

INTRODUCTION

A Tale of Two Cities

EPCOT will take its cue from the new ideas and new technologies that are now emerging from the creative centers of American industry. It will be a community of tomorrow that will never be completed, but will always be introducing, and testing and demonstrating new materials and new systems. And EPCOT will always be a showcase to the world of ingenuity and imagination of American free enterprise.

—Walt Disney, *Walt's Last Film*, October 1966

There was once a place where neighbors greeted neighbors in the quiet of summer twilight. Where children chased fireflies. And porch swings provided easy refuge from the cares of the day. The movie house showed cartoons on Saturday. The grocery store delivered. And there was one teacher who always knew you had that special something. Remember that place? Perhaps from your childhood? Or maybe just from stories. It had a magic all its own. The special magic of an American home town.

—1996 brochure for Celebration, Florida, Disney's planned community

The future has never seemed so old and so dated. But it wasn't always this way. Rewind and press play to sift through visions of a tomorrow that never quite arrived—a world of rocket ships and tailfins and atomic energy—plastic dreams and plastic realities—the future of the 1960s. Al-

though we wink and smile at the naïve longings of days past, it would be a mistake to deny the ideological force and representational power contained in these images. And it would be equally foolish to laugh too long or too hard at history, leaving our own calcified and worldly-wise longings to sit unmolested in smug cynicism, as though we were too bored to make the same mistakes again. The entertainment industry in general has always been sensitive to our tastes, desires, needs, and longings—always providing us with the sweet release of escape, even when the release we demand is the ironic and self-deprecating command of the so-called post-modern condition.

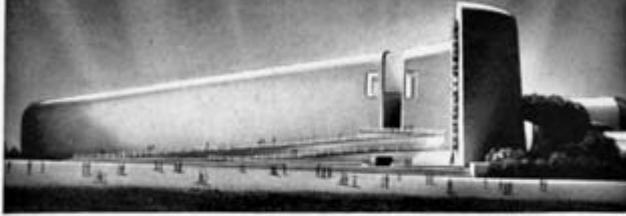
Thus I begin my study of the home with two particular places, which tell three different, but related stories: Disney's EPCOT and Disney's Celebration. Before I mislead you into believing that Disney is a target of this effort, I must be fair and explain that Disney represents, in many ways, the highest development of our culture's dreams, ambitions, and ideals. The Disney Company, which some have criticized as an evil entity, is steeped in capitalist and consumerist ideologies, but I beg you to defer judgment as we are all implicated in these processes.¹ Rather, I would ask readers to search for the little pieces of this Magic Kingdom—as they find themselves nestled in our homes and hearts, animating our toys and technologies, and breathing life into our dreams and fantasies—fatally linking our idea of the good life with a technical future.

Conceived in the 1960s, Walt Disney's Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow, or EPCOT, was to be both a laboratory for future technology and a home for the citizens of tomorrow. As Sharon Zukin notes in *Landscapes of Power*, EPCOT Center (as well as Disneyland) was prefigured in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago (as well as in the 1939 World's Fair in New York), with its development of "amusement parks and rides, stage-set representations of vernacular architecture, state-of-the-art technology, and a special construction of an ideal urban community" (225). More important to this discussion, the Columbian Exposition marked a significant moment in the development of American domesticity. In 1893, at this very fair, where Frederick Jackson Turner delivered his influential thesis on the frontier, a wide range of communications and transportation innovations were put on display, electricity and

the recently invented incandescent light bulb enjoyed prominent positions in the spectacle, and the first “all-electric kitchen” was introduced to an amazed American public.² It is this bundle of concepts and innovations that can be traced through the twentieth-century American home. An awareness of this cultural trajectory is key to properly understanding the “smart home” and its related concepts.

