

Disney techno-nature

[Parts of the World](#), [Africa](#)



Disney Techno-Nature Like most Disney material, nature themes were incorporated into the earliest parks, including Adventureland, Frontierland, Nature's Wonderland, and the newest, Animal Kingdom. Disney carefully edited these "natural" settings that show the less wild side of the wilderness. However, how does the tourist comprehend the illusions? How are the plants and animals adapting to reflect the illusion, and how are they accented by the interactions with both human nature and Disney's technological nature? These questions and more will be answered within the following sections: Definitions, Technological Nature, Kilimanjaro Safari, and The Final Answer. The Animal Kingdom is a modern exhibit designed to follow the "natural pattern" of an African community. The most eye-popping attraction, the Kilimanjaro Safari, is an open-air, nearly barrier-free animal reserve at Florida's Walt Disney World. It was a major shift from a cow playground to a zone of care for other wise caged animals. Here, African animals freely roam through acres of savanna, rivers, and rocky hills. The rider is advised to be aware, "You never know what could happen in the wilderness" (Tate 1). Definitions Before I can begin to consider the "nature" of the Animal Kingdom, the definitions of nature and technology must be established. Webster's American College Dictionary lists nature as "the natural world as it exists without human beings or civilization." In the case of the Animal Kingdom, this definition is inappropriate because Disney itself is a man-made civilization, with merchants, restaurants, and restroom facilities. Technology is defined as that "branch of knowledge that deals with applied science, engineering and the industrial arts." This definition of technology can be reworked to fit the Disney model of nature. What exactly does Disney

do? Disney applies technology to the Florida area. Technology has allowed for hundreds of acres of Florida land to be safely destroyed by means of controlled burning. With the help of technology, Disney has transported lonely zoo animals and put them in their "original" surroundings once again. Technology uprooted pieces of Africa to better care for African animals in the United States, as well as to provide adventure for those who cannot jet to Africa for a true safari, which includes some risk of danger and insecurity. (Tate 2) In following the form of Heidegger's definition of technology as a mediation of nature, it correctly fits the Disney technological nature (qtd in Phillips 218). Technological Nature With these working definitions of nature and technological nature, we can move onto how Disney's Animal Kingdom uses technological nature. In the newest theme park, Animal Kingdom, Disney has recreated an African community and several other exotic lands, like Dinoland and Asia. Disney engineers, called Imagineers, imported African trees, grasses, and other plants, to provide the setting for the pseudo-savanna attraction, the Kilimanjaro Safari Ride. How does technology add to the realness of the park? "While theme parks are mostly illusion, occasionally things that seem authentic really are. Thatched roofs on buildings in the faux village [of Harambe] were hand woven by 13 Zulu thatchers brought over from South Africa, using bundles of grass harvested by their wives, sisters, and mothers. Some 1500 hand-painted wooden animals were crafted in Bali, under Disney supervision." (Gunther 123) Ninety students from African countries were hired to "really validate the experience." Disney has done a convincing makeover of the Florida acreage. When Franklin Sonn, the African ambassador to the United States saw the

