Omnitopia Excerpts

The following are brief excerpts from my published essays regarding omnitopia. Naturally I encourage you to download the full articles to learn more.

If you have difficulty accessing these resources through your library, please contact me at Andrew.Wood@sjsu.edu. I am happy to assist you personally.

Wood, A. (2003). A rhetoric of ubiquity: Terminal space as omnitopia. *Communication Theory, 13*(3), 324-344.

We examine omnitopia to confront the sense that once each space becomes "everyplace," no single place seems real to us. An initial inquiry into the nature of terminal space may provide useful insight into omnitopia as a grander fusion of similar environments that enact a protected locale for the wealthy and privileged. From a rhetorical perspective, terminal space becomes a text affirming a particular value system based on mobility. Here, one recalls the 1997 Robert Zemeckis film, *Contact*, in which a wealthy industrialist has abandoned the earth, living in airplanes and, eventually, an orbiting Russian spacecraft. What better marker of wealth may one find than the ability to move wherever and whenever one chooses? Compare this freedom to the signs in many urban fast food restaurants that demand their occupants to leave the premises within 30 minutes. Of course, the study of terminal space is really an inquiry into the state of the modern project and the ability to construct a sense of power so complete that it becomes almost monolithic.

Wood, A. & Todd, A.M. (2005). "Are we there yet?": Searching for Springfield and the Simpsons' rhetoric of omnitopia. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 22*(3), 207-222.

The Simpsons radically departs from television's tradition of relatively fixed environments. *The Simpsons* depicts urban life as a "virtual space," such as one might find in an online environment. Its rules and consequences depart radically from everyday experience (or so one might first imagine). One might initially explain this phenomenon as being a consequence of the animated nature of the show. To be sure, animated places are freed from the constraints of physics. That's part of their power, part of the pleasure of viewing them. When Bugs Bunny famously announces: "You can get away with nearly anything--in an animated cartoon," he celebrates the mutability of his medium while recalling the relatively fixed nature of ours. In real life, we assume persons and places to be confined to immutable laws of physics and decorum: one may not be in two places at the same time; one must know one's place. However, *The Simpsons* does more than merely play with the rules of "real life" for comedic effect. We have argued that the show insightfully depicts the increasingly paradoxical nature of public life wherein urban environments seem to be transformed into themed Vegas-sets, Disneyfied into a "Toontown." Treating *The Simpsons*' notion of public life as omnitopian accounts for its rhetoric of ubiquity. Our goal, however, has not only been to offer an account of Springfield, but to demonstrate how this popular culture text reveals practices of modernity beyond the show's comedic frame.

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Wood, A. (2005). "The best surprise is no surprise": Architecture, imagery, and omnitopia among American mom and pop motels. *Space and Culture, 8*(4), 399-415.

With their ancient sheets, Pepto Bismol-colored bathroom tiles, and yard-sale quality furniture, mom-and-pop motels preserve an almost forgotten component of American public life. As a scholar and as a traveler, I have come to love motels that cling to the highway even as they struggle to remain solvent in the face of national and international chains. However, as I have proposed in this essay, motels' dislocation enacted through vernacular architecture, fragmentation enacted through iconic imagery, and mutability enacted through roadside simulacra reflect a larger process through which they (and other peripatetic places) began to naturalize the omnitopian experience. Motels, with their promises of anonymity, their endless repetition of names such as Sunset, Starlight, Capri, and Western, and their orientation around the comings and goings of automobiles, provide a useful case study for the growth of omnitopia in the United States.

Wood, A. (2005). "What happens [in Vegas]": Performing the post-tourist *flâneur* in "New York" and "Paris". *Text and Performance Quarterly, 25*(4), 315-333.

[W]e rediscover the strollers of totalizing environments, wanderers through the nodes of omnitopia that seem perpetually to lead from one consumer ploy/play to another. We find that these tourists adapt the place into their kind of space, a stage-set for their own performances. Drifting through a hyperurban matrix of themed environments, post-tourist *flâneurs* drag meanings from individual sites, commenting upon them, framing them, and editing them on the spot or elsewhere. Here and there (and even in the "everywhere" of omnitopia) they counter what Nigel Thrift describes as the feared inevitability of a dehumanized world in which the "lifeworld is taken over by the system, 'authentic' spaces by programmed consumer spaces, tactics by strategies, and so on" (Spatial Formations 5). To be sure, their productions of consumer places -- fragmented, inchoate, fleeting, and ephemeral--may not "challenge" them in a manner suitable to cultural critics, nor do they enable the experience of genuinely "authentic" relationships as imagined by the idealists among us. But these performances are meaningful enough; they affirm the potential to play in the landscapes of power. And sometimes playing is the most radical choice one can make.