A part of the same curious tradition of spectacle and speculation, the origins of Walt Disney’s city can also be traced through the “World of Tomorrow” World’s Fair held in New York in 1939–1940. Among many notable attractions listed in *The Official Guide Book of the New York World’s Fair 1939* is General Motors’ “Highways and Horizons Exhibit,” which featured Norman Bel Geddes’s “Futurama” highway-of-tomorrow ride (consisting of “magic chairs” that moved spectators around what was then the largest scale model in the history of the world) (see fig. 1). It is one of the most widely referenced precursors to what would become suburban America (*The Official Guide Book of the New York World’s Fair 1939*, 207–8). A transcript of the Futurama narration reads prophetically, as spectators were treated to a view of a model of what looks remarkably like a contemporary concrete superhighway (without the potholes, accidents, and litter): “Looming ahead is a 1960 Motorway intersection. By means of ramped loops, cars may make right and left turns at rates of speed up to 50 miles per hour. The turning-off lanes are elevated and depressed. There is no interference from the straight ahead traffic in the higher speed lanes” (Zim, Lerner, and Rolfes, 109). According to Helen Burgess, in her article “Futurama, Autogeddon,” the General Motors exhibition was prophetic in other ways as well: “In a montage of stock images, the film announced the coming of the world of tomorrow by tapping into narratives of progress and manifest destiny. The film then went on to showcase the Futurama model exhibit, showing close-ups of the Futurama diorama in action, and ended with shots of the popular exhibition building itself, replacing the familiar ‘the end’ with ‘Without End’ to signifying that the future was something to strive for indefinitely” (par. 10). Beyond simply proposing a future of automobiles and superhighways, the General Motors exhibit emphasized a way of being that would be more clearly realized as consumers approached the 1960s as imagined by Bel Geddes.

TOUR THE FUTURE WITH GENERAL MOTORS



GENERAL MOTORS HIGHWAYS AND HORIZONS EXHIBIT AT THE NEW YORK WORLD'S FAIR

YOU RIDE IN SOUND-CHAIRS.

viewing a world in miniature—a vast world of future cities and countryside—industrial and mountainous sections—airports, lakes, rivers and waterfalls—streamlined Diesel trains, tunnels and boats—ten thousand moving cars on the superhighways of tomorrow. A spectacular and life-like "futura" covering more than 35,000 square feet and extending for a third of a mile in and about this General Motors exhibit building of wonders.



CHEVROLET
PONTIAC • OLDSMOBILE
BUICK • LA SALLE
CADILLAC • FRIGIDAIRE
BODY BY FISHER

1. General Motors advertisement (*The Official Guide Book of the New York World's Fair 1939*).

A more recent precursor of the smart home can be found in the 1964 World's Fair, also held in New York, for which privately owned Walter Elias Disney Enterprises (WED) created attractions for Ford Motors ("Magic Skyway"), Pepsi-Cola ("It's a Small World"), General Electric ("Progressland"), and the State of Illinois ("Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln")—all of which were among the most popular attractions that year (Thomas, 313). What is significant about EPCOT, however, is that it takes these attractions a step further, and imagines them as parts of an integrated living environment—in EPCOT, actual families would live, work, and play in a technologically rich environment. In a promotional film released in October 1966 Walt Disney described this idealized relationship between the corporation and the individual: "When EPCOT has become a reality and we find the need for technology that don't [*sic*] even exist today, it's our hope that EPCOT will stimulate American industry to develop new solutions that will meet the needs of people expressed right here in this experimental community."³ In keeping with the spirit of his times, he imagined that the vast resources and engineering capabilities of corporate America that had provided the middle class with such abundance and prosperity in the 1950s could be called on to take this technological manifest destiny a step further, solving problems that had yet to be imagined. Walt continued, enthusiastically, "It will never cease to be a living blueprint of the future where people actually live a life they can't find anyplace else in the world." On another occasion, he explained, "It's like the city of tomorrow ought to be, a city that caters to people as a service function" (quoted in Thomas, 349). Even more revolutionary (or prophetic), this city of the future would have no landowners (except, presumably, at the corporate level), no voting controls, and no retirement; all citizens would be required to work for the maintenance of the city and would live in rented houses and apartments (Thomas, 349). EPCOT, as envisioned by Walt Disney, would be the second coming of the American dream, redirecting the frontier myth into consumer practices, and speaking to all peoples of a place beyond prosperity, beyond freedom, and beyond the mundane imaginings of ordinary life. In short, EPCOT was to be the future—a spectacular vision of an American utopia institutionalized as a process of constant becoming.

