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# THE DARK RIDE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of
Modern Languages and Intercultural Studies
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Brandon Kwiatek
August 1995

# THE DARK RIDE

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Michael Ann Williams
Director of Thesis

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# THE DARK RIDE

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An intersection of vernacular architecture studies and American studies, "The Dark Ride" defines the standard amusement park attraction both generally within the contexts of horrific iconography and the history of amusement devices and structures, and also specifically within the contexts of five amusement park environments. As a "ride-thru Halloween," the dark ride maintains a popular tradition of deriding and mocking the symbols of hell and death. As a variety of theater, the dark ride shares its technological and structural origins with primitive cinema (whose own century-long development intertwines with that of the dark ride) and the scenic attractions of late 19th and early 20th century expositions and amusement parks. As a commercial shapeshifter, the dark ride responds to the greater changes in its environment with structural alterations made over time; to illustrate this tendency, "The Dark Ride" presents structural histories of eight rides in five traditional amusement parks. Finally, from a constructivist point of view, I examine the attraction as a liminoid space which dark riders variously interpret as an opportune location for romance, storytelling, mischief and vandalism.

# Introduction

"The Dark Ride," a study of a standard amusement park installation ride, represents the intersection of two amenable disciplines that purport to investigate heretofore unacknowledged objects on the popular cultural landscape: American studies and vernacular architecture studies. American studies was born of and the most recent vernacular architecture studies reflects the academic trend of the new social history, an academic attempt to democratize the scope of research by including all varieties of social phenomenon at all cultural levels (Carter and Herman 1991:4). In much the way American studies complements American history, vernacular architecture studies complements architectural history, both fields sharing an added interest in popular culture—its various media and commercial structures. Popular culture should be of great interest to the folklorist as well, not only because popular culture is traditional culture but also because people interact with traditional popular structures and manipulate traditional popular symbols in the constant effort to build personal meaning. Although the various media, as the interconnected extensions of our eyes, ears and voices, have generalized or standardized the structures and symbols, the interactions with and manipulations of them occur on a specific, private and individual level. Describing these personal responses to general environments or experiences—often subversions or reinterpretations—is a task rightfully belonging to the folklorist, who has turned his/her attention away from the products of tradition and concentrated on discovering the process of making meaning by making tradition. "The Dark Ride" attempts to fulfill this complex assignment by describing how the dark ride is at once an artifact of commercial traditions of supernatural

imagery and architectural change and an enactment of individual responses to those traditions.

It is not my immediate business to justify the serious study of American amusement parks—the deciphering of the intricate cryptography of an American culture largely defined by its devotion to leisure and recreation. The scholar's justification already has been written by Margaret J. King. Her rallying cry for the study of "theme parks" (their antecedents, present forms and future incarnations) introduces a special issue of the *Journal of Popular Culture* devoted to the subject of this "New American Muse." King writes persuasively,

> The serious implications of amusement parks are not immediately obvious. It does seem that this is the ideal sort of topic—obvious yet unseen, omnipresent yet unexamined—that is the special call of the popular culture scholar, and those students of American culture in its widest sense, to question and observe, answer and analyze. No single field can by itself be expected to encompass or to explain such a complex production in its rich and mobile mix of artifacts, people and behavior; human, animal and automated forms, graphics and sculpture, machines of every style and description; artifice and fantasy at every possible level and on every theme imaginable (1981b:57).

But for the essays contained in that special issue, and several published elsewhere and at later dates, few scholars have answered King's multi-disciplinarian call. Those who have responded have been forced to simplify a complexity that defies simplification. Unfortunately, the overwhelming phenomenon that is the amusement park generally has resulted in abstracted digestions of it by scholars of traditional popular culture. The first typical over-simplification reduces the number of parks in America to one or two oppositional archetypes which can then be compared (Francaviglia 1981; Johnson 1981; King 1981a; Mechling and Mechling 1981; Weinstein 1992). Fitting a fluid phenomenon into a prefabricated analytical framework of assumptions and presuppositions depletes the amusement complex—whether it be Coney Island, Disneyland, or Marriott's Great America—of the chaos and symbolic contradictions which sustain its vitality. The end

result of such forcing often is a treatment of a profound subject smacking of superficiality.

More significant is the distortion of perception caused by narrowing the wide-ranging field of the outdoor amusement industry into one or two representative parks. Without building on an understanding of the long history and vast scope of the industry in one's work, the resulting conclusions reflect as accurately as a fun house mirror. One very easily overlooks the lines of development and the reflexive influences the parks have on one another. Consequently, the most egregious flaw of recent scholarship is its concentration on the theme park to the utter neglect of the traditional amusement park, as if the latter had been displaced completely by the former. The result of ironically ignoring the "obvious yet unseen, omnipresent yet unexamined" is an unfortunate misunderstanding of the substantial cultural and architectural contributions of each. The so-called "theme park" is differentiated from the traditional amusement park by its architectural pre-planning and scientific approaches to crowd control. Whereas the traditional amusement park is an organic evolution of sorts with one ride leading to another over time as money and space permit, the "theme park" is a development of the drawing board, executed entirely in blueprint before the first building is raised. Consequently, the difference between them is one of feeling—the traditional park is a disorienting clutter of rides and attractions, the theme park a deliberate coherence of ideas[1]. Additionally, the term "theme park,"

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[1] Of course, the traditional theme park, as the older incarnation of the recreational environment, provides an intimation of older age as well as the feeling of harmonic disunity. In Europe, amusement parks were more properly "pleasure gardens" in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Originally linked to taverns and inns, these pleasure gardens countered the raucous environment of the fair with their preservation of an idyllic nature within the urban landscape (Adams 1991:3-4). In America, however, the traditional amusement park has its origins in 19th century sylvan glens or groves, popular leisure spots away from urban centers; occasionally, the traditional park developed from an early 20th century end-of-the-line trolley park founded by transportation companies in an effort to extend their days of operation by giving the city commuter a reason to use the rail system during the weekend. Relics of the outdoor amusement industry—some thriving, some not—the parks discussed in this study are between 69 and 111 years old and reflect both of these American origins.

suggesting exclusively the modern spectacles of the controlled leisure environment, is something of a misnomer because all amusement parks contain theming or artificing to some extent. Amusement parks, by definition and history, are themed and artificed. If differentiation between the two must be drawn, it is best to delineate on the basis of their customers or "guests." In short, the traditional amusement park serves a small region while the "theme park" draws on the larger tourist market. For this reason, the "theme park" is more accurately termed the "tourist park," and will be labeled as such for the remainder of this thesis.

It is popularly said of large amusement parks that they can't be seen in just one day. As Margaret King notes, the amusement park is an "overwhelming panoply" from every point of view, cultural and architectural. Just as the amusement park can not be experienced and appreciated by its guests with only one visit, the amusement park can not be digested by the scholar with only one study (or even by one scholar with several studies). Tony Bennett's examination of "the thousand and one troubles" which England's Blackpool Pleasure Beach presents the semiotician (1983), insightful as the study is, is an overwhelming reading of the many economic, historical, and symbolic levels on which this seaside attraction operates. His method of attack is a form of semiotic shorthand in which each observation is the kernel of a more elaborate paragraph, paper or thesis; the unfortunate consequence of too little of too much is that each tantalizing tidbit, left unfulfilled, is soon forgotten. The result compromises the importance of the topic. "Understanding the parks, then," King asserts, "might be considered the ultimate challenge of the generalist's skill" (1981b:57). The hazard facing the generalist-scholar of amusement parks is, of course, over-generalization. Such a problem afflicts Russel Nye's "Eight Ways of Looking at an Amusement Park" (1981), an interpretation of the idea of amusement park theming. This essay, like each of the essays on the subject, is useful in

part. Each contributes to a seeming whole. However, that whole describes the amusement park phenomenon in unruly abstractions by the know-it-all witness of some cold eye of observation. Little official work has been advanced to show how the amusement park is actually used from day to day and year to year by its owners, builders, artists and customers.

It is to this need that I respond with "The Dark Ride." By focusing not on the amusement park in a general sense but on one variety of attraction in five specific amusement parks, I hope to shed light on how the amusement park is an artificial environment which occasions very real experiences and individual responses to them. I proceed from the constructivist's general assumption that the meaning of cultural texts are not inherent but emerge from people's manipulation, interpretation and subversion of them (Bruner 1994:407). Unlike J. Meredith Neil's reading of the roller coaster as an abstracted emblem of modernity and entertainment (1981), my study of the dark ride combines its manipulation of recognizable symbols with numerous observations of official and unofficial human interactions (renovations, interpretations and vandalism) with the ride. I've chosen the dark ride as my subject because it has yet to receive a thorough treatment by either scholars or afficionados of amusement park collecteana. Despite intriguing parallels between the development of the dark ride and the development of the amusement industry as a whole, both camps have largely overlooked the historical importance and cultural significance of this variety of attraction in favor of the more obvious and notable: popular culture scholars ignore the less advertised traditional parks which house the older dark rides (perhaps because such parks are seen wrongly as not popular enough to constitute popular culture), and historians apparently prefer the collectible beauties of the carousel and streamlined excitements of the roller coaster to the chunky dark ride's ghoulish and shabby imagery. In no academic study and only one popular reference work (Weedon and Ward 1981) has the dark ride received more than a sentence or two; my task, then, has been to

assemble these few sentences and add them to my own research into the subject to compile a more complete history. In addition to documenting the ride's iconographic origins and technological development, I will examine the dark ride as a cultural artifact that is continually invented and reinvented. The result is the traditional dark ride opening its doors before us: mind your head, please, no smoking and keep hands and feet inside car at all times.

