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Disney through the Web looking glass

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Abstract

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For critics of the Disney Corporation, the World Wide Web is a convenient medium for providing information and expressing concern. The majority of anti–Disney Web sites are run by either Christian or labour rights organisations as utilitarian adjuncts to offline campaigns. In contrast are a number of idiosyncratic individual anti–Disney sites that provide links to criticism from a variety of perspectives. The Web appears to facilitate this type of cross–issue critique. On the other hand, some forms of opposition to Disney, such as by employees and corporate competitors, are largely absent from the Web. Assessing challenges to a corporation by examining Web sites is likely to give a partial picture.

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Shadows in the Kingdom

For those whose childhood memories stretch back a few decades, the name Walt Disney is likely to bring associations of wholesomeness, innocence and American virtue. From the time of its earliest movies such as *Fantasia* to the 1950s television show *The Mickey Mouse Club* and the famous theme park Disneyland, the Disney enterprise made a name for itself through the packaging of good feelings in a safe environment where the only threats were well understood and contained.

Some of this image persists, but in the past decade a shadow of discontent has begun to dim the innocent sparkle of the Magic Kingdom. The reality is that Disney has become a multibillion–dollar corporation that in many respects is no different from any other communications giant. The Disney Corporation has been exposed for paying pitiful wages to employees in the Third World, just like other multinationals accused of

exploitation, such as Nike.

In its corporate expansion, Disney has acquired a plethora of subsidiaries, including some whose activities — such as producing Hollywood films with lots of sex and violence — do not fit Disney's traditional image. More generally, Disney engages in aggressive marketing just like any other corporation, undermining the impression that it is part of a different world of magic and innocence.

In these ways Disney has opened the doors for dissatisfaction that is especially acute because the reality — a commonplace one in the corporate world — clashes with its longstanding image. Cynics will say that Disney's image as a "happy family" was never realistic, but instead behind the scenes Disney was just as marked by rivalries and ruthlessness as any other large organisation. Nevertheless, Disney's public image, conveyed especially through Disneyland and its filmed entertainment, maintained the myth for many years. But one consequence of this was that once the curtain was pulled back, disillusionment was especially intense.

Dissatisfaction with corporations can lead to many forms of action, such as individual customers withdrawing their patronage or making complaints, employees organising or going on strike, and community groups launching campaigns (Hirschman, 1970). Here we look at just one facet of anti–Disney sentiment and organising: anti–Disney Web sites.

For some groups, such as churches and labour rights organisers, the Web provides a convenient tool but does not introduce any qualitatively new dimension to their activities: the Web is used mainly as a supplementary medium of communication. For others, though, the Web makes possible the expression of opposition that previously would have remained limited or unexpressed. It is cheap and easy to set up a Web site, the main requirements being time and energy.

Our aim is to explore the ecology of anti–Disney on the Web, in particular looking for new species of opposition that flourish in the Web medium. First, though, we begin in the next section with a brief overview of Disney in its historical and social context, outlining the corporation's transformations that have led it to be a target for particular types of opposition. Then we turn to anti–Disney Web sites, classifying them — Christian, labour rights and others — and then assessing them in several ways, including by their appearance, goals and strategy. The most distinctive emergent aspect of anti–Disney Web sites is the existence of independent sites that link to other sites, including those that have little common ground.

Disney in context

For more than 80 years, the Walt Disney Company (the "Company") has produced and disseminated a specific set of family values and world views. In the safe and preferably sterile world of Disney, good prevails over evil, all hardships are overcome and people live happily ever after. Through corporate acquisitions, mergers, subsidiaries and new start–up ventures, this Disney ideology has become naturalised across filmed entertainment, television and cable broadcast networks, books and music, newspaper and magazine publishing, theatre productions, amusement parks, home video, consumer merchandise and, of course, the Internet.

The Company's beliefs and attitudes continually have been recycled through an expansive mass production, with all business units synergistically linked together like the tentacles of a giant octopus. Although, as Gomery [1] points out, the Company has "not been a success story from the beginning," its systematic growth and regularisation of business units into profit centres has made Disney one of the largest transnational corporations in the world. In turn, this has enabled the Company to cultivate a powerful demand for generic cultural commodities from audiences of all ages.

The commodification of Disney culture, as evidenced by the first musical cartoon *Steamboat Willie* (1928), can be seen as part of Walt Disney's core ideals and business decisions to sell cartoons by the foot. The original Disney animations were sold to the major studios in large numbers and used in double bills serving the whole family. The Disney shorts were fun to watch and the images themselves became commodified. Advertisements and promotions, in addition to the films, created a sense of desire for the featured Disney products and commodified anything associated with the Disney brand name.

