From City to Spectacle:
How the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow Became Disney’s Permanent World’s Fair

Michaela E. Novakovic
Haverford College Class of 2017

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Paul Farber
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Abstract

In 1965, Walt Disney, using dummy corporations, bought up vast tracts of land in central Florida upon which he planned to construct the city of the future, which he dubbed EPCOT – Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. However, the Epcot that stands in central Florida today is not a city, but rather, a permanent World’s Fair. The various architects of EPCOT, from the 1960s into the 1980s, imagined the site as a place where social concerns were mediated. However, the form of this space of social mediation changed with historical and social circumstances throughout the mid-to-late 20th century. It is at this intersection of EPCOT and Disney history, spatial analysis, and American history where this thesis ventures to explain how this space of the future was molded to reflect cultural concerns. EPCOT is considered in three iterations: as an intention and an aspiration by Walt Disney, an adaptation and evolution by the Imagineers, and an unveiled space of the future for the public, made possible by both its intention and adaptation. Devoting attention to these iterations unpacks the park’s complexity as a space of the future for Americans. This thesis demonstrates how EPCOT’s vision for the future is inextricably linked to and influenced by circumstances of its present and perceptions of the past.
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