Unlike past utopias, which yearned for a state of completeness, this one would achieve perfection in the process of change. Like the latest software, EPCOT would be perfectible insofar as it was upgradeable, and its sophistication would lie in its ability to be rewritten. An early manifestation of contemporary corporate strategies which seek to manage innovation as a resource which can be directed to produce continued results, the idea of an institutionally regulated revolution may seem paradoxical at first, but when considered alongside the respectable business practices of insurance, real-estate speculation, moneylending, and stock trading, this attempt to negotiate “risk” makes a great deal of sense. It seems that as long as technological development is a capitalist enterprise, there will continue to be economic benefits for companies that can subdue the chaos of radical innovations by channeling change through the matrix of existing infrastructures.

This cultural orientation which situates daily life outside of the ordinary suggests, on the one hand, that the coherent nature of the Enlightenment self and the conceptual purity of high-modernist architecture are present in Disney’s plan, and on the other hand, that this plan can account for the incoherencies of a changing self and the instability of a changing city. Mary Anne Doane’s discussion of modernism, for example, points to the consequences of “chance” and “contingency” in the realization of freedom amid the organizing forces of modernist rationality and industrial time as an expression of “cinematic time,” which “acknowledges contingency and indeterminacy while at the same time offering the law of their regularity” (31). Where modernist aesthetics intended to produce freedom, industry finds an asset in abstracted social relations. However, more recent industrial developments (like just-in-time production, flexible accumulation, and pay-per-use) seem to be a reaction to contingency itself. Consequently, recent mainstream cinematic displays seem to accept the contingent nature of representation, yet adhere to a relatively stable system of narration.⁴ Taken as a “regular” part of subjective experience, rationalized systems must take into account this regular irregularity as an area of knowledge. And in a society which traffics in cultural commodities such as film, television, fashion, and advertisement, entrepreneurs must inevitably industrialize these spaces as well. Thus, the goal of EPCOT was

to rationalize fluidity, to traffic in what has been often called “postmodernity” as part of an ordered strategy for social progress.⁵

For all of their visionary promise and utopian dazzle, Walt Disney’s plans for EPCOT were shelved after his death, which occurred a mere two months after he released them, and the company’s efforts, under the direction of his brother Roy Disney, were turned toward the more profitable end of providing entertainment. It was in the name of entertainment that EPCOT was eventually resurrected, in the early 1980s, as the EPCOT Center theme park, a tourist destination and companion to the Magic Kingdom theme park at Disney World in Florida. The updated corporate position on the EPCOT Center was expressed in an article in the futurist-oriented *Omni* magazine, published in September 1982: “The EPCOT that will open this fall will have no permanent residents. The company has adopted the line that the tens of thousands of daily visitors to the Florida Disney complex will be its residents” (Osonko, 70). And, although the article cites Walt Disney’s enthusiastic rhetoric, reminding readers that EPCOT “will always be in a state of becoming” (ibid.), one reader felt the need to express his dismay in a letter published in the following February. In his letter to the editor, Jerome Glenn writes, “When I found out that EPCOT would not have residents, I was furious at WED Enterprises for not honoring Walt’s wish” (10). EPCOT had shifted from being a utopian community forged out of a union between big business and the common citizen, the rationalized embodiment of planning in a technological society, to being a theme park in a society that had increasingly found its utopian promise in entertainment and media. Rightfully ruffling the futuristic feathers of at least one reader, EPCOT had ceased to be a place where the future was to be sought as a process of becoming and had been replaced by a series of attractions through which new products could be observed. The early plan for EPCOT had been scrapped to make way for a more limited and more resolutely commercialistic actuality. The transformation was a profound one, which reverberated through the discourses of household technologies. With the transformation of Walt Disney’s plan in the 1980s, the whole project of “becoming” was understandably watered-down and diminished in its affective flavor. Sure, the current EPCOT traffics in some of the familiar futurist tropes, but it has lost a little bit of its romance

(even if it still maintains its intensity). The new EPCOT, as a theme park, is a vehicle for consumption and, as such, the subjective agency it offers to its audience is no longer the becoming that comes through living in the future, but the actualization that comes through consumer practices and the enjoyment of entertainment. To return to the idea of managed innovation, the original plan for EPCOT and its eventual form might not be all that divergent, since both are attempts to provide a rational subjective context to the seeming disorder of radical innovation. From a consumer perspective, EPCOT might best be understood as an example of what John Hannigan has called the “riskless risk”—it is an orderly context in which a potentially estranging future can be consumed.⁶

