGS OF MAIN STREET, USA

#### The Symbolic Midwestern Main Street

A symbolic American landscape, as defined by landscape biographer D.W. Meinig, is "a part of the iconography of nationhood, part of the shared set of ideas and memories and feelings which bind a people together" (164). He proposes that every mature nation develops their own symbolic landscapes and that the types of landscape images that the nation uses to convey values or meanings will help to reveal the nation's symbols. Some symbolic landscapes refer to a specific place. Others however are "powerfully evocative because they are understood as being a particular kind of place rather than a precise building or locality" (164). He identifies three symbolic American landscapes that fall into the latter category: the New England village, the Main Street of Middle America, and the California suburb.

This paper is concerned with the second 'kind of place' - the Main Street of Middle America. Since the Main Street symbol refers not to a specific street in a specific town, but to a kind of place, authors describe the symbol's physical characteristics using a similar, but not identical, vocabulary. Meinig focuses on the commercial and civic buildings and the time period: "a street, lined with three or four-story red brick business blocks, whose rather ornate fenestrations and cornices reveal their nineteenth century origins. Above the storefronts and awnings are the offices of lawyers, doctors, and

dentists . . . A courthouse, set apart on its own block, may be visible, but it is not an essential element . . . This is Main Street" (167). Author Pat Ross' description of Main Street also focuses on commercial and civic buildings, but she chooses adjectives that reveal the values she associates with each individual building or space: "the town green, where good spirit prevails; the local diner and its comfortable fare; the well-stocked fiveand-dime; the bright lights that dance around the movie marquee; the imposing façade of the local bank; the stately Town Hall" (xv). Richard Francaviglia describes not only the physical characteristics of Main Street, but also the roles that it plays, including economic functions (retailing), social functions (the location of community parades), and civic functions (location of government and its services). He continues, "Buildings such as a city or town hall or courthouse are an integral part of Main Street. . . . Churches, railroad stations, grain elevators, water towers, and other important buildings and features may also be important landmarks on, or very near, Main Street; yet they are always seen in reference to the commercial buildings which line the street' (Francaviglia Main Street *Revisited xix*). Though these descriptions vary, they all focus primarily on the buildings of Main Street and include references to commercial buildings and to a civic center with a town hall or a courthouse.

None of the sources to which I referred claimed to know precisely how or why the peculiar combination of physical characteristics described above, the Main Street of Middle America, came to be a symbolic American landscape. Most of them did assume that it was one, for good or ill. Francaviglia suggests, "Main Street may appeal to a sense of collective innocence in that our youths are times of relative simplicity before we experience significant personal, economic, and sexual responsibility. Main Street and

other idealized place images may be points of refuge for Americans who would just as soon turn back the clock if it meant recapturing lost innocence and simplifying their lives" (Francaviglia *Main Street Revisited* 154). However, though the children of turn-of-the-century Main Street are now, if surviving, over a hundred years old, the symbol persists in our national consciousness. Perhaps Francaviglia's hypothesis holds true for our oldest generation, but the reason for the perseverance of the symbol through the generations probably lies elsewhere.

Meinig, in defining the connotations of the word 'middle' in Middle America, suggests a second answer that focuses more on location, economy, and size than it does on the time period. He writes that Main Street is 'middle': "in location – between the frontier to the west and the cosmopolitan seaports to the east; in economy – a commercial center surrounded by agriculture and augmented by local industry to form a balanced diversity; in social class and structure – with no great extremes of wealth or poverty, with social gradations but no rigid layers, a genuine community but not tightly cohesive; in size – not so small as to be stultifying nor so large as to forfeit friendship and familiarity" (167). In essence, Middle America is an average America, perhaps making it a place to which 'average' Americans can relate.

Whatever the reason, the physical characteristics of the Main Street of Middle

America have come to be associated with a set of values, and the values, like the physical characteristics that have come to represent them, vary between individuals. Words used to express these values include free enterprise, social morality, progress, improvement, 'small town virtues', 'the backbone of America', 'the real America' (Meinig 167), patriotism, sanctity, security, slower times, closeness to the people, honest aspirations,

few pretenses (Francaviglia *Main Street Revisited* xviii), spirit of the entrepreneur, material attainment (Francaviglia *Main Street Revisited* 176), friendliness, a place to 'hang out' (Ross *xv*), friendship, order, intimacy, innocence (Fjellman 170), and benevolent authority (Dunlop 35). The words in this list can be placed into one of three categories that summarize the values associated with Main Street: order enforced by a benevolent authority, material attainments of the small-town entrepreneur, and a social consciousness that encompasses family, community, and country.

## A Reproduction of the Symbolic Landscape

Main Street, USA in the Magic Kingdom (opened in 1971) is built to look like a small-town Midwestern Main Street during the years 1890 – 1910 and includes most of the symbol's physical characteristics (less the bank and churches) listed above. A number of real towns have been suggested as its inspiration; the forerunners are Marceline, Missouri (Walt Disney's childhood home) and Fort Collins, Colorado (hometown of Harper Goff, one of the original WED engineers). The WED (which stands for Walter Elias Disney) staff did borrow elements from these two towns, but pieced them together with elements of additional small towns, abstracted the borrowed elements, eliminated details that did not fit the archetypal American Main Street, and created a space that imitates the symbolic Main Street more than it does the Main Street of any real town.

The real Main Streets in small towns at the turn-of-the-century had varying details that would not have conformed to today's symbolic image of them. For instance, Francaviglia describes a photograph (see Figure 1.1) taken in 1905 of Kansas Avenue, the 'Main Street' of Marceline, Missouri:



Kansas Avenue in Marceline, Missouri, in 1905 (photo: Francaviglia *Main Street Revisited* 145)



Figure 1.1 Main Street, USA in the Magic Kingdom, in 2002

Gaunt power poles lined this street, and the buildings had a relatively ragged profile: although most of them achieved two stories in height (indicating that substantial commercial progress had been made), some buildings were one story and, in a number of cases, there were empty spaces between the buildings. Nevertheless, there was an overall look of modest prosperity in the town in 1905, even though Main Street was unpaved. To the dismay of some merchants in 1905, Marceline's streets, even in the business section along Main Street (Kansas Avenue), were a quagmire of mud in wet weather, dusty in dry weather, and what one critic called an 'equine latrine' throughout much of the year, as horses left piles of droppings in the street as they plodded along pulling wagons or hauling riders. (*Main Street Revisited* 144-145).

Most of these details do not conform to Walt Disney's vision for his theme parks which he hoped would be "the essence of America as we know it, the nostalgia of the past with exciting glimpses of the future" (Disney qtd. in Finch 61). Some of the quotidian realities (the 'gaunt power lines' and 'equine latrines') were sanitized to fit the image of the 'essence' of America, the symbolic landscape Disney strove to recreate.

Finch explains that though Main Street, USA is not an exact reproduction of Marceline, Missouri, Fort Collins, Colorado, or any other small Midwestern town's Main Street, it retains the 'memory' of these towns (48). The memory that Finch introduces is not necessarily the memory of a person who has visited such a town, but our collective memory of the Main Street symbol. Finch continues: "[Disney] thought in archetypes and so he conceived an idealized version of the past in which everything is as it should have been. He understood very well that nostalgia tends to blur images. What he did was to take those misty images and give them a renewed sharpness of detail that was well researched and faithful to its sources, but which eliminated imperfections and evidence of decay" (48).

## An Unreal, Real or Hyperreal Landscape

Main Street, USA at the Magic Kingdom never intended to be, or even to reproduce, a real Main Street. Walt Disney explains, "Disneyland is like Alice stepping through the looking glass. To step through the portals of Disneyland will be like entering another world" (Disney qtd. in Finch 60). Main Street, USA is the mirror's reflection of the geographical Main Streets that lie on this side of the looking glass. It is not an exact replica, but an image, a distorted and idealized reflection, which Disney transforms into three-dimensions and allows visitors to enter.

Critics have discussed whether these created other-side-of-the-looking-glass spaces in Disney World are real or unreal, or if the real itself is no longer real, and both Disney World and its surroundings are hyperreal. The critics point to two qualities that qualify the space as unreal: simulation and temporality. As Sorkin explains: "At Disneyland one is constantly poised in a condition of becoming, always someplace that is 'like' someplace else. The simulation's referent is ever elsewhere; the 'authenticity' of the substitution always depends on the knowledge, however faded, of some absent genuine" (216). Main Street, USA refers to a place in the unvisitable past of 1890-1910. Its authenticity, its 'realness' to the visitor, is dependent upon its resonation with either the visitor's memories of personal experience with the space (now one hundred years ago) or with more recent images of the symbolic Midwestern Main Street. The visitor will find the space a remarkably 'authentic' simulation of the symbolic Midwestern Main Street image (a place to which she can never journey), but does that translate into 'real?'

Huxtable introduces the temporality of Main Street, USA as a second argument for its unreality. She maintains that it and other 'themed creations' are "made for the

moment, instant environments intended to serve only as temporary, substitute events, conceived and carried out as places to visit in which novelty, experience, and entertainment are sold for immediate profit and a short period of time" (69). She denies it reality based on the visitor's ephemeral contact with it. The designers appeal to 'proven family-oriented formulas' in Main Street, USA, so that the visitor can quickly pull the formula's reference from her mental files and make visual sense of the environment around her. The space is built for the visitor to comprehend in one day, but will not sustain her for a longer period of time, as a 'real' place should.

## A Stage

Disney World is neither a 'real' place, nor a simulation of a real place, but the simulation of a symbol and is therefore intended not for 'real' life, but for a temporary escape from real life. This type of unreal space has precedents within our society. In fact, its purposes parallel those of a stage. If Main Street, USA is thought of as a stage set, it signals to visitors, not that they are actually entering a Midwestern Main Street or the years 1890-1910, but that they are entering into a story about them. When Walt Disney compares the experience of a visitor in the park to Alice in Wonderland ("like Alice stepping through the looking glass"), he alludes to the park as the setting of a story and to the visitor as a character, an active participant, in the story.

Finch elaborates upon the park as stage set: "This is a world of illusion, but the props are startlingly real, and we must remember that the movie industry has had long experience in conjuring up other times and other places. The Western towns and European squares that can be found on Hollywood back lots may consist of nothing but false fronts attached to crude frameworks, but they are remarkably convincing.

Disneyland is, in fact, like a gigantic back lot open to the public" (Finch 63). This 'back lot' however is not a set for a movie through which the public is allowed to roam between shootings. Instead, it is a stage created specifically for the public. As they wander across the stage, they are transformed into characters in a 'movie' dependent upon them to enact the story. Of course, they are not given a script for their movie and therefore feel that a combination of their decisions and serendipity is guiding the plot. They have what Gottdiener calls an "air of freedom" (108). However, whether they are conscious of it or not, they are dependent upon the set to give them cues and to guide them through the story. The spirited dialogue between the set and the actors provides a plot for the story.

The stage sets precedence for the temporary simulation of a space, but the transformation of its audience members into actors has little precedence in our country. Gottdiener describes our country's most prevalent form of entertainment as a 'spectacle' that "does not allow for participation, only passive viewing" (108). In the movie, the play, the television show, the sporting events watched in large stadiums or on television, the radio and perhaps even the book, the audience observes the action from afar and does not participate in it. A Disney World brochure describes its departure from our country's traditional forms of entertainment: "Up until now, audience participation in entertainment was almost non-existent. In live theater, motion pictures and television the audience is always separate and apart from the actual show environment . . . Walt Disney took the audience out of their seats and placed them right in the middle of the action, for a total, themed, controlled experience" (qtd. in Gottdiener 108). In Main Street, USA, the audience member (the visitor) is granted active participation in the story. The reader will note however, that the experience is still 'controlled,' and that the set exerts the control.