"The dark ride's penetration into the amusement industry is just getting under way," announces John Wood, vice-president and chairman of Sally Corporation, a company which in recent years has produced animatronics and special effects for multimillion dollar dinosaur adventures, haunted houses and other "themed experiences" (Muret 1993b). Wood's statement reveals the myopia of an amusement park industry which often eyes the future but mostly overlooks its own rich past. Dark rides, like their kin the walk-thru fun house, have been standard amusement park attractions since the 1920s; however, close thematic relatives of the dark ride theater have been penetrating western civilization since at least the middle ages. Now, during the dark ride's spectacular renaissance in the industry, it is timely and appropriate to examine the lower-tech precursors of these rides which, by the graces of nostalgic kitsch and their continued ability to pack a good bump in the dark, remain on the American landscape.

"In these [dark rides], passenger-carrying vehicles, which may be boats, cars, or small trains, pass through dark tunnels or closed-in passages at a very low speed. Along the way, surprise scenes such as mechanical ghosts, flirting devils, and similar devices pop out to scare or amuse the slowly passing riders" (Mangels 1954:141). William F. Mangels, an early historian of the outdoor amusement industry and himself a former showman and patent-holder (famous for his ever-popular Whip), provides a terse but complete description of the material subject of this thesis: the dark ride[2]. Unpacking his

definition of something so profoundly superficial through interpretation and documentation is my more lengthy task. "The Dark Ride" accounts for both their general existence on the American and European cultural landscape and also the specific appearance (or disappearance) of eight traditional dark rides[3] in five North American amusement parks. Indeed, "The Dark Ride" is part constructivist history and part constructivist documentation. Writing the general history of the dark ride is a matter less of drawing lines of direct descent (the knot of religious, cultural, and technological changes has complicated the geneaology) than of examining manifestations of "dark rides" distributed through space and time and which spin themselves into the future. Documenting a specific dark ride as a cultural construction requires understanding it as both amusement device and money-maker, interconnected roles which function within the environment and commercial development of the amusement park of which it is only one part.

A variety of popular and architectural traditions have shaped the dark rides into their present forms. Subsequently, to describe and interpret the rides in this study, I place them into three major historical contexts: iconography, technology and the 20th century development of amusement parks. The first context—iconography—concerns the evolving expressions of the supernatural in the popular imagination. Correspondingly, the first

[2]The term "dark ride" is that which has been used by the American outdoor amusement industry to describe this variety of attraction throughout the 20th century. The origin of the American term is unknown, although Mangels' definition appears to be the first appearance in print. I call the dark ride an "American term" because, though similar rides are prevalent in Europe, there they have their own names: in England the dark ride is a "ghost train," in Germany a "Geisterbahn" (Weedon and Ward 1981:255).

[3]Throughout this thesis, I will distinguish between traditional and non-traditional dark rides (though they all belong to a greater tradition of development and change). Traditional dark rides are "traditional" not necessarily because they are chronologically older but because, architecturally, they best reflect the commercial tradition of change inherent to the outdoor amusement industry. Non-traditional dark rides, those "themed experiences" based on more specific and fleeting trends in popular culture at large, are less amenable to gradual architectural change. When they are no longer timely and appropriate they are not, like the traditional dark ride, altered or refaced but completely destroyed. In other words, while its amusement environment changes, the non-traditional dark ride itself does not.

section of this thesis, "Laughing Inside the Mouth: The Grotesque and Mysterious Iconography of the Dark Ride," closely examines saints' legends and medieval festival dramas for the kernel of an attitude toward hell which, though substantially changed, continues to thrive through the mass media and individuals' interactions with them. Linking these tributaries to the dark ride is that, through a manipulation of symbols and each in its own way, all "defeat" death with life: the visceral reactions of both shock and antagonistic laughter. Concerns related to this discussion of the comic and shocking grotesque include the secularization of hell, the sanitization of death and the attraction/repulsion of the past.

The second section of this thesis, devoted to the historical context of the technology of late 19th and early 20th century entertainments and amusements, is entitled "Engineering Thrills and Events Against Nature: The Mechanical Ingenuities of the Dark Ride." Derived from the "scenic railways" and "illusion rides" constructed for the late 19th and early 20th century expositions, the dark ride (like other varieties of "flat rides") combines two of the three basic mechanical forms of the outdoor amusement industry (the carousel and roller coaster) to assault the body and disorient the mind. Technologically (as well as thematically), dark rides maintain the popular 19th century tradition of "ghost illusions" and "magic lantern" shows, museums of curiosity and waxworks and suggest an intertwining relationship with the twentieth-century development of Hollywood special effects, especially the gimmicky horror films of the 1950s and early 60s. All efforts imply an application of industrial science to recreational purposes in an attempt to enliven or reenchant a disenchanted world by faking the past, a "post-modern" or "carnivalesque" tendency instituted by 16th century secularization. The third historical context, that of the American amusement park in this century, reveals how the tradition of the dark ride coincides with an industry which is a barometer of current taste and trends and introduces the constructivist considerations of the thesis.

Drawing on the work of "Carnival" theorists, my analysis of specific dark rides in the third section, "Changing to Sustain: Renovation and Destruction in the Dark Ride," focuses on changes to the dark ride structures over time through both official alteration by park owners, artists and maintenance crews, and also unofficial alteration by riders. A dark ride, like all other amusement devices, exists only as long as it remains commercially viable and therefore evolves to suit customer tastes and expectations. Unlike other rides which resist renovation and retheming, however, a dark ride can be changed and substantially changed again through the addition and reconfiguration of track, the replacement of scenes with new horrors, or the drastic retheming of its facade and interior. In other words, a carousel painted anew or a Ferris wheel given new lights basically resemble their former selves in appearance and operation; the experience of riding them remains unchanged. By contrast, a dark ride, if originally themed as a jungle but reconceptualized as a castle, can promise substantially different experiences to prospective riders; this malleable marketability preserves the shell of the structure through various changes. Thus the dark ride remains the most carnivalesque of all carnival attractions by resisting change only by embracing it completely, a characteristic which I demonstrate through structural histories of dark rides operating successfully at Lake Winnepesaukah (Rossville, Georgia), Knoebels Amusement Resort (Elysburg, Pennsylvania), and Bushkill Park (Forks Township, Pennsylvania). Against the case of two dismantled dark rides in Dorney Park (Allentown, Pennsylvania) which largely disregards its historical significance, I contrast three flourishing dark rides in Kennywood (West Mifflin, Pennsylvania) which embraces its past as its unique selling point. Relying on literature and brochures published by the amusement parks, I describe how the parks themselves make literal meaning of their dark rides.

Through all modifications and alterations, the dark rides remain essentially the same

and preserve their original purpose: to frighten and amuse by any means necesary and whether official or unofficial. A significant purpose as well is to provide a cover of darkness for activities on the part of its riders: smooching, laughing, yelling, cursing, spitting, vandalising. The dark ride is a theater and not a ritual. Accordingly, the final section of my thesis interprets the dark ride as an official drama that is interrupted by riders horning in on the act—as a liminoid otherworld that is destroyed rather than a sacred arena for psychological transformations. The dark ride has been called "an abbreviated narrative" for riders that copies the conventions of popular fictional forms such as the Gothic novel and horror film (Bennett 1983:150). Its linear track follows a basic plot through scenes which riders "read" and "interpret" variously; a leading contemporary dark ride manufacturer makes a similar observation, noting that the ride's "concept" or "storyline" is the foundation for its development and construction (Muret 1993a). In practice, however, riders often subvert the intentions of designers by reinterpreting the ride for their own entertainment. With behavior that ranges from a bit of hanky panky to a little mischief or even vandalism, riders alter the experience with sexual advances or verbal or physical assaults against its paper maché and fiberglass caricatures. Riders who defy official rules in order to leave their cars and run about replace the threat of being surprised by a mechanical ghost with the threat of being caught by operators and ejected from the ride and/or park. Their behavior is not without precedent, however; audiences through the ages have interrupted the dramas and films staged before them with illusion-breaking interactions. Amusement park officials acknowledge these more destructive and dangerous possibilities and have several means of deterrence. One of the best remains changing it from year to year in order to keep the rider's interest, the tested logic being that a captivated rider is not a mischievous one.