Although formally and nominally EPCOT had already been built in the 1980s, Walt Disney’s utopian rhetoric of 1966 got dusted off and used once again in the 1990s, this time to promote the creation of Celebration, Florida. Established in 1994, Celebration is a planned residential community just outside of Orlando, near the Walt Disney World resort and theme park. Tapping into the New Urbanism movement, which was officially named in 1990 and generated a professional organization (the Congress for the New Urbanism) in 1993, Celebration would make use of “neotraditional,” pedestrian-friendly planning and would provide a nostalgic feel through “six traditional design styles,” “small neighborhood parks,” and “ample public spaces” (Fulton, 10, 25).⁷ Focusing on the qualities that made pre-World War II middle-class neighborhoods colorful, interesting, and dynamic, New Urbanist cities like Celebration reflect an attempt to turn away from sprawling, automobile-centered suburbs, and the social and civic isolation that they produce.

However, Celebration goes beyond architectural styles and geographical layouts to satisfy its residents. According to the city’s official website, Celebration is “a place where memories of a lifetime are made, it’s more than a home; it’s a community rich with old-fashioned appeal and an eye on the future” (<http://www.celebrationfl.com>). As the slick nostalgia of the promotional materials betray, Celebration is all Disney. Its wistful glance at small-town American life places it securely in the tradition of Disneyland’s “Main Street, U.S.A.” Its rigorously planned aesthetics and scrupulously scrubbed surfaces give it all the flair of Disney’s feature animation.

And the fact that it houses actual residents while providing them with up-to-date technology suggests at least a nod to the more wide-eyed visions of Walt Disney himself. Celebration, as a result, is situated in the context of both Walt Disney's dream and the corporation's agenda, and represents a powerful manifestation of utopian thinking in the contemporary setting. Although radically different in appearance from both versions of EPCOT, Celebration is perhaps the most sophisticated and groundbreaking effort to advance the technology of innovation management that had been pioneered by its predecessors.

THREE ERAS OF DOMESTICITY

While the "home" is part of a larger tradition, stretching back for hundreds of years and representing a wide range of visions for the good life, these three utopian models—the EPCOT of the 1960s, the EPCOT theme park of the 1980s, and Celebration, Florida, of the 1990s—offer dramatic insights into the larger discussion of home automation. These models represent utility, comfort, entertainment, history, and technology, and an analysis of them serves as an apt point of departure for examining the smart home and futurist marketing strategies in general. Bound up in a dialectic which pits the future against the past, the narratives which have historically been used to sell smart homes are positioned in an uneasy rhetorical position. In general, advertising narratives tend to offer consumers access to things that are lacking, inviting people to improve their lives through commodities. The paradox of the smart home is that these improvements are to be both spectacular and comforting. They must embody a compelling new way of doing ordinary things; from washing clothes to doing the shopping, from mowing the lawn to watching TV, the key is to preserve the ordinary, but to modify it in an interesting way. As the Disney examples suggest, this idea has been subject to changes and negotiations as the moment of the smart home's technological realization approaches. The more radical notions of space-age technologies are replaced by traditional notions of living with technologies that, in the end, are rather mundane and ordinary. In order to make these innovations commonplace, they must seem commonplace. Because of this, a historical sampling of high-

tech-housing arrangements reveals that the narratives used to sell them must constantly negotiate between being and becoming and, inevitably, force their inhabitants to occupy the uneasy space between the human and posthuman.

In the American context, the middle-class suburban home has set the standard and become a cliché for the conception of the “good life” in the twentieth century. As early as 1934, Lewis Mumford noted the developing relationship between the good life and consumer culture.⁸ Although the home has been the subject of much debate for critics of bourgeois culture, an extended look at the middle-class American home reveals an interesting model of cultural development that can be broken down into three eras of domesticity, characterized by space, time, and information. These three qualities must be considered in succession, one on top of the other, with each always redefining the parameters of its predecessors. In my chronology, space exists first. Time is added to this element of space, re-ordering the fundamental principles of space as a union of space and time, or as an expression of motion (space as dynamic). To this new conception of space, information is added, which once again alters expressions of dynamic space, creating an expression of “narrative” space (a conception of space through time with meaning). Each successive element thus represents a “technical” reordering to a conception of place in relation to the good life; each development increases abundance and multiplies agency. Each successive refinement of domestic space brings us closer to the idea of “the Perfect Day”—a technologically enhanced vision of everyday life, freed from obstacles and oriented toward the pursuit of consumer satisfaction.