## An Introduction to the Magic Kingdom

The first example of the set's control is the sole entrance to the park, Main Street, USA. All visitors must process down its length before entering the rest of the Magic Kingdom. The architecture of Main Street, USA "was personally selected by Walt Disney, himself a Midwesterner by birth and during his early life. He felt that America's 'Innocent Years' at the turn of the century were best depicted by this structural style – and that this introduction into the special realm of Disneyland would be the perfect 'mindsetter" (Robert Jackson, publicity manager for Disneyland, qtd. in Francaviglia *Main Street Revisited* 147). The rest of the Magic Kingdom is seen only after the visitor journeys through Main Street, USA and is physically encompassed by the values that it symbolizes. The park's introduction is an allusion to slower times in 'the real America,' to a time and place where the residents valued family, community, and country. 'Rooting' the rest of the park in the 'easily understood values' of Main Street, USA makes the adventure, history, fantasy, and future, in short, the 'fabulous,' "all the more accessible to the millions of visitors who enjoy it annually" (Finch 64).

Gottdiener proposes an additional symbolic justification for Main Street as the introduction into the park. He believes that each of the Magic Kingdom's 'lands' (Adventureland, Frontierland, Tomorrowland, and Fantasyland) corresponds to "compartmentalized aspects of the world of a young boy growing up in a midwestern town" (Gottdiener 114). For instance, he compares Adventureland to childhood games, comic-strip superheroes, and backyard play, Frontierland to summer vacation and Boy Scouts, Tomorrowland to spectacular careers in science and technology, and Fantasyland to fables and bedtime stories. Main Street, the landscape in which Walt Disney spent his

boyhood, is the introduction into these lands of his childhood dreams. It is "the simulated real foundation for the simulated fantasy of the other realms or sections of the park" (Gottdiener 115). The Midwestern Main Street symbol alludes to a period of innocence, to our nation's collective childhood. As the visitor walks down the Main Street corridor, through a symbol of his own childhood and innocence, he is mentally prepared for the rest of the park, the fantastic dreams of childhood. In this way, Main Street sets the stage for the park.

#### An Enrichment of the Quotidian

Though perhaps rare in our country, the landscape as stage set is by no means a concept original or peculiar to the Disney theme parks. Authors have compared the Disney theme park to three additional types of landscape stages: the playful utopia, the greenhouse, and the pleasure garden. Each of these stages is built (created by humans) to temporarily transport the visitor away from her quotidian realities, to divert, amuse, and relax the visitor, and to re-energize the visitor in preparation for her return to the 'real' world.

The most straightforward example of this is found in Gottdiener's comparison to a "ludic [expressive of a playful but aimless outlook] utopian built environment" (111) that offers a distinct contrast to the everyday. He describes several aspects of the everyday that are absent in the Disney theme park. Most fundamentally, it is free from threats to personal safety. It is also free from the visitor's everyday worries (jobs, deadlines, schedules, meetings, family crises, budgets, etc) and "free of pathological urban experiences produced by an inequitable and class society such as slums, ghettos, and crime" (111). Gottdiener sets up a sharp dichotomy between Disney World, which

"possesses the 'illuminating potentiality' of a space occupied by the symbolic and the imaginary, in which something fantastic can and usually is always happening" (Gottdiener 111), and the 'real world.' On Main Street, USA, the visitor is liberated from her quotidian routines and worries.

Michael Sorkin takes this opposition between Disney World and the 'real world' and adds interdependence between the two opposites. As he compares the Disney theme parks to a greenhouse, he focuses upon the artificiality and the idealization found in both. "The winter garden – the 'hothouse' – is all artifice, about inaccessibility, about both its own simulations and the impossibility of being present at the scene evoked: it is not recollective, but fantastic. At its core, the greenhouse – or Disneyland – offers a view of alien nature, edited, a better version, a kind of sublime" (210). However, both the park and the greenhouse are created and maintained by civilization. Sorkin continues, "Indeed, the abiding theme of every park is nature's transformation from civilization's antithesis to its playground" (210). Civilization returns to the park and greenhouse, which it created, to enrich its ordinary experiences.

The third comparison, 'pleasure garden,' defines itself; it is a garden, a part of the landscape, set aside for civilization's pleasure. Finch introduces the pleasure garden in his suggestion of the Disney theme parks as "a twentieth-century equivalent of Versailles" (46). He continues, "I do not mean to suggest that they contain architectural marvels to match the Palace of Versailles, the Trianons, or the Orangery, but as pleasure gardens there are many parallels to be found" (46). The parallels to which he refers include that each is a reflection of the culture that produced it, each is a fantasy,

"removed from the everyday realities of life," and each is an archetypal expression of the taste of its time (47).

From these three comparisons, we learn that Disney World (including its Main Street, USA) offers the fantastic and symbolic in distinct contrast to the 'real world', is dependent upon the real world, enriches the real world, is a reflection of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American culture (and values) that produced it, and is an archetypal expression of the taste of our time.

## An American Archetype

The circle is complete; Disney World borrowed a symbolic American landscape, the Midwestern Main Street, reproduced it, placed it on a stage, set up a dichotomy between it and the landscape it came from, and, in the process, created a new American archetype, Disney World. Landscape historian J. B. Jackson writes, "We are inclined in America to think that the value of monuments is simply to remind us of origins. They are much more valuable as reminders of long-range, collective purpose, of goals and objectives and principles. As such even the least sightly of monuments gives a landscape beauty and dignity and keeps the collective memory alive" (Jackson 152). The Disney theme parks are examples of the latter type of monument, a reminder of what Walt Disney saw as the goals, objectives and principles of his country. In Disney's own words, "Disneyland will be based upon and dedicated to the ideals, the dreams, and the hard facts that have created America" (qtd. in Sorkin 206). Therefore, the Disney theme parks serve as a reminder, not of past times and places, but of the values we now associate with those times and places; they use yesterday's architecture to speak of today's values. Some will argue that the parks speak only of today's value of

commercialism. Perhaps, it is ironic that this enormous corporation uses the image of small town America to talk about free enterprise, small town values, few pretenses, and honest aspirations. Nevertheless, because it does, these values are reinforced in our nation's shared ideas and memories. Main Street, USA in Disney World has become a symbolic American landscape.

Walt Disney continues the above quote: "And it will be uniquely equipped to dramatize these dreams and facts and send them forth as a source of courage and inspiration to all the world" (qtd. in Sorkin 206). Whether or not his theme parks have actually become a 'source of courage and inspiration' to the world is highly debatable. However, they have become both a representation of America and a national landmark, a must-see for international travelers who seek the American experience. As their fame (or infamousness) spreads beyond our country, they become not just symbolic American landscapes, but symbolic world landscapes. Finch discusses the dispersion of these 'dreams and facts,' these values, into the collective world view:

"The aspect of Disney that has most interested me is best summed up in the observation that his imagination was clearly rooted in specifically American values and was demonstrably formed by his own background, yet its appeal is universal. There is no contradiction here – blue jeans are very American but are coveted all over the world – still the implications are fascinating. Walt Disney is a universal symbol for American culture. If we understand him, we understand something about how America views the world and the world views America" (Finch 32).

Finch goes on to explain that Disney World "does not reflect just one facet of the American dream" but is "shaped by fundamentally American attitudes and values" (32). Each land is a different symbol; each symbol represents several value sets. Together they form an extensive collection of the values that people across the world associate with America.

The Disney theme parks have become an archetype, a prototype, an original pattern from which all other things of the same kind are made. They have worked their way into our language to define, not just themselves, but a type of thing. A 'Disneyland' is defined in the Webster's New World Dictionary as "a place or condition of unreality, fantasy, incongruity, etc." As Main Street, USA is reproduced both by historic small towns looking to rehabilitate their downtowns and by town planners and mall developers looking for new models of development, critics lament the 'Disneyfication' of portions of our built environment. As long as Main Street, USA retains an influence over our built environment, our language, and our nation's self-image, there is need for its further study.

### Conclusions

This chapter has sought to answer *what* are some of the existing scholarly studies of Main Street, USA. Extensive research into *why* and *how* many of these readings were formed is outside the realm of this thesis. Further exploration of the *why*'s and *how*'s and even the *when*'s and *where*'s of the values presented in this chapter would prove interesting in further studies.

For the purposes of this thesis, it suffices to say *what* these readings are. Main Street, USA is read neither as a real place, nor as a simulation of a place, but as the simulation of a symbol. As it gives physical form to the symbolic Main Street of Middle America, it creates a stage set that communicates the setting of the day's show to the visitor. The stage set alludes to the values (friendship, order, intimacy, innocence) associated with the symbolic landscape, and so the introduction to the day's show foreshadows the slower times to come in the rest of the park. Through this transportation

into the symbolic, the visitor temporarily escapes the everyday. The physical representation of the symbol (Main Street, USA) has, over time, itself become a symbol that is part of our nation's everyday consciousness.

The remaining two chapters discuss in greater depth the stage set's physical form and its relationship to the visitor. They transport the reader from the scholarly readings found in this chapter into the space itself.

#### **CHAPTER 2**

#### INTERACTIONS BETWEEN THE CAST AND SET

### The Actors

An estimated 14,784,000 visitors stepped out onto the Main Street stage in 2001. One day's show features an average of 40,504 guest actors who play roles opposite the recurring Disney "cast members" (Disney World's term for park employees). The guest actors are not expecting to experience a 'real' street. As Allan Jacobs writes about real streets across the world: "The show is not always pleasant, not always smiles or greetings or lovers hand in hand. There are cripples and beggars and people with abnormalities, and, like the lovers, they can give pause; they are reason for reflection and thought. Everyone can use the street" (4).

On Main Street, USA, however, not everyone can use the street. Because guests are limited to those who can afford the hefty entrance fee, class distinctions are minimized (Gottdiener 109). In addition, the visitors expect the show to be pleasant. An anecdote from one of my winter 2002 visits provides an example. One visitor accidentally collided with another and then apologized to him. The second man replied genially, "Not a problem. This is Disney after all!" – 'the happiest place on earth.' Both men laughed. Walt Disney commissioned his Imagineers to design settings for pleasant shows saying, "All I want you to think about is when people walk through or have access

to anything you design, I want them, when they leave, to have smiles on their faces. Just remember that. It's all I ask of you as a designer" (qtd. in The Imagineers 18).

Sorkin reads this "happy regulated vision of pleasure – all those artfully hoodwinking forms" as a "substitute for the democratic public realm." He believes that it "does so appealingly by stripping troubled urbanity of its sting, of the presence of the poor, of crime, of dirt, of work" (Sorkin xv). This thesis however argues that Main Street, USA is not, and does not intend to be, a substitute for the democratic public realm, but a temporary escape from it, a show. The visitors become actors; they are self-cast and anticipate that they will be playing roles in a show with a pleasant fairy tale ending. The Show

The remainder of this chapter explores a day's 11-hour long show and divides it into six acts. It approximates a time range during which each act occurs and bases these times upon two visits to the Magic Kingdom (Monday, February 25, 2002 and Friday, March 1, 2002). Though the time range for each act will vary – as the park hours vary – according to the day of the week and the season of the year, the acts themselves remain constant. The remaining subheadings in this chapter give a name to each of the acts of the show. The names represent the predominant role that Main Street, USA plays in each act. Now, let the show begin.

#### 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.: A Stage Set and a Funnel

At 8:50 a.m., guests are waiting at the Walt Disney World® Transportation and Ticket Center outside the Magic Kingdom. A cast member leads the crowd in a countdown: "5-4-3-2-1," and then the first guests are allowed to begin boarding the monorail and ferry for the final leg of their pilgrimage to the Magic Kingdom. Guests

disembark from the monorail and ferry to join the crowd of those who have arrived by buses and boats from the Walt Disney World® Resorts. Each guest runs her ticket through the turnstile and then files into an outdoor lobby just south of the train station. The train station looms tall overhead and hides the view into the park as effectively as a curtain hides the view of a stage just before show time. Two short tunnels extend under the train station, and the guest follows the crowds into one of these tunnels. She finds the walls of the tunnel lined with posters advertising the park's attractions, and the salty aroma of popcorn wafts through the morning air from carts near the tunnels' openings to greet her. The Disney Institute writes: "The experience of entering the park is designed to remind guests of the experience of entering a movie theater. There is the ticketing and the turnstile, the lobby, the halls to the screening rooms lined with posters displaying the coming attractions, and even the popcorn" (114). The movie theatre entrance sets the tone for the day by classifying the subsequent environment as a place where, just as in a movie theatre, one will be entertained.