## *Laughing Inside the Mouth: The Grotesque and Mysterious Iconography of the Dark Ride*

"There is nothing abstract about the grotesque," Philip Thomas tells us (1972:57). Indeed, the grotesque is the embodiment of an abstraction, whether it be Edmund Spenser's personifications of vice in *The Faerie Queene* or Flannery O'Connor's characterizations of Southern religiosity in *Wise Blood.* The grotesques of the dark ride—their various skeletons and monsters or, in short, their iconographic caricatures—embody that wide-ranging, unwieldy abstraction called the "unknown" as filtered through the imaginative lens of the "supernatural." John Agar, actor-icon of 1950s horror and sci-fi movies whose credits include *Revenge of the Creature, Tarantula, The Brain from Planet Arous* and *Hand of Death,* sums up the comedy that intentionally and unintentionally results when low-budget filmmakers try to represent the abstracted unknown, to make visible the rightly invisible.

> I always kind of had the feeling that when people looked at some of these science fiction things, we were going to get a big laugh. On a couple of occasions, some of the things that were supposed to frighten people really looked rather ludicrous—funny, rather than scary. I feel it's more natural to deal in something that people understand, rather than something that human beings don't come in contact with. It's a touchy situation to be in (Weaver 1988:10).

Conventional director's wisdom holds that, in horror movies, the unseen is always scarier than the seen. Even in films with enormous special effects budgets, revelation of the monster reduces the fear quotient significantly. The subsequent violence of attack may be graphic and stomach-turning, but its fearsomeness declines the more familiar it becomes. The monster, once embodying the unknown, becomes the known body and is tamed and

dismissed immediately as a great, big disappointment. Like the horror movie, the dark ride offers a chance to experience both the unknown and the known. The unknown, the literal darkness or absence of light that surrounds its passengers, is its most frightening aspect as it suspends wide-eyed riders for a few moments in the void with the anxiety of the inevitable for company. Like horror movie patrons waiting white-knuckled in the darkened theater for the monster to jump out and attack on screen, dark riders travel through the twists and turns anticipating the sudden shock they know will come. Strangely, revelation—bringing the unknown to life with a sudden trigger of hydraulics or bright spotlights—depletes the dark ride's power because the ride momentarily surprises but offers no new images or symbols. To portray the abstract, it reworks the same old stuff, the clichés that will not die, because we as dark riders fully comprehend and expect the language of symbols. We want to see something for our trouble and money, and we want it to conform to our previous experience with and fondness for things scary.

Taken out of the context of their gloomy passages, the images of the dark ride are so familiar as to be overlooked. The famous monsters, skeletons, demons, spiders and anonymous beasts which predictably decorate these haunted houses, castles and ghost ships are appropriated from all the popular sources of horror simultaneously and indiscriminately: fiction, films, Halloween decorations and costumes. Combinations and inclusions of atmospheric motifs clutter the dark ride outside and in like the generic elements whelped in the B-movies of all-nite drive-ins: the far out prehistoric future of *Robot Monster* (1953), the outer space Amazons of *Cat Women of the Moon* (1954) and the Wild-West Prometheus of *Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter* (1966) find their cultural mirror in the dark ride's crossbred assemblage of often incongruous but always recognizable iconography (Illustration 1). One room leads to an unconnected other, one twist becomes another turn through time and space as dark riders travel an erratic

line from mad science lab to jungle to ghost highway over a span of three minutes. The well-known and understood icons of the dark ride refer to no predecessor and nothing beyond themselves; its devils are not those cavorting across the medieval stage and its skeletons are not those of the *Danse Macabre*—not directly anyway. Just because the dark ride doesn't invite closer scrutiny of its fleeting forms doesn't mean that we can't cast a meaningful backward glance to discover that the dark ride inherits a tradition (loaded with all its changes) of stagecraft and hellish imagery. Most importantly though, the dark ride continues an *attitude* of mockery and derision toward the best special effects hell can muster.

Contemporary parallels to medieval festivals pop up out of nowhere and don't-know-where on the American cultural landscape. For example, the Biblesta is an annual religious parade of Biblically-themed floats in Humboldt, Kansas. Folklorist James Hoy considers the parade a contemporary, albeit distant (and Protestant), analogue to the processional stages of medieval Corpus Christi plays (1977). Glancing at pictorial similarities between medieval hellgates and hellmouths that allude to stage design and many contemporary dark ride structures, one might forge an argument for the dark ride as a degenerate medieval stage. Still, I am wary of going so far as to say that dark rides in travelling carnivals are pageant wagons full of scenery, and that those installed in amusement parks are the lost stages for a "Harrowing of hell," because the dark ride is an exuberantly secular phenomenon flapping its severed ties to the past. Without advertising its indirect and roundabout descent from its sources, the dark ride revels in its devils, ghosts and otherworldly beasts for the sake of instant revelry, spectacle and entertainment alone rather than moral and spiritual edification. Unlike the medieval plays and Biblesta floats, which are the products of guilds and civic organizations, the traditional dark rides in this study often represent the vision of one lone artist or renovator contributing to a familiar

commercial tradition. However, I will suggest that a residue of medieval cyclical drama, staging and iconography coats the dark ride outside and in; perhaps its unwitting ties to the past are even stronger than those of the Biblesta, a sudden and inspired expression of community piety, because they are the uninspired products of ages of psychological habit. Indeed, the dark ride embodies the full range of religious and cultural changes which have occurred over millenia of human development (all "the funk of forty thousand years," as the King of Pop, Michael Jackson, sings in "Thriller," his triple-platinum homage to the horror genre). By cannibalizing past and contemporary forms and images for its own present purposes to surprise and amuse, the dark ride provides a working definition of the "carnivalesque." With its secular interpretation of religious images of death, the dark ride surprises us at every turn with iconography: frightening as it shocks but quickly reduced to the ridiculous as we regain our senses and realize the tawdry illusion. The icons themselves seem to realize the illusion, making sport of themselves: a skeleton digs its own grave with a jackhammer while, above, stylized ghosts sport in the air. Defusing the horrible with the humorous is a tendency with notable precedents. This game of defeat by laughter is a long-standing dramatic tradition with discernible origins in medieval festival occasions which incorporated the stylized grotesquerie of Carnival. The game continues in the popular imagination, perhaps most flagrantly in the dark ride, but changed by secularization and spectacularly realized with technology. Hell as a cultural construct emerged over time and emerges still as the idea of horrible death is invented and reinvented.

Vernacular sermons and penitential literature, apocalyptic books and visionary narratives, illustrations and paintings, religious legendry and popular drama circulated throughout medieval Europe, each influencing and refining the others in a constant flow of reciprocal creativity to nourish a body of Christain belief with iconography. By such iconography, I mean those loaded symbols of heaven and hell, good and evil, whose

meanings would not have escaped either the clerical or popular mind credulous of a world guided by angels and threatened by demons at every moment and turn. The incessant borrowing of theological ideas and images between the interrelated forms of representation complicates their study because the study of one involves, to some extent, the study of all. Because many eloquent studies of the Classical, Celtic and Jewish tributaries to the medieval Christian imagination exist elsewhere, untangling the original knot of the devil and hell is less my concern than examining one attitude toward these frightening subjects as expressed in popular dramatic forms. More specifically, our initial focus centers on the hellmouth, a fixture of the medieval stage.

Three main Biblical references (Revelation 20:1; Matthew 16:18; and Job 41:14) describe hell as, respectively, a pit, a gate and a mouth, pre-Christian metaphors for a pre-Christian concept of the afterlife which were later embellished, combined and artistically expanded over generations of literary and oral tradition (Eileen Gardiner 1989). Job 41:14 asks about Leviathan, "Who can open the doors of its face? There is terror all around its teeth." This description of the beast which terrorizes humankind led to the visualization of hell as the open jaws of a sea monster, an interpretation maintained by Pope Gregory I (c.540-604) and popularized in the 13th century (Frye 1978:139). Public art made the hellmouth a formidable symbol of death and just punishment to a wide and largely illiterate audience. Doomsday paintings and tapestries, chancel arches, door carvings, church facades and altarpieces, as well as manuscript illuminations, all evidence the ubiquitous representation of hell as a gaping mouth (Sheingown 1992:1-2). The most spectacular and impressive of these representations, however, remains the hellmouth of stage design. Several written records and accounts evidence the presence of the hellmouth on the stage but its actual appearance remains subject to conjecture and academic debate. The best physical description of what the stage might have looked like—or perhaps what might have influenced stage design—are pictorial representations of hell. Generally, three sources of

information are available from which to reassemble the sparse details of medieval staging: the texts of dramas themselves, contemporary descriptions and illustrations of the performance. For one example, a report from 1437 describes the appearance of an elaborate Passion Play hellmouth in Metz, France: "The mouth and entrance of hell in this place was extremely well made, for by some mechanism it opened and closed of itself, where the devils wanted to go in or out. In this head there were two eyes of steel which sparkled magnificently." Some traditional dark rides graphically preserve the hellmouth, decorating their entrance with a set of monstrous gaping jaws to swallow car after car (Illustration 2); most, however, do not. One very interesting similarity between the medieval hell of the stage and the dark ride of the amusement park is a consistency of allegorical orientation. The medieval stage, decorated with accessories to indicate localities, always placed hell stage left (right to the spectators' point of view) because, theologically, hell was located at the left hand of God (Mantzius 1937:53-66). By and large, the dark ride's entrance is placed, from the rider's point of view, to the left of the exit doors[4]. The positioning suggests that the riders have become actors within the stage of the dark ride; in character as Jesus Christ, the riders descend to hell on the left and return triumphantly to the world above on the right.

