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The Changing Space of Animation: Disney's Hybrid Films of the 1940s

J.P. Telotte

Abstract In the early 1940s, Disney animation underwent a critical reassessment, one in which commentators who had previously praised Disney's efforts, particularly for the studio's realistic advances, began to emphasize how, in its efforts at realism, Disney had moved away from, even betrayed animation's avant-garde possibilities. That seeming 'break' with animation's subversive spirit, however, was hardly as definitive or deliberate as many critics claimed. This article examines Disney's hybrid animation efforts of the 1940s, particularly films like *The Three Caballeros* (1945), *Song of the South* (1946), and *Fun and Fancy Free* (1947), in light of the tension between animation's realistic and subversive possibilities. In these films, the author suggests, we can see the Disney studio's interest in recouping something of the modernist attitude with which it had earlier been associated, or at least an effort at finding some accommodation between what Disney had been and what it was becoming as it came to dominate the American animation industry.

Keywords Anthony Vidler, cartoon, hybrid animation, modernism, multiplane camera, realism, reflexivity, spectatorship, technology, Walt Disney

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> In animation, at its best, we thrill to the means of representation and not only the representation. (Michael O'Pray, 1997: 201)

Midway through its narrative, Disney's *Fun and Fancy Free* (1947) offers its audience a most striking situation – and a revealing technical achievement. Jiminy Cricket of *Pinocchio* (1940) fame jumps up on a window frame and looks out across a yard, various shrubs, and a street to a house in the deep background, situated apparently amidst the Hollywood hills. He then moves into and across these multiple planes of visual detail to find himself outside that house and peering through its picture window. While the house frame itself is animated, the interior he glimpses is a live-action scene of a party involving a little girl, Luana Patten, the ventriloquist Edgar Bergen, and two of his dummies, Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd. That movement deep into the frame – an artificial three-dimensional movement here rendered all the more effectively by the use of the Disney multiplane camera – stops with a real three-dimensional scene, the framed image of the live actors (and not-so-live dummies), as if the animated scene had somehow produced the live-action, as if the window scene were a kind of three-dimensional movie projected for the animated two-dimensional character, and as if *our* world constituted the entertainment for the cartoon one. Yet, clearly the opposite is the case; this generally pedestrian Disney post-war effort has simply inverted the usual visual and narrative situation, combining several of the company's more effective technologies of illusion to help frame its two animated stories. And that frame, as Michael O'Pray's (1997) remark suggests, provides us with an unexpected reflexive 'thrill' by foregrounding the very 'means of representation', by underscoring the technological 'trick' of its hybrid technique. In the process, it also casts in relief an interesting and unremarked complexity in the development of Disney's animation aesthetic in this period, particularly in its approach to space.

Throughout much of its early history, Disney animation was, as Timothy White (1992) notes, 'almost universally praised . . . by the public, popular journalists and critics, and even academics and "serious" artists' (p. 4). It was lauded for the way it broke the boundaries of conventional narrative and generally linked to the world of avant-garde art, with Walt Disney himself even compared to a surrealist artist like Dalí (Leslie, 2002: 102). As Esther Leslie recounts, Disney animation was even 'showcased' at the First Moscow International Film Festival in 1935 and enthusiastically supported by Sergei Eisenstein because of its revolutionary spirit, particularly its capacity for 'freely reimagining' the world 'according to fantasy and will' (p. 231). Yet as Disney moved towards the development of what has been termed an 'illusion of life' aesthetic – and as the Disney brothers demonstrated a rather unprogressive political stance by opposing the Teamsters' efforts at unionizing their animators – critical opinion began to