As the guest emerges from the short tunnels, the curtains part. She finds that she is not in a dark theatre facing a screen, but on the set of the Main Street stage. Live actors and costumed Disney characters are positioned throughout Town Square. Main Street, USA stretches north beyond Town Square and just beyond it sits the Cinderella Castle. During my February visits, I heard several people, children and adults alike, murmur wonder at the 'reality' (three-dimensionality) of the park. One woman beside me said to a friend "Well, there it is. Its real." A small girl tugged at her mother's hand and squealed with apparent delight, "Mamma, it's real! Its really real!" Most guests have seen two-dimensional representations (photographs and videos) of the Cinderella

Castle before arriving at the Magic Kingdom. They have been prepared for a twodimensional movie by the entrance. The juxtaposition of two-dimensional preparations with the three-dimensional reality of the stage set gives the latter an unexpected brilliance, solidity, and 'reality.'

The rush to the castle during this act reduces Main Street, USA to a funnel (Fjellman 170). Each person must pour into the funnel through the tunnel entrances under the train station, and flow down Main Street to arrive at the castle. Photographs taken during this act from the south end of Main Street, USA toward the castle reveal hats, caps, and hair of all colors and textures, but no faces. The guests are all facing away from the photographer and north to the castle.

## 12 p.m. - 2 p.m.: A Destination

At 12 noon, the balloon man strides onto Main Street, USA with an impossibly large bouquet of inflated silver Mickey Mouse heads bobbing above his own blond head. His arrival on stage indicates that Main Street is entering a new act and that it is beginning to function as a destination for some guests. Some of those people who funneled down Main Street with their eyes fixed on the castle during the last act begin to return to Main Street, to dine, to shop, and to purchase shiny silver Mickey Mouse balloons. They meander leisurely up, down, and across the street. They let themselves be lured by aromas from Casey's Corner (smells of hot dogs and French fries), the Main Street Bakery (smells of piping hot, fresh-out-of-the-oven cookies), and the Plaza Ice Cream Parlor (smells of ice cream). People carry food from one of these three cafés to sidewalk tables outside the restaurants or to tables off the north end of Main Street. A few people plop down on the street curb to rest their feet and munch on their lunches and,

in doing so, foreshadow the coming act. The Main Street area also features two table service restaurants: Tony's Town Square Restaurant and the Plaza Restaurant. As indicated by their names, neither of these restaurants is located on Main Street itself, but in the squares/ plazas immediately adjacent to Main Street. As guests return to Main Street, USA and patronize these two restaurants, the cafés, and the retail stores, they affirm Main Street, USA as a destination of its own.

## <u>2 p.m. − 3:30 p.m.: A Stage for a Parade</u>

By 2 o'clock, a few seated people have accumulated on the street curbs to wait for the 3 o'clock parade, and others, drawn in by the parade spirit, join them. Soon, the street is lined with parade goers. A cast member wheels a small green and white striped vending cart into the middle of the street and sets up shop selling parade paraphernalia. Additional cast members place long foam tubes into the trolley track, so that the wheels of the parade floats do not catch in the track. These two events (the arrival of the parade vendor and the placement of the foam tubes) effectively stop the activity of the Main Street vehicles (the horse-drawn trolley and the streetcars) and they signal the cessation of 'everyday' Main Street activities. By parade time, 3 o'clock, the street is entirely cleared but lined with parade goers many people deep. The dénouement of this act, the parade, swells with music and color and makes references to movies and characters with which the guests are familiar. The anticipation of the parade and then the afternoon parade itself set Main Street, USA apart from an ordinary small town street on an ordinary day; they sanctify it as a holy day, a holiday.

## 3:30 p.m. – 5 p.m.: A Commercial Center

As the afternoon parade comes to a close, the spectators leave their viewing posts on the curbs at the street edges. The floodgates open, and the waters of people spill out onto the cleared street and bathe it in humanity. Many guests flow down the street after the last parade float. Others remain in Main Street and shop in the retail stores. As this act plays itself out, the crowds on the street thin, but the stores lining the street grow busier. Main Street, USA reestablishes itself as the retail and commercial center of the Magic Kingdom just as a Main Street in a small town would traditionally have been the commercial center of the town.

## <u>5 p.m. − 7 p.m.: A Festival</u>

At five o'clock, the Walt Disney World® Magic Kingdom Security Color Guard conducts the daily Flag Retreat Ceremony. A brass band, its members dressed in sharp red coats and crisp white slacks, plays our national anthem. On the two days that I visited, people up and down Main Street stood motionless, hands over their hearts, and faced the flag as it was lowered. As the symbol of our country and of the patriotic small town retreats, sparkling white lights adorning the eves of Main Street, USA's Victorian buildings illuminate. The placement of these lights is not consistent with the all-American small town image, but is instead reminiscent of the nighttime photographs of Coney Island. The lowering of the flag and the illumination of the lights symbolize the transition of Main Street's stage set for the next act of the play – the festival act. People begin to arrive in Main Street, USA in droves. On Friday and Saturday evenings, even at 5 o'clock, guests are staking out their seats for the 7 o'clock evening parade. People are everywhere; filling the street to overflowing, lining its curb, pouring down its sidewalks

25

and into the stores. They are eating, listening to the bands and quartets, dancing, and purchasing. The transformation is typified by a rather nondescript false storefront at the furthest end of Center Street (the street crossing Main Street at its center point). In this act, the sign on the storefront is brilliantly illuminated and proclaims this the most prominent building of Center Street. The sign, printed in bold lights, reads: "ART FESTIVAL." In this brilliant, bustling, crowded act, Main Street is festival, fair, and amusement park (sans rides).

#### 7 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.: An Electrical Parade

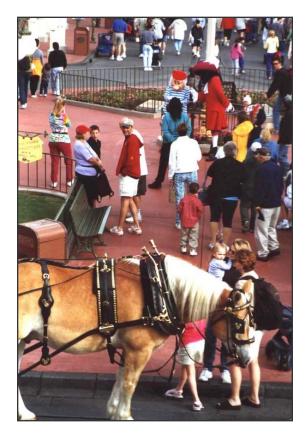
On Friday and Saturday evenings, a grand finale follows the festival. The actors reposition themselves for this final act much as they did for the three o'clock parade. The street is cleared, and its curbs and sidewalks are filled to overflowing. In the Florida winter, as the 7 o'clock show time approaches, natural light dims and then extinguishes. The white lights on the eves of Main Street, USA's buildings shimmer and twinkle against the pitch-black sky. Beyond Main Street, the castle glows majestic and magical, now silver, now blue, now pink, and now golden. The undulations of its colors draw the eye, and the castle remains a visual magnet throughout the act. At 7 o'clock, the lights on the eves of the buildings extinguish, leaving the stage bathed in complete darkness. The guest actors relinquish their active roles and collectively assume the role of the audience. They have taken a seat along the edges of the street/stage, the lights have dimmed, and they wait for a show to begin. Out of the darkness, music swells, and the first parade float, with brilliant lights defining its edges, emerges from a building off Town Square. It swirls up Main Street, USA towards the castle, mimicking the crowd's procession up the same street at the beginning of the day. The electric, sparkling body of the parade

follows its head, winds up Main Street, and is gone. The lights on the building's eves reilluminate, signaling the end of the parade. At the end of this parade, just as at the end of the afternoon parade, the floodgates open, and people pour out into the street. In this finale act, however, they funnel south up Main Street, USA, towards the train stationturned-visual-magnet, into Town Square, into the short tunnels under the train station, and out of the Magic Kingdom. (See Figures 2.1 - 2.7)

#### Conclusions

Main Street, USA plays roles that correspond to traditional public square roles: stage set (establishing the character of the town), destination, stage for festivals and parades, and the town's commercial center. An interesting peculiarity of Main Street, USA is that, because visitors see it only during the course of one day, it must cycle through each role every day. Each day, 365 days a year, as a new set of 40,504 guest actors enter the park, the 11-hour show will be repeated and Main Street's roles re-played in a set order (stage set and funnel, destination, stage for a parade, commercial center, festival, and electrical parade). The form of the set must be versatile in order to respond to both the changing roles and the changing setting (from small town Main Street to Coney Island style amusement park). It must take the lead in its relationship with the visitor and guide him through the acts. In each act, cues given by the stage set signal roles the visitor will play. Chapter 3 explores specific methods the stage set uses to guide the visitor through a day's show.

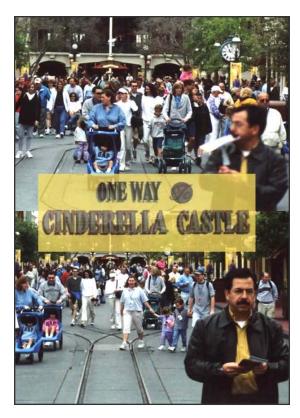




9:15 am

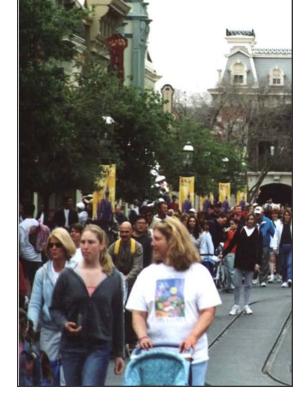
Figure 2.1 A Stage Set





10:15 am





11:15 am

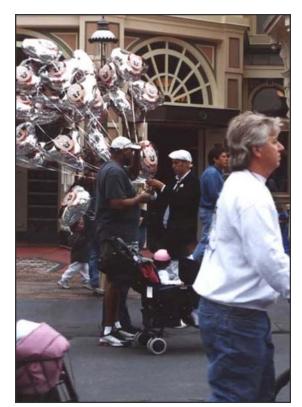
Figure 2.2 A Funnel





12:15 pm

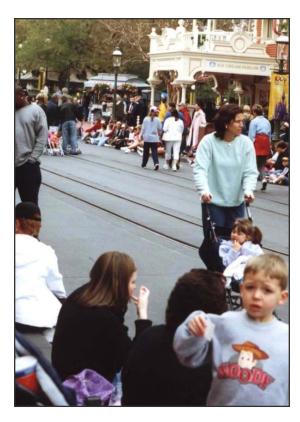




1:15 pm

Figure 2.3 A Destination





2:15 pm

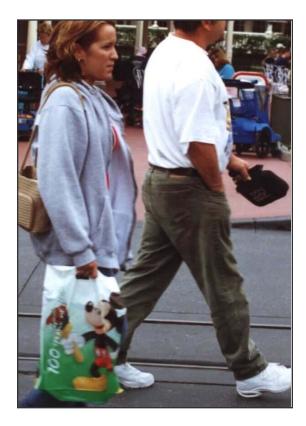




3:15 pm

Figure 2.4 A Stage for a Parade





4:15 pm

Figure 2.5 A Retail Hub



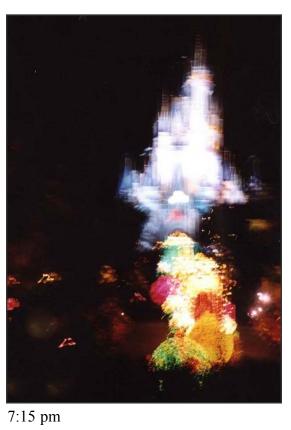


5:15 pm



6:15 pm

Figure 2.6 A Festival



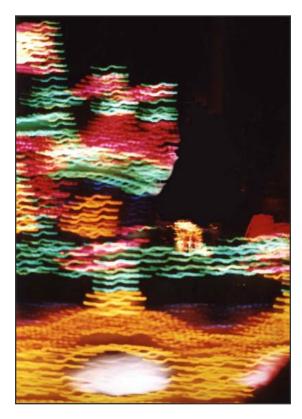


Figure 2.7 An Electrical Parade

#### **CHAPTER 3**

### PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SET

### Orthogonal Layout as an Outline of the Plot

Main Street, USA, distilled to its most primitive element, is not a form, but a two-dimensional line. The line points like the magnetic needle of a compass due north. One of the inspirations for the linear entrance into the Magic Kingdom is the Pike amusement park in Long Beach, California where the WED staff "noticed that the main thoroughfares always attracted a throng of pedestrians, while anything off the main drag suffered a great decline in traffic. This observation led to what Disney designers have referred to as the 'miracle of the hub.' Having already decided that Disneyland would have just one entrance, the WED staff created Main Street as a long entrance corridor that could absorb large numbers of visitors during peak hours" (Bright 61).