First of all, the abundance of so-called virgin land in the United States from the onset of this nation’s birth informs my discussion of “home” in a number of interesting ways. In his 1893 essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” Frederick Jackson Turner attributes the American character to an abundance of space. Although the importance of the closing of the frontier, as Turner inferred from U.S. census reports from 1890, on the formation of the American character has been hotly debated, a number of scholars have continued along this line of inquiry,

investigating the power of the uncultivated space as a symbol in the formation of American culture.⁹

An idea of space that serves to purify, renew, and construct the American citizen figures strongly in our conception of the American good life. The suburban home, with its spacious front and back yards, clearly finds its place as a post-World War II expression of Manifest Destiny writ small on the humble aspirations of the middle class, in which the abundance of postwar prosperity was experienced alongside the desire to spread out, all of which was aided by the automobile. Significantly, the logic of Manifest Destiny finds its way into Walt Disney's October 1966 EPCOT promotional film, wherein Walt explains, "We think the need is to start from scratch on virgin land and building [*sic*] a special kind of new community" (*Walt's Last Film*). Disney defines the possibility opened up by an expansion into new space and couples it with his particular vision of utopia.

Closely linked to the American home's relationship to space is the issue of time. Technologies of movement, capture, and force as applied to space have supplemented American notions of abundance by facilitating easy movement over territory and by forcing the land to yield its fruits. These technologies add to the colonization of space as an element of time, in that they speed up movement and thus force more stable notions of space to yield value which was previously unimagined. Horses, railroads, automobiles, and the factory are but a few technologies which are implicated in the spatial practices of the American dream and which function to contain, subdue, and transform the Wild West and convert it into civilized and civilizing space.

Other examples might appropriately include those technologies which turn the process of expansion toward new frontiers, beyond those of an increasingly colonized world progressing toward the age of globalization. The drive for the maximization of internal spaces, epitomized by the temporal practices advocated in Frederick Winslow Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management*, seeks an efficiency of existing spaces which cuts the time spent traversing distances in the motions of labor and thus opens up the spatial practice of work to increased fields of prosperity. As Taylor explains in his 1911 text, "Eliminate all false movements, slow movements,

and useless movements. . . . After doing away with all unnecessary movements, collect into one series the quickest and best movements as well as the best implements” (61). Thus a control of space is crucially linked to a technique, or optimized use of that space in time, revealing the crude nature of earlier eras of geographic expansion and the crude qualities of the critique it inspires. Thus, the good life is characterized not simply by a vast space, but by a maximized space and regime of control which produces a yield. In the home the goal of maximizing space and control translates into what was once called “home economics,” or the study of the home as workplace, and the achievement of maximized comfort through efficient laboring. In a word, ease.

A third parameter for the development of the smart home is information. Electronic media, used here to describe technological forms which are designed to deliver information (and are thus combined with content), deserve special consideration in the discussion of the home, as they add a third element to the interplay of space and technology described earlier.¹⁰ The flow of electricity, the tuning in of codes, the politics of “off” and “on” are precursors to current debates about “new media,” which differ chiefly in their relative level of interactivity. Of course, traditional mass-media forms like books, newspapers, and magazines require interaction through their respective interfaces, but the electronic operates at the level of perception. It is in the very desire to simulate experience through a direct appeal to the senses that these technologies work.¹¹ Other forms of electronic media, in spite of their supposed content, also function to stimulate the nervous system—making light out of darkness, reaching far beyond the curve of the horizon, filling the dead silence with sounds from the past, or livening up loneliness with electrified images of imaginary friends.

Electronic media, as information and entertainment, characterized by the movement of data across space and the generation of perception in the absence of an original phenomenon, provide the earlier matrix of the home with a richness and breadth that cannot be found in their absence. Taken as a process of transmitting data in one form or another across space, mediation exhibits the efficiency of technological transport and extraction, making the spaces we inhabit yield profit where value had been

all but exhausted—the power of electronic media to occupy space and to overlay that space is a means of generating value in the absence of matter. To use the television as a metaphor, the forms that appear on screen are only ordered arrangements of light; without the transmission of the coded information, the screen is filled with static. One only has to look beyond the television to see this at work in other areas of the contemporary world—at the expansion of service-based industries that rely on their associations with the broadcasted world and the popularity of entertainment to see the profit-generating capacity of media in space. By creating meaning where none existed, or seeking to change existing meanings for the maximization of profit, electronic media plays a third and crucial role in the management of the home as an efficient living space.