As deCordova (1994) illustrates, Walt Disney created a consumerist environment by merchandising toys, dolls, clothes and novelty items with Mickey Mouse's image on them as a way of earning income. As a result, Disney cartoons became a cunning way to promote non–film purchases that increased the Disney bottom line. Soon, children were badgering parents into buying Disney merchandise for them. Adults quickly became the largest consumers of the supporting Disney merchandise since children did not possess enough disposable income to become consumers of products displayed through films.

Although Mickey Mouse is more than 80 years old, his timeless features and his high visibility in promotional campaigns make him seem younger than ever. According to the Company's 2001 10–K financial report, Disney generated US$2,590 million dollars in revenue from consumer products alone. This sales figure suggests a larger consumer caste made up of children, adults, parents and grandparents who can relive the magic of Disney vicariously through their offspring. "Baby Boomers," for example, who have grown up with Disney characters, can relive the nostalgic fantasy on their own or share that Disney feeling with their kids. Disney capitalises on this sense of timelessness with its licensed cartoon characters and films and has marketed them in a way that recycles interest over and over again.

Today, Disney designs, promotes, markets and licenses merchandise in a way that combines the seamless appeal to children *vis-à-vis* multiple layers in the film's narrative with a highly visible product line in the marketplace. In its search for profits, the Company employs a cross–promotion and merchandising strategy, utilising recycled characters and themes through nearly every possible mode of communication. This includes working with non–Disney companies such as McDonald's to act as retailers through the Happy Meal, in and of itself a tool to exploit the willingness of parents to capitulate to the desires of children despite the negative effects of the products.

Television advertising has played a significant role here. As Schickel (1968) suggests, television has been an important promotional outlet for the Company's characters, themes and new projects since 1950. Disney television programmes promote the Company as a brand name and promote Uncle Walt as an artistic genius who has a monopoly of magic and imagination. There is no better childhood friend than Uncle Walt. Disney television programmes also promote Disneyland, Disney World and Disney movies as exercises in magic and imagination for the "kid in everyone," especially for the kid born into "good" and "wholesome" families.

As a result of this cross-promotion strategy, Disney has circulated its preferred set of opinions and common sense across multiple media to multiple age and gender groups. This is clearly an example of the corporate invasion of childhood that Disney has been doing for decades. A kind of generic monoculture surrounds audiences with leitmotifs of nostalgia, perpetual childhood and fantasy in a dominating ideology, or what Schiller in "On That Chart" [2] calls "packaged consciousness — a one–dimensional, smooth–edged cultural product — [that] is made by the ever–expanding goliaths of the message and image business."

Disney culture, then, is the by–product of a dominating synergistic corporate strategy Disney uses to monopolise the flow of information. For Schiller [3], this "constitutes the true levers of contemporary power." For other scholars and Disney critics such as Wasko [4], Disney "stories and characters typically go through a process of Disneyfication, which involves sanitization and Americanization." This process has had a significant impact on audiences across the globe, especially for those who are acutely aware of Disney's ideological agenda. As this article demonstrates, anti–Disney Web sites offer ways of combating the Disneyfication of society.

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Most scholars and critics alike would probably agree that a large part of Disney's success could be credited to its "skillful use of new technologies" [5]. In particular, Disney's corporate marketing strategies have become evident on the Company's Web site (www.Disney.com) — one of the largest Internet sites run by a transnational conglomerate. In the autumn of 1995, the Company increased its bottom line with the start–up of Disney Online, a business unit established to create a Web site that would represent all of the individual Disney business units as a cohesive whole.

Since then, Disney Online has provided the Company with new tools to shape the production and distribution of information as a homogenised marketing commodity. Unlike any other promotional vehicle, Disney.com has given Disney business units direct access to consumers' homes and the ability to solicit immediate commercial transactions. The title bar of Disney's home page is not shy about stating: "Disney Online — Where the Magic Comes to You!"

Disney aggressively pursues new audiences and markets as well as trying to maintain its current consumer base by driving traffic toward its Web site. As Blevins [6] points out, the Company focuses on access to interactive online technology by specifically promoting Disney merchandise through the Internet and vice versa. For example, *Hunchback of Notre Dame* sing–along cassettes and read–along cassette and book products advertise a statement on the back of the packages that reads: "Share the music of Disney — Visit our Web Site: www.Disney.com."

Disney merchandise invites consumers to log onto the Internet and explore Disney's massive Web site, which is full of catalogues, games, images and interactive animated stories from Disney films. Disney also advertises its Web site address in newsletters and at the end credits of its home videos and theatrically released features. Each of these cross–promotion vehicles drives traffic toward the Disney.com home page while reminding audiences how easy it is to log on.