Hell—that famous "last enemy"—has always been entertaining and the devil has always benefitted from the best lines and costumes. Within the European mystery, miracle and Corpus Christi cycles of the 14th through 16th centuries, the plays performed most frequently were those which required the portrayal of Satan, Lucifer and a miscellany of devils. Curiously, the varieties of devils were often the most developed characters in the plays. While apostles were virtually indistinguishable from one another, the major and minor devils were portrayed variously and individually, and their personalities ranged from

[4] In contrast, dark boat rides almost always give entrance on the right and exit on the left.

malevolently cunning to stupidly comic (Mantzius 1937:42-46). In the several plays which involved hell as a scenic location, the hellmouth became the central and most elaborate feature of the stage. Theology required that at the conclusion of every Old Testament play those who died before the Incarnation be carried off through the hellmouth (Kahal 1991:138). The hellmouth was also the site of Christ's entrance for the Harrowing, one of the most popular medieval performances because of its militaristic action and struggle between good and evil. This dramatic episode derives from the *incensus ad infernos,* an account of Christ's descent which was added to the popular apocryphal "Acts of Pilate" or "Gospel of Nicodemus" as early as the seventh century. This "Harrowing of hell" dramatized Christ's journey to the world of the dead to break down the doors with righteous violence and lead Adam and the virtuous souls to salvation (Russell 1984:108). Bellows Christ outside the gates, "A Hollite portas, principes,/ Oppen uppe, ye princes of paynes sere,/ Et elevamini eternales,/ Youre yendles gatis that ye have here" (Happé 1975:552-56). When Satan refuses to yield, Christ busts open the gates, exciting spectators with a glimpse inside the dark netherworld. The Harrowing, the dramatization of Christ's triumph over death, was not only an enactment of a serious teaching but also an appropriate and irresistable occasion for humor. The hellmouth was where devils ran out hooting, clowning and exploding firecrackers before they and their captured sinners were swallowed back into the infernal belly of eternal death and destruction. The seamless mix of sobering and amusing images, however, should come as no surprise when one situates the religious drama historically within its festival context which uses the grotesque mouth that devours as one of its most potent symbols of death and life (Bakhtin 1984:325).

The European mystery, miracle and Corpus Christi cycles were sequential religious dramas performed either outside the cathedral or in the marketplace from the 14th through 16th centuries. The first actors were members of the priesthood who maintained the

solemnity of the performance, which was neither popular amusement nor special art but a mass glorification of holy personages. Gradually, each pageant or play contributing to the cycle became the responsibility of one craft or religious guild (Staines 1991:80). Performed in a single location on scaffold stages or in procession on movable wagons, the cycle was ultimately a creation of the immediate community and an expression of civic pride and piety. The entire town participated in the staging, costuming, and supporting of the plays. "The rehearsal periods were times of fun and feasting," says Harold Gardiner, "and for fully three months in the year the play was really the thing" (1967:92). If pleasing God was the overt objective of the dramatic cycles, then satisfying the popular love for a festival was the tacit one (Mantzius 1937:86). Subsequently, the cycles became expressions of Carnival—celebrations of food, sex and violence—officially sanctioned by the Church but simultaneously and symbolically antagonistic to it. It is the devil who best characterizes this intimate bond between fertility and decay. Like his progenies the fool and clown who rise in mock resurrection after being beaten, the manhandled medieval stage devil emerges from the mouth of death to recite an epilogue to the performance (Willeford 1969:89-91). The immortal or clever devil figure is today a trope maintained less familiarly by few and infrequent circuses than by Warner Brothers' outsmarted Wile E. Coyote, *A Nightmare on Elm Street's* wise-cracking Freddy Krueger, and *Tales from the Crypt's* punning Cryptkeeper.

Beyond a historical explanation for the comic devil exists a theological reason for his presence. Whether one believes the cycles to be a degeneration of liturgical drama or a wholly vernacular innovation, the question remains how to justify the presence of farce and humor within performances overtly devoted to sacred themes. In reply to this seeming contradiction, V.A. Kolve understands the medieval vernacular cycles as a blending between austere asceticism and the essentially human nature of laughter. Austere asceticism, or the scrutiny of all acts according to eternal consequences, pervaded medieval

thought and institutions with its dark cloud of general doom. Christ and the Christian God were not credited with a sense of humor, and their austerity was interpreted as an appropriate model for human behavior. However, laughter was deemed uniquely characteristic of man. It defined and distinguished him from the other animals. Secular and religious circles synthesized these apparent contraries and advised laughter in moderation. Scriptural precedent for God's desire for human mirth was found in an interpretation of 2 Kings 6. King David, who danced and prostrated himself before the Ark of the Covenant and pleased God, proved that mirth and gladness, properly done, honors both God and man (Kolve 1966:124-33). The result was a form of "slapstick theology" which influenced—or perhaps rationalized—the festival dramas.

Supplying mirth for the dramatic cycles were the conventions of Carnival, festivals genetically pagan but, thanks to syncretization, thematically Christian. My loose definition of Carnival frees the word from its etymology (in Italian, literally, "to remove meat"); not referring to strictly the period of carnal indulgence before Lenten abstinence, Carnival denotes *any* atmosphere of sanctioned indulgence and illusory disorder preceding, surrounding or permeating a holiday or sacred feast. Historian Peter Burke notes that in medieval Europe "every festival was a miniature Carnival because it was an excuse for disorder and because it drew from the same repertoire of traditional forms, which included processions, races, mock battles, mock weddings, and mock executions...It is closer to the truth to think of the religious festivals of early modern Europe as little carnivals than to think of them as grave sedate rituals in the modern manner" (1978:199). Describing the "world-turned-upside-down" atmosphere of sating every appetite (carnal, sexual, and aggressive) within which such festival drama occurred, Roger Abrahams writes,

> The range of styles, in terms of subtlety, is very limited in festival drama. Indeed, the dominating moods are melodramatic or farcical. In such plays, as in most other festival activites, there is no respect for everyday reality. Indeed,

> festival seems to do its best to deny reality, by turning the world and its social hierarchies upside down, by having acrobats, stilt dancers, and other such performers defy gravity, or by having performances given by characters whose roles are suffused with hyperbole or the ridiculous (1972:354-55).

Accompanying the solemn Corpus Christi processions were giants and dwarves, the grotesquely humorous rear-guard of the Blessed Sacrament—grotesque on account of their physical deformity, humorous because such inexplicable deformity was terrifying and needed to be dismissed by laughter. Carnival gaiety and Christian sobriety not merely co-existed but were mutually incorporated to produce a religious and social occasion. Inversions and distortions of religious ritual and Christian images were standard during winter's Feast of Fools or Feast of the Innocents and other ritual spectacles in which citizens or children were permitted to "invade" the cathedral and turn it upside down and inside out. They upheld excrement on the communion chalice, led asses to the pulpit to bray sermons, and substituted obscenities and nonsense for responsorials, all at the official invitation of the clergy (many of whom, in the lower orders, participated directly in the inverted rituals). Even the conclusion of Lent, the Easter mass, was for centuries officially marked by *Risus Paschalis*, the congregation's "Easter laughter" at the *Fabula Paschalis* or clerical "Easter drollery" (Willeford 1969:93). Carnival's irreverent behavior was bounded by sanctioned time and place, however. Mocking the Church outside of Carnival, disrupting the order with malevolent intent rather than in a playful spirit, was decidedly sinful. Similar combinations of the sacred and profane—reason and disorder—comfortably existed for a time in public medieval drama.