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change. While *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was widely embraced, both for its landmark status as a feature and for its realistic effects, achieved with the new multiplane camera, by 1941 the critical climate had clearly shifted. Even Siegfried Kracauer (1941), a key early theorist of cinematic realism, criticized the Disney films for the way they had begun to 'imitate the technique of the realistic films' (p. 463) by emphasizing three-dimensional space, camera movement, and characterization. In a declaration that suggests his support for early animation's avant-garde spirit (if not for its equally inherent spirit of imitation), he argued that the cartoon should work differently, that it should emphasize 'the dissolution rather than the reinforcement of conventional reality', since 'its function is not to draw a reality which can better be photographed' (p. 463). Paul Wells (2002) has recently renewed this charge, arguing that while 'Disney made animation a credible art-form', he also 'veiled the capacity of the form to more readily exhibit its subversive credentials', and thus demonstrate its complexity. The result, he suggests, was the emergence of a style that, while 'endorsed' by a cross-section of American culture, clearly broke with the transformative and self-conscious or reflexive spirit found in earlier animation (p. 45).

Yet that 'break', I want to suggest, was hardly as definitive as these commentaries imply for, during the war years and immediately following, we find evidence of Disney repeatedly trying to regain some balance between those realistic and subversive possibilities that, ultimately, are both intrinsic to animation, as well as to create the sort of reflexive flourishes that we see rather surprisingly foregrounded in an otherwise conventional film like *Fun and Fancy Free* (1947). The efforts of this period point to an increasing interest in recouping something of that modernist attitude, or at least finding some accommodation between what Disney had been and what it was becoming. Certainly, *Fantasia* (1940) hints at this ambition with its attempts to forge a link between classical music and animation in a non-narrative format. But that effort to retrieve an avant-garde spirit shows most clearly in another sort of film that would, for a time, dominate Disney's efforts and that has, unfortunately, usually been seen in a very different light – in fact, as but one more symptom of the studio's realist thrust that Kracauer and others had lamented. In the late-war and post-war era, the studio sought, for various reasons, to combine the attractions of its multiplane camera with one of the earliest approaches to cartooning – hybrid animation – a combination of animation with live-action figures, used most notably in the Fleischer brothers' Out of the Inkwell series, as well as in Disney's own Alice comedies of the 1920s.[1] And that combination points to a rather more complex concern with space, certainly far more of a modernist attitude, than our critiques have acknowledged.

We might consider the way in which a number of Disney's hybrid feature films directly address the issues of space bound up in their

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creation, particularly the space of spectatorship that, while typically elided from classical film narrative, is (as Leslie, 2002, notes) commonly implicated in modernist texts. In his study of space, culture, and architecture in the early modern era, Anthony Vidler (1992) offers an important lead in this direction. For he describes how, along with its insights into psychology and culture, the 20th century introduced a new sense of space, what he terms 'warped space', itself a kind of hybrid between physical and psychological notions of space that modernist artists would try to evoke because of the way it 'elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity' (p. 11). And he suggests that this new sense of space is such a crucial development that we might well think of it as 'the leitmotiv of modernity itself' (Vidler, 2000: 5).

Drawing on the work of Freud, Walter Benjamin, and Georg Simmel, among others, Vidler (2000) describes how the new urban world – that which was populated by the audience for the equally new phenomenon of film – had taken on not only a fresh awareness of a new dimension, that of psychological space, but also had begun to manifest a variety of space-oriented neuroses and phobias resulting from various processes of 'psychological projection or introjection' (p. 8). As part of this investment, space was no longer perceived to be just a 'stable container' or objective and measurable dimension of human experience. Rather, it was increasingly seen 'as a product of subjective projection', an inconstant and shifting realm that might best be described by the emerging vocabularies of 'displacement and fracture, torquing and twisting, pressure and release, void and block' (p. 1). In fact, this new sense of space posed a fundamental challenge for a conventional point of view because of the way it thus 'put the assumed stabilities of the viewing subject into question' (pp. 4, 10). That sense of instability obviously colors the hybrid animation of both the Out of the Inkwell cartoons and Disney's Alice shorts, both of which depend on a blurring of the boundaries between the real and the imagined and, to some extent, between the audience and the action. But it is an effect that would resurface and wield a telling influence over Disney's feature efforts in that vein during the 1940s by reflexively troubling their seemingly realist bias.