Of particular interest to this discussion of the Perfect Day is Paul Virilio's concept of "dromology," or the study of speed. Identifying the crisis of dromospheric pollution, or the environmental damage caused by increased speed, Virilio focuses on information technology, whose rate of transfer increasingly approaches that of light speed and radiation. Looking at everything from war to terrorism to electronic commerce to surveillance to accidents, Virilio discusses the role that speed and acceleration plays in an increased "dematerialization," "depersonalization," and "derealization" of everyday life. Because of telepresence and real-time technologies which enable everything to happen worldwide at once, "*the time allotted to decision-making is now insufficient*" and tasks become increasingly automated (*A Landscape of Events*, 92, emphasis in the original).

While Virilio's panic over the future of life in an increasingly wired and mediated world is certainly a worthy site of debate, I would encourage readers to reserve a critical assessment of the issue's urgency for now and instead focus on the more practical elements of Virilio's critique. The five chief aspects of this critique are (1) information moves more quickly than it did before; (2) it covers more distance; (3) as a result of this rapid movement over greater distances, subjects are allotted less time to make thoughtful decisions; (4) to help negotiate the problem of less time, cybernetic systems often supplement the decision-making process; and (5) because time-saving methods often create increased time-pressures, sub-

jects, aided by technology, respond more quickly, further accelerating a world that is already speeding along at velocities in excess of any human scale.

In relation to the home, this process of speeding up through media and communications brings the world into the home and the home to the world. As a result, there is an expansion of the home to include the informational representation of the world and a simultaneous contraction of the home's space through an ability to micromanage the space-time efficiency of the home. The pinnacle of this complex of space, time, and information is realized in the smart home, and it is the purpose of this project to discuss how the idea of the smart home has functioned in different contexts to sell visions of the good life that are anchored in the maximization of these three elements. The result is a flattening out of temporality.

As all available options are becoming increasingly accessible in any given moment, and as new possibilities are increasingly added to this pool, functioning in time has less to do with waiting for events to unfold chronologically than it has to do with choices about which "time" to occupy.¹² As is the case at Disneyland, historical time and geographical space are converted to navigable regions as entertainment choices. The concept of multiple temporalities is crucial to the understanding of contemporary media and should underscore the urgency that is often implied when discussing a coming paradigm shift. Rather than moving toward a cataclysmic end, the smart home's reorganization of living space should be understood as a spreading out of variables across an eternal present. The unfolding of the future as a linear process is replaced by a proliferation of choices about the present.¹³

In order to function effectively, and to avoid the distance between the technological object and its integration into the everyday that is necessitated by the futurist narrative, a special narrative has to be developed. To introduce new technologies and secure their use as everyday items, an ideal technology narrative must situate the object somewhere between "ordinary" and "desirable"—technology must become necessary or "handy" while at the same time represent an improvement of the ordinary. Also favorable to the meaning and use of the object is its capacity to belong to a system that includes other objects. Rather than appeal to

extraordinary desires (like soaring through space with rocket packs or eating delicious twelve-course meals in pill form), the narrative of technological advancement must move away from futurism. And although little has been written on this phenomenon beyond the familiar postmodern discussions, which read it as the end of the “new” or an “end of history,” this vastly undertheorized narrative exists.¹⁴ It can be seen in the “moderate” promotional strategies of current smart home innovators—I call it the Perfect Day.

A technologically enhanced mode of daily living, the Perfect Day streamlines the exchange between commodity and consumer, cultivating the terrain between impulse and gratification. This is accomplished by trimming undesirable or irrelevant options and offering up customized solutions and experiences. In effect, the Perfect Day is life edited in real time, in conformity with consumer narratives.

