

# Fans as the Researcher's Unwitting Collaborators: A Few Notes on Disney Theme Parks, Fandom, and Data Collection

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the notion of fan labor through Disney park fans' work of "Disney scholarship" and "Disney history," as well as the extent to which such data might be used by academic researchers. While it provides unavoidable entry points to academic investigations of Disney theme parks and their history, this body of knowledge reveals underlying motivations specific to fandom's social and cultural economy. A brief history of Disney park fandom will show how fan-created works of "Disney scholarship" evidence popular expertise in often disregarded areas of culture, as well as processes of fan labor that complicate the traditional amateur/professional binary. For all their claims to professionalism, fans generally regard paid labor with suspicion and trade fan-collected data by rules typical of a gift economy. As self-styled Disney historians morph into Disney custodians, they reveal underlying motivations that help make sense of the data they produce: in their struggle to preserve Walt-era attractions and protect the park from the corporation's commercialism, fans reveal a set of prescriptive attitudes on how to engage with the parks that inform their practices as park chroniclers. This is especially evident in controversies over proposed attraction updates, as fans set out to promote a historically and aesthetically discerning appreciation of Disney products, outside the imperatives of commercial culture.

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The highly participatory nature of the form of entertainment on offer at Disneyland and later Disney parks has made them a consistent topic of interest for researchers and critics. From their very onset, the parks have thus stood out for both their symbolic value and the behaviors that they seem to encourage, allowing them to be variously identified as new public realms or modern-day pilgrimage centers for an increasingly secularized society. Less than ten years after Disneyland opened in 1955, postmodern architect Charles W. Moore thus noted that its carnival-like atmosphere allowed for “play-acting, both to be watched or participated in, in a public sphere.” This, he contended, made the park a modern-day Versailles “keyed to the kind of participation without embarrassment which apparently at this point in our history we crave.”<sup>1</sup> A decade and a half later, anthropologist Alexander Moore found the parks an analogue not of royal palaces but of pilgrimage centers, where “grand play [emerges] to take on much of the organized ritual form of the pilgrimage and to fulfill much of the ritual function.”<sup>2</sup>

It is this article's contention that, owing to their “producerly” qualities, Disney theme parks allow for still other modes of participation, including what might be termed “fan labor” in the area of Disney scholarship and history.<sup>3</sup> Ever since the publication of the fanzine *The E-Ticket's* first issue (1986) and earlier, Disney park fans have collectively amassed a body of knowledge that Disney researchers would be foolish to ignore—especially now that the Disney corporation has closed its archives to outside researchers. But while fan-produced scholarship offers unavoidable (though often neglected) entry points to any academic investigation of Disney theme parks, the purposes that it serves and its underlying motivations are distinct from scholars' and need to be investigated in terms of the symbolic and social currency of fandom.

Fans' work to uncover the parks' history and preserve their legacy is likewise indicative of normative ways to engage with the Disney corporation and its products. As self-styled Disney historians occasionally morph into Disney custodians or preservationists, they reveal underlying motivations that help make sense of the data that they produce: in their efforts to protect the legacy of Walt-era attractions, fans reveal a set of prescriptive attitudes that inform their practices as park historians and chroniclers. Their aspirations to a historical and aesthetic connoisseurship of Disney parks repeatedly sends them on a collision course with the Disney corporation, whose business decisions, fans argue, run against Walt Disney's very legacy.

Special attention will thus be paid to the complex web of relationships between fans and the Disney corporation, and its impact on the reliability of fan-created works. A study of controversies that have shaken Disney fan communities will eventually shed light on how, by allegedly catering to fans, fan-created works of “Disney scholarship” actively shape a specific vision of fandom while promoting prescriptive ways to engage with Disney products.

### Disney Fandom: A Short History

It was in the late 1960s that organized Disney fandom first emerged, coalescing around collectors' growing interest in Disney memorabilia—a trend intensified by Mickey Mouse's fortieth

1. Charles W. Moore, “You Have to Pay for the Public Life,” in *You Have to Pay for the Public Life: Selected Essays of Charles W. Moore*, ed. Kevin Keim (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004), 126.

2. Alexander Moore, “Walt Disney World: Bounded Ritual Space and the Playful Pilgrimage Center,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 53, no. 4 (1980): 207.

3. On “producerly” qualities, see John Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom,” in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (New York: Routledge, 1992), 30–49.

4. Jim Korkis, "Birth of Disney Fandom Part One: The Mouse Club," MousePlanet, March 28, 2012, [https://www.mouseplanet.com/9899/Birth\\_of\\_Disney\\_Fandom\\_Part\\_One\\_The\\_Mouse\\_Club](https://www.mouseplanet.com/9899/Birth_of_Disney_Fandom_Part_One_The_Mouse_Club); and Jim Korkis, "Birth of Disney Fandom Part Two: The NFFC," MousePlanet, April 4, 2012, [https://www.mouseplanet.com/9900/Birth\\_of\\_Disney\\_Fandom\\_Part\\_Two\\_The\\_NFFC](https://www.mouseplanet.com/9900/Birth_of_Disney_Fandom_Part_Two_The_NFFC).

5. Leonard Maltin, *The Disney Films* (New York: Crown, 1973).

6. Michael Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its Golden Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Michael Barrier, *The Animated Man: A Life of Walt Disney* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2008).

7. Jim Fanning, "Disney Historian or Disney 'Distorian'?" in *How to Be a Disney Historian: Tips from the Top Professionals*, by Jim Korkis (n.p.: Theme Park Press, 2016), 118. Unlike Maltin's and Barrier's work, Smith's, Canemaker's, and Thomas's work in Disney history does not stem from "fanzines" but originates in corporate, academic, or journalist endeavors. A former UCLA librarian trained at the Library of Congress, Smith founded the first Disney archives in 1970 to collect artwork and other corporate material for artistic and legal purposes. As per his online biography, Canemaker's BA research project at Marymount Manhattan College led him to explore the newly created Disney archives in 1973 and provided the basis for later publications on Disney animation, starting with *Treasure of Disney Animation* (John Canemaker and

birthday and the character's perceived innocence in such turbulent times. These efforts resulted in the creation of non-Disney affiliated organizations: first The Mouse Club (founded in 1979) and, later, The National Fantasy Fan Club (founded in 1985 and renamed The Disneyana Fan Club in 2009).<sup>4</sup>

Predating the creation of such formal organizations, fans' first efforts at compiling what they would later term "Disney history" may be traced back to Leonard Maltin's and Michael Barrier's almost simultaneous efforts in this area, both of whom used their own fanzines as vehicles for their writings. In February 1967, seventeen-year-old Maltin published a filmography of Disney films in his own *Film Fan Monthly*, which caught the eye of studio executives and later blossomed into a book, *The Disney Films*.<sup>5</sup> While initially focused on comic books, Barrier's articles in *Funnyworld* (published between 1966 and 1983) soon expanded to animation, opening a career that would later see him publish a history of Hollywood animation and a well-received biography of Walt Disney, both published by major university presses.<sup>6</sup> They, along with Disney archive founder Dave Smith, animation history professor John Canemaker, and journalist Bob Thomas, are now commonly identified by later Disney historians as the originators and standard-bearers of "Disney History."<sup>7</sup>

Often claiming the legacy of such illustrious figures within the Disney fan community, a few Disney fans now proclaim their status as Disney historians—a designation that Jim Korkis, another such Disney historian and a prolific writer, claims to have invented. By this, Korkis refers to those who, like him, do "original research, like interview people, locate material,... verify material, and organize that material into a coherent structure" and connect the raw facts "into a story so that people can better understand" them.<sup>8</sup> Korkis has since then bestowed this title on other fans-turned-writers, such as Didier Ghez and Jeff Kurtti—all of whom are featured in his book, *How to Be a Disney Historian: Tips from the Top Professionals*.<sup>9</sup> Through his own example and with almost five decades of experience in the field, Korkis has over time established himself as an inevitable point of entry for any study of Disney fandom and set the standard for fans' efforts in Disney history.<sup>10</sup> His gatekeeping efforts are especially visible in the prescriptive norms of behavior described in *How to Be a Disney Historian*—the first attempt to formalize Disney history as a coherent set of practices. This title, along with a number of posts written by Korkis, will consequently provide the basis for much of my discussion.<sup>11</sup>

While the bulk of Disney history focuses on Walt-era animation, Disney parks emerged as a specific topic of interest in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when a first generation of park fans set out to document Disneyland's history and interview its creators. Their work has since then turned into a cottage industry, complete with specialized publishing houses (such as Bonaventure Press and Theme Park Press) for the self-publication of works created by fans and serviced by Amazon's catch-all selection, e-reader friendly platform, and on-demand printing capabilities.

