

Book Reviews

Lukas, Scott A. *Theme Park*. London: Reaktion Books, 2008. 272 pages; bibliography, index.

Socio-architecture has been a concept far longer than its formal definition first coined by Humphry Osmond (psychologist) and Kyo Izumi (architect) in 1951. Earlier, it was attributed to Sir Winston Churchill that we shape our buildings and thereafter they shape us. Scott Lukas in *Theme Park* continues this interest in the social and cultural meanings of architectural space with a brilliant description and analysis of recreational space and its evolution from a place of amusement and entertainment to an environment of altered reality.

The practitioners of architecture and planning have frequently differed as to the primacy of the artistic and aesthetic over the functional and behavioral. Though the importance of the social realities of architectural design has been recognized since Ebenezer Howard's pioneer efforts in the development of the garden cities of Letchford and Welwyn in the early part of the 20th century, Lukas starts in the middle of the previous century at the social significance of the development of parks and planned recreational space as the early stages in a continuous process of the evolution and development of the theme park.

In six chapters, through a combination of anthropological, sociological and psychological perspectives, the theme park is viewed as Oasis, Land, Machine, Show, Brand and Text. Through description, numerous photographs, illustrations, drawings, and sophisticated analysis blending numerous social scientific theories and concepts, Lukas takes us through the early planned gardens, expositions and amusement parks, like Coney Island, to major theme parks like Disney World and finally to themed communities like Las Vegas.

In "Theme Park as Oasis," pleasure parks, such as Vauxhall in England, are noted as places of natural beauty that were supplemented with the availability of some forms of entertainment and refreshment. These alternate environments contrasted with the growing dehumanization and impersonality of the industrial urban environments of the times.

Similarly, the chapter "Theme Park as Land" focuses on the emerging role of recreational space as an educational vehicle for sharing the geo-

graphical and cultural diversity of a world beyond the reach of a local population. Though often portrayed in stereotypes, these parks provided voyeuristic opportunities to go where one could not.

In “Theme Park as Machine,” the role of the amusement ride, be it a roller coaster, carousel or another application of technology, is viewed as a vehicle of social interaction and common experience to be shared by all groups and classes of people. The democratization of fright, fear or awe plays an important role in the theme park experience.

This opportunity of experience is also addressed in “Theme Park as Show.” Immersion in an increasingly total experience marked the transition from amusement to a true theme park experience. Theme parks were emerging, with the advent of Disneyland and a number of similar venues, as total experiences and not just a collection of amusements. A central theme permeated the park experience not only in terms of amusement experiences but also of all of the actions, activities and events that took place both within and between the amusements. In the dramaturgical perspective of Goffman, Lukas takes us through the planned presentations that link together the total park experience. Interestingly, having worked as a park trainer at AstroWorld, Lukas is able to introduce numerous ethnomethodological explanations and insights into the theme park experience.

From an economic perspective, the fifth chapter focuses on the marketing potential of “Theme Park as Brand.” The Disney influence has shaped the modern theme park as not only a coherent marketing strategy, but also a social and cultural experience that promotes the theme as a valued identity as well as a product opportunity. The goal of the modern theme park is to socialize the participants into cast members while they are in the park as well as when they return to their homes and the outside world. The opportunity to socially condition individuals to become both advocate for and a consumer of experience was not lost on either Orwell or Disney.

In the final chapter, “Theme Park as Text,” Lukas explains how the concept of theme parks is extending beyond the concrete and physical and becoming conceptual and cultural. Moving from socio-architecture to environmental psychology, Lukas focuses on how the concept of the theme park is being extended to communities and commercial venues ranging from resort towns, planned neighborhoods and retail megaplexes.

The sociological perspectives of Berger and Luckman, who focused on the social construction of reality, have been adapted by Lukas in his examination of the theme park as the social construction of a faux reality. According to Lukas, the faux reality of the theme park is being enhanced by new technologies and psychological conditioning principles as the theme experience morphs to become, in fact, a new reality. This was stated best by Walt Disney, who believed that the reality of the park was real and that it was the outside world that was false.