Of course, in animation's early days, the hybrid approach was partially motivated simply by the need for various economies of production, the most obvious of which was that, by incorporating live-action elements, animators had to draw fewer images, thus reducing costs and speeding up production. In the 1940s, such economies again became attractive, particularly at Disney, since budgets had become tighter, many skilled animators had been lost to the war effort, and the studio had committed much of its remaining resources to producing training and informational films for the government. In place of its labor- and cost-intensive full-length animated features of the pre-war years, then, Disney developed a hybrid formula that would dominate

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its production for much of the decade, resulting in such feature films as *The Three Caballeros* (1945), *Song of the South* (1946), *Fun and Fancy Free* (1947), *Melody Time* (1948), and *So Dear to My Heart* (1949), among others. Often weakly constructed, these 'package pictures', as they were known within the studio because of the way they packaged together various short cartoons, were typically episodic, depended heavily on musical numbers, and used live-action scenes to link their animated sequences – or animation to link their live-action elements. Yet, despite the live-action material, within the studio they were never considered to be particularly realistic or conventional efforts; rather, veteran Disney animators Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston (1995) recall that these projects were usually approached as 'a showcase for . . . experimentation' (p. 511).

Moreover, the films were marketed in that same light, as distinctly innovative stylistic efforts, in keeping with the studio's growing reputation for technical advances. Thus the original theatrical trailer for *The Three Caballeros* (1945) described its combination of live-action and animation as 'the newest thing to hit the movies since talking pictures came in'. And in an obvious publicity piece, a behind-the-scenes article in *Popular Science* (1944) preceding the film's release referred to it as 'another surprise from the Disney bag of tricks' (p. 107). Certainly, there was something new to its techniques, particularly to the creation of a three-dimensional illusion in this and the following hybrid efforts. To create its eventual illusion, *The Three Caballeros*, for example, combined three separate photographic processes: the multiplane camera, a front-projection technique using the multiplane apparatus, and a new rear-projection process.

In spite of that technical complexity, though, critical response mainly focused on the *situations* created by its mixture of cartoon and human characters. One critic slammed the film for its 'impossible to understand' narrative (Brown, 1945: 23), while the *Time* (1945) reviewer, commenting on Donald Duck's romantic pursuits of several live-action women, attacked its 'alarmingly incongruous case of hot pants' (p. 92). Even one of the most perceptive responses, that by Barbara Deming (1945), would quickly shift from noting that its 'techniques are mixed incongruously' (p. 228) to suggesting that in the narrative Disney has 'wrought something monstrous' (p. 226), a world in which 'boundaries fall apart' (p. 229). Moreover, she reads this turn symptomatically, as a sign of Walt Disney's own 'artlessness', his growing tendency simply to mirror the attitudes and values of his culture, one for which boundaries and certainties of every sort had indeed begun to disappear. Thus she reads *The Three Caballeros* (1945) within the cultural context of late Second World War America, a world wherein 'values . . . are in conflict and in question', and she attributes both its stylistic and its thematic 'incongruities' to the 'nightmare of these times' (p. 226).

Of course, Deming is correct with respect to 'these times'. In

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keeping with the cultural situation created by the war, *The Three Caballeros* (1945) was conceived as a film that would encourage a new level of inter-American friendship.[2] Yet it approaches that task in a way that surprisingly addresses the issues of space bound up in its complex creation, particularly the space of spectatorship. In fact, *The Three Caballeros* almost immediately strikes this note, as it begins with Donald Duck opening several presents 'from his friends in Latin America', the first of which contains a projector, screen, and films. As he subsequently runs these films, Donald immediately resituates himself from the status of a cartoon subject and inhabitant of the conventional space of animated narrative to, like Jiminy Cricket in *Fun and Fancy Free* (1947), an unconventional spectator, in fact, a moviegoer himself. Here he looks into another world (south of the border), as if suddenly aware of a different space that these cartoons – or his *own* cartoons, for that matter – make manifest, certainly a space of decided difference for America in the 1940s. For these films and his new status as viewer allow the thoroughly American duck to stake out a new territory, one in which he can unconventionally 'meet' his friends from South America and see, apparently for the first time, its varied realms and some of the *rara avis* who inhabit them. At this point we can begin to glimpse how the film's key strategy, its paralleling of America's awakening to Latin America's importance with Donald's discovery of his new 'friends', coincides with its stylistic ambitions: its showcasing of that other, fantastic or 'warped' space, as Vidler (2000) terms it, that animation exploits and makes available for our experience here, as well as Disney's own reawakening to the possibilities of such cartooning.