Fan-created content on Disney theme parks and their history generally fall into three broad categories: fanzines, books, and blogs. Disney park fanzines are now all defunct, and most contributors who are still active have since moved online—though some, like the short-lived *Tales of the Laughing Place* (2004–9), took the reverse route, moving from online to print publishing. Most prominent and fondly remembered by fans are *The E-Ticket* (1986–2009), created by

Robert Abrams, eds., *Treasures of Disney Animation Art* [New York: Abbeville Press, 1982]). Thomas, for his part, published Walt Disney's first authorized biography in 1976 (Bob Thomas, *Walt Disney: An American Original* [New York: Disney Editions, 1994]). This followed an earlier biography, Richard Schickel's much-reviled *The Disney Version* (Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Times, Art and Commerce of Walt Disney* [Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, 1968]), which is considered by the fan community as poorly researched and is therefore included in fan bibliographies only with words of caution—when not excluded entirely. While some of them initially met with a measure of resistance by Disney (now a regular fixture at the studio, Maltin thus explains that his first book was seen as a rival to an in-house publication to be released at the same time), all such "Disney historians" have enjoyed access to the famed and now closed to the public Disney archives—and, in Thomas's case, to Walt Disney himself, whom he interviewed a number of times prior to Walt's death, in 1966.

8. Jim Korkis, "How Jim Korkis Invented the Term Disney Historian," *MousePlanet*, January 18, 2012, [https://www.mouseplanet.com/9854/How\\_Jim\\_Korkis\\_Invented\\_the\\_Term\\_Disney\\_Historian](https://www.mouseplanet.com/9854/How_Jim_Korkis_Invented_the_Term_Disney_Historian).

9. Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian: Tips from the Top Professionals* (n.p.: Theme Park Press, 2016).

10. JeniLynn Knopp, "Interview with Jim Korkis," *The Disney*

brothers Leon and Jack Janzen, and *Persistence of Vision* (1992–98), which was distributed with tapes featuring interviews of major Disney artists by its founder Paul Anderson. Disney park fanzines typically alternated between interviews with Disney park employees (most prominently, Disney Imagineers, as park designers are known internally); backstories and analyses of Disney rides or parks; and, in the case of *The E-Ticket*, fan mail sharing fond recollections of childhood visits.

Fan-created books on Disney theme parks include memoirs and autobiographies of Disney park employees, collections of interviews with Disney artists, and "secret histories" and "behind-the-scenes" narratives—many of which are based on extensive interviews with former Disney employees.<sup>12</sup> Much in the way that memoirs and autobiographies rest on an audience's expectations that those are, to some extent, self-confessional and revealing of untold truths, self-styled "unofficial" histories and "tell-all" books likewise reveal an antagonistic approach to the Disney corporation, which stands implicitly accused of maintaining narratives friendly to its business purposes.

Disney park blogs mostly feature Disney park news, in the form of sneak peeks and previews of upcoming attractions, lands, or parks, as well as reviews thereof. Other content includes interviews with Disney artists and employees, book reviews, vintage ephemera, internal documents (concept artworks, training manuals, etc.), and the spiels (and different versions thereof) of current or long-gone attractions.

Now well into the thousands, Disney park fan websites originated with The Disneyland Information Guide (The DIG)—an amateur forum for the queries of prospective Disneyland visitors. Sometime in the mid-1990s, the forum was taken up by Al Lutz, who had started writing—most often critically—about Disneyland's direction (or lack thereof) on Usenet groups. In 1996, The DIG inspired Deb Will to create an East Coast counterpart, Walt Disney World Information Guide (WDWIG), later renamed AllEars.net. The DIG later morphed into MousePlanet (2000), whose core columnists included Lutz, Kevin Yee, Adrienne Vincent-Phoenix, Shelly Smith (now Valladolid), and Jim Hill. In 2002, some MousePlanet contributors broke away and moved to their own websites: Lutz to MiceAge (now MiceChat), Hill and Valladolid to Jim Hill Media. Developing parallel to The DIG galaxy of offspring, other popular Disney park fan sites include Peter Werner's DisneyInformationStation (formerly WDWINFO) and DISboards forums (1997), as well as Doobie Moseley's LaughingPlace (1999), which developed from its founder's twin ambition to compile a listing of all the windows on Main Street at Disneyland (they all carry the names of famed Disney collaborators) and a directory of all Disney-related websites.<sup>13</sup>

A selection of more historically inclined fan sites (as opposed to the more news-centric sites above) notably include Werner Weiss's Yesterland (1995), which provides photographic records of bygone attractions and lands, in addition to essays on Disney parks history; *Disney History Institute* blog (2009), run by Todd J. Pierce and Paul Anderson (founder of the *Persistence of Vision* fanzine), whose "primary focus [is] Walt himself" and his "creative legacy"; *Stuff From the Park* (matterhorn1959.blogspot.com), a premier source of vintage Disney parks photography and ephemera, as well as internal documents, including training manuals (*Standard Operating Procedures*); and DoomBuggies (1997), which began as "Chef Mayhem's Unofficial Tribute to the Haunted Mansion" and is devoted to the attraction's creation story.<sup>14</sup>

*Driven Life* (blog), December 22, 2010, <https://thedisneydriven-life.com/2010/12/22/inter-view-with-jim-korkis/>.

11. Korkis's central position and extensive, long-cultivated networks with like-minded fans (by contrast with other Disney historians more closely associated with academia) have likewise been especially useful for my analysis of Disney fandom's social and cultural economy.

12. Memoirs and autobiographies of Disney park employees include Van Arsdale France, *Window on Main Street: 35 Years of Creating Happiness at Disneyland Park* (Nashua, NH: Stabur, 1991); Rolly Crump and Jeff Heimbuch, *It's Kind of a Cute Story* (n.p.: Bamboo Forest Publishing, 2012); William "Sully" Sullivan, *From Jungle Cruise Skipper to Disney Legend: 40 Years of Magical Memories at Disney* (n.p.: Theme Park Press, 2015); Nicklaus Hopkins, *Of Mouse and Men: Confessions of a Walt Disney World Character Performer* (n.p.: Theme Park Press, 2017); and R. J. Ogren, Suzanne Ogren, and Bev Bergeron, *Remembering the Magic: More Stories of Our Walt Disney World Careers* (n.p.: Theme Park Press, 2017). Unofficial histories of Disney parks include David Koenig, *Mouse Tales: A Behind-the-Ears Look at Disneyland* (Irvine, CA: Bonaventure Press, 1995); David Koenig, *More Mouse Tales: A Closer Peek Backstage at Disneyland* (Irvine, CA: Bonaventure Press, 2002); David Koenig, *Realityland: True-Life Adventures at Walt Disney World* (Irvine, CA: Bonaventure Press, 2007); Chris Strodder, *The*

Book writers and fanzine and blog contributors often intersect, and many Disney historians have known each other for decades, with the effect that Disney fan works are rife with cross-references, in the form of reviews of books by fellow Disney historians, occasional nods on personal blogs, or material borrowed from each other. More generally, fans now stand at the center of an ecosystem of Disney-related content, some of it fan-collected, some fan-created, and others still fan-oriented—including an expanding collection of books and magazines now officially produced and published by the Disney corporation itself, with the cooperation of self-appointed Disney historians.<sup>15</sup>

## Disney Parks History as "Found Data" and "Fan Labor"

### *Standards of Accuracy*

While invaluable in their erudite knowledge of Disney parks and their history, fan contributions also invite caution. Indeed, some fans now lay claims to intellectual authority and scholarship, while they largely operate outside academic circles.<sup>16</sup>

At stake here is how fan-created or fan-collected data may serve as documentary sources for an analysis of Disney—in other words, how they might qualify as what others have termed "found data" and how the study of their work constitutes an "unobtrusive method" to investigate a notoriously secretive or downright censorious company.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the fan-collected data and fan-directed works of Disney history sometimes percolate over years or decades, opening up entire swaths of behind-the-scenes territory (such as issues of labor organization) that the Disney corporation works hardest to keep out of sight.<sup>18</sup>

An excellent case in point is provided by Patrick Jenkins (who goes online by Matterhorn1959), whose blogs feature dozens of digitized training manuals (or *Standard Operating Procedure* manuals or "SOPs," in Disney parlance) of the 1960s and 1970s, most likely collected at auctions or via eBay. Other examples include a variety of books released by publishing houses primarily or exclusively catering to theme parks fans, such as David Koenig's *Mouse Tales* series or former head of Disneyland's Human Resources Van Arsdale France's autobiography.<sup>19</sup>