Laughter was never irreverent in the cycles because it proceeded from the righteous humiliation of the wicked. "God is in control, the evil and the demonic behave stupidly because that is their nature, and the proper reaction to this example of the rightness of things is laughter" (Kolve 1966:139-40). Saint Sebastian summarizes the theological reasoning, translating it into vernacular terms in *The Golden Legend*: "The devil thinks he

conquers by making martyrs, but while he catches he is caught, while he binds he is bound, while he wins he loses, while he tortures he is tortured, while he strangles he is killed, while he mocks he is laughed at!" (De Voragine 1993:98). Demonic defeat was derived from hagiography and homiletic literature in which a saint afflicted with threats and temptations would ultimately humiliate and manhandle the demon, often with comic results (Russell 1984:260). One exemplarly source for contemporary investigation remains the aforementioned *Golden Legend,* or *Legenda Aurea.* Dated about 1260 and authored by the Dominican Friar Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend* is a reading on the saints transcribed from legendry and oral theology. One thousand surviving manuscripts, multiplied into both Latin and vernacular editions following the advent of printing in the 1450s, attest to the book's popularity throughout Western Europe. *The Golden Legend* was perhaps second only to the Bible in its number of readers (Ryan 1993:xii) and provides some insight into our iconographic subject. One outstanding episode in the collection describes how Saint Juliana, imprisoned, thrashes an inept demon come to tempt her in jail; upon her release, the saint drags the demon out in chains behind her. "The demon continued to plead with her, saying: 'Lady Juliana, stop making a fool of me or I'll never again be able to mislead anyone! Christians are supposed to be merciful, but you haven't shown me any mercy at all!' But she dragged him from one end of the marketplace to the other and finally tossed him into a sewer" (De Voragine:161). Note the episode's imitation of dramatic life as she takes the devil to the marketplace, the seat of popular festival, in order to humiliate him publicly. Similar episodes in legendry reinforce the saints' triumph over death, a victory fundamental to the definition of sainthood. Incorruption of the body, as evidence for saintliness, suggested the martyr's Christ-like triumph over "the last enemy." In the joining of altar and tomb to present shrines and relics, the Church's practice of sainthood represented a breaking down and inversion of

ancient barriers between the human dead and the universe. "The imagery of a martyr's relics is never in any case an image of the *memento mori*," writes André Grabon; "rather it strives by all means in its power to proclaim the suppression of the fact of death." The relic trade itself symbolized this triumph further. Dismemberment and removal of a part of the dead from the context of its grave tended to suppress the saints' mortality (Brown 1981:75-78). In a description by Saint Jerome (c.341-420) of the Roman pilgrim Paula's reaction to the strange goings-on within the tombs of the prophets in the Holy Land, he suggests that the holy personages transcend death in order to continue their battles with evil:

> She shuddered at the sight of so many marvelous happeneings. For there she was met by the noise of demons roaring in various torments, and, before the tombs of the saints, she saw men howling like wolves, barking like dogs, roaring like lions, hissing like snakes, bellowing like bulls; some twisted their heads to touch the earth by arching their bodies backwards; women hung upside-down in mid-air, yet their shirts did not fall down over their heads (Brown:106).

Certainly this account of exorcisms-in-progress was a terrifying example of the disorder of demons. Saint Jerome's description alone explains the real fear of possession, a hellish Carnival that distorted the natural order by turning the body upside-down and inverting the roles of humans and animals. It was the human and this-worldly Carnival, however, which defeated symbolically the ever-present threat. Religious laughter in medieval drama, depending on grotesque exaggeration to the point of ridiculousness, depended on the conventions of Carnival to blunt the terrifying edges of hell and death.

Literally the most explosive comic relief in the religious cycles, a variety of devils employed pratfalls, slapstick exchanges, ludicrous parodies with inverted values and rituals to elicit laughter from their audience. Jeffrey Burton Russell asserts that the tendency toward the comic devil figure began in the theater as early as the 12th century under the influence of the folk performances of mimes, jugglers and maskers (1984:259). If the comic devil is a profane invasion into the sacred world, then all the medieval theologists' talk of righteous laughter seems a bare rationalization for the decline of strict solemnity and

piety. Indeed, the forms of Carnival humor opposed the official and serious tone of medieval ecclesiastical culture. While the lower church orders welcomed and even participated in the oppositional festivities, those elevated in the hierarchy found many aspects disturbing, an unease expressed in their writings if not in their actions. Church authorities, as the civic authorities, were torn between recognizing the social benefits of Carnival as a mass release of tensions and suppressing the baleful residue of paganism in it. The doctrine of "accommodation," Pope Gregory I's official instruction to Bishop Augustine regarding the conversion of pagans in AD 601 (Burke 1978:229), seems to be an early attempt to reconcile these two motivations; by redefining pagan traditions by couching them in Christian terms, church officials permitted the festival impulses of the converts and hoped that the transplanted imagery would take hold and additionally, in some miraculous or abracadabrian feat, transform the former into the latter. William Hone, an early 19th century historian of oddities and eccentricities, describes this period of accommodation as a time in which "darkness overspread the world." Citing the "deplorable ignorance" of the clergy, many of whom were only slightly more learned than their congregations and only slighlty less susceptible to the persuasions of pagan remnants, Hone in 1823 asserts that pre-Reformation religious spectacles were merely continuations of earlier bad habits: "During this period, in order to wean the people from the ancient spectacles, particularly the Bacchanalian and calendral solemnities, religious shows were instituted partaking of the same spirit of licentiousness" (1969:156-157). Little surprise, then, that sporadic attacks on popular recreations and culture had been occurring from within the Church since its earliest years, launched by elevated members of the hierarchy.

What distinguishes the reformations of the 15th century from previous attacks is that these attempts represent much more concerted and systematic efforts to reform popular culture on theological grounds. The reformations of the 15th and 16th centuries may best

be thought of as the reform of popular culture (that is, "Carnival culture" or the culture of spontaneity and disorder) on the grounds of both Protestant and reformed Catholic theology which objected to pagan vestiges and the license for over-indulgence. The process and history of reformation activities are too diverse to detail here because, in short, different reformers of different denominations attacked different areas of popular culture differently and for different reasons. Indeed, "reformation" is better termed "reformations" for an accurate description of the events as not some monolithic movement but a series of disparate actions against popular or Carnival culture. Sufficient for our purposes is Peter Burke's admittedly unfair but useful simplification: "Catholic reform tended to mean moderation; Protestant reform was more likely to mean abolition." For example, the former attempted to purify the cult of the saints, the religious dramas, and the festivals of their residual pagan excesses; the latter sought to suppress and abolish feast days, feasting, the cult of saints and holy images entirely. Consequently, popular culture was attacked on two fronts: by the Protestant reformations (Lutheranism, Zwinglianism, Calvinism, and Puritanism) and by the Catholic reformation officially issued by the Council of Trent in 1562 and 1563 and unofficially undertaken by individual reformers (Burke 1978:207-22).

Like any other syncretic blend, both religion and festival were the more powerful because of lamination. In the battles between Carnival and Lent, like all battles between elite and low culture, the lowbrow Carnival wins in the beginning because its diversions rally the most supporters (Lent, however, wins the larger war because the official forces of order in turn carnivalize—cannibalize—those forces of disorder and then fashion them into new and acceptable forms. For example, amusement parks are Carnivals fundamentally changed into capitalist commodities; they have been transformed into expressions of official culture and thus are well-ordered places to be transgressed and subverted by the Carnival forces of mischief and misrule). The 16th century, according to Karl Mantzius, "represents

at the same time the decline of the drama and the highest perfection in the domain of scenery." As those "Masters of Machinery," as the special effects personnel were then called, superseded the actors and play itself in importance, the plays degenerated into spectacles and conjuror's tricks laden with decapitations, flying angles and devils, and burning saints. Plays which once had been controlled by church authority or guildsmen were later appropriated by professional actors and lower-class artisans who compromised the dignity and sublimity of sacred subjects with farces and pantomimes designed to lengthen the performance (Mantzius 1937:68-75; 113-15). Rosemary Woolf concurs, suggesting that following the clerical writing of the mystery plays, later revisions through subsequent performances occurred. Invented incidents, ornate elaborations and irrelevant comic diversions became intrusive to the greater religious themes and threatened to supersede them. The exaggerated use of lofty language contributed to the growing ludicrousness of the plays (1972:312-13) and their quickening degeneration into pure Carnival spectacles, although a more accurate description of the trend might be the plays' "return" to their Carnival origins rather than their "degeneration." If it is indeed a return we are describing, then it is one which was changed by progress and increasing technical sophistication.

The hell of the later medieval stage was an illusion greatly improved until the illusion became the focus of the performance to the detriment of the art. Whether or not the plays had ever been truly very artful is not important; what is significant is that the plays were *perceived* to have deteriorated by ever-increasing sections of the public. Indeed, the reformation of popular culture which had originated on religious grounds had by its second phase (1650-1800) become an argument for good taste and the abolition of entertainments which pandered to the lowest common denominators of society (Burke 1978:240-41). Not surprisingly, the old complaints persist today. In his recent and abrasive litany of the worst

products of American mass culture and media, James Twitchell laments the vulgarity of a popular culture obsessed with the cheap delights of pulp fiction, the perverse thrills of exploitation films, the titillation of rock-n-roll. Of course, the situation could not be otherwise. After all, Carnival, as the expression of popular culture and tradition, is the world of the marketplace; in a capitalist society in which the marketplace has been extended to penetrate all areas of human life, its culture has necessarily inherited the nose-thumbing spirit and bawdy, rowdy tastes of Carnival in which Crapola is its crowned king. It is to Twitchell's discredit that, cultural elitist that he is, he apparently believes that western civilization has suddenly slipped from a high golden age into a morass of vulgarity and intellectual vacuity. Popular culture has worshipped before the sweating, porcelain throne of Crapola traditionally.

