

Journal of Consumer Culture

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Book Review: The Disneyization of Society

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Journal of Consumer Culture 2005; 5; 266

DOI: 10.1177/146954050500500209

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against spiritualism, unmasking its fakery and thus advancing the cause of secularism.

It was magic performances that led, at the close of the Victorian period, to the emergence of film. By the 1880s John Maskelyne and David Devant were the stars of the magic entertainment business. In 1882 Georges Méliès visited London, where the magicians Maskelyne and Devant were showing 'animated photographs' as part of their entertainments. These inspired Méliès to make further experiments in this line and he briefly became the first successful maker of films, but soon abandoned them since he disapproved of filmic illusions that did not announce themselves as such, whereas film, of course, could fascinatingly blur the boundary between illusion and reality.

Disappointingly During does not explore this, yet he devotes a whole chapter to the question of whether there is a literary equivalent to secular magic as a way of considering the relation of magic to the wider culture. But perhaps a lengthier discussion of film, as well as opening up a hugely extended field, would have rather undermined During's commitment to a view of the 'lightness' of 'secular magic'. Film, after all, can be one of the darkest, as well as one of the lightest of art forms.

Enthralling as During's history is, the book is ultimately disappointing. In siding so partisan a fashion with the 'light' magic of entertainment he disavows the continuing importance in an allegedly secular culture of surviving and often 'dark' forms of belief in the supernatural. In the end, therefore, this assessment of 'secular magic' is Panglossian. Granted that its pleasures are as harmless as During suggests, there is something rather banal about making this the central conclusion of an account so rich in its exploration of many different kinds of belief and unbelief, and many and various aesthetic and literary experiences.

Alan Bryman, *The Disneyization of Society*. London: Sage, 2004. 199 pp. ISBN 0-7619-6765-6, \$34.95

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Alan Bryman is undoubtedly one of the leading experts on the sociocultural aspects and consequences of Disney, or what he calls Disneyization, 'the process by which the principles of the Disney theme parks are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world' (p. 1).

Disneyization comprises four central elements – theming, hybrid consumption, merchandising, and performative labor. Theming is the coherence lent to a location or institution by the overarching application of a focal narrative. Bryman gives numerous examples of how a variety of social locations – museums, amusement parks, hotels, towns, malls – have been themed. He also draws attention to reflexive theming, or the recognition of a brand name as a theme in itself. Bryman points out that although theming has its roots in themed attractions and grand exhibitions such as the world's fairs, it was Disneyland that popularized theming, especially by transforming themed attractions into themed environments and providing a more permanent site. Theming also works through the principles of adjacent attraction and differentiation to allow those who employ it to compete in the entertainment economy.

Hybrid consumption is 'the general trend whereby the forms of consumption associated with different institutional spheres become interlocked with each other and increasingly difficult to distinguish' (p. 57). It serves two general purposes – to create a destination and to entice people to stay longer in a given setting and consequently to increase spending. The ideas of hybrid, or dedifferentiated, consumption were used long before Disney, most notably with the advent of the supermarket and department store, but once again it was Disney that helped to demonstrate the synergistic consumer opportunities available through hybrid consumption. Bryman again cites numerous examples – casinos, cruise ships, sports stadia, zoos – to demonstrate the growing ubiquity of this practice.

Merchandising is 'the promotion of goods in the form of or bearing copyright images and logos, including such products made under licence' (p. 79). It is a form of franchising whereby businesses are able to garner further revenue from images and associations which have already attracted the attention, and likely the money, of the consumer. Bryman points out that synergy is key to merchandising such that promoting one entity is usually helpful in promoting others. For example, the inclusion of toys related to the latest blockbuster movie in a child's fast food meal is likely to increase sales at both the fast food restaurant and the box office. The movie industry, television networks, and sports teams are all particularly successful at taking advantage of this process.

Performative labor refers to the type of emotional management and theatrical performances required of employees, particularly those in the service industry. Such labor can be seen as either a form of surface acting or deep acting but both are meant to help differentiate what are likely

otherwise largely indistinguishable goods in an increasingly service-oriented society. Performative labor also appeals to the principle of consumer sovereignty whereby businesses must guarantee customer satisfaction in order to ensure their repeat business. Bryman takes on Hochschild's well-known work on the damaging effects of performative labor to suggest that what is perhaps more central in the potential harm caused by such performances is the perceived loss of a sense of autonomy by the worker. He also gives a brief introduction to the idea of aesthetic labor, especially the role that physical appearance can play.

Perhaps the most interesting discussion of these principles is through the twin processes that Bryman sees as enabling them – control and surveillance. It is through control over visitors, experiences, and workers that Disneyization is most easily enabled. Similarly, surveillance of visitors, experiences, and workers also assists in the enabling of Disneyization. Resistance is possible, however, and Bryman points up several ways in which both workers and consumers are able to engage in subversive behaviors.

The book concludes with a discussion of the implications of Disneyization. Bryman introduces the idea of a systemscape (created as an extension to Appadurai's [1996] notion of 'scapes') to refer to 'the flow of contexts for the production and display of goods and services' (p. 161). This systemscape is the lens through which he then applies Disneyization on a global scale. The negative effects of this process are also discussed, particularly in terms of sweat shop labor, the destruction of the ecosystem, the decay of inner cities, and the creation of what he terms partial citizens, those with inadequate financial means to engage in the consumer culture requisite of Disneyization.

Although Bryman spends a great deal of the book giving examples – arguably far too many of them – to demonstrate what Disneyization *is*, he devotes a seemingly equal amount of text to clarifying what Disneyization *is not*. In the opening pages of the book he is quick to point out the difference between Disneyization and Disneyification (a process whereby objects are sanitized and trivialized). He also repeatedly makes clear that while Disneyization takes the Disney theme parks as its paradigm, it is by no means solely applicable only to Disney. Finally, and most notably, the book is rife with distinctions made between Disneyization and Ritzer's (2004) idea of McDonaldization. While the two processes can be seen to complement one another (in fact, Bryman even acknowledges the latter as the source of his own definition of the former) they are, in fact, quite separable. McDonaldization is characteristic of a homogenized, Fordist world with fewer choices and greater cultural imposition while Disneyization

describes better an emerging post-Fordist, heterogenous world of increasing variety and consumer choice.

The idea of Disneyization is unquestionably a valuable one, especially for scholars of consumption and social trends. However, I question the applicability of its processes to much beyond the realm of consumption. Thus, while McDonaldization can be applied to a whole range of social institutions and practices – production, sex, religion, the family – I doubt if we are likely to see many of these topics discussed in the context of the principles of Disneyization. In sum, Disneyization would seem to be better seen as a supplement to, rather than an equal partner with, McDonaldization.

References

- Appadurai, Arjun (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ritzer, George (2004) *The McDonaldization of Society*, Revised New Century Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.