As fans so often accuse each other of inaccuracies and low reporting standards (as will be shown shortly), one might want to call into question the validity and veracity of the examples mentioned above. Yet, for lack of better options and direct access behind the scenes, one might find a measure of confidence in the above-mentioned sources' remarkable consistency. Not only does their systematic collation suggest that private practices and public discourses are in this specific case generally aligned, but France's autobiography and the SOPs also likely share the same author, as suggested by the distinctive and peculiar use of suspension points that otherwise pepper his writings.<sup>20</sup> Additionally, all three fan-collected or fan-directed sources can be triangulated with and corroborated through external sources and third parties outside the community of fans, such as sociologist John van Maanen's two studies of Disney parks or even Disney's own self-help book on management methods—whose observations and terminology closely match documents unearthed by fans.<sup>21</sup> Much in the same way, Koenig's accounts of various events are generally consistent with their presentation in the press—as illustrated by Koenig's reports of labor struggles at Disneyland attraction Jungle Cruise and reports in the

*Disneyland Encyclopedia: The Unofficial, Unauthorized, and Unprecedented History of Every Land, Attraction, Restaurant, Shop, and Event in the Original Magic Kingdom* (Santa Monica, CA: Santa Monica Press, 2008); Jim Korkis, *The Vault of Walt* (n.p.: Ayefour Publishing, 2010); and Jeff Baham, *The Unauthorized Story of Walt Disney's Haunted Mansion*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: Theme Park Press, 2016). For anthologies of interviews with Disney artists, see Didier Ghez's seminal edited collection, *Walt's People: Talking Disney with the Artists Who Knew Him*, now clocking at twenty-one volumes (Didier Ghez, *Walt's People: Talking Disney with the Artists Who Knew Him*, 12 vols. [n.p.: Xlibris, 2005–12]; and Didier Ghez, *Walt's People: Talking Disney with the Artists Who Knew Him*, 9 vols. [n.p.: Theme Park Press, 2012–18]).

13. Much of this short history of Disney park fan sites is drawn from Jim Korkis, "The History of Documenting Disney History," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 22–24.

14. Paul Anderson, "Welcome to the Disney History Institute," *Disney History Institute* (blog), October 5, 2009, <http://www.disneyhistoryinstitute.com/2009/10/welcome-to-disney-legacy-institute.html>; and Chef Mayhem, "About (The DoomBuggies Story)," DoomBuggies, n.d., <http://www.doombuggies.com/about1.php> (accessed February 15, 2019). Other resources in the area of Disney history and Disney parks scholarship include: Didier Ghez, "Disney History," *Disney History* (blog), [local press.<sup>22</sup> His interviews with employees likewise prove generally consistent with the work experience described online in anonymous forums for park workers.<sup>23</sup>](http://disneybooks.</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

Fan-collected data and fan-produced history are also certified through a relatively structured network of peer validation within the Disney fan community. Such efforts at cross-validation take on various forms, from reviews of fellow fans' works (often, though not always, in favorable terms), to one's willingness to share data or collaborate with colleagues of good standing and reputation in the community. Added to those informal methods of validation is the considerable prestige bestowed by the recognition of the Disney corporation itself (whose official publications often rely on contributions especially commissioned from Disney historians) or of the Disney family-owned, independently run Disney Family Museum.<sup>24</sup> The latter not only lists some Disney historians as collaborators but also provides its tacit endorsement of *The E-Ticket*, whose assets it bought in 2010 and which it now sells at its gift shop.<sup>25</sup>

When used with a measure of caution, primary and secondary data collected by fans can therefore be found to satisfy criteria for authenticity and representativeness. This suggests that, in the absence of direct access to primary sources (for instance, located in the Disney archives), fan-collected or fan-directed (or, for that matter, Disney-sanctioned) publications may be dealt with as "good enough" entry points.

### *Fan Expertise and Distinction Strategies*

Issues of fannish expertise and recognition reveal distinction strategies, as those with access to publication and a measure of prestige often prove keen to dismiss some others as quacks, "fanboi experts," or "Distorians"—in other words, "charlatans ... who dishonor the intent of [the] original designation" of Disney historian.<sup>26</sup> Judging from the outpour of criticism that they face, their most common crimes include plagiarism and failure to give due credit to other fans' earlier efforts; inaccuracies and sloppiness (the usual result of copy-paste-happy bloggers none too concerned with fact-checking or looking up original sources); lack of originality, likewise the result of overreliance on data available online; and, lastly, an uncritical and indiscriminating love of all things Disney.<sup>27</sup> As Korkis remarks, a "Disney fan's love of Disney is different than a historian's love of Disney."<sup>28</sup>

Such accolades and dismissals of who is truly worthy of the Disney historian label provide evidence that "fans themselves are frequently involved in the hierarchical evaluation of fannish textual productivity via feedback, recommendations, beta reading and mentoring, as well as through fine-grained fan distinctions whereby reputation/status accrues to certain fan creators but not others."<sup>29</sup> More generally, those modes of authentication and distinction give credence to the notion that some fandom testifies indeed to a form of "popular 'expertise' that mirrors in interesting ways the knowledge-production that occupies academia. Within the realm of popular culture, fans are the true experts; they constitute a competing educational elite, albeit one without official recognition or social power."<sup>30</sup>

We may therefore accept the conclusions of participatory culture expert Henry Jenkins that there is such a thing as fan expertise, meaning that while not all fannish productions are created equal, some can indeed be used with a certain degree of confidence by researchers. Unsurprisingly,

[blogspot.com/](http://blogspot.com/); *Passport to Dreams Old & New* (blog), <http://passport2dreams.blogspot.com/>; ImagiNERDing, <http://www.imaginerding.com/>; *Imagineering Disney* (blog), <http://www.imagineeringdisney.com/>; and DIX - A Disney Resource Index, <http://www.dix-project.net/> (a website maintained by Disney fan Harald Nast to "build an index of [online] resources" with over three thousand entries, including such rare documents as Chouinard art instructor Don Graham's 1932–40 lectures at the Walt Disney Studios).

15. Starting with a slew of Disney-sanctioned books on Disney animation and Disney parks art—including such early works as Robert D. Feild, *The Art of Walt Disney* (New York: Macmillan, 1942); and Anonymous, *Disneyland, the First Quarter Century* (Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Productions, 1979)—the Disney corporation's efforts to cater to fans have culminated with the founding of D23 in 2009, the company's first attempt to provide an official avenue for Disney fandom, complete with glossy magazines as well as exclusive events and conventions, most notably the biennial D23 Expo.

16. See for instance, Jeff Kurti's self-explanatory title to his chapter: "Disney Scholarship," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 141–48. Though fans occasionally show disdain for academia, along with sporadic streaks of anti-intellectualism, some figures do bridge the gap between the two communities. This is especially true of Barrier and Canemaker, whose work is now

issues of fan expertise and their modes of certification also betray social and symbolic concerns, to the effect that the study of Disney park fandom and fans' textual production yields not one but two strands of data: one that relates to the Disney parks and another that relates to their fans and the "communicative events" surrounding their exchanges.<sup>31</sup>

Despite their claims to "professionalism" (as evidenced in the subtitle to Korkis's book *How to Be a Disney Historian: Tips from the Top Professionals*), Disney historians remain first and foremost fans. Disney fans' claims to real "scholarship"—albeit deprived of academia's perceived snobbishness and anti-Disney bias—thus help replicate structures of domination otherwise typical of fandom. More highly educated fans often appear keen to differentiate themselves from fandom's "cultural proletariat" and "use [legitimate culture's] official criteria on its unofficial texts."<sup>32</sup> More critically, and for all their railings against "fanbois" and assorted "Disney geeks," Disney historians fulfill two other conditions that identify them as fans. As many insist, Disney fans' work in the area of Disney history does not qualify as a "job" or "professional endeavor" but should rather be considered part of one's "personality," with Disney historians something like "ministers of faith."<sup>33</sup> This, in turn, makes pay largely irrelevant—to the point that one's willingness to sacrifice time and money to accumulate data (ephemera, factoids, etc.) is usually a point of great personal pride.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Disney historians deal with areas of culture generally scorned by "legitimate culture" or, to reprise expressions introduced by media scholar John Fiske, work at "a form of moonlighting to fill in the gaps left by legitimate culture workers"—"a work whose dividends lie" not in monetary rewards but "in the appreciation of one's peers in a community of tastes."<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Disney fans' pretensions to professionalism serve more as a reference to a code of ethics than to a specific employment status.