Disney's Web site is easy to find without prior knowledge of its address, being well positioned on numerous Internet search engines such as Yahoo and Google. Thus, it is

easy to see how Disney attempts to surround its existing and future consumers with a global marketing campaign that is immersive and crosses international borders with a minimum of change.

Scholars such as Bryman (1995; 1999), Buckingham (1997), deCordova (1994), Dorfman and Mattelart (1975), Hiaasen (1998), Lewis (1994), Ostman (1996), Smoodin (1994), Wasko (2001), Wasko *et al.* (2001) and Yoshimoto (1994) have shown that the commodification of Disney culture has now reached global markets once unattainable. The Internet, in particular, has delivered Disney culture to millions of households, schools and workplaces all over the world.

However, the same technology has enabled anti–Disney groups and individuals to voice their views and spread their own messages against what Bryman [7] calls the "Disneyization" of the world: "the process by which the principles of the Disney theme parks are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world." A fly in the ointment of Disney's expansive and successful online strategy, then, is the appearance and persistence of anti–Disney Web sites, which have become quite skilful showcases of the same new technologies that Disney uses.

Anti–Disney Web sites articulate intense dislikes for one or more of Disney's activities, including exploitation of labour, objectification of female images, favourable portrayal of homosexuality, condoning of a Gay–day parade and promotion of a "Gay agenda," recreation of folk tales as xenophobic and racist texts, and reaffirmation of a patriarchal and imperial society.

In many ways, the authors of anti–Disney Web sites have positioned their goals, methods and strategies in direct reaction to Disney's operating and promotional ideologies and their perceived impact on society. Although they do not share the same social and political views, anti–Disney sites could be said to be against some facet of the Disneyfication of society.

Web challenges

Using search engines, it is straightforward to track down a range of Web sites critical of Disney. Some sites offer links to others and through such links a reasonably comprehensive list can be obtained. By the nature of the Web, sites come and go, so it was never our intention to compile a definitive list of anti–Disney sites but rather to investigate the main types of these sites.

The general ease by which Web sites can be posted, modified and removed leads to a methodological complexity not usually encountered with print or broadcast media: our investigations may lead to modifications of the sites. In particular, as soon as we contacted site managers asking questions about the sites, it became a prospect that the sites might be modified because of our scrutiny.

We took the precaution of making copies of the sites before sending our questions, but nevertheless the sites as public objects are susceptible to transformation as a result of scrutiny. The bottom line is that the sites as you might link to them today may well be different from their availability, content and appearance when we analysed them. Copies of sites that have changed or disappeared are available from the first author on request.

Having found a finite universe of anti–Disney Web sites, we classified them into three categories: Christian, labour rights and "other." Tables 1, 2 and 3 list the principal sites that we examined along with our assessment of several features of the written content of the sites:

- the reasons for being critical of Disney;
- the goal of the individual or group running the site, namely what they would like Disney to do or become;
- the methods by which the site sponsors proposed or undertook to move towards their goals;
- the site sponsor's strategy for achieving its goal, namely who will act using the methods and how this will bring about changes in Disney.

Before proceeding further, it is worth noting that there seems to be no standard framework for analysing anti–corporate Web sites, or indeed Web sites more generally. Some possibilities include semiotics, social movement theory, political economy and sociology of knowledge. Our primary purpose is to look at the ecology of anti–Disney Web sites or, to use another analogy, to map the epistemological topography, namely the distribution of sites in conceptual space.

Conceivably there might be anti–Disney sites set up by Disney's competitors, by governments, by dissatisfied customers or any of a wide range of antagonists. In practice we observed only a few distinct species of sites.

Christian sites are a prominent category (see Table 1). An example is a section of the American Family Association's site that is critical of Disney primarily because of its promotion of a homosexual agenda and secondarily because of its purveying of sex and violence in filmed entertainment. Another concern expressed in these Christian sites is Disney's refusal to ban an annual "Gay and Lesbian Day" parade.

The usual goal expressed in the Christian sites is that Disney renounce its anti–Christian ways and return to a policy often described concisely as "pro–family." Several methods are used to encourage this change, such as letters to the chief executive officer and boycotts of Disney films, videos and theme parks. This campaign reached its peak in 1996 and 1997, with mobilisation of many Christians especially through individual churches.

Table 1: Selected Christian anti–Disney Web sites.