A second, perhaps less practical, reason for the linear entrance is that it lends itself to storytelling. "In Imagineering architecture, the obvious function of a building is secondary to its primary purpose: to help tell the story" (Imagineers 84). Main Street, USA unfolds, just as a story does, in a straight line which runs through an introduction, rising action, dénouement, and a conclusion. Each of the architectural forms along the way plays a role in the story. The plan view provides an outline of the plot. (See Figure 3.1)

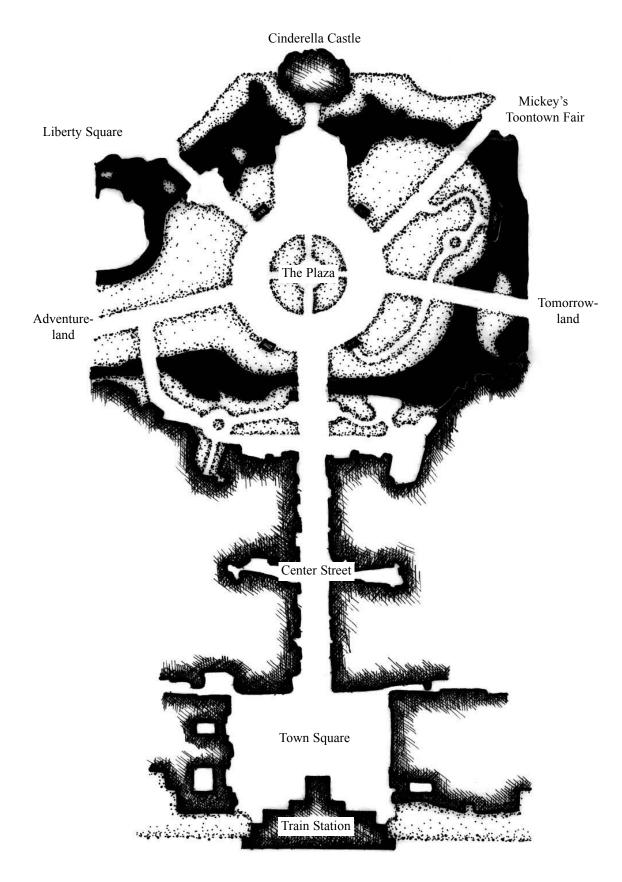


Figure 3.1 Main Street, USA at the Magic Kingdom in Walt Disney World, Florida

Main Street, USA has a marked beginning, the Train Station, and a marked end, the Cinderella Castle. The Train Station and the castle act as anchors, pulling Main Street taut and straight between them, grounding her and themselves in the process. At her most elemental scale, Main Street, USA's primary function is to connect, physically and visually, the train station to the castle (the entrance of the park to its heart). In this way, the Main Street sub-plot sets the stage for the larger story of the Magic Kingdom, for "these two landmarks, both symbolically Euro-American in design and form, anchor the viewer in fantasy and folklore on the one hand and history on the other." (Francaviglia *Main Street Revisited* 155)

Town Square separates the Train Station from the southern end of Main Street. A visitor enters the park through entrance tunnels located underneath the Train Station and is introduced to the park by Town Square. "By experiencing Main Street's square first, one steps back in time and in the process is exposed to a visual mythology about the small town" (Francaviglia *Main Street Revisited* 151). The Train Station, City Hall, Firehouse, and Exposition Center define the edges of Town Square. As a visitor enters the Magic Kingdom, she is immediately encompassed by these symbols of "the controlling hand of benevolent authority" (Dunlop 35). She is reminded of the values represented by these buildings, of order and laws, and of the necessity to adhere to them. As Town Square provides the introduction to the Main Street, USA show, it teaches a little moral.

Town Square, like Main Street, is a smaller scale version of its 'real-world' counterpart and reaches just 100 feet in diameter. (See Figure 3.2) Francaviglia estimates that the town squares in most American small towns would be closer to 300



Prototype circle-in-square in eastern Pennsylvania (photo: Francaviglia *Main Street Revisited* 159)

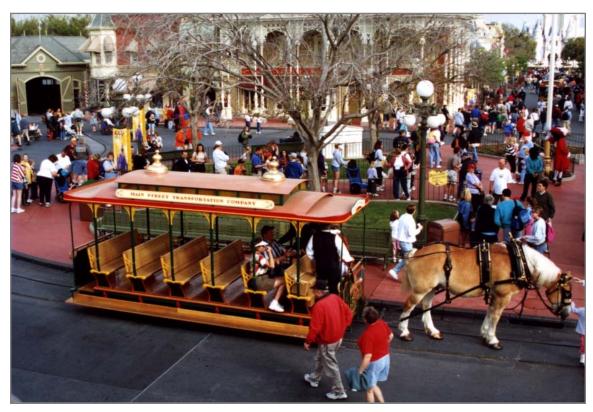


Figure 3.2 Town Square in the Magic Kingdom

feet in diameter (*Main Street Revisited* 157). Disney's version features a triangular island with rounded edges in the center of the square. Francaviglia suggests that the rounded edges of the island "permit the pedestrian and horse-car traffic to move smoothly around it" (158). He proposes the circle-in-the-square plan found in small eastern Pennsylvania towns, such as Gettysburg and Hanover, as the prototype for Disney's Town Square (157, 159).

The Main Street corridor carries the visitor through the plot's rising action. A cross street, Center Street, dissects Main Street roughly at its mid-point. Center Street is short and terminates in building façades in lieu of retail stores or a destination. Its primary role is similar to that of the joke in a drama. Just as the joke releases built-up tension, so Center Street relieves the pedestrian from the continuity of Main Street's building façades. (See Figure 3.3) The towers at each of the four corners of the intersection punctuate the architecture of the two Main Street blocks. The intersection also provides nodes for vendors and musicians (see Figure 3.4) and allows sunlight to penetrate the shadowed side of Main Street. (For more on shadows, see Figure 3.5.) In essence, it relieves what might otherwise become monotony in the Main Street plot.

Center Street is not perpendicular to Main Street, but intersects her at approximately 80°. Francaviglia suggests the town plat of Fort Collins, Colorado as an inspiration for this angled intersection. Because the hometown of Harper Goff, one of the original WED engineers, "was laid out at right angles to the Poudre River in 1867, and the town's later (1880s) addition was laid out at a 45-degree angle to that original plat, the Fort Collins Central Business District possesses a number of angled intersections that provide visual variety. As translated by Goff, these may have inspired the ingeniously

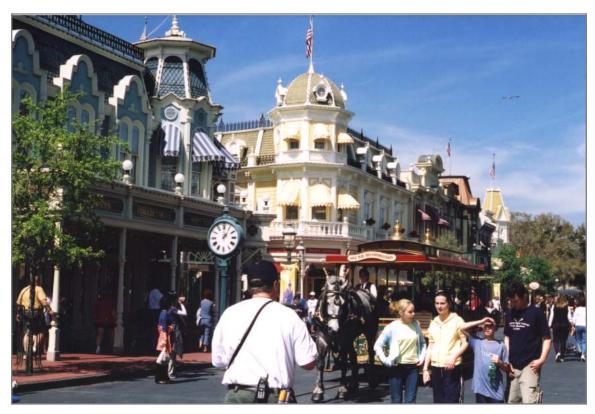


Figure 3.3 Intersection of Center and Main Streets in the Magic Kingdom



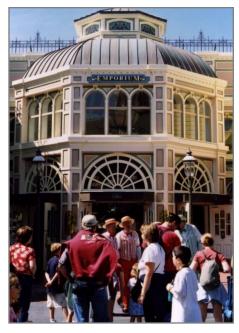


Figure 3.4 Vendors and Musicians at the intersection of Center and Main Streets

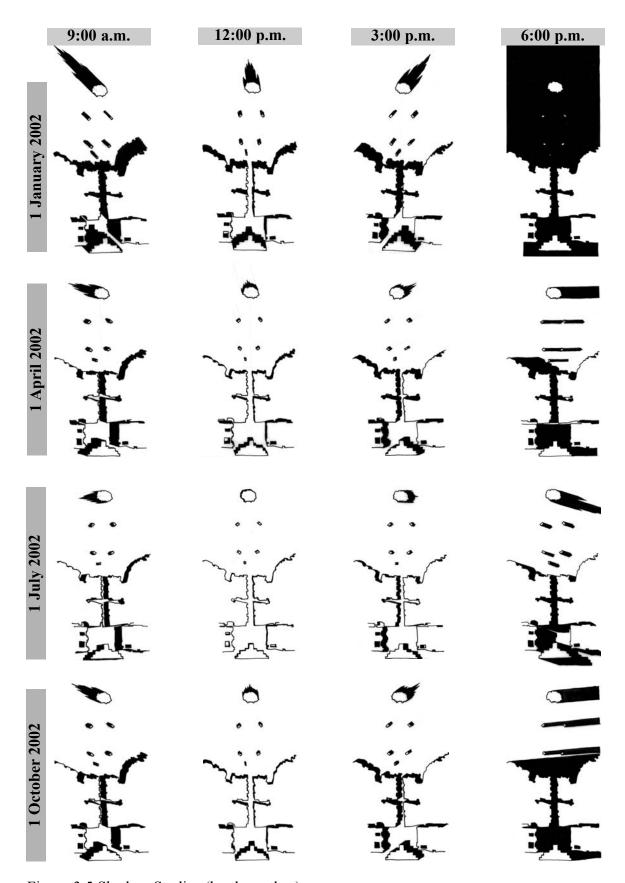


Figure 3.5 Shadow Studies (by the author)

angled intersections that Disney and his designers placed about halfway down Main Street USA" (Francaviglia 150). Whatever the inspiration, the resulting angle provides a break from the near symmetric geometry of the Main Street plan.

The visitor emerges from the confined, urban Main Street corridor into the story's dénouement, the verdant, circular Plaza that lies due south of the Cinderella Castle. The Plaza is surrounded by a moat of water indicating that it, not the castle towards which the visitor has hitherto been walking, is the true hub or life force of the park. Radiating out from the Plaza's center point are five paths, each of which leads to one of the Magic Kingdom's 'lands': Adventureland, Liberty Square (and on to Frontierland), Mickey's Toontown Fair, Tomorrowland, and through the castle to Fantasyland. (See Figure 3.6) Finch compares this layout to "a diagram of Walt Disney's imagination" (63). Beth Dunlop elaborates, "the past – in the form of Frontierland and Adventureland – is to the left; the future, Tomorrowland, is off to the right. Fantasyland is straight ahead" (Dunlop 37). The sequence flows in an order indicative of Western thought. Reading from left to right, an observer travels from the earliest time periods through the world of fantasy or timelessness and on into the reaches of the future. Chapter 1 discussed Main Street as a symbol of childhood innocence; Francaviglia hypothesizes that the Plaza "signif[ies] late adolescence, for here we must make decisions which can take us further backward in time (Frontierland), to distant places (Adventureland), or into the future (Tomorrowland)" (Main Street Revisited 156). The sub-plot of Main Street, USA is predetermined and reaches its dénouement here at the Plaza. The overarching plot of the Magic Kingdom, however, has just begun.



Figure 3.6 The Plaza (photo: Dunlop 47)

### Themed Architecture

As discussed in Chapter 1, Main Street, USA is a stage set that represents a small Midwestern town during the years 1890 – 1910. An impetus for the choice of this specific range of years within the Victorian time period is the excitement of transition. Disney explains: "Here is America from 1890 to 1910, at the crossroads of an era . . . the gas lamp is giving way to the electric lamp, and a newcomer, the sputtering 'horseless carriage' has challenged Old Dobbin for the streetcar right-of-way . . . America was in transition" (qtd in Janzen 24). If Main Street, USA represents the innocence and naiveté of our nation's childhood, the specific time period chosen reminds us that she will soon lose that innocence as she comes of age. It foreshadows its own demise and the excitement of the ensuing choices. It prepares the visitor for the Plaza as described by Francaviglia "signifying late adolescence, for here we must make decisions" (*Main Street Revisited* 156).

The architecture is an adaptation of the time period's Victorian architecture and is therefore themed. (See Figure 3.7) The idea of a theme, of a Theme Park, has drawn much criticism; in fact, it is perhaps what "canonical modernists hated most about Disney's architecture." Dunlop however argues that architecture has always been themed. "Indeed, it might be argued that abstract modern architecture had an engrossing theme itself, that of its own modernity" (Dunlop 7).