The amateur/professional dichotomy is likewise further complicated by the changing recognition and employment history of Disney historians. As a result of tangled relationships with the Disney company itself, Disney historians' aspirations to independence and impartiality are sometimes belied by their necessary cooperation with the corporation and some of its employees. The Disney company thus sometimes provides exclusive content to Disney historians and their blogs (such as sneak peek previews of upcoming parks and attractions), which drives traffic up. Just as importantly, some fans are now professionals in the field, some as freelancers or "Disney geeks for hire," whose expertise and clout among "rank-and-file" fans have allowed them to contribute articles for official Disney publications or even one-off projects, such as books.<sup>36</sup> Others still are or were at some point full-time workers at the company, working as Disney archivists or "Second-Generation Disney Imagineers"; often growing up in the direct vicinity of Disneyland and starting as fans, Imagineers like Chris Merritt eventually found employment at the Disney company (sometimes starting as rank-and-file cast members) and, from this position, set out to document the work of their elders.<sup>37</sup> To this extent, fannish productions in Disney park history are representative of the false "amateur/professional binary" sometimes identified as central to fandom.<sup>38</sup>

### *Disney History as Fan Labor*

Raising the issue of Disney fans' employability inevitably entails recognizing fannish productions as works of labor (and not just "unproductive" leisure), whose worth (monetary and otherwise) expands well beyond the cultural capital of Fiske's cultural economy of fandom. As new media



discussions of working conditions by employees are likewise closely monitored, arousing fears among staff that even private forums are now unsafe places for employees to vent freely. As an employee once remarked on one such forum: "Bottom line is if they can identify you from your post(s), they can take steps that you will no longer have to worry about what you say on line. The Company wants to micromanage the content available on line, especially from its own cast" (mapo, "The Beginning of the End? Or the End of the Beginning?" *Stupid Guest Tricks* (forum), September 13, 2013, <http://stupidguesttricks.com/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=8675&p=344487&highlight=snoop#p344487>).

19. Koenig, *Mouse Tales*; Koenig, *More Mouse Tales*; France, *Window on Main Street*; and Van Arsdale France, *Window on Main Street: 35 Years of Creating Happiness at Disneyland Park*, rev. ed. (n.p.: Theme Park Press, 2015).

20. In the publisher's note to the new edition, France is quoted explaining: "My understanding of punctuation is limited...and I've never really known when a paragraph is supposed to be a paragraph. As a result...I used these little 'lead dots'...when I don't know where to use a comma. And...Paul Brewer, Head of Disney's Creative Services, would say, 'Here comes old "Lead Dot"' (France, *Window on Main Street*, rev. ed., x).

21. John Van Maanen and Gideon Kunda, "Real Feelings: Emotional Expressions and Organization Culture," *Research in Organizational Behavior* 11 (1989): 43–102;

that helps no one, you need to be selective in how you share it and who you share it with. Also, remember that once your information is out there, anyone can use it and use it without crediting you as the source."<sup>45</sup>

Who deserves access to prized information, and on what conditions? One's willingness to share treasured or exclusive data is a direct measure of the quality of other Disney historians' work and serves as yet another example of the peer-validation process typical of Disney scholarship. By contrast, efforts to keep control of exclusive information or claim responsibility for its discovery might be understood as a process of "capital accumulation"—with knowledge on Disney usually the capital most readily at hand.<sup>46</sup> This helps explain Disney historians' occasional habits of putting a price on information requested by people outside the gift circle to make fan labor more readily understood as "work" (and hard work, for that matter), as well as restore a sense of reciprocation between insiders and outsiders. Rather than as "payments," those claims may thus be more accurately understood as symbolic of the time and labor spent on collecting costly information.<sup>47</sup>

### Fans as Custodians: The "It's a Small World" Controversy

As they set out to protect the legacy of Walt-era Disney products and attractions, fans reveal a set of prescriptive attitudes on how to engage with Disney products that inform their practices as historians and chroniclers. This is especially evident in Disney historians' ambiguous relationship toward the Disney company, as well as efforts to promote a historical and aesthetic appreciation of the parks that stands firmly outside the imperatives of the corporation's commercial culture.

#### "Bad" versus "Good" Disney

Much in the same way that they draw a sharp difference between the "Disney brand" and the "Disney company," or between the Disney company under Walt Disney's leadership and its modern counterpart, fans often end up presenting themselves as the adjudicators of "good" or "bad" Disney.<sup>48</sup> Fancying themselves (sometimes with good reason) a thorn in the corporation's side, fans occasionally appear engaged in a losing battle for Disney's soul. Determined to save Disney from itself, Disney park fans stand very much in the same position as *Doctor Who* fans, whom Jenkins, quoting cultural studies expert John Tulloch, describes as:

a "powerless elite" who claim a privileged relationship to the series by virtues of their mastery over its materials and yet who have little or no influence on "the conditions of production and reception of their show." What they do possess is "the power to gloss and to write the aesthetic history of the show," the power to analyze its contents and evaluate its episodes. The *Doctor Who* fans Tulloch studies exert this power to criticize production decisions running counter to their own interests in the program and to police violations of a series continuity.<sup>49</sup>

As their designation as Disney historians might suggest, much of the fans' scholarly production focuses on Walt-era developments, with particular emphasis on Walt Disney's biography and lifework, as well as on Walt-era collaborators. Judging from the output of such publishers as Theme Park Press, the Disney corporation's recent history seems somewhat less interesting or valuable—especially under the leadership of CEO Michael Eisner, whose perceived commercialism some fans find particularly loathsome. As a result, Walt and his continuators

John Van Maanen, "The Smile Factory: Working at Disneyland," in *Reframing Organizational Culture*, ed. Peter J. Frost, Larry F. Moore, Meryl Reis Louis, Craig Lundberg, and Joanne Martin (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1991), 58–77; John Van Maanen, "Displacing Disney: Some Notes on the Flow of Culture," *Qualitative Sociology* 15, no. 1 (1992): 5–35; and Ted Kinni, *Be Our Guest: Perfecting the Art of Customer Service* (New York: Disney Editions, 2003).

22. Associated Press, "Jungle Cruise Wiseacres in Trouble at Disneyland," *Daily News*, October 12, 1997; Shelby Grad, "Disney Tells Jungle Cruise Jokers to Take a Ride," *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1997; and Marla Joe Fisher, "It's a Small Mutiny Rising at Disneyland," *Orange County Register*, October 11, 1997.

23. Stupid Guest Tricks, "Welcome to StupidGuestTricks.com," *Stupid Guest Tricks* (forum), February 11, 2003, <http://stupidguesttricks.com/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=70>.

24. Kurtti stated that "certain individuals have become acknowledged experts in particular areas of Disney scholarship, and that specialization tends to be respected and used as a resource by others across this academic field. But there is not real 'officialization' or 'certification' of Disney historians, except the trust of The Walt Disney Company or the Disney family" (Kurtti, "Disney Scholarship," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 147). Regarding the reuse of fan-collected factoids or interviews in official Disney

(such as the animators known as the "Nine Old Men" or Disneyland's original Imagineers) are consistently hailed as standard-bearers of quality, though less reverent critics like Barrier have pointed out the declining quality of the studio's output even during Walt's lifetime, when the latter started losing interest in the film business.<sup>50</sup> Fans thus draw a sharp difference between the Disney brand (which they profess to love) and the Disney business (especially the modern media powerhouse, which they usually do not hold in high regard), suggesting that the films and products that they hold dear are somewhat independent from the corporation that produces them.<sup>51</sup> Fans' resistance to the Disney corporation is part of their social personas, and some fan sites like MousePlanet (which started out as the highly critical The DIG) or the blog *Re-Imagineering* have repeatedly stood against allegedly ill-advised changes brought to the parks by the corporation's new management. *Re-Imagineering* thus presents itself as "a forum for Disney and Pixar professionals to catalog past imagineering missteps and debate solutions in hope that a new wave of creative management can restore some of the magic that has been missing from the parks for decades."<sup>52</sup> Some Disney park books likewise tout their "unofficial" or "unapproved" status as badges of honor and have taken broad swipes at changes introduced from the 1980s on.<sup>53</sup>

As a result, many Disney historians define their relationship toward the corporation as "adversarial," sometimes mutually so. War stories of seasoned Disney fans are almost proof of one's alleged self-importance (meaning that Disney has taken notice of their vocal criticism), and Disney fans often meet with the resistance and censorship of the Disney corporation. Disney thus routinely stands accused of restricting access to its private archives to exert control of its "approved narrative," as well as retaliating against Disney fans or writers whose reporting it perceives as unfriendly.<sup>54</sup> Even the designation as Disney historian is cause for friction within the Walt Disney Company, whose representatives sometimes object to the very validity of this concept.<sup>55</sup>

### *From Scholarship to Stewardship*

Indeed, fans' efforts to document the parks and keep a record of their history frequently run against the corporation's efforts to present the parks at their all-time best and prevent any unfavorable comparison with the past: "One of the rules of the Disney Business is that whatever is newest is the best thing Disney has ever done, and all those older things can't even compare... Now is the best time of your Disney life, they claim. You cannot have people thinking that something better was removed by Disney often for financial reasons."<sup>56</sup> Contrary to a company viewed as dismissive or uncaring of its legacy, Disney park fans and Disney historians typically display a conservationist streak. Likely the result of their historical proximity with the community of Disneyana collectors, Disney historians have since set out to keep whole fragments of Disney history from slipping into oblivion, as entire collections (including items formerly in the hands of the Disney archives) are now auctioned off to the highest bidder.<sup>57</sup> Fans' anti-dispersal efforts thus rest at least in part on making once-privately held documents widely available and on allowing them to find their way into the public record—books, blog posts, or fan-site entries.