An ancestor of the Perfect Day is the negotiation between being and becoming dramatically acted out in Greenfield Village, Henry Ford’s prototype of postmodern history. Using his fortune to purchase historic sites of invention (like Thomas Edison’s Menlo Park laboratory and the Wright brothers’ bicycle shop, for example), Ford constructed an entire village of historic buildings just outside of Detroit, Michigan. A tribute to American inventors and industrialists, Greenfield Village was called by Ford himself “a synthesis of the home-spun and the high-tech” (quoted in Votolato, 75). The village presents itself like a strange combination of Disney’s “Main Street, U.S.A” and Knott’s Berry Farm’s “Ghost Town,” an eclectic mix of buildings that conjure up images of an America steeped in nostalgia, even as the nostalgia it conjures up is that of invention and industrial progress. Greenfield Village uses the past to create a history as movement into the future, making it a profound attempt to reconcile the tension between being and becoming by establishing the process of becoming into the notion of historic nationalism—American technological exceptionalism yoked to Manifest Destiny.¹⁵

This negotiated introduction of gadgets into the space of the traditional home is also an understood aspect of the history of design, as evidenced in the following passage: “The domestic kitchen became one of the greatest arenas of this contest. With high-tech, Sub-Zero refrigerators and glossy

Kitchen Aid dishwashers standing proudly between Colonial or Shaker cabinetry, American kitchens reconciled the personal need for emotional comfort with the high technological expectations of the modern family” (Votolato, 4). Like Henry Ford’s “historic” village, Disneyland’s “Main Street,” the Bonaventure Hotel, a taxicab in Tegucigalpa, or glitzy Las Vegas itself, the space of the home during a period of technical transition during the age of mass media is full of paradox or, dare I say, postmodern stylistic elements.

But these metaphors fail inasmuch as they require one to travel and are vulnerable to imposition by others. The Perfect Day, on the other hand, is about being at home. It is about experiencing the chaotic thrills of the postmodern without interruption, without regret, and without consequence. As a fantasy of total consumer indulgence, the Perfect Day is a utopia of personal desire triumphant over liberal fantasies of ethics and justice. It is the experience of perfect freedom through the belief in a perfect lie.

Because I seek to weave a narrative out of traditionally discrete artifacts (scientific management, appliances, consumer culture, robots, personal computers, etc.), and then to comment on the theoretical ramifications of this social history, I have divided this book into rough chronologies tied together by concepts that sometimes reach for the future or yearn for the past to form coherent narratives about the present. As I develop my thesis, I often “unveil” information in an episodic manner, with the intention of producing a cumulative effect or understanding, rather than presenting my argument in a more traditional, linear fashion. Questions raised but left unanswered in one chapter will be answered as the discussion is picked up again in later chapters. But because this area of study is a largely unexplored one, it is inevitable that there are many questions I cannot ask, and even more that I cannot provide adequate answers for. To return to an American metaphor, I am working toward a frontier, and so lack the perspective of the native for whom the frontier is more appropriately called “home.”

Using historical texts and sociological studies, as well as primary sources on home economics and management, I chart in the first chapter shifting conceptions of the home and the introduction of electric appliances

against American industrial developments during the early twentieth century. In reference to the threefold model of expansion I have offered in the introduction, I show how that era unified the space of the home with scientific time-management techniques, reproducing time-efficient labor practices in the domestic setting.

Focusing on post-World War II America and the emergence of the digital computer, I provide in the second chapter a history of electronic household appliances. Using historical accounts and archives, as well as advertisements and popular media, I chart the path from televisions to personal computers and beyond. The “house of tomorrow” presented a model of “futuristic” living aided by new technologies, but imagined in accordance with the spectacular lifestyles of the space age and televisual popular culture.

The most recent incarnation of the automated house—the smart home—as I discuss in the third chapter, eschews futuristic motifs and instead relies on a combination of the traditional and the high tech. Using magazines and newspapers, science fiction, film, how-to guides, websites, and other sources, I provide a detailed discussion of the contemporary smart house. Navigating through shifting conceptions of the automated house (the space-age home, the haunted house, and the reality-show set), I conclude the third chapter with the exceptionally mundane (or mundanely exceptional) vision of living promised by the smart house.

The concluding chapter of this book is a discussion of the Perfect Day—a technologically enhanced style of daily living. Considering interactivity as a refinement of disciplinary form, even as it liberates subjects from the constraints of more static media, the Perfect Day is an attempt to institutionalize everyday life as the ultimate consumer practice. In attempting to remove undesired impediments to the realization of the self in the consumer world, the Perfect Day offers a posthuman solution by which traditional ethical considerations can be avoided and pleasure can be pursued.