This book is both a sophisticated social scientific review of the history, development and transformation of theme parks and an entertaining and extremely well-written journey through the world's vacation venues. With the advantage of having been a participant in the world of the theme park and a scholar of socio-architecture and cultural anthropology, Lukas provides a variety of perspectives and insights into this interesting aspect of an alternative social experience. He takes us on an informed journey from recreation to "re-creation." Like the best of theme parks, this book is both fun and informative and helps us understand an important element of popular culture as both a participant and as an observer. It is a memorable ride.

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Tucker, Linda G., *Lockstep and Dance: Images of Black Men in Popular Culture*. Jackson: The UP of Mississippi, 2007. 191 pages; bibliography, index.

At a basic level, popular, unlike high, culture, seeks to investigate various topics including art, film music, sports, that generate from the perspective of every day individuals and institutions. In that vein comes the book *Lockstep and Dance: Images of Black Men in Popular Culture* by Linda G. Tucker who seeks to examine African American males within the, larger context of popular culture. The theme that runs through this text is that contemporary representations of black men as criminals generate support for violent methods of "controlling, containing, and annihilating black men" (6). Furthermore, this support reinforces the structure of the prison writ large. The term *lockstep* suggests inflexible, strict obedience, while *dance* denotes a flexible freedom of movement. Thus, the title does indeed fit the general focus of this book: two ways of viewing Black men in America: heroes and victims.

In Chapter One, “Writing Home,” Tucker details “how white America sees black men” in that its behavior, policies, and practices seem both moral and just (3). The term *prison writ* appears quite often at this stage of the book. Specifically, the prison writ is due to the perception that “black men are a race of criminals [that] yield a racialized system of containment” (5). Furthermore, representation practices in popular culture perpetuate the image of black men as a group predisposed to criminal behavior. Here the author sets her ideas in the context of John Wideman’s book, *Brothers and Keepers*. It is here that the construct of representation becomes a central theme in the book. Tucker elaborates on the lives of two African American men, John Wideman and his brother Robby, showing how they hope to resist white oppression. Robby’s unsuccessful attempt to “plac[e] himself beyond the reach of the criminal justice system” is compared to John Wideman’s escape attempt “from Pittsburg, from poverty, from blackness” (31). These men did not succeed in liberating themselves in ways they had hoped. Used in the sense of how people, behavior, and events are portrayed, Tucker notes that there are two competing dimensions of representation. One is the way in which black men are seen by whites and the other way is how whites are seen by blacks. Tucker argues that representations of the former function “as resources that are used in the United States to define real black men’s relationship to whites and to enable the latter to maintain social, political, economic, and institutional control” (23).

In “The Legacy of Type,” Tucker expounds on the topics of minstrelsy, lynching and what she describes as a “white lore cycle” (50). Blackface minstrelsy, lynching, and advertisements all capture the relational nature of white identity (50). According to the author, “minstrel performance allowed white men to appropriate – or at least try on for size – what they perceive as a competing masculine identity” (51). Tucker’s depiction of lynching emphasizes the spectacle of an event to be witnessed, primarily by white males. The smell, the sight of lynched black males, the ads, and the pictures of deformed bodies sent to friends and to opponents of lynching are strong features of this chapter.

In “Court Gestures,” Tucker focuses on the ambiguous court performances of black basketball players who have been able to play the game for the benefit of both themselves and their audiences. The focus is on black males performing in positive and in negative ways. This chapter con-

tinues the theme of the previous chapter: black men are portrayed as criminals and as brutes. Much of the discussion is centered on Latrell Sprewell and Dennis Rodman, former basketball players. These players, according to the author, find ways to resist the system. In Sprewell's case, he is known for assaulting his coach. In Rodman's case, he challenges and breaks the rules of conduct expected by athletes in that high-profile position. The light is shone more on Rodman than on Sprewell, primarily through his impulse to break rules, to not show for practice, his flamboyant attire, and multiple tattoos. Moreover, the image of these basketball players is juxtaposed against that of Michael Jordan, whose image conforms to the larger society's expectation of how black men, especially black athletes, should conduct themselves.