Fans' antagonistic attitudes toward the Disney corporation were made especially clear in 2008 when the corporation proposed changes to its much-beloved Disneyland attraction "It's a Small World," first developed for the UNICEF pavilion (sponsored by Pepsi-Cola) at the 1964 New York

publications, see Jason Surrell's occasional references to *The E-Ticket* magazine (Jason Surrell, *Pirates of the Caribbean: From the Magic Kingdom to the Movies* [New York: Disney Editions, 2006], 18, 32).

25. The Walt Disney Family Museum, "The E-Ticket Magazine," The Walt Disney Family Museum, July 27, 2010, <https://www.waltdisney.org/blog/e-ticket-magazine>.

26. Kurtti, "Disney Scholarship," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 142; Fanning, "Disney Historian or Disney 'Distorian'?" 119; and Korkis, "History of Documenting Disney History," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 13.

27. On plagiarism, see: Jim Korkis, "Thou Shalt Not Steal: Plagiarism and You," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 57–60; on standards of accuracy, see: Jim Korkis, introduction to section 1, "The Basics," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 1; David Lesjak, "Untitled," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 156; and Fanning, "Disney Historian or Disney 'Distorian'?" in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 117; on lack of originality, see: Kurtti, "Disney Scholarship," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 141.

28. Jim Korkis, "Disney Brand v. Disney Business," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 61–62.

29. Matt Hills, "Fiske's 'Textual Productivity' and Digital Fandom: Web 2.0 Democratization versus Fan Distinction?" *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 10, no. 1 (2013): 139. For such instances of collabo-

World Fair. Conflict erupted when plans were leaked that, much in keeping with earlier changes to previously character-free attractions (such as Swiss Family Tree House and Submarine Voyage rebranded as Tarzan's Tree House and Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage), Disney's classic attraction was to be updated with the introduction of Disney characters—a move widely perceived as compromising the attraction's "artistic integrity" while trivializing its message of world peace. The attraction's dolls, who represent the children of the world singing in unison, risked not just being upstaged by their higher-profile Disney counterparts but also being marginalized, critics claimed, as a "Spirit of America" tableau was also considered to replace a rainforest scene.

"It's a Small World" probably remains the attraction most easily associated with the style of a singular Disney artist, Mary Blair, whose status as an artist has systemically been pitted against the company's perceived "crass commercialism." Largely confined to the preproduction of animated films, Blair's work as a color designer allowed for far more liberty than otherwise displayed in finished Disney films—a position that allowed her to develop a whimsical, markedly individual style but also made her relatively unknown beyond the circle of Disney fans.<sup>58</sup> As one fan puts it, the proposed changes came to be regarded as "the straw that broke the camel's back."<sup>59</sup> In addition to going "too far in their 'character invasion' of the parks," Disney management had dealt one final blow to Blair's legacy, following the previous destruction of her two tile murals in Tomorrowland.<sup>60</sup>

Fans thus turned their efforts on presenting the attraction as a work of art to be preserved to prevent Disney management from moving forward with its update plans. In the process, fans demonstrated what Fiske has termed "fan productivity," that is to say, efforts by fans to influence the actual product and "participate in the construction of the original text."<sup>61</sup> Yet, in a departure from Fiske (who suggests that "fan productivity" largely rests on the industrial, collaborative nature of popular culture's commodities and resulting "contradictions, inadequacies and superficialities"), it was precisely fans' appeals to the attraction's status as a "uniquely crafted art-object" that were mobilized to influence the corporation.<sup>62</sup>

In identifying a singular author with an attraction whose artistic integrity was now compromised and in contrasting Walt's original vision with the perceived greed of the modern corporation, fans engaged in historiographical disputes over the meaning of Walt Disney's legacy, in effect accusing the corporation of "revising its history into an approved narrative" and promoting only "a version of history that will help it to earn greater profits."<sup>63</sup> By tinkering with the attraction in yet another attempt to increase its cross-promotion efforts, Disney management came to be suspected of erasing (or at the very least tampering with) the memory of one of Walt's final achievements—something that Korkis finds characteristic of the Disney business. "The Disney Business counts on Disney fans having short memories and whose attention can be diverted to a new shiny object.... The memory of Walt Disney is often considered an impediment to operating the business for the greatest profit."<sup>64</sup>

To reprise fan comments posted online, the controversy was soon set in the following terms: "The question of the 'it's a small world' additions is really twofold: is this in the spirit of what Walt wanted for the park and does it add rather than detract from the theme, style, and experience of the ride."<sup>65</sup> Especially at stake was whether the addition of Disney characters and a tribute to

ration, see Barrier's willingness to share data with fellow Disney scholar Canemaker, as explained in his mixed review of Canemaker's *Nine Old Men*: "Not only is Canemaker a good researcher, but he writes about his subjects with real enthusiasm for their work and real affection for most of them as people. Because of my respect for his methods and his results, I made available to him, for his new book, interviews I conducted with Milt Kahl, Les Clark, and Eric Larson (his Larson chapter in particular draws heavily on my 1976 interview)" (Michael Barrier, "The Emperors' Clothes," *MichaelBarrier.com* (blog), May 2003, [http://www.michaelbarrier.com/Commentary/Williams\\_and\\_Canemaker/Williams\\_Canemaker.htm](http://www.michaelbarrier.com/Commentary/Williams_and_Canemaker/Williams_Canemaker.htm)).

30. Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans & Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 86.

31. Lee, *Unobtrusive Methods in Social Research*, 132.

32. Fiske, "Cultural Economy of Fandom," 36. This might explain Korkis's insistence on his academic credentials and command of academic standards, as he suggests that he strives for a happy balance between "two extremes": "those Disney historians who are completely committed to the standards of academia" and "those who are much more casual in their approach to writing about Disney history." As he explains: "Some of you might be aware that there is an accepted way in the world of academia to present material so that it is considered legitimate and professional.

the United States distracts visitors' attention away from the children of the world, "trivializes the central theme... and emphasizes global brand marketing and franchising above all else"; in "yet another prelude to selling more plush," Disney parks have "now devolved into an elaborate hyper commercial window display, all charm and sincerity leached from its bones."<sup>66</sup>

The controversy originated in two Disney park fan sites and soon spread to many others, with MiceAge's Lutz first breaking the news, casually noting: "It should be interesting to see how Disneyland's PR department spins that one, especially when the Disney purists catch wind of it."<sup>67</sup> Subsequent efforts to organize and oppose the proposed changes were in large part coordinated from *Re-Imagineering*, a blog maintained by Ken Bruce, "a former employee of Pixar Animation Studios" and, with at least eleven entries on the topic, the foremost avenue for fan resistance.<sup>68</sup> In language typical of the debate, the first entry on the topic by Bruce (alias Mr. Banks) thus reads:

"It's a Small World" is a work of art. Those fortunate enough to be the caretakers of a masterpiece are more than welcome to try on a new frame once in a while, to carefully restore its surface, switch out the lighting or even move the piece to another room.

But even the most fool-hardy owner knows not to paint over the original canvas.

Disneyland is your land. Don't let this happen.<sup>69</sup>

Setting the tone for much of the controversy, those arguments were reprised in later posts contributed by members of the Imagineers and Disney artists community, including an open letter (also sent to the *Los Angeles Times*) by Blair's son, a former Imagineer himself. He notably writes that "the desecration of Mary's art is an insult to Mary Blair, her art, and her memory," while others describe the attraction as "a genuine piece of American art, created by a great American artist" and call the changes "akin to defacing any well-known work of art hanging in any museum around the world."<sup>70</sup>

Not content with reaching out to the community of current or former Disney employees, mobilization efforts even extended to casual fans, with the Los Angeles press an additional outlet to alert the public, and even campaigns to coordinate the action of rank-and-file Disneyland fans.<sup>71</sup> MiceAge's columnist Andy Castro set up a (now defunct) Save the Small World website specifically dedicated to this purpose, urging aggrieved fans to write, call, or email the corporation and "let your voice be heard, and tell Disney to Save the Rainforest and Save the Small World."<sup>72</sup>

In the face of the public outcry, the Disney corporation chose to address the controversy and get on with a counteroffensive, with then-president of Walt Disney Imagineering Marty Sklar leading the charge—an initiative that an unimpressed fan describes as "as much desperation as it was spin."<sup>73</sup> Contradicting arguments that tied the attraction almost exclusively to Blair's creative genius and allowed it to be held in the same regard as a traditional art-object, Sklar wrote on LaughingPlace:

We all agree that "It's A Small World" is a Disney classic. But the greatest "change agent" who ever walked down Main Street at Disneyland was Walt himself.... Mary Blair's illustrations were, of course, the spark. But this was one of those great Disney "team efforts," and many Disney legends joined her: Marc Davis, Blaine Gibson, Rolly Crump, Harriet Burns and numerous others. And, of course, Bob and Dick Sherman added that song we can't

My master's thesis on William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that was praised unanimously by my review board of professors is not written in as interesting a style as my columns for *MousePlanet*" (Korkis, "How Jim Korkis Invented the Term Disney Historian").