The architecture that sets the Main Street, USA stage, certainly, is themed architecture, but so is the Victorian architecture from which it borrows, which is based on Medieval prototypes. Victorian architecture "freely adapts" "stylistic details . . . from both Medieval and classical precedents" (McAlester 239), but it does not replicate the

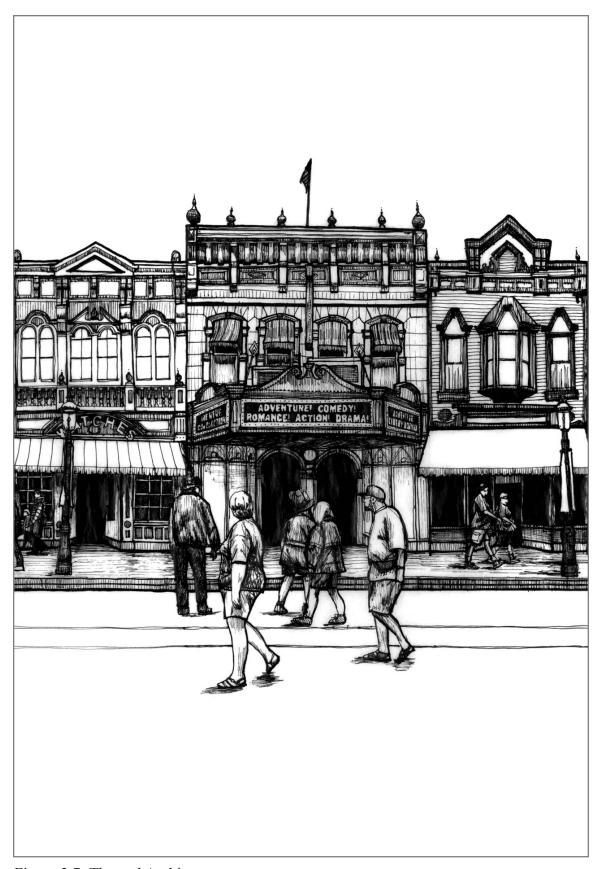
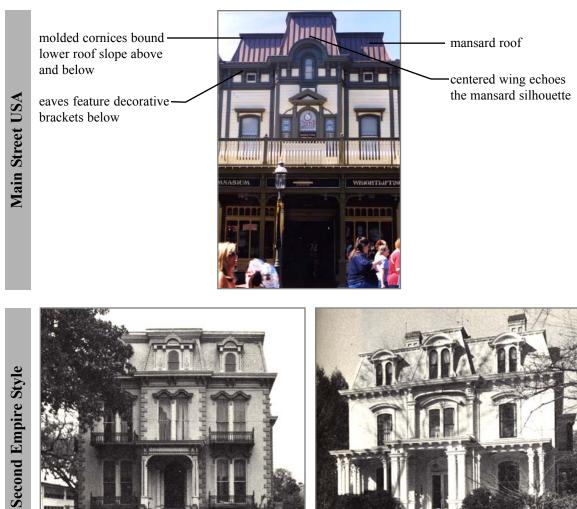


Figure 3.7 Themed Architecture

Medieval buildings and "little attempt is made . . . at historically precise detailing" (McAlester 239). Like the Main Street architecture, Victorian architecture creates a setting, meaning that it manipulates borrowed characteristics of buildings from previous eras to evoke values associated with those eras.

An example of the Victorian themed architecture, the Gymnasium and Weightlifting building on the western side of Main Street, USA, has drawn from both the Second Empire style (McAlester estimates the time range of this style to be 1855 – 1885) and the Stick style (1860 – ca. 1890) of Victorian architecture. From the Second Empire style, the building borrows a mansard roof, a centered wing echoing the mansard silhouette, molded cornices binding the lower roof slope, and eaves with decorative brackets below. (See Figure 3.8) From the Stick style, it borrows horizontal and vertical bands raised from its wall surfaces for emphasis, wall cladding that appears to be wooden boards (actually fiberglass), and brackets which form extensions of the vertical bands. (See Figure 3.9)

Both of these styles, Second Empire and Stick, were in turn borrowing characteristics from distant times and places to evoke a mood. These styles, though they grace the buildings in which the visitor lives out his real life, are simulations of other places and even idealized simulations of symbols, which were condemned by critics quoted in the last chapter. The Second Empire style imitated the latest architectural designs from France, including the distinctive mansard roof revived from the baroque designs of 17<sup>th</sup>-century French architect François Mansart. Through the use of this style, the designer alludes to both the most modern European design trends and to the beautiful,





**Baroque French Architecture** 



Figure 3.8 Victorian Second Empire style prototypes for Main Street, USA architecture

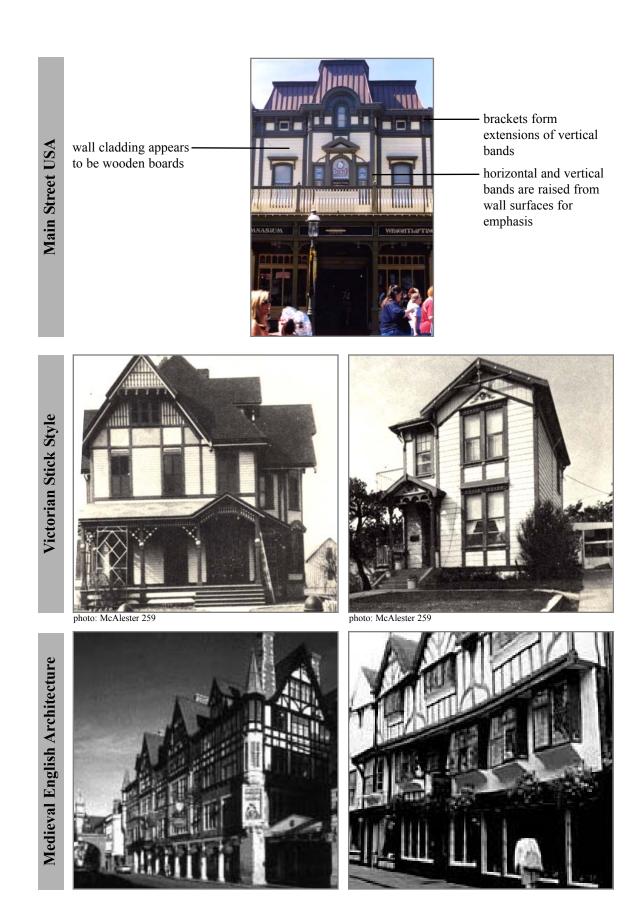


Figure 3.9 Victorian Stick style prototypes for Main Street, USA architecture

grand, severe Baroque chateaux designed by Mansart. The Stick style adapts Medieval English building traditions into modern American forms.

A second example of the themed architecture is the Collectibles and Memorabilia for the Sports Enthusiast building also on the western side of Main Street. (See Figure 3.10) It borrows characteristics from the Spanish Eclectic (approximately 1915 – 1940) style of architecture: a low-pitched gabled roof, second-story balcony, Spanish tile roof, turned spindle porch supports and round arches on the balcony. The Spanish Eclectic style borrowed from the entire history of Spanish architecture, from Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic, and Renaissance inspiration (McAlester 417). This building, like the Gymnasium and Weightlifting building, does not precisely conform to a particular Victorian style, but borrows and stylizes elements from the mentioned styles (and a few others) to create a stage set that evokes the essence of the Victorian time period.

### Reduced Scale

The Main Street architecture uses several additional techniques to alter the themed elements it borrows. However, with each change made to the architecture, the theme, the essence of the time period, remains preserved.

Main Street, USA is smaller in scale than its 'real-world' prototypes; the street itself is approximately 30 feet wide and the total space between the buildings (the street and the sidewalk together) is an average of sixty feet wide. The heights of the buildings flanking the street reflect the street's reduced scale; the three story buildings range from approximately 30 to 35 feet tall. Even the street trees "are trimmed so as not to grow out of scale" (Imagineers 84), and during my winter 2002 visits, were a modest 15 to 20 feet tall. The reduced scale serves a number of purposes: it evokes a space built of our

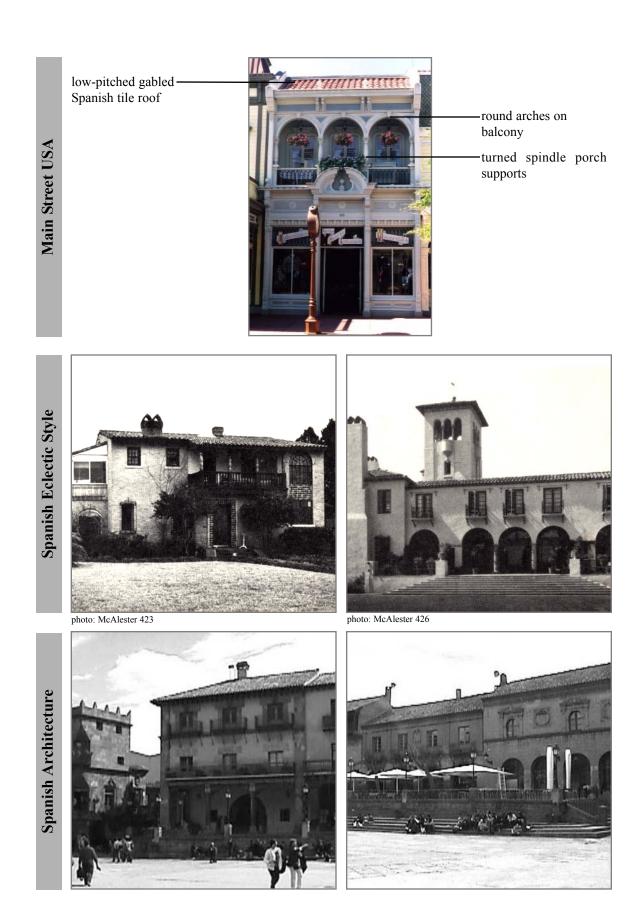


Figure 3.10 Spanish Eclectic style prototype for Main Street, USA architecture

collective memories, grants visitors a sense of control over their environment, and creates a sense of intimacy. (See Figure 3.11 for a comparison of the reduced scale City Hall in Main Street, USA to its full-scale prototype, the Larimer county courthouse, in Fort Collins, Colorado.)

An adult who revisits her childhood home often finds it and its contents to be smaller than she remembers. Main Street, USA, our nation's collective childhood home, exaggerates this effect. The street and buildings are smaller than the full-scale prototypes we find in the world outside, for they are built from memories of the past. A visitor may subconsciously feel that they are built of her own memories, for their reduced scale is that of a newly re-encountered place remembered from her childhood.

Walt Disney remarked on a similar effect, "People like to think their world is somehow more grown up than Papa's was" (qtd. in Finch, *Walt Disney's America* 48). Main Street, USA is Papa's world built by our immediate ancestors. Its reduction in size makes our own world feel larger, more solid, and, perhaps, more important in contrast. As the outside world grows larger and their immediate surroundings smaller, visitors themselves "feel a little larger than life" (Finch 63). The reduced size of the surroundings grants visitors, particularly children, an added portion of control over those surroundings.

Finch mentions the "feeling of intimacy" (63) on Main Street, USA "especially in contrast to the glass-and-steel canyons of modern cities" (63). The reduced street width pulls the buildings closer together allowing the pedestrian to relate to both sides of the street at once. The reduced building height allows the entire building, from the ground level up to the metal cresting on the roofs to carry on a dialogue with the pedestrian.



The Larimer County courthouse in Fort Collins, Colorado (photo: Francaviglia *Main Street Revisited* 149)



Figure 3.11 City Hall in the Magic Kingdom

## Forced Perspective

Main Street may at first glance appear to be a small to-scale replica of its full-scale real-world counterpart. However, the art directors who designed Main Street, USA employed forced perspective, a technique that they learned while designing sets for motion pictures. Bright explains:

"Film designers, long accustomed to dealing with the confined spaces of studio sound stages, were masters at using tricks of scale to make buildings appear much taller or more distant. Through forced perspective, they could create subtly diminishing changes in scale, especially vertical scale, so that a building narrowing toward its top seemed to tower much higher than its true height. It was the only way their sets could accommodate buildings two or three stories tall within a limited space and still leave enough clearance for the sound stage's lighting grids above" (Bright 63).