The film's two other main stylistic turns further develop this stylistic 'story', first by linking Donald to a pointedly non-realistic style of animation, and second by juxtaposing him with real humans in the film's showcase hybrid scenes – those on which most critical commentaries have focused.[3] While the two brief cartoons Donald watches, about Pablo the penguin and the Argentine boy Gauchito and his donkey-bird, are done in the typical Disney style of the period – with soft, rounded figures, set in a recognizably realistic context, and with the exaggeration of specific traits or features to emphasize personality – both are really about aberrations, departures from the norm: a penguin who only wants to be warm and a donkey with wings, both suggesting Latin America's exotic nature. Those exotic stories, along with the opening of a second box, lead away from a conventionally realistic and 'cute' approach as they bring the Brazilian parrot, Joe Carrioca, a pop-up book offering images of his country, and an invitation from Joe to go with him to Brazil that immediately introduces a shift in both style and content – as if the film were pointedly leaving behind conventional Disney animation and especially its typical spatial styling. For Joe suddenly and surrealistically multiplies, transforming into a row of images recalling the popular 'Brazilian Bombshell',

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Carmen Miranda, all beckoning seductively to the duck and effectively exploding the sense of conventional personality. When Donald follows these fantastic images *into* the book, into a most unexpectedly 'deep' composition, he not only becomes a viewing subject – or tourist – within a pointedly viewed world – that of the picture book – but the visual style also radically changes. For as he literally hops onto a train depicted on one page, the images become flat and hard-edged and the color scheme over-saturated, all characteristics of Artistic Supervisor Mary Blair's distinctive style, which was, as John Canemaker (2003) has observed, 'the polar opposite of the representational "illusion of life" aesthetic that had become associated with Disney in this period' (p. ix). It is, very simply, a movement in depth where there *is* no apparent depth, a strike at the conventions of representation, and a reminder of the ways in which animation might open onto unexpected spaces and other worlds, thereby subverting realist expectations.

That movement *into* a seemingly two-dimensional world rather surprisingly opens the door to another kind of spatial experience, the three-dimensional one of the hybrid scenes that dominate much of the rest of the film. These scenes, which employ both the front- and rear-projection techniques noted earlier, repeatedly involve Donald interacting with live characters – Aurora Miranda, posing as a cookie seller, a group of bathing beauties at the beach,[4] the popular Mexican singer, Dora Luz, and the dancer, Carmen Molina. In fact, the duck pursues the human women in each of these scenes, suggesting the sort of impossible sexual involvement that disturbed some viewers expecting the usual Disney fare, and that precipitated several protesting reviews. Yet those pursuits are not the ultimate point here. Donald's repeated and comically underlined frustrations, which were by this time part of his well-established character, should have told audiences as much. Rather, these encounters are all about border crossings or boundary blurrings, about discovering the beauty, talent, and wonders of another world, about moving out from the secure space of the conventional spectator (implicitly, America's prevailing stance towards its 'exotic' southern neighbors) to enter another space that beckons to us, as Carmen Molina repeatedly does to Donald. Those encounters, punctuated by all manner of quickly changing and reflexive images – Dora Luz as an image in Donald's eye, Donald transformed into the shifting lines of a film sound track, dancing cacti taking Donald's shape, and all parodying Busby Berkeley's spatially-impossible, proscenium-bursting, self-conscious musical numbers – work very much in the tradition of the avant-garde to interrogate our own space, our own carefully bordered world, as well as our own cultural insularity. In so doing, they pointedly emphasize one of this film's underlying impulses, its effort to recuperate an element of that earlier avant-garde spirit, the seeming abandonment of which had brought much criticism.[5]