33. Kurtti, "Disney Scholarship," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 141, 147.

34. Korkis states: "A Disney historian is a career and a passion. It is not a job. A job has regular working hours, reasonable financial compensation for doing the work, and sometimes other perks like health benefits or the use of a company car. No one has ever made a living just as a Disney historian. In general, they have some other source of income like an actual job or a working spouse or a pension in order to pay the bills and cover the bare necessities. Doing interviews, obtaining research material, contacting people, and related tasks all take time and money that never even come close to being repaid when the research is finally published" (Korkis, "Basics," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 3).

35. Fiske, "Cultural Economy of Fandom," 32, 34. Fiske's analysis builds on Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital and distinction theories. Bourdieu posits the existence of three distinct yet closely interrelated forms of capital, which are economic, social, and cultural. In his study of the economic and social determinants of taste, Bourdieu especially contends that apparently individual preferences serve "distinction" strategies and

get out of our heads....

We are not turning this classic attraction into a marketing pitch for Disney plush toys (rumors to the contrary)... We are not "young marketing whizzes" trying to make a name for ourselves. We were fortunate to have trained, and worked with, all of Walt's original Imagineers.<sup>74</sup>

Fan-led preservationist efforts did not go without alienating other fans, revealing antagonisms even within the Disney park fan community and setting off historiographical debates over the true meaning of Walt's legacy. Especially of concern to fans was Walt's original vision for his parks and, crucially, whether management's additions to "It's a Small World" honored or betrayed it. Preservationists were quick to side with the latter opinion, for example saying: "There is no more small world, just a faceless soulless corporation out to get every last buck from their 'guests' with no care for its legacy"; or "We don't see craftsmanship, we see crass commercialism, a directly antithetical concept to the ones laid out by Disney's founders, a philosophy that Disney already proved didn't work in the long run."<sup>75</sup>

In the face of such criticism, Disney loyalists came to adopt the corporation's "Walt-as-change-agent" and "attractions-as-team-efforts" lines of defense. Taking note of Walt's "plussing" efforts at Jungle Cruise, Nature's Wonderland, or Tomorrowland 1967, one commentator thus remarked that "Marty Sklar is carrying on the tradition that Walt started himself—constantly looking for new ways to make rides more appealing to the senses, fun and relevant to the times."<sup>76</sup> Other loyalists likewise took offense at perceived attempts to "trot [Blair] out like a sacred cow" and give her "sole credit" for the attraction, when many other Imagineers deserve equal recognition for their creative input.<sup>77</sup> In a nod to her costume designs for the attraction's dolls, Jim Hill thus notes: "If Alice Davis is okay with the changes..., then I'm okay with them too."<sup>78</sup>

More significantly, some comments reveal deeper lines of division within Disney park fandom, with opposing modes of appreciation of the parks. Preservationists' critical attitude is conflated with "hating" from "pseudo-fans," and their stance denounced as a deliberately antagonistic "marketing ploy" to drive traffic up or improve one's public profile—all of which makes for self-interested "shoddy reporting" and "irresponsible journalism."<sup>79</sup> "Armchair Disney enthusiast" Lutz, who first broke the story, is repeatedly singled out for his sensationalistic stories and his "history of not getting his facts straight [and saying] things that are flat-out untrue."<sup>80</sup>

Just as worryingly, it seems to loyalists that, in their somewhat artificial distinction between the Disney brand and the Disney business, preservationists are only too willing to dismiss the business underpinnings of many of the products that they profess to love, in complete ignorance of the normal workings of a private media corporation. Noting that "Disney is a company and other than the stock-holders doesn't need to explain themselves to anyone," some fans take a markedly pragmatic view of the company's business decisions, concluding that "character-based rides are generating revenue that the company can then turn around and pump back into the park in order to give DCA [Disney's California Adventure] a \$1 billion overhaul or re-do the subs [at Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage], or whatever."<sup>81</sup> What's more, "Walt knew his way around the marketing machine as well" and was not averse to using attractions as promotional vehicles, as notably illustrated by Crane's or Frito-Lay's sponsorships of Tomorrowland's Bathroom of Tomorrow or Frontierland's Casa de Fritos ("complete with a gigantic Frito-Lay vending machine").<sup>82</sup>

signify social status. Peer groups are thus structured along shared judgments of taste on as well as modes of appreciation of specific cultural products. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); and Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241–58.

36. Fanning, "Disney Historian or Disney 'Distorian'?" in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 118. Fans whose works are now published or sanctioned by Disney (in the form of Disney published books or articles in official Disney periodicals like *D23* or *Disney Insider*) include Jim Korkis, Greg Ehrbar, and Didier Ghez. See Didier Ghez and Pete Docter, *They Drew as They Pleased: The Hidden Art of Disney's Golden Age* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2015); Didier Ghez and John Musker, *They Drew as They Pleased: The Hidden Art of Disney's Musical Years* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2016); Didier Ghez and Andreas Deja, *They Drew as They Pleased: The Hidden Art of Disney's Late Golden Age* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2017); and Jim Fanning, *The Disney Book* (New York: DK, 2015) (Fanning also regularly contributes to *D23*).

37. Merritt's employment history is, to that extent, remarkable: starting as a cast member in 1990, he went on to serve as show designer from 1996 to 1999, and, later, from 2006 to 2008. Since 2013, he has been senior

Contrasting with preservationists' selective appreciation, loyalists show themselves unwilling to separate the company's products from its business strategy. Their embrace of parks and attractions as products of business rationalism thus serves to dismiss their rivals' "artification" efforts, and much of their emphasis on the attraction's status as a commodity helps downplay its alleged artistic merits. In a somewhat surprising reinstatement of cultural hierarchies, loyalists even seem to suggest that true appreciation of the parks rests on the recognition of their intrinsically commercial and popular nature. Stating that "this is Disneyland, not the Shakespeare or The Louvre," they insist that the "ride is not a piece of 'art'" and has never had any "real historical or artistic significance."<sup>83</sup>

Yet even preservationists are keenly aware of the limitations of their fight and deem their protest mostly symbolic. By speaking the language of the dispossessed and disrespected, they make the controversy an effort to take a stand, make oneself heard, and ultimately reclaim ownership and authority over the park. As Save the Small World's Castro notes in a post signed under his online moniker of MasterGracey (after a character from Disneyland's Haunted Mansion):

Honestly, this effort in general will likely be a waste of time. But that's not the point. Much like with the general elections in the US, we've become passive, uninterested, and detached from it due to the politics of the situation. If nothing else, we should voice our opinions for something we all take so much interest in - Disneyland. If those opinions are ignored, at least they were heard.<sup>84</sup>

Castro's prediction proved right, and his and fellow preservationists' wishes were ignored. "It's a Small World" reopened in late 2008 with twenty-nine Disney characters (all rendered in Blair's style) added to existing, location-appropriate scenes—save for *Toy Story*'s Woody and Jessie, featured in the new "Spirit of America" tableau. (Such changes were pioneered at Hong Kong Disneyland, whose version of the ride opened in 2008, and have since 2018 been brought to Tokyo Disneyland.)

## Conclusion

Fans' historiographical disputes over the attraction's authorship and reception and over Walt's original vision for the parks and his legacy place the "It's a Small World" controversy firmly within the realm of Disney history—albeit a popular one, contributed by both major outlets and established figures in the community, as well as rank-and-file devotees. In their efforts to preserve the attraction and provide an interpretive framework for the parks' historical and aesthetic significance, Disney historians seem to confirm Jenkins's conclusions that "we need to reconsider the importance of 'trivia' as unauthorized and unpoliced knowledge existing outside academic institutions but a source of popular expertise for the fans and a basis for critical reworkings of textual materials."<sup>85</sup>

While fan controversies have long been recognized as a defining feature of fandom (to the point that such heated debates have been termed "fantagonisms"<sup>86</sup>), resistance to preservationists' efforts show that theirs is a far from universally accepted vision of fandom and reveal two conflicting modes of engagement with the parks. Disney historians and preservationists work to present parks as legitimate "art" or "culture," whose historical or aesthetic appreciation transcends their status of commodities and even occasionally runs counter to the Disney

production designer. Other Disney historians once on Disney's permanent payroll include Korkis (who started as a street performer at Walt Disney World in 1995 and later moved on to backstage positions at the Disney Institute, Disney Adult Discoveries, the College and International Programs, and Epcot's Disney Learning Center); Kurtti (senior marketing representative, 1991–95, and creative director at the Walt Disney Family Museum, 2005–15); Greg Ehrbar (copywriter for the Walt Disney Company for over thirty years); and Paula Sigman Lowery (who spent twenty years working for the Walt Disney Company, including fifteen years at the Disney Archives).

company's business interests. This position never fails to infuriate loyalists, who, in their full embrace of the parks' industrial nature, view efforts to separate the corporation from its finished products as artificial at best, and utterly misguided at worst.