All questions of class tastes aside, the fatal blow to the medieval cycles, according to Harold Gardiner, was the development of spectator and actor, each of whom gradually inhabited separate realms within the play world. Medieval drama did not ignore its audience because it could not have, given the close proximity of the people who in their rowdiness were known to interrupt the performances, interfere with the actors and shatter the best theatrical illusions (Mantzius 1937:76). But its history is one of increasing separation between onlookers and actors, between what Hans-Jürgen Diller terms the "audience-sphere" and the "play-sphere" (1992:252). Citizens became mere onlookers to troups of professional actors who usurped the practice of dramatic diversions (Harold Gardiner 1967:92-93). Seat and stage became more distant, and the mouth of the unknown was removed from their close experience. Consequently, hell was viewed from a distance, not only literally but also philosophically. The iconography of hell became rich fodder for artistic appropriation.

Like anything else seen too often and for too long, the gaping jaws of the hellmouth—imagined as a real threat which was beaten during calendrical festivals—lost

much of its power as a symbol for moral admonishment. By the 16th century the vernacular hellmouth was an inadequate representation of a still-real threat. Popular fondness for the symbol alone kept it alive through a process of change, the only means of sustaining. Eventually and ineluctably the subject of year-round parody, the hellmouth soon enclosed the fireplaces, doorways, and windows of the generally sophisticated (Frye 1978:140) as mere tokens of the ancient and superstitious mind. The intersection of strict Catholicism, reformations and humanism during this period intimated the philosophical beginnings of the secular. Peter Berger generally defines secularization as "the process by which sections of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols." In short, it is the examination of the world and self without religious interpretation (1969:107-8)[5]. Secularization, as it frees culture and society from one way of thinking, opens up the older sacred and profane worlds to artful reinterpretations. Subsequently, and especially during the next centuries of reformation and counter-reformation, the grand effects of the medieval imagination became a treasure to plunder.

Rabelais's great work, *Gargantua & Pantagruel* (written in five books from 1532 until the author's death in 1553, the first four of which were published during his lifetime) appropriates earlier Carnival traditions to tell a tale of giants as convoluted as coiled intestines and effectively establish a new literary form: the "carnivalesque," an often politically subversive assemblage of parodies derived from popular sources (the traditional symbols and language of Carnival and the marketplace). As evidence and description of such festival behaviors and worldview, Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* has

[5]"Secularization" as a proper term only came into usage in England circa 1648, during the time of the Peace of Westphalia, in which lands and possessions were transferred from ecclesiastical to civil control and the separation of government from religion was created (Livingston 1989:373). However, the more generally defined process of secularization or separation had begun in the 16th century during the religious reformations.

been instrumental to folklorists, ethnographers and anthropologists who seek explanations for contemporary forms of festival behavior analogous to medieval Carnival. However, my interest lies less in Carnival as a medieval ritual with late-20th century analogues (Mardi Gras in New Orleans or the Greenwich Village Halloween Parade, for examples) and more in Carnival as an event of the marketplace whose symbols and diversions were eventually borrowed, commodified and turned into the stuff of the outdoor amusement industry. My study, then, depends not on Bakhtin's learned discussion of Rabelais and his medieval sources but on my own recontextualization of Rabelais at the crossroads of late medieval culture and the early Renaissance where he was touched by—and perhaps was reacting to—those first stirrings of popular reform already discussed.

Rabelais's volumes—the birth of the carnivalesque—certainly contain after-the-fact representations of medieval Carnival; more significant for my purposes, however, is their inherent suggestion that forms from the past can be reassembled and realized. Like the process of historians making history, the carnivalesque is a deliberate process of reconstruction which suggests the politics and attitudes of its own political or cultural context rather than speaks any truth of the past. Implicit in Rabelais's work is a then-developing attitude that the past can be evoked and faked by transforming the remnants of traditional popular culture into a transgressive and subversive fiction. Indeed, *Gargantua & Pantagruel* is not a Carnival but the idea or a simulation of one in book form; it is essentially the original amusement park, filled with fantasy lands and costumed characters cut from an old, enchanted and apparently grotesque world and pasted into a literary collage for the purpose of satire and amusement. As the earliest and greatest collection, concentration and rendering of folk humor in world literature (Bakhtin 1984:58), *Gargantua & Pantagruel* suggest that their author collapses the folklorist's roles of ethnographer, popularizer, and fictionalizer centuries before such collapse became

fashionable or even widely feasible.

One episode, "How the Devil was fooled by an old Woman of Popefigland," evidences the borrowing of medieval Carnival symbols and motifs already discussed throughout this section. *Book Four*, Chapter 47 concludes the story of a devilkin who, twice outsmarted by a peasant farmer and mocked at in the open market place, returns for a third time to the farmer for a "scratching match," a battle favoring his sharp nails over his dull wit, to determine who will remain the sole owner of the farmer's field. Though the farmer, physically unmatched, is willing to forfeit the land, the farmer's wife conceives of a plan to trick the little devil into conceding defeat:

> The way it happened was this. The devil came to the farmer's door, where he knocked and called out: "Hi, peasant, peasant! Now for a good clawing-match!" Then he went briskly and resolutely into the house, but did not find the farmer there, only his wife lying on the floor, weeping and wailing.
>
> "What's this?" demanded the devil. "Where is he? What's he doing?"
>
> "Oh," cried the old woman. "Where is he, the wretch, the butcher, the brigand? He's torn me to bits, I'm finished, I'm dying of the wound he gave me."
>
> "Why?" asked the devil. "What's the matter? I'll make him dance for you pretty soon."
>
> "Oh," said the old woman, "he told me, the butcher, the tyrant, the devil-scratcher, that he had an appointment for a clawing-match with you; and to try out his nails, he merely scratched me with his little finger, here between my legs, and tore me quite open. I'm finished. My wound will never heal. Just take a look. But now he has gone to the blacksmith's to have his claws sharpened and pointed. You're done for, master Devil, my dear friend. Make your escape. He'll be here in a moment. Please, please, run away off."
>
> With this she lifted her clothes to the chin, as Persian mothers of old used to when they saw their sons fleeing from the battle, and showed him her what's-its-name. When the devil saw this huge and continuous cavity, extending in all directions, he cried out: "Mahound! Demiurge! Megaera! Alecto! Persephone! He shan't find me here. I'm off like a streak. Very well, leave him the field." (1983:549)

The farmer's wife frightens the little devil away by reworking the characteristic image of hell as a gaping mouth. Her "gash," that "huge and continuous cavity, extending in all directions," is merely one end of an alimentary canal which begins with the mouth; in

Rabelais's work, the symbols of life and death, like the parts of the body, are intimately bound and joined together so that the vagina both excretes and gives entrance to new life, the belly is both womb and tomb for the mouth that swallows dead flesh to nourish itself. Thus the devil is humorously defeated by his own endlessly reflexive symbols of Carnival license: food, sex and violence. Still, Rabelais's purpose is not to defeat the devil symbolically for a religious message but to use that tradition of powerful laughter to support other, political and social messages. In the context of *Book Four,* the devilkins are emmisaries from Papimania (the seat of Roman idolatry) who feed off the poor farmers of Popefigland; such devilkins are made analogous to members of the Catholic clergy who sustain themselves with the contributions of hard laboring parishoners (Zegura and Tetel 1993:144-45). The author turns the tradition of demonic humiliation on its head, changing the message into one of defeat of all-too-human tyrants.

Like the hellmouth which Rabelais shapes into, on one level, an occasion of ribaldry and on another an instance of sharp political satire, the other symbols and popular images of hell were refashioned by later authors and artists to represent new ideas by relegating them to comic insets, linguistic symbols and charged metaphors. Popular culture is nothing if not resilient and conservative; despite the intertwining of political and religious changes in the 16th and 17th centuries, and despite official Protestant suppression on account of the overt Catholicism of the mystery plays and Catholic suppression on account of overt paganism, the mystery plays persisted throughout a century of reformation activities due to public affection for the traditional form (Harold Gardiner 1967:92-112). Even after the banishment of the cycles in later reformation years and their general disappearance in Europe by 1600 (Burke 1978:221-22), the comic and hellish elements did not disappear but mutated into other forms of art and drama (Turner 1993:91) which did not represent hell literally, but manipulated the power of its metaphors (Cary 1992:187,

205). The "carnivalesque," to my imagination, is not strictly a subversive literary style but, more generally, a process falsely attributed to post-modernism: the appropriation or cannibalization of forms and images associated with the past which are then assembled into new contexts which endow them with new meaning. Superficially, the present-day forms and images resemble their forebears ostensibly though essentially they may be very different. In this way, the image of the grotesque devil and the form of demonic defeat give the dark ride its character; the essential causes of laughter, however, are not derived from fart-jokes or dull wits but stem from the deliberately harmless appearance of the frights. In those dark ride tableaux which attempt a semblance of unmitigated horror (a scene of a skeleton operating a guillotine in Le Cachot, for example [Illustration 3]), the illusion is threatened by our perception of the paper-maché, foam rubber or fiberglass representations of death as the quaint kitsch from America's "innocence." This formidable subject of linking the traditional dark ride to a closed period in American history is one to which we will return at greater length and in greater detail when we discuss changes to individual dark rides over time.