Forced perspective on Main Street, USA is accomplished through the use of full-scale elements at the base of a building and elements that grow progressively smaller towards the top of the building. Reference materials express differing hypotheses on the proportions of the heights of building floors. Some references suggest a very systematic approach to the reduction of scale. A popular hypothesis is that each floor is seven-eighths scale of the floor below it: a first floor is full scale, a second floor is seven-eighths scale, a third floor is three-quarters scale, etc (www.hiddenmickeys.org). A second hypothesis is proposed by Richard Irvine, a Disney art director involved in the planning of Disneyland. He contends that Main Street was built to a scale that "looked good reduced in proportion. The first floor of its buildings is about 90 percent full-size. The second floor is around 80 percent, and so forth, so that your eye is deceived with the feeling of looking up at an exaggerated vertical space as well as looking at Main Street horizontally" (qtd. in Bright 64). In contrast with these regulated proportions, the

Imagineers simply state that "façades on Main Street are normal size at ground level, smaller at the second level, still smaller above that, and so on" (Imagineers 84). Beth Dunlop expands: "On Main Street, the first stories are full scale but the floors above are much smaller: it is not really the 7/8ths scale or 5/8ths scale that is often attributed to Disney, but a play of dimensions far more capricious and cinematic than that. Everything was scaled so that it 'looked right,' bigger or smaller than it might be" (37).

In examining the proportions of actual buildings on Main Street, USA, Dunlop's hypothesis seems to emerge as the most accurate. (See Figure 3.12 and 3.13) The buildings on Main Street are all approximately the same height, 30 to 35 feet tall (with the exception of the corner buildings at the intersection of Main and Center Streets and at the north and south ends of Main Street), however some have two floors while others have three. Because all of the buildings have first floors of traditional heights (ranging from 11 to 14 feet tall), the three-story buildings rely heavily on forced perspective to maintain the average 30 to 35-foot total building height. The two-story buildings are not so constrained, and their proportions are closer to those of their full-scale counterparts. The proportions of each building are individually manipulated to achieve the desired effect for that building. When an observer views the long shot, the continuity of the building heights is important. At this angle, the exact proportions of each individual building (and any inconsistencies between the buildings' proportions) are lost. When an observer views the close up, she sees only one or two buildings, and, at this angle as well, the inconsistency between the buildings' proportions is lost.



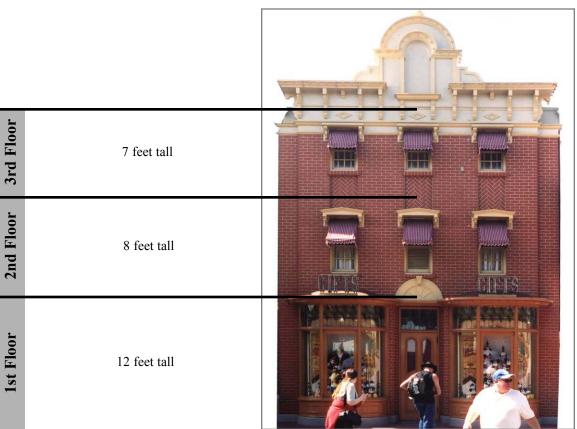


Figure 3.12 Forced perspective





Figure 3.13 Forced perspective

### Color Palette

In order to convey the illusion that each storefront along Main Street is owned and operated by a different business, each building is a slightly different height, a different set of colors, a different combination of styles of architecture than its neighbor. However, because the buildings are not owned by different businesses and the WED staff has control over the design of the entire stage set, the 'different' building façades are visually tied together to create a coherent whole. This chapter has discussed several mediums employed to achieve the coherent look (façades of similar heights and similar architectural styles). An additional medium employed is a carefully orchestrated color palette. Referred to as the 'Disney effect,' the "subtlely integrated variations in color carried from one building to the next . . . creat[e] a deliberately color-coordinated landscape, a chromoscape made possible by Disney's total environmental control" (Francaviglia "Main Street U.S.A" 149). The variations in color are achieved in two ways: a building's primary color is used as an accent color in the adjacent buildings, and cream and white are used as accent colors throughout Main Street.

As the designers pull the primary color of one building into the accent colors of adjacent buildings, they visually knit those buildings together. A similar technique is used in painting when an artist mixes a small portion of its adjacent colors into the paint of each object. This allows the object both to retain its primary color and to relate to the objects surrounding it. The use of this technique is demonstrated in four buildings on the eastern side of Main Street. (See Figure 3.14) The primary color of one façade is a brilliant red. The same red paints the roof of a tower on an adjacent façade, the vertical stripes of the store awning on an additional façade and the signage, window awnings, and

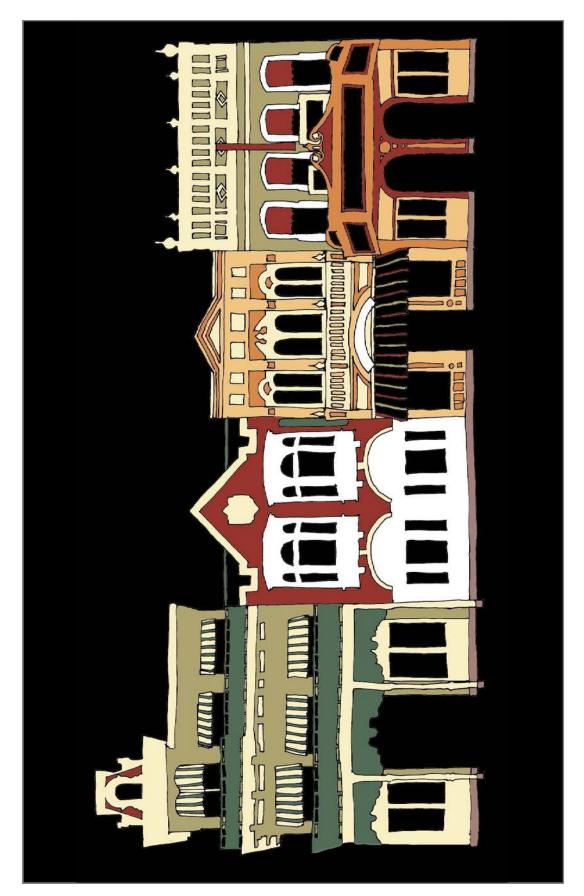


Figure 3.14 Color Palette

marquee of a third façade. The primary pumpkin orange color of the second façade is repeated in the marquee of its southern neighbor. The third and fourth façades share the same moss green primary color that appears in the vertical stripes of an awning on a façade between them. In this manner, each building is tied through color to its immediate neighbors.

The cream and white accents in each of Main Street's buildings act as threads which run through many individual pieces and tie the whole together. In Figure 3.14, each building has cream accents and three of the four buildings have white accents. These accents facilitate a consistent look throughout Main Street.

In addition to unifying Main Street, USA, the color palette also works to establish a mood through its unusual and saturated color. John Hench, an Imagineering artist, explains that the mood created by the colors complements the action on Main Street: "It was an appropriate and stimulating response to the attitude and feeling of the guests. It just seemed to give the place more life" (qtd Imagineers 95). Examples of this saturated, non-traditional use of color include, not only the buildings, but also the bright red sidewalk.

# Visual Magnets

Because the Magic Kingdom is not a book or a movie, but a three-dimensional stage through which visitors may wander, Walt Disney designed guides to move visitors through the intended plot. He reportedly believed that there should be a "wienie at the end of every street" (qtd in Francaviglia *Main Street Revisited* 157). His rather inelegant term "wienie," borrowed from the slang of the silent film business (Disney Institute 112), describes one type of these guides, a visual magnet, that serves a tri-fold purpose: to

attract visitors, to orient visitors, and to terminate vistas. When the visitor is traveling north along Main Street, he feels, not as though he is just ambling along, but as though he is being pulled to a destination, to the Castle. The actual destination to which the visual magnet is guiding the visitor may be not be the magnet itself, but, in the case of the castle, to a plaza just in front of the magnet. The visitor may not know that he is being led to the plaza, but arrives there nonetheless as he follows the pull of the castle.

Once the visitor has arrived at the destination and moved on beyond it, he can refer back to the magnet to orient himself. "Disneyland," said Walt Disney, "is going to be a place where you can't get lost or tired unless you want to" (qtd in Dunlop 29). The visual magnets are pivotal in wayfinding for they are taller than their surroundings, prominently located at the ends of axes, and themed to match their corresponding 'land.' The visitor can visually locate the 250-foot tall Cinderella Castle from most locations in the park and determine his position in relation to the castle. Examples of additional visual magnets include the Train Station and the magnets placed at the ends of the paths radiating from the Plaza: the rocket ship in Tomorrowland, the stern-wheel riverboat in Frontierland, and the gateway bearing spears and human skulls into Adventureland.

The same characteristics of the visual magnet which aid the visitor in wayfinding (taller than its surroundings, prominently located at the ends of axes, and themed to match its corresponding land), also make the magnet an important tool to control and terminate vistas (what the visitor sees and from where he sees it). As the visitor looks down Main Street, he sees only Main Street and the castle; his view of Fantasyland, which lies just north of Main Street, is blocked by the castle. The setting of the Main

Street, USA story is not diluted by glimpses of other times or places, by settings to other stories.

In choosing the most prominent places on the stage for the visual magnets, the WED staff borrowed two techniques from the movies: perspective and lighting. Dunlop describes the influence of the cinema upon the use of perspective in Main Street, USA:

"The view down Main Street frames the castle, making it seem grander and more imposing than it actually is. This was one of Disney's cinematic architectural manipulations: in fact, it is a time-tested mechanism for underscoring the prominence of important buildings. Hench, of course, relates it to the movies: 'In motion pictures you start out with an establishing shot, a long shot, a wow. The long shot should say something to you. Most cities have the long shot'" (Dunlop 37).

The visual magnet is the 'wow.' As the visitor to Main Street, USA enters Town Square, the scene opens with an establishing long shot to the Cinderella Castle. The Castle is centered on the vanishing point of the Main Street building façades; their diminishing heights form two arrows pointing directly to the Castle. At the end of the day, as the visitor faces south from the Plaza to the entrance, he again views a long shot. Facing south however, the Train Station is the 'wow.' (See Figure 3.15)

The second device, perhaps also borrowed from the cinema, is the use of a spotlight. Because the setting is during daytime hours and outdoors, the sun functions as spotlight. Main Street is oriented on a north-south axis; the visitor enters from the south and faces due north to the Cinderella Castle. Throughout the day, for most of the year, the visitor's view of the castle (the south side) is bathed in sunlight. (Refer back to the Figure 3.5) Only during the early morning and late evening of mid-summer will a slim shadow be cast on the face of the castle. At no other orientation would the sunlight be as



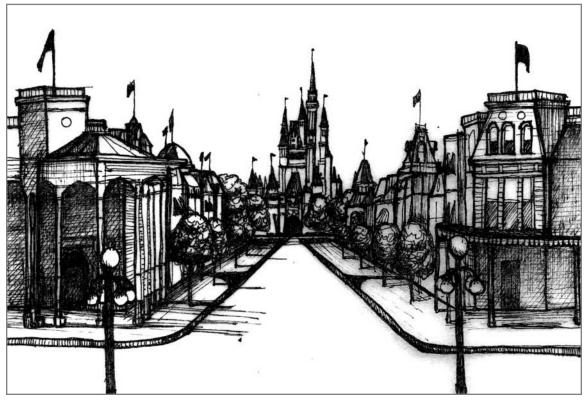


Figure 3.15 Visual magnets

constant a presence. As the visitor walks down the frequently cool, shadowy corridor of Main Street, he is guided to the warm glow of the white sunlit castle in front of him.