To this extent, fan labor in the area of Disney history comes across as another arena for fan participation in the parks, on at least two levels. Disney historians' work to chronicle the parks' history and legacy represents an effort of "textual production" to assign the park with additional meaning and depth. Additionally, by bridging the gap between Disney scholarship and Disney stewardship, Disney historians and their preservationist allies actively shape and promote a favored mode of engagement with Disney products—one deemed aesthetically and historically discerning.

## NOTES, CONTINUED

38. Hills, "Fiske's 'Textual Productivity' and Digital Fandom," 130.

39. Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis, "Editorial," in "Fandom and/as Labor," ed. Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures* 15 (2014), <https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/593/421>.

40. Tisha Turk, "Fan Work: Labor, Worth, and Participation in Fandom's Gift Economy," in "Fandom and/as Labor," ed. Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures* 15 (2014), <https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/518/428>.

41. Without entirely ruling out the possibility that authors might make a profit from their book, Theme Park Press makes it clear on their website that this should not be an author's primary motivation for submitting a project: "How much money will I make? Maybe enough to wash your car; maybe enough to buy a new car. Who can say?" ("Write for Us," Theme Park Press, n.d., <http://theparkpress.com/write-for-us.htm> [accessed February 15, 2019]).

42. Turk, "Fan Work." Turk is quoting Karen Hellekson, "A Fannish Field of Value: Online Fan Gift Culture" *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 4 (2009): 115.

43. Hellekson, "Fannish Field of Value," 114.

44. Paul Anderson, "What Ever [Sic] Happened to Persistence of Vision? Post #19," *DISboards* (forum), June 24, 2002, <https://www.disboards.com/threads/what-ever-happened-to-persistence-of-vision.219937/>.

45. Jim Korkis, "Sharing and When Not to Share," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 51.

46. , "Cultural Economy of Fandom," 42.

47. See, for instance, the following anecdote, which Korkis shares online: "A few months ago, I was contacted by an author working on an official Disney cookbook. The author contacted me because the publisher wanted to include some 'historical' recipes and Walt food anecdotes and several sources recommended me. I had a pleasant talk on the phone and talked about some of the information in my research files which sparked an excited interest. I then asked how much I would be compensated and the conversation turned cold. I was told that it was felt I would just give the information in exchange for a small credit in the acknowledgments. I pointed out that Disney Historians often spend decades and quite a bit of their own money obtaining this material that doesn't exist anywhere else.... This is not a unique situation and quite often I have been asked to hand over material simply because I have it and someone else

- wants it and wants to profit from it" (Jim Korkis, "Friday-Guest Historian Day 'Macaroni Mickey Mouse,'" *Disney History Institute* [blog], November 14, 2009, <http://www.disneyhistoryinstitute.com/2009/11/friday-guest-historian-day-macaroni.html>).
48. Korkis, "Disney Brand v. Disney Business," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*.
49. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 87.
50. In contrast to Canemaker, whom he deems representative of "High Church branch of the Disney faith," Barrier writes: "I'm deeply skeptical of the whole 'nine old men' mythology. When Disney animation was at its most vital, the idea of freezing it in a mold determined by nine animators, however good they were, would have seemed ridiculous; and it was. The exaltation of the nine, beginning in the '50s, signified the beginning of a steep decline that culminated in the dead-end Disney features of the '70s, *Robin Hood* and *The Aristocrats* and, to be sure, *The Rescuers*" (Michael Barrier, "Remembering Ollie," *MichaelBarrier.com* (blog), April 22, 2008, <http://www.michaelbarrier.com/WhatsNewArchives/2008/WhatsNewArchivesApril08.htm#rememberingollie>).
51. Korkis, "Disney Brand v. Disney Business," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*.
52. *Re-imagining* (blog), <http://imagineerebirth.blogspot.com/> (accessed February 15, 2019).
53. In a scathing criticism of Paul Pressler, a former Disney store head turned chairman of Disneyland Parks and Resorts, Koenig, writes: "Unfortunately, while Disney management clings to the image of 'The Happiest Place on Earth' to sell tickets, they no longer strive for perfection. Why go to the trouble and expense of providing a *premium* product if people will pay for adequate?... Remember that Disneyland is a show not a shop, one that should be run by a showman not a shopkeeper" (Koenig, *More Mouse Tales*, 13, 216). In thinly veiled terms, and in an autobiography published by Disney Editions, even former president of Walt Disney Imagineering Marty Sklar later joined in such criticisms, denouncing Pressler's corner-cutting on maintenance as short-sighted and detrimental to the Disney brand (Marty Sklar, *Dream It! Do It! My Half-Century Creating Disney's Magic Kingdoms* [New York: Disney Editions, 2013], 305–8).
54. Barrier thus notes: "Writing about 'Disney history' in today's environment is a difficult and sometimes impossible job because the Walt Disney Company's posture toward independent writers—writers who are not being paid by Disney, and whose work is not under the company's control—is essentially adversarial. That has always and inevitably been the case to some extent, but it was much less so back in the nineties, when I shared space in the Walt Disney Archives with writers who were, like me, there at the company's sufferance but not expected to submit to its censorship" (Michael Barrier, "A Couple of Overdue Reviews," *MichaelBarrier.com* (blog), August 13, 2016, <http://www.michaelbarrier.com/WhatsNewArchives/2016/WhatsNewArchivesAugust16.html#overduereviews>). Korkis likewise writes: "Like any company, the Disney Business wants to control its story and, if it can, control how you write the story" (Korkis, "Disney Brand v. Disney Business," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 67). More recently, journalists from the *LA Times* have been blacklisted from advance screenings of Disney films as a result of the newspaper's critical look at Disneyland's political influence over Anaheim's city council (Callum Borchers, "Bob Iger's Blacklisting of the Los Angeles Times Is a Bad Look and a Bad Omen," *Washington Post*, November 4, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/11/04/bob-igers-blacklisting-of-the-los-angeles-times-is-a-bad-look-and-a-bad-omen/>).
55. "The Disney Company does not have a job for Disney historian, though it has a great need for one. While working at Walt Disney World, the manager of Disney University officially decreed in memos, conversations, and presentations that there was no such thing as a Disney historian" (Jim Korkis, "What Is a Disney Historian?" in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 6).
56. , "Disney Brand v. Disney Business," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 65.
57. Dave Smith explains that, as a result of a tight budget and space constraints, "we de-accessioned some of the items which no longer fit within our collecting policy and made them available to Disney Auctions. We have a limited budget, limited manpower, and limited space, so we had to decide what is most important to have from a business standpoint" (Jim Korkis, "Why You Won't Get a Job at the Disney Archives," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 40). Beyond the collection of material items, fans' efforts to collect soon-to-be-lost swaths of Disney history include interviews

with Disney old-timers: "Interviews are essential, and a serious Disney historian should interview as many people as possible—before it's too late. I regret having delayed some interviews which will never happen because in the meantime the authors have passed away" (Alberto Becattini, "Confessions of a Disney Comics Historian," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 99).

58. This propensity to celebrate "unsung heroes" (especially from a company so prominently identified with its founder) is a typical fan strategy. Blair's celebration as a singular artist within the Disney umbrella notably parallels that of Carl Barks, author to countless Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge comics (published from 1942 to 1966). While comics were allowed to bear only the name of Walt Disney (much as cartoons did prior to 1941), Barks's distinctive style soon earned him the moniker of the Good Artist. Despite Disney's, comic book publisher Dell's, or even Barks's best efforts to maintain his anonymity, fans eventually uncovered the artist's identity in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with Malcolm Willits—the first fan ever to identify Barks in 1957—recording the artist's first interview in 1962. Barks's recognition resulted in no small part from Barrier's own work—including the first essay ever written on Barks's work, "The Lord of Quackly Hall," published in the June 1967 issue of *Funnyworld* ("The Lord of Quackly Hall," *Funnyworld* no. 6, June 1967), as well as a complete bibliography of Barks's work, published in installments starting in September 1967. In 1982, this bibliography (along with a biographical and critical essay) was released in book form, *Carl Barks and the Art of the Comic Book* (New York: M. Lilién, 1982). See Donald Ault, ed., *Carl Barks: Conversations* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), xxvii–xxviii; and Michael Barrier, *Funnybooks: The Improbable Glories of the Best American Comic Books*, 1st ed. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), 324–25.