Group	Reasons	Goal	Methods	Strategy
American Family Association	1. Promotion of homosexual agenda. 2. [Secondary] Purveying of sex/violence. [Note: Disney coasts on a false reputation of wholesomeness.]	Corporate leaders change direction (towards pro–family agenda).	• Write letters of complaint. • Boycott films, theme parks, ABC, Disney channel. • Obtain local church support. • Display	[implicit] People's awareness leads to letters/boycott leads to change in corporate direction at the top.

			bumper stickers.	
Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights	Disney's hostile portrayal of Catholics in *Priest, Nothing Sacred* and other productions.	Disney returns to its former family–friendly, moral position and represents the Church correctly.	1. Provide postcards for members to complain to Disney. 2. Put ads in newspapers. 3. Cooperate with sympathetic organisations. 4. Encourage Catholic organisations to sell Disney shares. 5. Encourage members to make phone complaints to Disney. 6. Educate the public about the nature of Disney.	[implicit] Pressure on Disney leads to changes in corporate policy.
Christian Action Network	Disney's promotion of homosexual agenda, anti–Christian and anti–family agenda (specifically Disney's condoning of the annual Gay and Lesbian Day parade).	1. Increase group membership. 2. Get Michael Eisner, President of Disney, to stop allowing the annual Gay and Lesbian Day celebration. 3. Reduce participation in Gay lifestyle.	1. Write complaint letters and sign petitions to Disney's CEO. 2. Get people to join the boycott of Disney and all of its theme parks, films, TV shows, properties, merchandise and projects.	Changing Disney executives' awareness will lead to changing some of its policies towards non–heterosexuals.
	1. Disney's promotion of "unwholesome" family values and pro–Gay agenda. 2. Disney's involvement with violent and	1. Biblical principles underline all levels of Disney and the larger sphere of public policy.	1. Get people to join the boycott of Disney. 2. Write letters to politicians and Disney	Mobilisation of activists in small towns and big cities across the

Concerned Women for America	adult–oriented films (via Miramax) and events (Victoria's Secret fashion show). 3. Disney's negative moral influence on society.	2. Women's public policy issues get on local and national agendas. 3. More people adopt Internet filtering technology.	executives. 3. Pressure politicians to enact stronger economic and social policies against Disney.	U.S. (including e–mail) leads to wider adoption of Biblical principles.
Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention	Disney's anti–Christian, anti–family and pro–homosexual agenda (including violence and sexual content in Disney productions; promotion of infidelity, adultery and homosexuality).	Disney returns to pro–family policies.	• Boycott (of movies, videos, merchandise, theme parks). • Education (to support boycott). • Letters to Disney's CEO. • Encourage pastors to support boycott. [follows AFA explicitly]	[implicit] Financial and moral pressure induces Disney executives to change policies.
Radically Saved Boycott of Disney	Disney's promotion of a homosexual, anti–Christian and anti–family agenda.	Disney stops promoting homosexuality.	Call attention to negative press surrounding the boycott of Disney (promote the boycott of the company). Encourage self–directed exploration of anti–Disney Web content.	Raising awareness increases the size of the boycott, which encourages corporate leaders to change their direction.
Sound Mind Investing	Disney not an ethical company because of its promotion of unwholesome family values and the subsequent negative influence on society with declining moral values.	1. [Primary] Increase client base. 2. [Secondary] Get people to save for their retirement by investing in ethical companies that support Christian values.	Make people more aware of anti–Disney movements and other companies that are considered to have unethical business practices.	Offering a range of investment and general financial advice helps its client base follow Christian values and lead a life guided by Biblical principles.

Survival Enterprises: The truth about the Walt Disney Company	Disney's promotion of an anti–family, pro–sexual–perversion agenda through films and pro–homosexual company policies.	Warn ignorant people of Disney's anti–family action in an area labelled "family oriented."	[implicit] Make people aware of the problems; encourage boycott of Disney products	[implicit] Awareness and boycotts change Disney policies (though this is not happening in practice).

The anti–Disney sections of Web sites run by Christian organisations were set up as adjuncts of this grassroots campaign. For example, much of the material on the American Family Association's Web site is taken from a leaflet that was widely distributed in Christian communities. The site ReligiousTolerance.org provides an informative analysis of the Christian anti–Disney sites, commenting that "the boycott of Disney has largely fizzled out by the end of 1997" (Conservative Christian Boycott of Disney Company, 2003).

Given that sex and violence are found in films from many different producers and given that most entertainment giants could not be said to endorse a Christian–style pro–family agenda, it seems that Disney has been targeted because of its image. The American Family Association's site says that Disney coasts on a false reputation of wholesomeness. As one of the non–Christian individual sites vividly puts it, in a list of "Days to mourn in Disney corporate history": "June 30, 1993: Disney buys Miramax Films, which is somewhat like the Catholic Church suddenly bringing New York City's annual Gay Pride parade into Vatican City" (Why Take Down Disney?, 2003).