“The Last Black Face” examines films that are favorably received by mainstream audiences [which] tend to entertain white audiences while reassuring them that the threat of blackness, which is embossed in the white imagination as the image of a black male, has been contained. More often than not, the perceived threat is contained by a comedic frame and/or narrative in which criminality is severed from structural and systemic inequities and violence. (101)

This chapter is centered on the meaning of two movies, *Bamboozled* and *Barbershop*. In *Bamboozled*, Tucker notes that Spike Lee is caught in the lockstep of his own dance because every black male character in the film is complicit in a slippage of representation that ultimately results in their extermination as black entertainers (114). In *Barbershop*, Tucker sees this physical space as one for social bonding, for entrepreneurship, and for a definition of character among black men. It is not just a place for cutting hair. Rather, it is a place where black men have “resisted such images [of criminality] in ways that have little to do with white ways of looking” (121).

In “Holler If Ya Hear Me: Black Men, (Bad) Rap(s), and the Return of the Black Brute,” Tucker reiterates the image of black men as portrayed in the media through rap and rappers, focusing specifically on Tupac Shakur, whose “thug-like tattoos also suggest that his work is informed by an African American messianic tradition” (157). Rap artists use their craft to point out images and instances of social injustice. At the same time, rappers are caught between political expression to uplift their community and their behaviors that appear in conflict with that philosophy of uplift. Tucker finds

that “when black men speak beyond the parameters of acceptability delineated by white America, their voices are demonized” (131).

On the whole *Lockstep and Dance* seeks to bring together elements of popular culture into a work that focuses on the lives of black men. Although there are elements of repetition, Tucker, who at the end of the work admits that she is a white Canadian woman, does bring a measure of objectivity to the study. Since the cultural concept of representation is a salient feature of this work, I would have liked to see more analysis from the perspective of how meaning is obtained from these events in the lives of black men. On the whole, readers should be able to read *Lockstep and Dance* objectively and to place it within the larger body of scholarship on popular culture.

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Villez, Barbara, *Television and the Legal System*. London and New York: Routledge, 2010. 141 pages; bibliography, index.

We now have Barbara Villez’s valuable *Television and the Legal System* in English. First published in French as *Séries télé: visions de la justice* in the middle of the decade by the Presses Universitaires de France, it has now been republished by Routledge in its “Law, Society and Popular Culture” series, translated by the author, a native New Yorker now teaching at University of Paris 8. Reading it again now, after struggling through the French version, I must admit to only grasping a fraction of its subtlety and breadth.

It is certainly no surprise, coming as it does from one of the seminal European figures in the development of the study of comparative media and law, that this monograph offers an important guide, proposing new ways to think about how the import/export of television legal drama inexorably influences legal culture in a nation like France. “American citizens know their rights and how their judicial system works,” Villez writes in an important passage,

although there has never been an obligatory program on the subject included in school curricula, contrary to France. It is likely that a vast majority of the population in the United States has acquired this information simply from watching courtroom dramas, perhaps religiously and for some, from a very young

age. If the French television channels buy American law series and French viewers watch, when programming is reasonable, then it should be no surprise that people in France have acquired criteria on the American legal system rather than on their own. Watching the American law series produced since the 1990s, which provide a complex image of law and justice, the French have become aware of questions which are not foreign to their own society, one that has become just as judicialized and complex. Thus, it is perhaps not only the quality of these programs which lure the French viewer, but also the questions dealt with and which echo those of all modern societies.

Villez also suggests discerning ways to think about each of the major players in such dramas, from judges to juries, and contemplates lawyers as both mythic figures and models.

Television and the Legal System is, however, also a first-rate book about television. So much writing about television these days—the Open Court series (*The Sopranos and Philosophy*, *Seinfeld and Philosophy*), the BFI TV Classics, for example—often have little or nothing to say about television itself. Villez offers not only important insights concerning the particularities of television narrative but a rich survey of seminal American legal dramas as well. Whether writing about *Perry Mason*, *Ally McBeal*, *Picket Fences*, or *The Practice*, she demonstrates an indigenous knowledge of the genre. Comparing developments across decades or laying out a valuable typology of the genre, Villez’s writing is consistently clear and judicious. She even examines the industry question of whether to “purchase or produce” and ponders the implication of the increasing international circulation of television, especially American television, for understanding legal systems.

Television and the Legal System is not merely a translation. Villez has updated, in an afterword, developments since the book was published in France and given us a thorough and useful filmography as well. May I add as well, as an admirer of the form, that the book’s epigraphs are a thing of beauty?

I count myself lucky to have heard Barbara Villez speak on more than one occasion. The same combination of engaging modesty and critical acumen she radiates in person shines through these pages as well.