Efficient Pedestrian Circulation

Visual magnets are not the only medium used to guide the pedestrian's journey. In fact, according to Francaviglia, "No one can argue with Disney World as a model of efficient pedestrian circulation; the Disney planners win the highest marks in crowd movement control which operates without the sensation of active manipulation ("Main Street U.S.A." 155). Pedestrians have their choice of three different types of spaces through which to move: down the vehicular street, along the sidewalk and transitional space, and through the stores inside the buildings. As discussed in Chapter 2, the vehicular street acts as a funnel, accepting large numbers of visitors and moving them quickly down Main Street to the Plaza. The street's small scale (30 feet wide) appeals to its primary users, the pedestrians. Intermittently, a horse-drawn trolley or an early automobile passes down the street, toots its horn, and parts the sea of pedestrians.

The sidewalks, located on either side of the vehicular street, are twelve feet wide. They directly abut the street allowing pedestrians to flow easily off the street and onto the sidewalk and vice-versa. The only obstruction between the sidewalk and street is a modest curb, and ramps are regularly spaced along the street to diminish even that obstacle. There are however both street trees (oaks) and site furniture (lampposts, trashcans, signage, hitching posts, statues - See Figure 3.16) on the sidewalk at the edge adjacent to the street. They form a sort of screen with enormous holes in it. The screen does not stop people from passing through it; it merely delineates the border between the two zones, sidewalk and street. During the daily parades, it serves an additional purpose:

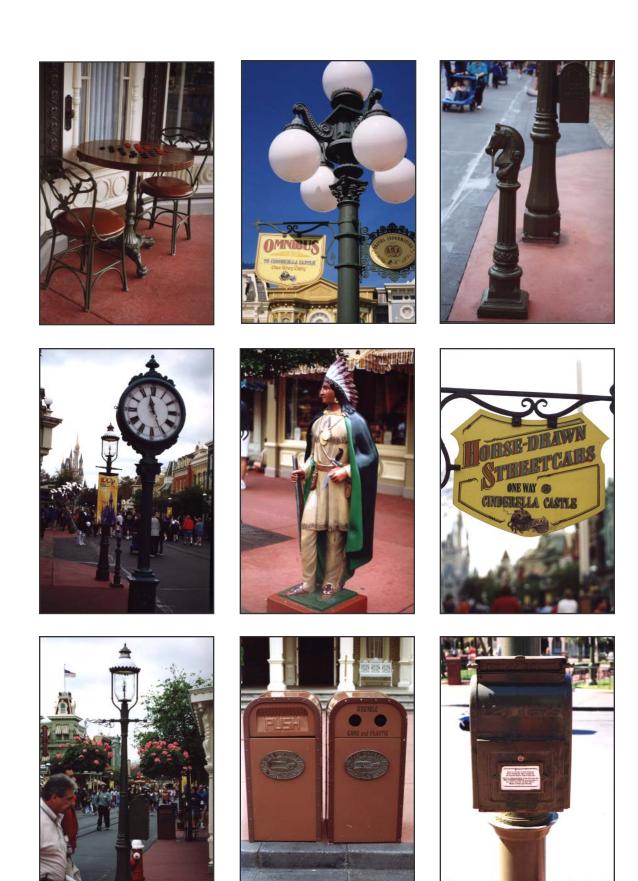


Figure 3.16 Site furniture on sidewalk

the one to three feet of sidewalk between the furniture and the street curb provide seating for parade-watchers that is both out of the vehicular street (the parade route) and out of the sidewalk (now the primary funnel between castle and train station). Of course, the street furniture also serves its primary function (trashcan, streetlight, etc) and contributes to the Victorian theme (turn-of-the-century mail collection box, hitching post, etc).

The transitional space, a concept elaborated upon by author Christopher Alexander, includes both the awnings of the buildings which extend over the sidewalk and the recessed doors of the buildings which draw the sidewalk into the building. As a pedestrian walks along the sidewalk, she travels under the awnings of storefronts. She passes eye-level windows filled with the stores' merchandise. The transition to the recessed door and into the store is seamless. The transitional space blurs the boundary between outdoor and indoor space allowing for smooth passage between the two. (See Figure 3.17)

Once the visitor steps inside what appears to be a row of many individual storefronts, she discovers that each block of façades conceals either one large store or a series of smaller connected stores. On the west side of Main Street, the visitor can meander within a super-store from the Emporium façade at the southern end of Main Street all the way to Casey's Corner at the northern end. (See Figure 3.18) The interconnectedness of the stores eliminates the inconvenience of entering and exiting each individual store and encourages the shopper to pass through stores she would not have entered from the street. She can and does flow smoothly from the vehicular street, over the curb to the sidewalk, under the awning of a store, into a storefront, and then between stores.

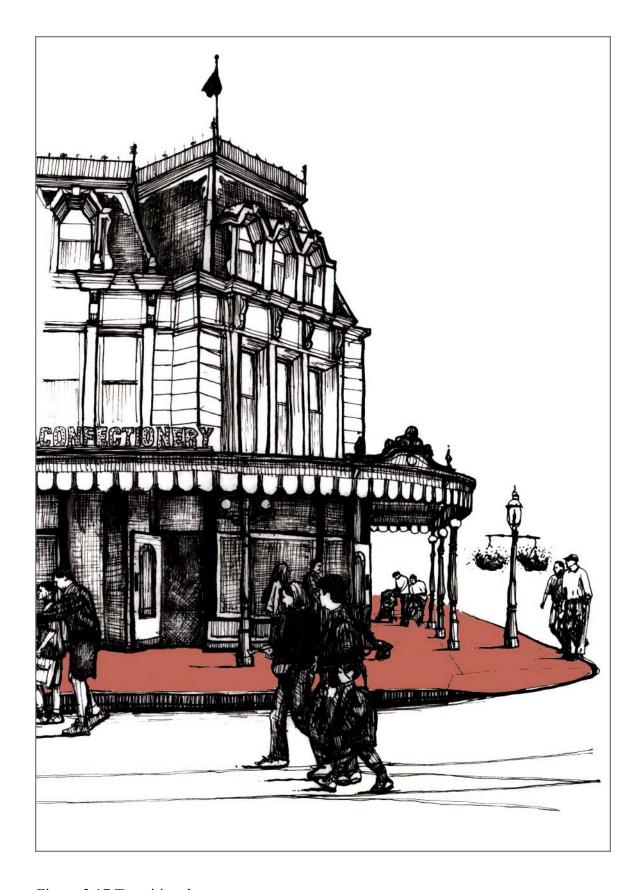


Figure 3.17 Transitional space

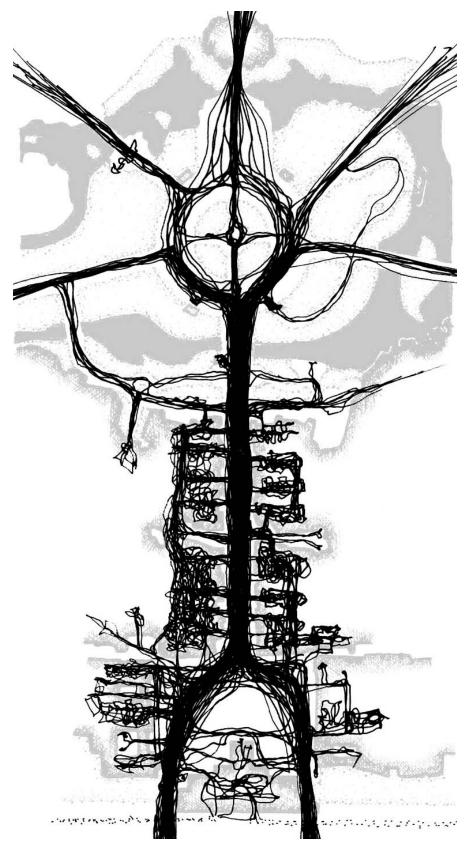


Figure 3.18 Circulation possibilities

# Visual Games Embedded in the Details

"When you walk through a Disney theme park, you experience the movie-making techniques of the long shot and the close-up . . . Stepping near enough to an object or building to see and define its shape, color and *detail*, is the close-up" (Imagineers 158). The close-up fleshes out the details of the story, and, in order for it to be engaging, provides information that is not legible in the long shot. Examples of such details include the popular 'hidden Mickeys.'

A 'hidden Mickey' is an image of Mickey Mouse (most popularly the familiar tricircle silhouette of his head and ears, but not limited to this form) concealed in the details of a Disney building, attraction, street, sidewalk, piece of site furniture, planting, etc.

Although Mickey occurs most frequently, other Disney characters are also hidden in details throughout the park. For example, the floral design at the base of the central flagpole in Town Square is reminiscent of feathers and forms the eyes and beak of Donald Duck. The metal cresting atop the Train Station contains the tri-circle Mickey silhouette. The pattern in the pediment above one of the doors on Main Street is reminiscent of his ears. (See Figure 3.19)

As a visitor's eyes pick these visual surprises out from their surroundings, she experiences a sense of discovery. One visitor described this feeling saying, "I had heard of Hidden Mickeys from a friend who has an annual pass, but this was my first sighting! What a rush!" (www.hiddenmickeys.org). The woman's reaction sounds extreme, but perhaps her 'rush' is not uncommon. She is participating with her environment and uncovering a secret that lies hidden there. The 'hidden Mickeys' owe their popularity to camouflage with their surroundings and to the visitor's ability to 'discover' them.

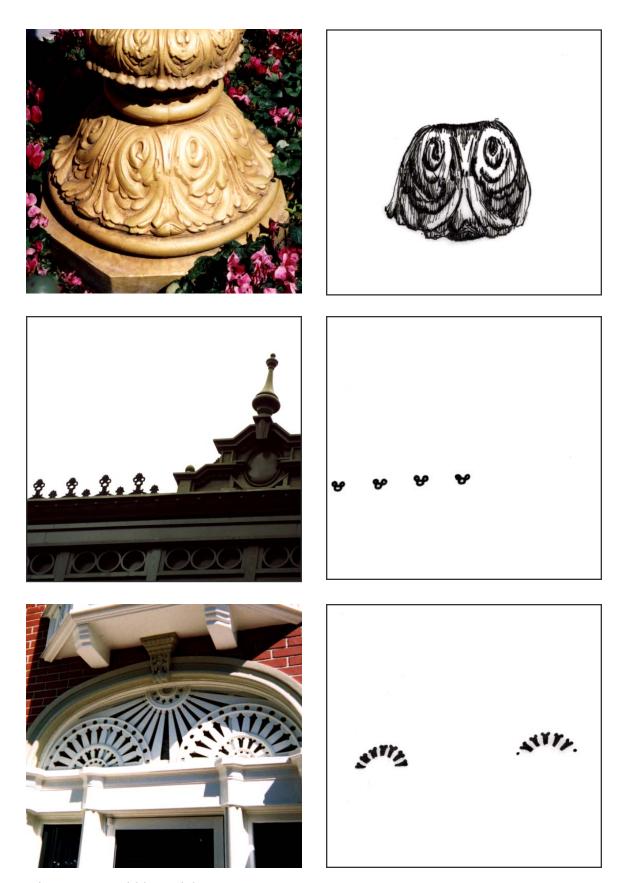


Figure 3.19 "Hidden Mickeys"

A second role of the 'hidden Mickeys' is that of a brand. Taking an example from the past, the crayfish, emblem of the Cardinal Gambara, is incorporated into fountains and onto balustrades at the Villa Lante, in Bagnaia, Italy, to celebrate his ownership and aid in place identification. Mickey Mouse plays the same role on Main Street, USA; his 'hidden' image brands it the property of the Magic Kingdom. It reminds visitors that this is no ordinary small town Main Street, but a part of the Magic Kingdom story.

### Sounds

Because the story of Main Street, USA is played out in a three-dimensional space, visitors experience it with all five of their senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. From the moment that a visitor emerges through the entrance tunnels under the Train Station until she arrives at the Plaza, she is encompassed by auditory stimuli as surely as she is by visual stimuli. Throughout Main Street, a musical sound track is piped through speakers hidden in the Main Street building façades. During my winter 2002 visits, the sound track played songs that were either 'all-American' (ex. "Yankee Doodle Dandee") or specifically mid-Western (ex. songs from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *Oklahoma*) that reinforce the all-American/ mid-Western theme of Main Street, USA. These songs were up-beat, catchy, and consuming. Numerous people danced or marched down the street to the beat of this music.

