In five chapters organized around geographic features and their associated cultural products, Chambers demonstrates how, at least since 1800, westerners tend to think of the Mediterranean in terms of the northern European image of it—the sort encapsulated by Romantic paintings or accounts of the “Grand Tour.” Within this story, he argues, the Ottoman and Islamic past of the Mediterranean emerges symptomatically, as disruptions at the margins or as veiled hints of some “Other” against which the identity of Western Europe, founded in the ruins of a particular ancient Mediterranean civilization, defines itself.

Chambers thus creates a new metaphor for the Mediterranean, a figure set in opposition to that of a landscape inscribed with Western aesthetics and political cartography. With its multiple and shifting currents and winds, Chambers’ figure of the sea hopefully suggests a “Mediterranean” that is not defined in terms of hegemonic nation and state, not “disciplined” according to the valuation of knowledge imposed by Western Europe since the Renaissance, not petrified in the ruins of ancient Greece and Rome, but rather inclusive of a range of difference and disruption, the ebb and flow of a fluid wave of voices.

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What are the antecedents of places like Disney World, the Las Vegas Strip, and the Mall of America? And how do these commodified, branded, and themed sites shape what we come to know about the world, and our place within it? Scott A. Lukas set out to answer these questions in Theme Park. Drawing on examples from around the world, Lukas explores how world fairs, pleasure gardens, and amusement parks in the late 19th and early 20th centuries presaged today’s theme parks in important ways. However, Lukas suggests that there is no linear path from Coney Island to Disney World—rather, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Lukas argues that the journey is ephemeral, made up of continuities, but also ruptures between past and present cultural spaces. In the end, the author contends amusement parks fade and theme parks proliferate because the latter offers a complete and immersive spatio-cultural form. This total space affords new subject positions (individual, family, consumer), knowledges (how we come to know place, people, brands), and narratives (coherence
Lukas suggests that theme parks have become “a life form—a means of negotiating the self, the world around it and the vast expanse of culture, people and things in the world” (p. 96).

Lukas presents this argument in six chapters, each articulating an interrelated way of understanding the theme park: as oasis, place, machine, show, brand, and text. Throughout these chapters, he weaves a narrative that draws insightful parallels between the past and the present in the birth of the modern theme park. For instance, Lukas traces how physical forms like architecture and the roller coaster have allowed visitors to travel imaginatively and engage in rituals of the self. He charts the importance of narrative in making the modern parks. And he addresses how the brand has become crystallized in theme parks, with a fascinating, if brief, discussion of Disney’s town Celebration. However, the strongest chapter is the final one, examining the theme park as text. It is here that Lukas explores the eruption of interstitial slippage in the total space he has crafted: “...the theme park as a textual and discursive object becomes subject to multiple rewritings, reappropriations and revisionings” (p. 223).

I strongly agree with Lukas’ above contention. But, the book would have been strengthened by a sustained consideration of multiple readings throughout its chapters, rather than solely in the last. I suspect this lacuna results from the book casting such a wide net, which is also one of its strengths. However, what Lukas gains in breadth, he sacrifices in depth and occasionally I craved specificity rather than abstraction. For example, his consideration of multiple readings could have been extended to consider how differently racialized, gendered, classed, or sexualized identities encounter these spaces, which receives scant discussion in Theme Park. While suggesting that early amusement parks functioned on exclusion (p. 159), Lukas does not address how contemporary theme parks might operate in a similar way, as the materialization of white, middle-class, heteronormative values. Perhaps unsurprisingly, people of color in theme parks are often made into hyperreal others to be consumed as part of the entertainment. This hyperreality is juxtaposed with the guest who, interestingly, regardless of race, is positioned as a person who can experience everything from a privileged position of invisibility. This kind of analysis was missing from Lukas’s text. Thus, digging into the specificities of particular theme parks and the people who encounter them would have made an already complex book even richer.

Despite these critiques, Theme Park provides a comprehensive and sometimes compelling intellectual journey through the history of pleasure gardens, world fairs, amusement parks, theme parks, megamalls, and virtual spaces like Second Life. By charting the history of the present of the modern theme park form, and the ways that these sites...
might shape future possibilities, Lukas provides an insightful text for scholars in cultural geography, cultural studies, and tourism studies.

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Cultural geographers have long studied Latin America’s plazas, parks, and other public spaces in order to develop theoretical frameworks for understanding the region’s cultural and urban landscapes. Christopher T. Gaffney’s Temples of the Earthbound Gods treads similar but refreshingly new ground by establishing the importance of soccer stadiums as urban public spaces in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires. “Universal obviousness,” Gaffney argues, “may be the essential characteristic of stadiums that makes them such powerful vehicles for opening new ways of exploring and understanding the world.” (p. 39)

Gaffney begins by outlining the historical and material contexts of soccer stadiums in Latin America. He describes the development of soccer as an organized sport in the industrial urban landscapes of nineteenth-century Britain. By the turn of the twentieth century British expatriates had diffused the sport into many of Latin America’s major port cities. Although soccer was initially the exclusive domain of British expatriates and the creole social elite, with no organized indigenous sport with which to compete, soccer soon spread outward from private sporting clubs into the society at large. By 1906 Rio de Janeiro had 30 soccer clubs and by 1908 Brazilian teams were playing international matches. The ability to build monumental public architecture with reinforced concrete set off a frenzy of stadium building in the 1940s and 1950s. Gaffney underscores the extent to which the region’s passion for soccer transformed the urban landscape by noting that by 1970 Brazil claimed eight of the world’s 10 largest stadiums and today Buenos Aires has 79 professional soccer stadiums, more than any other global city.

In his treatment of Rio de Janeiro’s soccer stadiums Gaffney emphasizes the linkages between soccer, national identity, and race. In 1919 Rio de Janeiro hosted the South American Championship and the host team faced Uruguay in the final match. Gaffney observes that this game “was the first moment of a process that has continued unabated today: the almost complete cessation of urban normalcy when the