Released the next year, *Song of the South* (1946) seems less marked

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by that spirit of 'experimentation', less an obvious effort to recall the avant-garde tradition, although its key focus is also on fashioning a new vantage, in this case for young Johnny, its central character. And here too the film's stylistic experimentation, involving a greater emphasis on purely live-action and nearly seamless transitional hybrid scenes, drew less attention than its cultural content – its racially charged adaptation of Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus tales. While a Disney poster for the film would describe its combination of live-action and animation as 'An Epochal Event in Screen History', the *Time* (1946) reviewer focused largely on the Uncle Remus character, a figure 'bound to enrage all educated Negroes, and a number of damyankees' (p. 101). And that response was consistent with a marked change in critical perspective on Disney, as post-war commentators began to shift focus from aesthetic issues to what Eric Smoodin (1993) terms 'broader ideological ones' – questions interrogating Disney's implicit attitudes towards nationalities, gender representation, and race (p. 104). In fact, Smoodin argues that this shift may ironically have been abetted by 'the inclusion of more realism – both drawn and live-action' in the Disney films (p. 106), as if the turn to hybrid techniques had cast these ideological issues into relief, even made them unavoidable.[6]

And perhaps they were unavoidable, given the flimsy live-action story with its separating husband and wife, and the son who turns for consolation and guidance to Uncle Remus, a figure vaguely linked to the grandmother's plantation. Because it is weakly plotted, context becomes all, and that context, particularly the sense of place, is that of a rural plantation, peopled with servile blacks and a benevolent white mistress, and apparently isolated from the realities of its post-Civil War South setting. While it seems a context that the studio sought to frame not so much nostalgically as almost abstractly, as a kind of historical never-never land, the cultural weight of the live-action undercuts the appeal of its hybrid scenes and their alternative stylistic thrust. However, the narrative pointedly frames this world as an escape from the real, a place where Johnny and his mother go to get away from some vaguely described unpleasantries back home in Atlanta, where 'everybody's mad about what Daddy writes in the newspaper.' It seems the family is being split because the father is challenging the status quo and, despite his wife's pleadings, is determined to go back and face that situation after safely depositing his family in this country backwater, in the safe isolation he experienced as a child. Thus Johnny finds himself in a home that is not his home and one filled with problems that he too cannot avoid – a bitter and overprotective mother, two harassing neighborhood boys, and a bull that nearly kills him. However, neither the hybrid scenes nor the animated tales of Brer Rabbit satisfactorily resolve these concerns of place and space, bring Johnny to an acceptable home, or link the space of the imagination, represented by Uncle Remus's tales, to that of the real world, embodied in his parents' troubles. In short, while Uncle Remus tries

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to shift the child's way of seeing this world, and while the film suggests our own need to change perspective, to challenge a conventional point of view, the real world remains very much with us.

Yet, emphasizing the links between the animated and real worlds, what we might term a *reciprocality* of space, seems like the film's key concern, as its opening and the various 'packaged' cartoon episodes suggest. For *Song of the South* (1946) starts with an image of the interior of Uncle Remus's cabin, lit so that we cannot be sure if it is real or animated, and accompanied by his voice setting out a *coda* for the film:

> Just 'cause these here tales is about critters like Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox, that don't mean they ain't the same like can happen to folks. So them that can't learn from a tale about critters just ain't got their ears tuned for listenin'.