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Rickels, Laurence A. *I Think I Am: Philip K. Dick*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 2010. 440 pages; index, bibliography.

I Think I Am: Philip K. Dick marks the latest offering from Rickels in a complex body of work in both German and English that includes *The Case of California* (1999), *The Vampire Lectures* (1999), and *Nazi Psychoanalysis* (2002). The title itself speaks of the breadth of play involved in this undertaking. Is it actually *I Think I Am: Philip K. Dick*? Or perhaps the title is as it is on the cover with its abutment of self and Other: *I Think I am* [with black type] *Philip K. Dick* [with white type]. What is additionally striking as one reads the book is the missing “therefore” of Enlightenment thought. Given Dick’s fractured and sometimes psychotic perspective, the title is not, appropriately, *I Think; Therefore, I Am: Philip K. Dick*.

The alternate realities of Rickels’s title echo the indeterminacy of important existential questions in Dick’s oeuvre, such as “What is reality” and “What does it mean to be human?” Rather than argue for an answer to these questions, Rickels presents a correlation of ideas, an interdisciplinary “relay of texts” (19) offering connections between the deep subjectivity of schizophrenic case studies, Walter Benjamin’s Frankfurt School-inspired insights, and, of course, the work of Philip K. Dick. In a wide-ranging reading early in the book that includes Goethe, Byron, and Tolkien (especially his translation of *Pearl*), Rickels notes that “My one and only practical critique over the years has been to inquire of every system of thought and belief what it does with and for the dead” (7). Rickels’s analysis, therefore, begins with Dick’s work of unmourning for his dead twin sister Jane: “The embedded moment is the blind spot along for fantasy’s drive for super-vision—so super as to be dead, or rather dead-dead, eternally alive” (74). Dick, of course, like us, wondered often where the dead go, and Rickels’s psychoanalytical mapping attempts to retrace the author’s own research into schizophrenia. This blurring of the boundary between sane and insane then develops into a deeper interrogation within the demilitarized zone of Dick’s work, a place where neither readers nor characters can be sure about the distinction between reality/simulation, spirit/material, alive/dead, and past/future.

Dick’s work cannot be merely read, flung out as it often was at warp speed from within the event horizon of extreme postmodern angst. The

literature of psychosis itself, in fact, appears to have been the final frontier for Dick, the last place left to colonize, and sometimes, as in *Lies, Inc.*, it becomes Whale's Mouth, the undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveler returns. Rickels also notes that later works such as *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* and *Ubik* "refine and reflect the combination first tried out in *Martian Time-Slip*" (120) of unstable temporal realities. This theme of scrambled ontology, first noted in Rickels's title by the absence of the causal "therefore," later develops "though the archetypes of the collective unconscious [that] recur in a variety of altered states" (153). What begins as a quest to create meaning in *Galactic Pot-Healer*, for example, becomes dangerously pathological in *Dr. Bloodmoney*, where "Dick projects mass death resulting from convergence between psychosis and modern physics via the figure of Dr. Bluthgeld" (153). Psychosis and technology work together in a secularization of Christian teleology: no one can return in part because reality has an annoying habit of always changing. The ontological scramble becomes an epistemological one: if reality is always shifting, how can we know what is real?

The last part of the book explores Dick's other big question: what does it mean to be human? Here empathy is defining, and this quality, like the impossibility of fantasy and psychotic vision, is disembodied like Dick's tragically deceased twin Jane. Just as the "digitally enhanced" (an ironically tactile phrase) final cut of *Blade Runner* blurs the distinction between audience and fiction, "Dick's alternate reality of mourning or unmourning as half-life [,] views the deceased and the survivor as always having in common that they both lost each other. Therefore it proves possible to travel through a time in which one cannot decide who died on whom" (417). Similarly, the difference between human and non-human, human and replicant, dead and undead, past and future, real and unreal, collapses since each is a projection of the Other.

I Think I Am: Philip K. Dick is a complex work well worth the effort of exploration. Importantly, the book has application beyond the study of Dick and other writers and film-makers he influenced. Rickels does not merely invite readers to see Dick's work the way he does; instead, the theoretical framework invites a broader vision that includes and projects outward from science fiction and fantasy.

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