

Modern Disney and the Hyperreal

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Abstract

The works of authors in the 70s and 80s such as Umberto Eco and Jean Baudrillard respectively have drawn comparisons to Disneyland using the concept of the hyperreal. Since the publication of these works Disney has created two more theme parks, Epcot Florida and California Adventure California. Both of these parks have the same objective: to physically reproduce the culture and history of real places. *Epcot* recreates countries around the world while *California Adventure* focuses on reproducing California. When examining these various extensions of Disneyland, they seem to represent the differing views on the hyperreal as described by Baudrillard and Eco.

Epcot is almost a direct parallel to the wax museums described by Eco. People go from country to country (within a small park) in no apparent order much in the same way as people go from a wax sculpture of the *Last Supper* to one of *Doctor Zhivago*. *Epcot* lets people experience various countries to such an extent that they even hire people from those countries to increase its realness. They are, in essence, creating an alternate world that becomes as real, if not more so, than the one it replaces. The experience provides the visitors the feeling of actually being Germany or China instead of Florida.

California Adventure takes the theory of the hyperreal to an almost ironic extreme; it recreates/imitates an environment that people could actually travel to barely an hour away. It includes such places as Buena Street and Paradise Pier, the former being a recreation of the street where the Walt Disney Studios are actually located in Burbank and the latter a representation of such iconic piers as the Santa Monica Pier. Both are located a mere two hours driving time from the theme park itself. Instead of visiting the actual places, thousands of tourists travel to *California Adventure* and never experience the world outside the one (re)-created within. This peculiar circumstance applies to Baudrillard's concept/observation who even says that one of the reasons that people go to *Disneyland* is because it seems to be the real Los Angeles while Los Angeles per se and the areas surrounding it are not the reality (or, at least, do not live up to our expectations). This is what *California Adventure* and *Epcot* does: create a new perception of the real California. How these two places compare and contrast in the with respect to the hyperreal will be further evaluated in the course of this article.