Numerous though they are, the dark ride's legion of monsters, stemming distantly from the devils of the medieval cycles, are outnumbered by its skeletons in various threatening poses and innocuous reposes. To account for this bony population we must make some account for the western mind's now-obvious association of skeletons with death. Significant, then, is that the reform of popular culture coincided with a shift in religious mentality or sensibility. As Peter Burke succinctly asserts, "The godly were out to destroy the traditional familiarity with the sacred, because they believed that familiarity breeds irreverence" (1978:212). Coinciding with this separation between sacred and profane worlds was the separation between the world of the living and that of the dead: a santization of the fact of death that verged on denial of its most gruesome effects. Prior to this change, well-pronounced by the 18th century, the European attitude toward their dead

was one of casualness and familiarity. The dead surrounded churchgoers, both inside and out, in a religious community of living and dead: the important dead lay inside the church, buried under flagstones, pillars, porches, and in attics; lesser individuals were buried in anonymous graves in yards directly beside the church; thousands lay buried in common ditches, fifteen to thirty feet deep. In the churchyard, bones lay just under a bare covering of ground, mixed with stones, pebbles and grass. Cemeteries—locations away from the church but specifically reserved for burial—were, from the 14th to 18th centuries, not only public places but also centers of communal life. Markets, fairs and pilgrimages animated them with crowds who found nothing incongruous about celebrating amidst corpses (Montague 1974) because the dead themselves weren't scary. Strangely enough, what occasioned walled, unpublic areas for the dead were threats from the living. Private graveyards were a development that responded to the lowliest orders of social interaction occurring in the marketplace: prostitution and theft (Ragon 1983:50-51, 143-44).

The dead weren't scary but death certainly was. The association between human remains—skeletons and bones—and the unavoidable act of dying was made in pictorial representations which responded to the plagues which swept through Europe. Beginning in the 14th century, and on tombs especially, new and horrendous images of the dead in a state of corruption replaced those of the deceased in a state of recumbent sleep. "From the first appearance in Tuscany of 'a decayed corpse, consumed by snakes and toads' in the fourteenth century," says Roland Frye, "the tradition of macabre representations became increasingly widespread while the number of gruesome details multiplied." These details, designed to remind the viewer of the temporal state of his/her body and immortal state of the soul, embellished the varieties of *transis* carvings which represented three stages of death: *caro vilis* (vile flesh), *vermis* (process of decomposition), and *pulvis* (skeleton or shriveled-up corpse) (1978:113-14). The skeleton that carries a measurement of flesh-

dissolving time is a resonant image of mortality that persists today, even in the funny bowels of the dark ride. Related to the funerary art with its *memento mori* meditations were the representations of the famous *Danse Macabre*, whose first known appearance was in the Church of the Holy Innocents cemetery in Paris, dated at 1424 or 1425 (Montague 1974). In these widely distributed series of images (prints, paintings, or carvings) Death, embodied as a skeleton, carries off members from each strata of society to remind viewers that death levels all of society's arbitrary hierarchies. The levelling tendency, though turned horrible, belongs to the Carnival world.

One of the symbolically richest images in the series is that of Death and the Fool: Death adorns himself in the Fool's trappings as he carries the Fool off to oblivion, showing that death is a fool who makes fools of us all. The Fool then survives his own death by being stripped of his skin and gawdy costume and returning to his deathly aspect and the world of death from whence he came (Willeford 1969:90-92). Mirroring this bound-up image is the "carnival-like dissolution of opposites" which semiotician Tony Bennett reads in the laughing death's head reigning over the exterior of the dark ride at England's Blackpool Pleasure Beach: "Life laughs at death, death mocks life," the symbolic exchange continuously merging and dissolving (1983:152). The dark ride preserves this healthy exchange between life and death by reacquainting the living with the effects of dying. In the dark ride, it is death who operates under great limitations while the rider passes unfettered through his ghastly scenes, surviving them by deriding them. Death in his personifications may mock our material bodies, but we as *dark deriders* have the power to make mockery of death's pathetic abstractions—abstractions which are based on future images of our own eventually corrupted selves and which suggest that, obliquely, we are mocking ourselves and the futility of our life.

The hells and netherworlds of the dark ride are laughable parodies of our worst

imaginations of afterlife or oblivion. Constructed of gaudy paper maché and glass fibers layered over arthritic armatures and muscled by erratic shocks of electricity and compressed air, hell's demons and life's grim reapers are reduced to powerless cartoons that evoke not a sense of dread but laughter at the ridiculous. The journey permits its riders to see the unknown pop out of the darkness, skirt triumphantly around its ridiculously inadequate spectacles, and to defeat, for the moment at least, the fear of impending mortality with a grin. Such is the image of the netherworld in medieval folk tradition (Bakhtin 1984:395) and such is the image in popular culture today. Sergi Danilov, the freelance artist who does much of the renovative painting for Lake Winnepesaukah Fun Town (Rossville, Georgia), admits that he "hates" decorating the park's dark ride, the Kastle, with horrific subjects; consequently, he notes that his scenes of devils and skeletal spooks are intended to be amusing, not terrifying. Similarly, a neat, literal compression of the two extremes appears in the name of a former, Ohio-based dark ride and fun house novelty company: Funny Fright, Inc. With its cartoonish iconography, then, the dark ride becomes a ride-thru Halloween in the summertime. Like Jack Santino's vision of Halloween assemblages, the dark ride's combinations of familiar images is a mediation between life and death in which the living can control the terror of dying (1992:167). It is precisely this need to control the ultimate fact, sanitizing and suppressing it wherever possible, that Walter Kendrick describes in *The Thrill of Fear* (1991), linking it to his insightful examination of the past 250 years of horror as poetic, fictional, staged and filmed entertainment. The moody trappings of a vaulted and mouldy medieval darkness enhanced the horrific in literature, poetry, and architecture; such Gothic stylizations turned the past into something haunted, a tendency which is secularization's own commercialized tradition and a topic which, again, I must postpone until a later section of this thesis. For present purposes, however, our interest lies in the visual spectacles provided by the magic lantern, phantasmagoria and

other illusion shows which presented horrors but maintained the dramatic tradition of defusing graphic terror with humor. Indeed, these are the closest subject precursors of the dark ride.

A description of supernatural iconography visualized and realized through modern technology begins with the magic lantern shows and "Phantasmagoria" which featured the first slide projectors whose value stemmed from their ability to produce special effects. An unnamed predecessor to the magic lantern was invented as early as the 17th century by Father Athanasius Kircher, a Jesuit priest who described the principles of projection in his book *Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae* (1646). In two marvelous illustrations which portray the properties of the lens and the projection of a slide, Kircher uses the image of a devil and one of a *memento mori* skeleton bearing a scythe and hourglass (Marek 1965:33). Certainly the father's religious message suffusing these familiar illustrations had drained in later years, concurrent with scientific advances in powerful lighting which enabled the lantern to develop beyond a parlor toy and into a form of public entertainment. The later name "magic lantern" and the even more fantastic and stage-worthy moniker "Phantascopia" in 1796 suggest the thorough secularization of the supernatural by itinerant and permanent showmen who transformed the imagery into quasi-scientific spectacle. Even within fifty years of its invention, the magic lantern was so ubiquitous as to warrant a definition in Edward Phillip's *New World of English Words* which explicitly describes its favorite subjects: "a certain small Optical Macheen, that shews by a Gloomy Light upon a white Wall, Spectres and Monsters so hideous that he who knows not the Secret, believes it to be perfrom'd by Magic Art" (Altick 1978:117). A natural development from the magic lantern was the "Phantasmagoria" which still featured the popular images and effects but enhanced them by mechanically animated slides, multiple projection techniques, and, introduced later in the century, oxy-hydrogen illumination ("limelight") and photographic slides (Weedon and Ward 1981:123). Certainly another improvement to the over-all

chilling effect came from the concealment of the projection machinery from the audience. First popularized in Paris by E.G. Robertson, a Belgian, in the closing years of the 18th century, the Phantasmagoria projected images onto one side of a thin, transparent screen; on the other sat an audience which marveled at the conjuration of spectres and apparitions which apparently advanced, retreated, and dissolved by means of lenses and concave reflectors. This "macabre entertainment" featured ghosts, demons and skeletons. In a manuscript dating from late 1801 or early 1802, Sir David Brewster provides an eyewitness account of Paul de Philipstal's atmospheric Phantasmagoria:

> The small theatre of exhibition was lighted only by one hanging lamp, the flame of which was drawn up into an opaque chimney or shade when the performance began. In this "darkness visible" the curtain rose and displayed a cave with skeletons and other terrific figures in relief upon its walls. The flickering light was then drawn up beneath its shroud, and the spectators in total darkness found themselves in the middle of thunder and lightning. A thin transparent screen had, unknown to the spectators, been let down after the disappearance of the light, and upon it the flashes of lightning and all the subsequent appearances were represented.