Christian organisation Web sites can be characterised as utilitarian, in that they were set up to promote a particular agenda, without distinctive independent expressive or artistic goals. In each site, the visual appearance of the anti–Disney sections is much the same as the rest of the site. There is a fair amount of sharing and linking between the Christian organisation sites, not surprisingly considering the way the boycott of Disney spread from one Christian group to another. A few anti–Disney Christian sites, such as Radically Saved Boycott of Disney, are run by individuals. These have agendas closely similar to the Christian organisation sites, but in appearance and style are more like other individual sites discussed below.

How, according to the Christian sites, is Disney to be actually transformed into the pro–family ideal that is their goal? In other words, what is the strategy of the Christian critics of Disney? In most cases, this is not spelled out explicitly. On the basis of the methods and goals, it can be inferred that the strategy is to mobilise large numbers of Christians to make protests and join the boycott. When the pressure and cost becomes sufficiently great, Disney executives will choose to change their policies.

However, there is little evidence that this strategy has had any success. The largest impact of the anti–Disney campaign may be on Christian communities themselves, with many people made aware of church leaders' concerns about homosexuality, sex and violence, in films and elsewhere. Our assessment on this point accords with that of Paige Patterson, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, who was quoted in 1998 as saying about the boycott, "Southern Baptists were speaking as much to themselves as anybody else" (Conservative Christian Boycott of Disney Company, 2003).

Several anti–Disney sites are produced by labour rights organisations (see Table 2). Their main concern is sweatshops in Third World countries where workers are paid pitiful wages in poor conditions to produce goods for Disney. Their goal is better wages and conditions for these workers. The methods recommended encompass pressure on Disney at the top — letters to the CEO and probing questions at shareholder meetings — and from the grassroots, for example through protests at Disney shops, street theatre to generate local media interest, and leaflets and community–access TV shows.

Table 2: Selected anti–Disney sites run by labour rights organisations.

Group	Reasons	Goal	Methods	Strategy
Campaign for Labor Rights	Disney sweatshops (paying 28c/h to garment workers in Haiti).	Better pay and conditions for workers at Disney factories in Haiti.	• Provide information to local activists. • Send letters to Disney's CEO. • Hold local protests in front of Disney stores, plus leafleting and street theatre, and at corporate recruiting sessions.	[implicit] Mobilisation, publicity and pressure from the bottom and at the top, as part of a wider labour strategy, lead to change.
Canadian Labour Congress	Disney sweatshops (low wages for Third World workers producing Disney garments and toys).	Higher wages for Third World Disney workers.	• Write letters to editors, retailers, corporations, politicians and community leaders. • Give presentations at schools. • Gain media coverage via street theatre, puppets and banners. • Produce programmes for community access TV.	[implicit] Pressure on Disney leads to change in corporate policy.

<u>National Labor Committee in Support of Human and Worker Rights</u>	Disney's sweatshops in Bangladesh.	Disney retains its Bangladesh factory, cleans it up and guarantees its workers their human rights.	1. Send letters to Disney's CEO. 2. Organise high–profile events at Disney venues. 3. Distribute leaflets. 4. Discuss the problems with Disney employees, shoppers and others.	[implicit] Pressure on Disney leads to change in corporate policy.
<u>Office of the Americas</u>	Disney sweatshops (low wages for workers across the Americas who produce Disney garments and toys).	Better pay and conditions for workers at Disney factories.	Promote an international boycott of Disney, Disneyland and all Disney subsidiaries.	Raising people's awareness of global injustices and the need for more peace leads to a more socially conscious society, which boycotts all Disney products and properties.
<u>Sweatshops.org</u>	Disney sweatshops (low wages for Third World workers producing Disney garments and toys).	1. Change public opinion about the exploitation of labour in all manufacturing sectors around the world. 2. Better pay and conditions for workers at Disney factories.	1. Write letters to Disney's CEO as well as editors, retailers, corporations, politicians, community leaders. 2. Provide information for local activists. 3. Encourage local protests.	[implicit] Mobilisation, publicity and pressure from the bottom and at the top, as part of a wider labour strategy, lead to change.

In one specific case, the Canadian Labour Congress in association with Maquilla

Solidarity Network, the secretariat for the national coalition Ethical Trading Action group, held an online vote for the "Sweatshop Retailer of the Year Award in 2001. Nearly 3,000 consumers in over twelve countries declared Disney as the winner, beating out Wal–Mart and Nike" [8].

Labour rights sites, like the Christian organisation sites, are utilitarian in design, with few frills. Many companies exploit workers in the Third World; Disney does not seem to be a target for any special reason besides this. Labour rights Web sites are auxiliary to the main effort by labour rights organisations, which is organising action by workers and supporters. These sites do not provide links to any other critics of Disney.