They also gathered to hear traveling musicians (ex. Dapper Dan Barbershop Quartet and the Main Street Harmonics Brass Band) who perform impromptu shows on Main street throughout the day. The Main Street vehicles add a background staccato of their own to the music: the clop of the horses' shoes, the soft whir of the automobile, and

the rumble and clang of the train. Both the traveling musicians and the vehicular sounds present themselves in opposition to the sounds on today's streets and remind the visitor of the setting's time period (1890-1910).

A couple of quieter sounds balance the symphony. The birds that land throughout Main Street, USA add their songs, most audible at the two ends of Main Street, the Town Square and the Plaza. A pianist plays off the north end of Main Street. At least one 'hidden' sound can also be heard. In one of the windows along Center Street, the words "Voice and Singing" and "Private Lessons" are inscribed. "Music & Dance Lessons" are inscribed on a neighboring window. Both windows are built to look as though they are cracked open, and a speaker is hidden beneath each of them. The speakers play a sound track of the voice and music 'lessons' and the instructor's encouraging voice: "Very good. Veeeery good!" The birds, the pianist, and the 'hidden' sounds are located outside of the primary pedestrian corridor. They are the auditory equivalent of the close-up and flesh out the details of the story.

During its show times, the castle forecourt stage show is the prominent sound on the northern end of Main Street, USA. The speakers in the Plaza and the north end of Main Street broadcast the music and dialogue for this play which is staged in front of the Castle. (During my winter 2002 visits, it showed six times throughout the day and each show lasted for approximately fifteen to twenty minutes.) These shows further augment the role of the Cinderella Castle as a magnet, for, not only can the visitor see the castle in the long shot, but he can hear it as well. (See Figures 3.20 and 3.21)

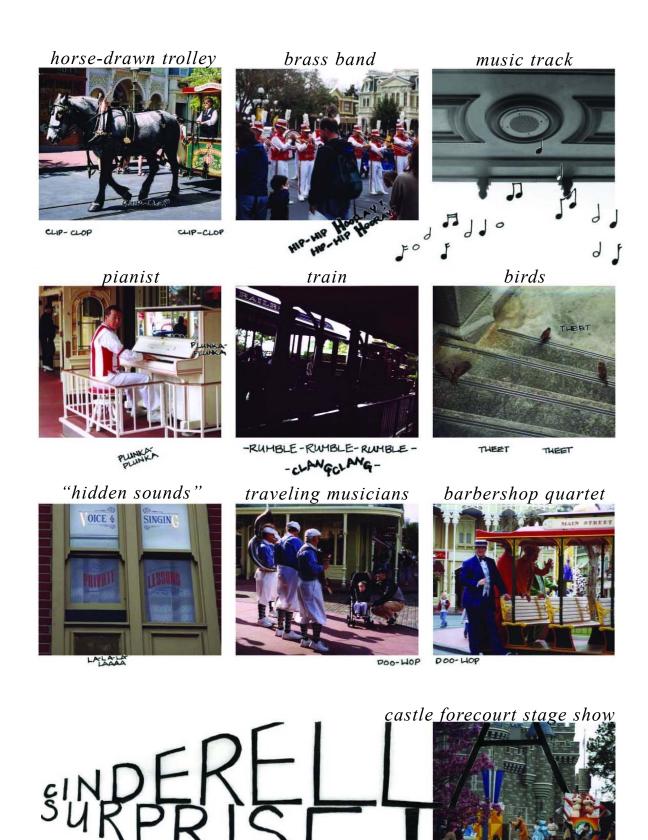


Figure 3.20 Key to map of sounds

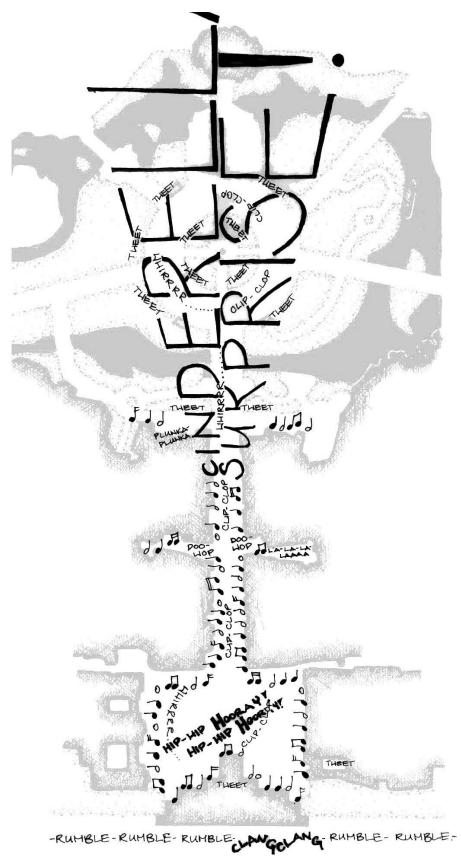


Figure 3.21 Map of sounds (for key see Figure 3.20)

# Smells

A mapping of the smells along Main Street, USA reveals them to be primarily food-related, so one might be tempted to dismiss them as commercially driven.

However, they play an integral role in the Main Street, USA story. The nose communicates the first words of the introduction to the visitor as she emerges out of the entrance tunnels under the Train Station. A popcorn cart is set up at the end of each tunnel, though, as the Disney Institute points out, few visitors will be hungry for popcorn as they arrive at the park in the morning (125). The smell of popcorn reminds the visitor of a movie theatre and foreshadows the show she is about to enter.

As she proceeds down Main Street, the visitor passes the bakery that "purposely pumps the scent of fresh baked goods into the street to support the story of America's small towns" (Disney Institute 125). The smells of ice cream, of hotdogs and French fries are all pervasive through the north end of the Main Street corridor. These scents are a warm, comfortable, solid, insistent presence. They tug at the nose, telling it the plot of the story.

Off the primary pedestrian corridor, a few gentle scents fill the air. Cotton candy's sweet scent is found both along Center Street and off Town Square. The aroma of orange blossoms hangs in the Town Square Exposition Hall gardens and whispers of exotic subtropical places. These two scents fill in the details of the story.

As the story reaches its dénouement in the Plaza, it returns to the scent of popcorn. Two popcorn carts are set at the southern entrance to the Plaza and signal to the visitor that, though the Main Street sub-plot has come to its end, the larger show is just beginning. (See Figures 3.22 and 3.23)

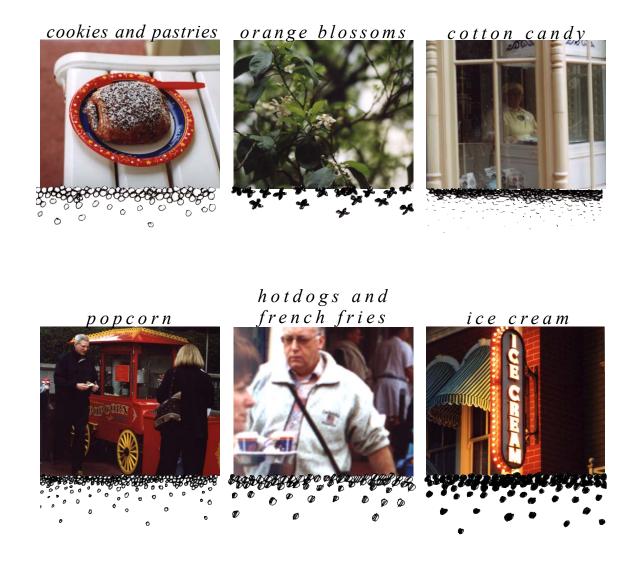


Figure 3.22 Key to map of smells

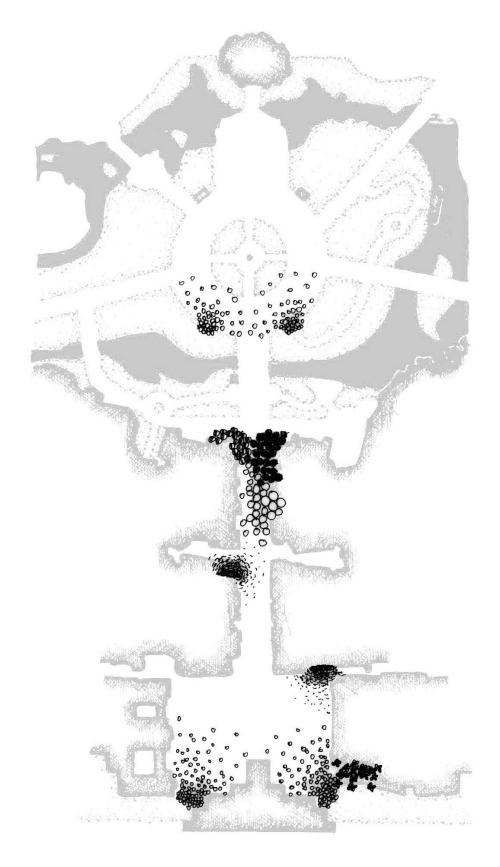


Figure 3.23 Map of smells (for key see Figure 3.22)

# Conclusions

Because Main Street, USA lacks the long-term citizens present on real Main Streets, it also lacks the layers of history and the richness of tradition these citizens would build in the space over time. Instead, its slate is wiped clean each evening in preparation for the next set of visitors to experience the unaltered one-day show. Main Street, USA's anonymity is one of its essential characteristics and ensures that the many people who have never seen it before can quickly relate to it.

Not only does Main Street, USA lack a richness of history and tradition, it may also lack a richness of types of visitors and of economic classes. Though official statistics on the park's guests are not available, it may be hypothesized that lower economic classes are not well represented in the park. This can be attributed primarily to the hefty entrance fee and secondarily to the costs of transportation, of accommodations in the area, and even of food and souvenirs within the park. Though the park is often thought to represent America and has become an American archetype, it is not equally accessible to each American. Additional studies are necessary to determine whether economic classes and even racial and ethnic groups are proportionally represented within the park.

Main Street, USA and real Main Streets do share several common roles: place of informal sociability, place of pageantry and festivals, marketplace, and civic center.

Although these purposes overlap, they are not parallel. While a real public square may tell a story, its primary purpose is usually more practical, the listed roles are a fulfillment of its citizens' everyday lives. In contrast, the primary purpose of Main Street, USA is to

engage the visitor in a show. The secondary roles it plays are merely characters in the show.

An exploration of the physical characteristics of Main Street, USA finds that each piece of Main Street's built environment is carefully crafted to achieve a specific effect upon the visitor's experience. They are programmed to influence her mood, to guide her through the park, to engage or divert her attention, and, most importantly, to set the stage for the show. Each piece of the built environment is designed in conjunction with and to complement the whole. Although some pieces are designed to be viewed in the long shot and others in the close-up and some built to be more prominent than others, they all work together to achieve a common set of visual, auditory, and olfactory purposes.

Neither the physical characteristics described in this chapter, nor the roles played and the readings given to Main Street, USA in the preceding chapters have represented unique discoveries made by the WED staff. Instead, each element is borrowed from a modern or historic precedent and often from a combination of different precedents. Each borrowed element is carefully and specifically pulled from the vast library of precedents to achieve a desired effect.

As visitors leave Main Street, USA, they carry its lessons well outside the bounds of the park and home to their real Main Streets and to their ordinary lives. Further study of Main Street, USA's influence on new town planning, and particularly on New Urbanism, would prove interesting, for it is here, in the transference of ideas from a stage set into the real world, that some danger occurs. Main Street, USA is not meant to support the rich layers of history and people that make our ordinary towns so interesting. If town planners borrow the specific pastiche of elements found on Main Street, USA,

they will also borrow its poverty of architecture and of regional influences. In striving to replicate its anonymous details, a real town will lose the eccentricities and peculiarities specific to their town. The eccentricities, the details relevant to the lives of the people and to the history of the region, and the characteristics that need to be explained to visitors help to bond a people to a space and allow that people to celebrate its town's glorious uniqueness.

Therefore, if a designer wishes to borrow anything from Main Street, USA, it must not be the specific details. Instead, it may be that each individual detail of a design, from the long-shot to the close-up, from the visual aspects to the sounds and smells, from the plan view to the elevation, can work together as a whole to contribute to the design's unique setting and roles. It is this mastery of the environment and the success of the design to affect the visitor's attitudes toward place, not the individual characteristics, that make Main Street, USA an undeniable design force.

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www.hiddenmickeys.org