It is a warning, of course, to 'tune' our ears – and eyes – correctly for what follows, so that we can better appreciate the correspondences between the animated and the real, the worlds of 'critters' and 'folks', including the rather hazy boundaries between the two. The subsequent hybrid scenes, easily some of the studio's most successful efforts in this area, underscore that linkage in their nearly seamless nature. When Uncle Remus walks from the background to a mid-frame fence rail and leans on it to talk to an animated Brer Rabbit in the foreground, it is almost impossible to tell where the real rail ends and the animated one begins. But that blurring of boundaries was an integral part of the film's visual design scheme; as animators Thomas and Johnston (1995) explain, 'the "real" parts were only theatrical sets . . . and had been designed with flat surfaces and simple shapes so they would match the drawings that had to be part of the whole composition' (pp. 524–5). When Brer Rabbit subsequently jumps onto the mid-frame fence and then beyond it, into the 'real' area occupied by Uncle Remus's body, he not only underscores that careful matching, but also prepares us for the narrative exploitation of what is essentially a new sort of space, since he then hops into the background, the area from which Uncle Remus had emerged (thus previously testifying to its reality), and in the process takes us into a fully animated shot, into the cartoon story wherein, just as he determines to leave his home behind, he finds himself caught in Brer Fox's trap and must use his wits to escape. It is, of course, a variation on Johnny's own plan to run away, as Uncle Remus's moral underscores: 'you can't run away from trouble. There ain't no place that far.' But just as importantly, it speaks to our situation as well, as we find ourselves, albeit pleasurably, also caught up in a trap, that of the film's hybrid scheme, which has made it practically impossible to parse out real space from animated. And within that subtly subversive trap, we are essentially compelled to make the connections between the realms of 'critters' and 'folks', to begin to see our world in a very different way.

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That design scheme, along with its implications, carries through the rest of the film's hybrid scenes, as borders constantly dissolve and the real and animated spaces become contiguous and mutually interrogating. For instance, leading in to his tale of the Tar Baby, Uncle Remus appears, walking from deep background into an animated foreground, where he encounters Brer Rabbit. In fact, Brer Rabbit hops all around him, over and under various fences, and, at one point, even from background to foreground *through* Uncle Remus's legs, before Uncle Remus stops to fish and casts his obviously animated line into an animated pond in the foreground, a move that, with a dissolve, casts *us* into a fully animated sequence wherein Brer Rabbit heads down the road and falls into Brer Fox's Tar Baby trap. While the introduction to the tale of the Laughing Place is more abrupt, the link is no less pointed. In this case when a crying Johnny comes to Uncle Remus for consolation, a close-up of his sad face simply dissolves into the image of Brer Rabbit, also in a sad state – tied up by Brer Fox and Brer Bear who are about to roast him. Yet the conclusion of this tale more emphatically links the animated and live-action worlds, as Brer Rabbit, laughing at Brer Fox and Brer Bear, throws handfuls of leaves into the air, and, through a dissolve, those same leaves seem to bridge worlds, as they come down all around a similarly laughing Uncle Remus who assures his listeners, Johnny and his friend Ginny, that they too have a 'laughing place' somewhere. The film ends on a similar note, as Uncle Remus, Johnny, and Ginny walk down a road, are soon joined by a variety of animated animals – all of whom cast realistic shadows and interact with the live actors – and eventually move into a landscape that dissolves into a perfectly matched animated one, recalling the opening, and complete with the naturalistic depth effects created by the multiplane camera. The animated world, the world of the imagination, it seems, easily opens up new space to those willing to shift their perspective or, as Uncle Remus says, become 'tuned' to it, as the concluding transformation from real to animated suggests that *we* are by this point.