For achieving their goals regarding Disney, the strategy implicit in the labour rights sites is that pressure on Disney, exerted both at the top and through grassroots efforts, will lead to changes in corporate policy. This is part of a wider anti–sweatshop campaigning effort that has significant support in most affluent countries (Klein, 1999). These efforts sometimes achieve success in particular cases but the continuing existence of Third World sweatshops testifies to the power of corporations to continue their practices.

In Table 3 we list a variety of anti–Disney sites that are neither Christian nor labour rights, though some express concerns overlapping with the Christian and labour rights sites. Some of these sites criticise some particular aspect of Disney, such as its lobbying for extending copyright protection (Losing Nemo).

Table 3: Selected anti–Disney sites, excluding Christian and labour rights sites.

Group	Reasons	Goal	Methods	Strategy
Café Arabica (Arab-American Online Community Center): Put the Mouse in the Doghouse	Disney's negative ethnic stereotyping of Arabs in films.	Disney portrays Arabs in a positive fashion.	1. Tell Disney's CEO about the negative impact of ethnic stereotyping in its productions. 2. Contact film critics and editors about offensive aspects of films. 3. Inform Disney that it will be boycotted until it changes.	Pressure on Disney leads to change in portrayal of Arabs.
	Disney's use of transnational		Urge visitors to learn more about	People's awareness leads to a more

People for the Understanding of Disney Is Evil	economic and corporate might to dominate society (take over the world).	Disney goes out of business.	Disney's strategy of "cult recruitment." Solicit ICQ chat sessions.	socially conscious society, which boycotts all Disney products and properties.
Losing Nemo	Disney's lobbying for continually extended copyright terms for Disney characters.	Ending the extension of copyright terms, in particular of Disney characters.	[implicit] Civil disobedience against extended copyright; make people aware of the problems.	[implicit] Civil disobedience and awareness end Disney's extended copyrights.
T L McDonald	Cultural degradation, homogenisation; body image stereotypes; animal stereotypes; environmental impact; corporate exploitation.	Local cultural production.	Urge individuals to redirect expenditure.	[implicit] Raising awareness.
Society of Disney Haters	Disney is not accountable for its unethical products and practices: sweatshop labour; human and animal endangerment; mistreatment of environment; mistreatment of employees and staff.	1. Disney changes its policies. 2. Government leaders change regulations towards corporations.	Get more people to participate in online discussions, post messages, ask questions, write critical essays and explore other anti–Disney Web sites.	[implicit] Pressure on Disney from a growing group of aware and angry netizens leads to change in social opinions and corporate policies.
	Disney's exploitation of child labour and focus only on	Make people more aware of anti–Disney movements	1. Get people to visit other anti–Disney Web sites and learn how to "fight back" against the evil empire. 2. Boycott Disney's (Miramax's) amoral films and	1. Offering a range of anti–Disney Web links enables people to increase their awareness of the problems

The Unauthorized Anti–Disney page	profit. Disney's production of films and other products that mock Christianity and wholesome family values.	and how Disney continues to extend its influence as a giant producer of culture.	products and the company's ABC television shows. 3. Encourage Web site visitors to e–mail the site owner to find out more about Disney's "crimes against humanity and nature."	and issues concerning the Disney empire. 2. People are inspired to get more involved in various anti–Disney activities promoted by Web links.
Web Alliance for the Respectful Treatment of Asian Cinema	Disney's editing of Asian films with new dialogue, new musical scores, removal of footage, different stories and/or new names, and prevention of sale of imported versions.	Asian films should be available uncut with the original language and musical score.	1. Write letters to Disney's CEO. 2. Tell others. 3. Sign a petition. 4. Refuse to purchase inferior films.	[implicit] Pressure leads to revised Disney practices concerning Asian films.
Why Take Down Disney?	Disney's iron control over its entertainment formula that produces boring mediocrity; Walt Disney's legacy of misogyny; Disney's ruthless anti–competitive behaviour; Disney sweatshops.	[implicit] Greater diversity and creativity in Disney productions; ending of misogyny, anti–competitiveness and sweatshop exploitation.	[implicit] Make people aware of problems with Disney.	[implicit] Heightened awareness influences Disney to change.

Other sites are generically anti–Disney: the authors appear to hate Disney and to raise a host of arguments against the Company, including exploitation of workers in the Third World, mistreatment of Disney employees, damage to the environment, degrading the culture through homogenised entertainment packages, and Disney's very existence as a

powerful multinational corporation.

Many of the sites in Table 3 are run by individuals. The goals and methods proposed by the individual anti–Disney sites (including the individual Christian sites in Table 1) are varied; in most cases there appear to be no strategies, explicit or implicit, to achieve goals, an absence that may reflect the unlikelihood that a single individual's efforts could budge a powerful organisation.