new kingdom, he said " This is my bush veldt. This is my home" (qtd in Shklyanoy 4). Kilimanjaro Safari Specifically, the Kilimanjaro Safari is the prime example of Disney's use of technological nature. " Everyone, listen up! Climb aboard your open-aired safari vehicle for an exciting expedition. African animals freely roam through acres of savanna, rivers, and rocky hills. Look out for giraffes, gazelles, elephants, and lions. But beware, you never know what could happen in the wilderness..." (Tate 1). This greeting is just the beginning of the " wild" ride through the safari. Guests travel in a 32-person vehicle driven by cast members (Disney employees) through an African savanna featuring giraffes, gazelles, elephants and lions. The land is filled with native African plants and trees. In preparing the park, Imagineers spent weeks in Africa, taking notes and photographs of the savanna lands of Africa. " The savanna where [the animals] roam was once drab [Florida] cow pasture, but every weed and rut has been meticulously contoured to resemble an African plain" (Corliss 67). Walt Disney himself would be thoroughly pleased with this transformation. The Tourist I briefly reproduce the setting of the Kilimanjaro Safari to place the reader inside the park. Now take a look at the tourists around you. Sometimes the tourist falls into a certain category, one particularly in the English sightseer. You've seen them; pale skinned or sunburned from the glaring Florida sun, wearing " belly packs", nylon soccer shorts, and black knee-high socks. He is carrying a seemingly expensive camera draped around his neck with a theme park map in hand. Sound familiar? How do the tourists see the Animal Kingdom, having never seen African animals up close nor met a native African? Of course this is awe-inspiring, to even the most frequent visitor. " Oohs and ahhs"

invariably trickle out from the Safari vehicle while passing the sunning lions and the bathing elephants, and crowds gather around the friendly native African students. How is Disney fooling the tourist? The animals presumably look like they reside together in this large acreage of land, but once again the Disney illusion prevails. Moats built to antagonize the most courageous predator separate the species from each other, and feeding troughs are built out of sight so that the animals are not competing to live, as they are in the wilderness. This illusion has several affects. The park was designed to draw us into nature, which has produced an unanticipated effect. The nature of humans has conflicted with the technological nature. Tourists observe only the face value of the park; it is human nature to take subsurface workmanship, such as the laboring of engineers and wildlife agriculturalists, for granted. Its illusion of intimacy and hospitality translates into the mental logic that says one has already 'been there,' fostering a sense of physical and psychic control that does not actually match the 'being there' of a savanna trek in a developed pasture area (King 67). The plants must continually be nurtured with nutrients found in African soils. A synthetic fuel is added to the eighteen inches of Florida sand in order for the foreign plants to propagate and live. The animals must readapt from a zoo surrounding to one more similar to where they were taken from, as well as adapt to the artificial hormones and antibiotics lacing the feed. (Mongeau) To the tourist, the plants and animals only make for the Disney illusion for the tourist's enjoyment. The sightseers must remember that the safari is a modern zoo terrarium and that the creatures are real and are living in a realistic environment, not just a theme park. The creatures, in perspective, are

interesting and entertaining because of human interest (King 65). The Final Answer In the beginning, nature was a competitor, a harsh environment to be subdued. Once under control, it no longer posed a threat but an opportunity for aesthetic and recreational exploration (King 60). Disney pioneered, engineered and directed a contradiction of sorts, and further accentuates the mental and emotional confusion of the average park sightseer. Disney has created what some critics call an "artful contradiction" and "Disnification" of nature (Corliss 66; King 64). Everything is real and almost completely authentic, but not real or authentic to the Florida mainland. Chairman and CEO Michael Eisner says, "This park is all about magic and illusion." The magic, in all its glory, separates the technological nature from the true nature from the tourist. The manufactured "magic moments" are what make it real and separate it from the dangerous possibilities of nature. It is not to say that Disney's Kilimanjaro Safari is naturalistically correct or incorrect; it is a representation, and not a reproduction of the true African savanna. How can nature be surpassed, you ask? Disney. That's how. Works Cited Corliss, Richard. "Beauty and the Beasts." *Time Magazine*; 20 April 1998: 66-70. Gunther, Marc. "Disney's Call of the Wild." *Fortune Magazine*; 13 April 1998: 120-124. King, Margaret J. "The Audience in the Wilderness: The Disney Nature Films." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 24. 4 (1996): 60-68. Phillips, Dana. "Is Nature Necessary?" *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks In Literary Ecology*. Eds. Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996. 204-22. Mongeau, Lionel, former Disney Imagineer. Telephone

interview. 19 March 2000. Shklyanoy, Polina. " Out of the Bottle." Advertising Age; 1 February 1999: 4.