However, the film clearly offers a kind of forced jointure, one we are cast into like Uncle Remus's fishing line or caught up in as with Brer Fox's trap, something constructed by the skill of the storyteller – Uncle Remus – as well as by Disney's skilled animators and technicians. The reflexive dimension of the narrative is simply inescapable. The real spaces here – of far-away and trouble-bound Atlanta, of the grandmother's elaborate plantation house, of the meager cabins and campfires of the black workers, of the poor white sharecropper's cottage occupied by Ginny and her family – are pointedly distinct realms, separated by physical distance, by real-world troubles, by social taboos, even by fences. And crossing those spaces, as Johnny does when he ducks under the fence surrounding the bull's pasture, only invites trouble, in fact, nearly gets him killed. *Song of the South* (1946), for all of its technical accomplishments, never quite manages to reconcile these real-world borders with the boundary-busting spirit

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of its hybrid scenes and, as a consequence, for all of its ambitions, never escapes the ghostly anxieties bound up in the different spaces it depicts – never escapes *reality itself*. And as this film's subsequent history tells us, the studio's efforts at boundary-crossing only invited troubles for it.

Still, *Song of the South* does seem to be working out, if somewhat unconvincingly, the essential Disney concern of this era and one not far removed from the modernist project: to demonstrate that there is another, more promising, world alongside our own, if only we could shift perspective to see it. Not simply our own 'laughing place', it is the space of the imagination, inviting us, in at least a nod towards the avant-garde tradition, to compare its topography to that in which we live – here shown as a world of fences, economic barriers, and cultural boundaries, all of which the film invites us to challenge. And that project continues in a film like *Fun and Fancy Free* (1947), although it is approached rather differently, almost perfunctorily, as if Disney had by this time begun to recognize how nearly impossible it was becoming to mix that modernist impulse with its illusion of life aesthetic, at least within a feature context. Despite the reflexive framing scenes we earlier described, this film is, on the whole, far less 'experimental' than the hybrid types preceding it. And the critical reception only confirmed that this formula was not going to work for a changing post-war audience. In fact, Steven Watts (1997) characterizes the response to this film as 'outright hostility' (p. 250), with the reviewer for the *New Yorker* seeing it as evidence that, as with the other package films, Disney seemed to be 'determinedly aiming at mediocrity' (p. 21).

However, *Fun and Fancy Free* hardly merits that charge of 'mediocrity'. While it packages two rather conventional – and conventionally realistic – cartoons, it does so with that clever reflexive twist of the animated Jiminy Cricket looking in on the live-action human world, prodding us to reassess the normal spectator–spectacle relationship. In fact, the film frames much of its 'package' with similar effects. To introduce the first cartoon sequence, the story of Bongo the bear, Jiminy makes his way through an apparent jungle, actually an indoor plant display whose nature we cannot make out because we see it from up close, and thus lack perspective and a sense of scale. We only recognize it when, in long shot, Jiminy catapults himself from an animated plant leaf into a hybrid scene of a real room and a shelf of real books, whose titles he then inspects – titles like *Misery for the Masses* and *Anatomy of Melancholy* – prior to launching into the narration of a very un-*Melancholy* cartoon about the bear who manages to escape from the gilded prison of his life as an exploited circus performer. Following the second cartoon segment, the story of Mickey, Goofy, and Donald who ascend a beanstalk to find wealth, only to be pursued by an angered giant, another sudden spatial shift occurs. As we return to the live-action party, Edgar Bergen, Luana

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Patten, Charlie McCarthy, and Mortimer Snerd discuss the story, obviously missing its subversive implications, decide that it is, after all, just a 'figment of the imagination', and thus reassert a boundary between the real and the imagined, just as the adults try to do in *Song of the South* (1946). But at that point, the roof of the house – now animated – is lifted off by Willie, the cartoon story giant, who peers in, excuses himself, and then heads off into the landscape to continue 'looking for a little mouse', as he announces. With the boundary between animated and live worlds literally lifted away, the film then closes with an extreme long shot of the famous Hollywood sign blinking in the background and Willie, the animated figure, continuing his search in this 'real' environment, leaving us with a very different perspective on our world: not just the narrative sense of how difficult it is to find freedom or wealth here, but, given this new sense of space and the obvious constructions of Hollywood, a stylistic reminder of how elusive the real is, and how *illusive* all that the movie culture constructs for us is as well. Certainly a clever ending and one consistent with the other reflexive framing scenes here, it nevertheless feels a bit like a trick that has too little connection to the two framed stories, much like the opening images of Jiminy Cricket. It simply catapults *us* into a hybrid world, forces us to acknowledge the relationship of real and fantastic spaces, even as it allows that such connections are part of an increasingly cinematized world.