59. Patt Lewis, 2008, comment on "Disney Fires Another Salvo in Defense of 'It's a Small World' Changes," *The Disney Blog*, <http://thedisneyblog.com/2008/04/11/disney-fires-in-defense-oits-a-small-world-changes/>. (The original post is still available, but the blog's comments section has since been removed.)

60. John Frost, 2008, comment on "Disney Fires Another Salvo in Defense of 'It's a Small World' Change," *The Disney Blog*, <http://thedisneyblog.com/2008/04/11/disney-fires-in-defense-oits-a-small-world-changes/>; and "Mary Blair Tile Murals," *Yesterland*, March 2014, <http://www.yesterland.com/maryblair.html>.

61. Fiske, "Cultural Economy of Fandom," 39.

62. *Ibid.*, 47.

63. Korkis, "Disney Brand v. Disney Business," in Korkis, *How to Be a Disney Historian*, 66, 68.

64. *Ibid.*, 61.

65. Anonymous, February 9, 2009, comment on "Tempest in a Teapot," *Daveland* (blog), <https://davelandblog.blogspot.fr/2009/02/tempest-in-teapot.html>.

66. Mr. Banks, "A World of Tears," *Re-Imagineering* (blog), March 4, 2008, <http://imagineerebirth.blogspot.com/2008/03/world-of-tears.html>.

67. Al Lutz, "It's a Changed World," *MiceAge*, February 26, 2008, <http://micechat.com/miceage/allutz/al022608a.htm>.

68. Kimi Yoshino, "'Small World' Plans Hit Sour Note," *Los Angeles Times*, March 29, 2008, <http://articles.latimes.com/2008/mar/29/business/fi-smallworld29>. Such entries notably include Banks, "World of Tears"; Mr. Banks, "The BLAIR Family Speaks," *Re-Imagineering* (blog), March 18, 2008, <http://imagineerebirth.blogspot.com/2008/03/blair-family-speaks.html>; Mr. Banks, "The World of Animation Speaks," *Re-Imagineering* (blog), April 5, 2008, <http://imagineerebirth.blogspot.com/2008/04/world-of-animation-speaks.html>; Mr. Banks, "There's So Much That We Share...", *Re-Imagineering* (blog), March 6, 2008, <http://imagineerebirth.blogspot.com/2008/03/theres-so-much-that-we-share.html>; Mr. Banks, "With Utmost Reverence," *Re-Imagineering* (blog), March 24, 2008, <http://imagineerebirth.blogspot.com/2008/03/no-one-approaches-our-classic.html>; Mr. Banks, "Why?" *Re-Imagineering* (blog), April 5, 2008, <http://imagineerebirth.blogspot.com/2008/04/why.html>; Mr. Banks, "Editorial Comments," *Re-Imagineering* (blog), June 18, 2008, <http://imagineerebirth.blogspot.com/2008/06/editorial-comments.html>; Mr. Banks, "One from the Heart...", *Re-Imagineering* (blog), March 21, 2009, <http://imagineerebirth.blogspot.com/2009/03/one-from-heart.html>;

- and Merlin Jones, "We Felt That We Had Accomplished What We Set Out to Do..." *Re-Imagineering* (blog), April 22, 2008, <http://imagineerebirth.blogspot.com/2008/04/we-felt-that-we-had-accomplished-what.html>.
69. Banks, "World of Tears."
70. Blair letter posted on Banks, "BLAIR Family Speaks"; and Banks, "World of Animation Speaks."
71. Yoshino, "'Small World' Plans Hit Sour Note"; and Brady McDonald, "Save Small World, Ride Creator's Family Begs Disneyland," *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 2008.
72. Andy Castro, "Save the Rainforest. Save the Small World," *Save the Small World*, March 2008, <http://savethesmallworld.com/> (site no longer available).
73. John Disney, "The Truth about the Changes to 'It's a Small World,'" *Disney Gossip (Because Sometimes You Need a Place to Vent!)* (blog), April 7, 2008, <http://www.disneygossip.com/2008/04/truth-about-changes-to-its-small-world.html>.
74. Marty Sklar, "Marty Sklar Responds to It's a Small World Issue," *LaughingPlace*, April 4, 2008, <http://www.laughingplace.com/News-ID10029590.asp>. Sklar's line of reasoning provided much of the rationale for the corporation's second public statement, when chief archivist and fan-favorite Dave Smith was brought in to respond to the rumored changes, writing: "With regard to the current controversy about changes being made in It's a Small World at Disneyland, allow me, as the Chief Archivist at the Disney company for the past 38 years, to remind those who are complaining that Walt Disney never intended Disneyland to be static.... And those changes did not end with Walt's death over 40 years ago. The Disney Imagineers have continued to follow his dream, frequently adding and changing things in the park to give today's guests the best possible experience" (Dave Smith, "Disney Archivist Dave Smith Comments on Small World Debate," *LaughingPlace*, April 11, 2008, <http://www.laughingplace.com/Latest.asp?l1=ID&l2=2923>).
75. Disney, "The Truth about the Changes to 'It's a Small World'"; Mr. Banks, "Why We Whine," *Re-Imagineering* (blog), October 6, 2009, <http://imagineerebirth.blogspot.com/2009/10/why-we-whine.html>.
76. Dave DeCaro, April 11, 2008, comment on "Disney Fires Another Salvo in Defense of 'It's a Small World,'" *The Disney Blog*, <https://thedisneyblog.com/2008/04/11/disney-fires-in-defense-oits-a-small-world-changes/#comment-6721>; and Ride Warrior, "Re: Marty Sklar Responds to IASW Rumors," *MiceChat*, 2008, <https://discuss.micechat.com/forum/disney-theme-park-news-and-discussion/disneyland-resort/96242-marty-sklar-responds-to-iasw-rumors?p=3776979#post3776979>.
77. Dave DeCaro, "Tempest in a Teapot," *Daveland* (blog), February 9, 2009, <https://davelandblog.blogspot.com/2009/02/tempest-in-teapot.html>.
78. Jim Hill, "Still Bothered by the Changes That Were Recently Made to 'It's a Small World'? 'Get a Key and Open Your Minds,'" *Jim Hill Media* (blog), April 7, 2009, [http://jimhillmedia.com/editor\\_in\\_chief/1/b/jim\\_hill/archive/2009/04/07/still-bothered-by-the-changes-that-were-recently-made-to-disneyland-s-it-s-a-small-world-attraction-get-a-key-and-open-your-minds.aspx](http://jimhillmedia.com/editor_in_chief/1/b/jim_hill/archive/2009/04/07/still-bothered-by-the-changes-that-were-recently-made-to-disneyland-s-it-s-a-small-world-attraction-get-a-key-and-open-your-minds.aspx).
79. DeCaro, "Disney Fires Another Salvo"; and DeCaro, "Tempest in a Teapot."
80. DeCaro, "Tempest in a Teapot"; and dl1955pounds, "Re: Save the Rainforest - Keep 'It's a Small World' a Classic," *MiceChat*, 2008, <https://discuss.micechat.com/forum/disney-theme-park-news-and-discussion/disneyland-resort/93918-save-the-rainforest-keep-it-s-a-small-world-a-classic?p=3665426#post3665426>.
81. Whit, April 12, 2008, comment on "Disney Fires Another Salvo in Defense of 'It's a Small World' Changes," *The Disney Blog*, <http://thedisneyblog.com/2008/04/11/disney-fires-in-defense-oits-a-small-world-changes/>; and Moon Waffle, "Small World Changes," *LaughingPlace*, 2008, <http://www.laughingplace.com/discussion/threads/small-world-changes.25385/page-2#post-833753> (site no longer available).

82. DeCaro, "Tempest in a Teapot."

83. Ibid.; and dl1955pounds, "Re: Save the Rainforest."

84. MasterGracey [Andy Castro], "Save the Rainforest - Keep 'It's a Small World' a Classic," MiceChat, 2008, <https://discuss.micechat.com/forum/disney-theme-park-news-and-discussion/disneyland-resort/93918-save-the-rainforest-keep-it-s-a-small-world-a-classic#post93918>.

85. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 86.

86. Derek Johnson, "Fan-Tagonism: Factions, Institutions, and Constitutive Hegemonies of Fandom," in *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, ed. Jonathan Gray, Cornel Sandvoss, and Lee Harrington (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 285–300.

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