For most of these sites, it appears that expressing dissatisfaction is an end in itself. Unlike the Christian organisation and labour rights sites, individual sites are largely expressive rather than instrumental. Many are adorned with Disney cartoon characters and other amusing touches. Some contain misspelled words and clumsy expression. Rather than being slick and professional, like Disney's and other corporate sites, the individual anti–Disney sites are personal and idiosyncratic.

Some of the generically anti–Disney sites contain links to anything that is negative about Disney, including links to Christian and labour rights sites, to news articles critical of Disney and to other individual anti–Disney sites. Some sites contain dozens of such links, though many links are now broken. In essence, these sites serve the function of cross–fertilisation. Whereas Christian sites offer links primarily to other Christian sites and labour rights sites primarily to immediate labour concerns, the individual cross–fertilising sites include both of these and much more. Without the Web, this function would be much more difficult to sustain. With the Web, it is straightforward.

We have omitted a number of sites that contain material critical of Disney but for which the label "anti–Disney" is not appropriate. For example, the site Transparency contains sophisticated essays on simulation and artificial realities, including essays on Disney creations: though critical of Disney, the primary point of these essays is less about Disney itself than a wider cultural dynamic.

We also omitted sites like Kazaa and other Internet tools that allow an individual to access the original content of companies like Disney and redistribute it in digital form. Sharing files — said by corporations to constitute stealing — can be read as a manifestation of anti–corporate sentiment. This can be an authentic form of resistance to Disney because of the re–appropriation process that surrounds the Disney artefact, a process that clearly takes place outside of Disney's strategic marketing plans. However, because file sharing as a phenomenon is seldom targeted specifically at Disney, we omitted these sites from our analysis.

The tables summarise features of anti–Disney Web sites but there is no equivalent way of dealing with anti–Disney sentiment and action that is not expressed via a Web site. Disney's corporate competitors — such as Time–Warner and Fox — certainly have reason to oppose Disney in certain ways, including the goal of capturing part of Disney's market or even taking over the corporation. There is no overt Web expression of this challenge to Disney, not surprisingly considering that corporations seldom engage in direct public attacks on competitors except sometimes in advertisements.

It is conceivable that some Web sites are fronts for Disney's competitors, in the style of corporate–sponsored fake consumers' groups (Stauber and Rampton, 1995), but this seems unlikely given the negative publicity that would result from exposure.

Some of Disney's employees — not just the ones in the Third World — have reason to oppose corporate policies, for example to improve their wages and conditions. For example, policies mandating equal treatment of employees without regard for sexual

preference — a source of concern from some Christians — is one response by Disney management to pressures from lesbian, gay and bisexual employees. Like any corporation, Disney employees have concerns about occupational health and safety, equal employment opportunity, excessive work hours, sexual harassment and bullying, but these matters are not apparent in anti–Disney Web sites.

Figure 1 is a conceptual topography of potential and actual anti–Disney sites. Groups internal to Disney, such as employees, seem not to be represented in anti–Disney sites, at least not explicitly. Among organisations and individuals external to Disney, only a few — the ones discussed here — host anti–Disney material on the Web.
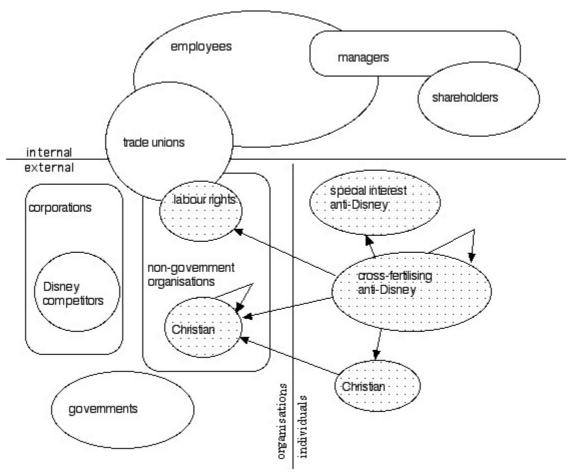

Figure 1: A conceptual topography of potential and actual anti–Disney material on the Web. The figure is divided into sections internal and external to Disney. The bottom–half section, external to Disney, is divided into organisations and individuals. Domains hosting anti–Disney Web sites are shaded. Arrows indicate principal Web links.

Figure 1 suggests that in analysing Web sites, it can be just as important to consider what is absent as what is present. There can be little doubt that anti–Disney sentiment exists in a wide range of groups and individuals. All of them are potential Web site authors or hosts, but only a few actually display Web sites.

■ ————————————————————

Discussion and conclusion

Our examination of anti–Disney Web sites reveals a number of features about opposition to Disney, about the characteristics of Web expressions of opposition to corporations, and about the process of Web site examination.