Yet this acknowledgement may be the most important element of the conclusion, since it obviously foregrounds the way in which all of these hybrid efforts, in various ways, sought to mine that underlying appeal of animation that O'Pray (1997) notes – the 'thrill' bound up in their artistry. Despite that element of self-consciousness, these films also have another sort of fallout that might shed some light on their relatively weak or troubled receptions. For in different ways they also subtly *undermine* another pleasure of the animated spectacle by reminding us of a problem implicit in those different spaces, one made quite explicit in the middle of *Fun and Fancy Free* (1947), as the animated viewers – Jiminy and Willie – also call into question the substance of our own space, thereby qualifying our satisfaction in a key part of the animation experience. For O'Pray also points out that a 'desire for omnipotence' is central to animation's satisfactions, as it demonstrates 'that the skill and virtuosity involved in form is supreme' (p. 200). The reflexive impulse here, however, ultimately threatens to empty out the whole process of representation, to show it all to be a kind of game.

While this revealing of film's own hegemonic power does recall something of the modernist agenda, it also points to a sort of functional paradox inevitably bound up in these films that many saw simply as new efforts at approaching the real. Thus, while Watts (1997) sees the hybrid films as evidence of Walt Disney's 'desperate search for direction' in the post-Second World War era (p. 250), I would suggest that they are more a revealing gauge of his efforts at working out the

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apparent contradictions between realist and avant-garde trajectories. However, once generally committed to a more naturalistic studio style and to feature-film production, Disney was – and despite a number of efforts – never quite able to find a formula for recouping that experimental spirit, not able to map out its quite other type of space.

Notes

1. For an extensive discussion of the Alice cartoons, see Merritt and Kaufman's *Walt in Wonderland* (1993).
2. Numerous commentaries have chronicled the story behind Disney's South American projects, undertaken at the behest of the Office of Inter-American Affairs. Among the most informative of those accounts are those provided by Smoodin (1993, see especially pp. 138–46), and by Kaufman (1997). Smoodin (1993) particularly pinpoints the problem on which most discussions of both *The Three Caballeros* (1945) and the earlier *Saludos Amigos* (1943) have principally focused, the implicit notion that

   > Walt Disney, a representative of the United States, could tour a foreign culture, come to understand it in just a short time, film it, and then bring it back home with him, all with the blessing and thanks of the culture he had visited. (p. 141)

   That seems a rather harsh judgment, though, particularly since the film's focus on Donald as spectator pointedly emphasizes his consistently naive perspective, his general lack of real understanding. The real focus, finally, is on celebrating the variety of different cultures, which is commensurate with the narrative's development of and focus on different kinds of space.
3. Watts (1997) perhaps best captures the tenor of this criticism when he describes Donald Duck's actions throughout the film as 'libidinous shenanigans' that suggested Disney might be losing touch with his core family audience (p. 248).
4. Actually, this action was filmed in a parking lot at the Disney Studio, with sand trucked in to suggest an Acapulco beach and secretaries and extras serving as the Mexican bathing beauties. For an account of this filming, see Kaufman (1997).
5. For a discussion of the assault on Disney's illusion of life aesthetic and a sampling of the various critical comments on the studio's changing style, see Waller (1980).
6. As Watts (1997) notes, though, Disney was well aware of the potential for controversy with the Uncle Remus tales, long before any decision had been made to do this project as a hybrid effort. He notes that, as far back as 1938, Disney researchers had been put to work, 'examining not only the Joel Chandler Harris stories themselves but a great deal of supplementary material' in an effort to achieve authenticity while avoiding any possible racial disputes (p. 278).

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