The most common types of anti–Disney sites are Christian and labour rights, most of which are online adjuncts to wider Christian or labour campaigns. For these Christian and labour rights organisations, the Web is simply another communication medium, a supplement to efforts elsewhere. Campaigning sites tend to be utilitarian in appearance and collectively self–referential in terms of links. The Christian and labour rights sites do not provide links to each other.

Individual anti–Disney sites, including some Christian ones, tend to be expressive and distinctive, in general less corporate in style. For example, T L McDonald's site is designed to create awareness and stimulate thinking about Disney's continual representation and promotion of a homogeneous "Americanised" mythology that has no connection to multiple histories or other cultures.

Some of the individual sites provide links to a wide number of opponents of and critical material about Disney, including to Christian and labour rights sites. These particular individual sites can be said to be "cross–fertilising" various types of opposition to Disney. This type of oppositional function, while not unique to the Web, certainly seems easier to find expression on the Web than through other media.

It is also important to note that certain varieties of anti–Disney sentiment and action, such as from employees and corporate competitors, have little or no visibility on the Web. If we can speak about an ecology of opposition to Disney, then the Web encourages growth of a new species, the cross–fertilising site, but suppresses any growth of corporate or employee opposition.

> If we can speak about an ecology of opposition to Disney, then the Web encourages growth of a new species, the cross-fertilising site, but suppresses any growth of corporate or employee opposition.

A number of studies have examined the power of multinational corporations (Barnet and Cavanagh, 1994; Greider, 1997; Korten, 1995; Mander and Goldsmith, 1996; Monbiot, 2000) and opposition and alternatives to them (Douthwaite, 1996; Klein, 1999; Korten, 1999). Some corporations, such as McDonald's, Nestlé and Nike, are singled out for special attention by activists. Disney is one of those that have received special condemnation, in particular the Christian–sponsored boycott of 1996–1997.

Despite efforts put into these campaigns, their overall impact seems to be minimal. Anti–Disney Web sites offer quite a collection of methods for opposing Disney's policies, but fail in giving any evidence of the effectiveness of these techniques. Both Christian and labour rights sites recommend writing letter–writing campaigns to Disney's CEO, but give no evidence that these letters earn any response.

More generally, anti–Disney sites are weak in offering a viable strategy for changing Disney's policies. If there had been dramatic victories in anti–corporate activism, these would be trumpeted widely and used as exemplars for challenging other corporations.

Our examination of anti–Disney sites offers a number of lessons about how to proceed in an assessment of sites. Most of these are based simply on commonsense or good research practice.

- Obtain background information on the corporation through conventional methods.
- Search for all possible sites using search engines.
- If possible, make copies of all sites analysed.
- Classify the sites by parameters of interest, such as appearance, size, purpose, authorship, language and strategy.
- Note the absence of types of sites dealing with expected types of anti-corporate activity.
- Contact site managers to check assessments.

We did not attempt to determine the effectiveness of anti–Disney sites in achieving their goals. Assessing the effectiveness of social action is notoriously difficult. If a Web site achieves vast numbers of hits and is central to an ongoing campaign, as in the case of the McSpotlight site (http://www.mcspotlight.org/) in relation to anti–McDonald's campaigning, then it is reasonable to say it is effective, but none of the anti–Disney sites has anything approaching this impact.

Many of the anti–Disney site managers who responded to our queries seemed unsure of the effectiveness of their sites. We can say, though, that anti–Disney Web sites are bound to increase awareness and stimulate thinking about the implications of Disney's corporate agenda and its source of power over the production and representation of a certain kind of homogenised culture. Furthermore, the cross–fertilising sites highlight diverse rationales and methods for opposing Disney in a way that is unusual in other media. Whether this stimulation and cross–fertilisation leads to organisational collaboration remains to be seen.

It is important to remember that Web sites are symbolic, though they can have material impacts. One correspondent reported to us not only making critical comments on discussion boards but also "going into video stores such as Best Buy and Wal–Mart and turning around the boxes of VHS and DVD videos published by Disney so that their labels face away from the front of the shelf, diverting shoppers' attention toward other studios' videos and creating more work for video retailers that wish to carry a large selection of Disney videos." To the extent that anti–Disney sites reflect and stimulate such action, the Company has something to worry about.

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Notes

1. Gomery, 1994, p. 85.

2. Schiller, 1996a, p. 16.

3. Schiller, 1996b, p. 114.

4. Wasko, 2001, p. 113.

5. Gomery, 1994, p. 86.

6. Blevins, 2002, p. 107.

7. Bryman, 1995, p. 25.

8. Ian Thomson, Maquilla Solidarity Network, personal communication, 16 April 2003.

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