With the deft manipulation of painted sliders, ghosts, skeletons, historical heroes and personages seemed to advance toward and address the audience with moving mouths; spectral transformations occured in which bodies shed their skin, receded, then returned complete and incorrupt. Brewster continues his description:

> The exhibition of these transmutations was followed by spectres, skeletons, and terrific figures, which, instead of receding and vanishing as before, suddenly advanced upon the spectators, becoming larger as they approached them, and finally vanished by appearing to sink into the ground. The effect of this part of the exhibition was naturally the most impressive. The spectators were not only surprised but agitated, and many of them were of opinion that they could have touched the figures (Altick:217-18).

For the remaining years of the century, subsequent copies of the Phantasmagoria appeared throughout Europe in various travelling and permanent exhibitions. Variously called the "Spectrographia," "Phantoscopic Theatre," or "Optikali Illusio," their names alone were

enough advertisement as they combined allusions to the phantoms inside to thrill the imagination with the vaguest pretensions of scientific importance to fascinate the curious intellect. So pervasive were the shows, and of such lasting impression, that their techniques were incorporated into stagecraft while the word itself entered the English vocabulary ("phantasmagorical") to loosely define the indefinable and to describe with almost superstitious reverence the new and bewildering experiences provided by modern technology (Altick:117, 217-19).

Coincident with the Phantasmagoria shows in the 19th century were the Ghost Illusions largely perpetrated by itinerant showmen using stages housed in wagons with carved and gilded facades which combined baroque and classical detailings to create a wall of formidable grandeur. Arthur Sellman describes the complexities of the typical exterior and interior:

> The stages in Ghost Shows invariably comprised a four-wheel box truck of fairly large dimensions, with one side of the truck being on hinges and made to open out from the centre like two large doors, and form a wing on either side of the stage, making an over-all width of about 30 feet. In this truck was carried most of the scenery and effects, and also permanently fixed in position at an angle of 45 degrees, the large sheet of plate glass in which the ghostly figures appeared....[The interior decoration, called "the Bogy" by showmen,] consisted of heavy decorative cloth linings that extended down either side of the booth, with side door curtains of matching material. An inside top lining and rafter scollops, not only kept out daylight but added to the general decorative scheme of the show's interior.

Inside, the illusion (occasionaly used in dark rides and fun houses, most notably the Haunted Mansion at Walt Disney World [Allen 1994:11]) is one familiar even to today's stage audiences: thrown onto a plate glass screen fixed at an angle of 45° in front of the stage was the reflection of brightly-lit actors, dressed in ghostly trappings, who were hidden below the raised stage in an area referred to as the "Oven" (Weedon and Ward 1981:123). With choreography and deft manipulation of light and reflection, the ghost illusionist was able to produce the most startling of effects. In 1863, "Peppers Ghost

Illusion" was presented in London with much fanfare by a Professor John Henry Pepper who, in true showmanship braggadocio, claimed to be its inventor, although the illusion was discovered by a Professor Wheeler in 1855 and first exhibited publicly although not so prominently in 1856. Significantly, though the illusions were intended to shock and amaze their audiences with their weirdness, the night's performance regularly concluded with a humorous sketch involving ghosts and goblins appearing from behind curtains and screens or in dark church yards from behind tomb stones (Sellman 1975:4-7), thereby preserving the greater tradition which would extend into the Hollywood haunted house comedies of the 1930s and 40s (*Spooks Run Wild* [1941] and *Abbot and Costello Meet Frankenstein* [1948], for examples) which often are lamented, incorrectly, as degenerations. The form has never been pure.

From its cultural inception to the recent crop of genre spoofs by Troma Films (*Toxic Avenger, Class of Nuke 'Em High,* and *Chopper Chicks in Zombietown*) and the *Evil Dead* series by director Sam Raimi which rightfully treats zombie gore as slapstick, horror in the media existed, and still exists, to be degraded with laughter. If humor is not contained within the source itself, as in the aforementioned titles, then it invades from the outside (often at the filmmaker's invitation) in a barrage of viewer insults directed at the film's technical ineptness, poorly crafted plot or bad acting. The contemporary cable tv program "Mystery Science Theater 2000" capitalizes on this amusing "dialogue," for lack of a better word, between films and viewers who know better. The show's simple scenario is thus: cheap sci-fi or horror films from the 50s and 60s play on a large screen aboard a spaceship while alien smart alecks, silhouetted in the foreground, provide a running, mostly insulting commentary on the images received from wayward television signals. Of course, the show only mimics a popular tendency to degrade media images in the comfort of one's living room and, as a media image itself, is not above being degraded

by its own viewers. The show, however, clearly illustrates the viewer interactions and interpretations which degrade every horror and science fiction movie. Even those with an array of ultra-sophisticated special effects are reduced to unintentional comedies by vocal members of an audience who are bored and unimpressed with the razzle dazzle. After all, campiness is inherent to the genre, and all the pyrotechnics and computer-generated images can't make a film transcend itself. In the vernacular, "awful" films do not inspire awe but are simply poorly executed; "terrible" films do not instill terror but suggest poor quality. Traditional dark rides, too, are "awful" and "terrible" in these common senses: they exist to be insulted for their obvious flaws. We will return in greater detail to this important tradition of insult and interference as it relates to the dark ride in the second and final sections of this thesis; now, however, to return to our subject's cinematic ancestors.

The Phantasmagoria and Ghost Illusion Shows were likely competitors for the money of city patrons and suburban fair-goers. While the former, eventually adding movement to its projections, intimated the beginnings of cinema (Altick 1978:219), both Phantasmagoria and Ghost Illusions were largely abandoned by the first years of the 20th century as motion pictures, the newest novelty, offered a more astounding, attractive illusion (Sellman 1975:6). A brief account of this new marvel, and its earliest spectacles, offers an intriguing glimpse at additional dark ride subject sources. Thomas Alva Edison's Kinetoscope, invented in 1891, was a peepshow entirely self-contained in a box in which 50 foot long loops of film could be viewed by individual viewers. The necessary brevity of such early films rendered useless any attempt at plot or character development; rather, film exploited its novelty, presenting mundane acts and slapstick accidents which were, in themselves, thrilling simply because they were captured on film. In 1895, Frenchman Louis Jean Lumiere invented his Kinétoscope de (en) projection or Cinematographé, a means of projecting moving film strips onto an outside screen (Marek 1965:150-52, 199-

201).

The shortness of the earliest films hindered plot and character development but allowed concentration on the more important visual spectacle. In the early years of the twentieth century, the most pioneering and influential film maker was Georges Mélies (1861-1938). Drawing on his experiences as mechanic, actor, cartoonist, stage-designer and magician, Mélies established himself as Europe's foremost producer and director of films, creating some 4,000 titles in all subjects (tragedies, romances, slapstick comedies, ghost shows, crimes, disasters, accidents) from 1896 to 1914. This *Roi de la Fantasmagorie, Jules Verne du Cinéma,* and *Magician de l'Écran* is known best for putting on film, with the help of trick photography sometimes invented for the occasion, the fantastic landscapes of his imagination. His *La Prophétesse de Thebes* (1907), "one of the first monster spectaculars in wild extravagances of colours," generally is considered the first epic. His *A la Conqûete du Pôle* featured an articulated Ice Giant of wood and wire requiring twenty stagehands to manipulate its eyes, arms, and fingers (Marek 1965:198-99). Perhaps most famous and enduring is his *Le Voyage dans la Lune* (1902) whose most startling image involves a rocket ship impaling the eye of a suitably distressed and literally cheesey man-in-the-moon.

Interesting to note, then, that the first illusion ride—as well as the most popular and lucrative attraction at Buffalo's Pan-American Exposition in 1901—was Frederick Thompson's similarly themed A Trip to the Moon via the Airship *Luna.* More delicious details on this very significant attraction in the following section but important to mention here that the near-coincidence between Thompson's illusion ride and Mélies's film (though there is no evidence that Mélies was inspired by or even aware of Thompson's attraction) suggest the beginning intertwining of dark ride and movies (two forms of theater), a tendency which characterizes best the development of the dark ride throughout the 20th century. The dark ride, like its mechanical ancestors the illusion rides and scenic railways,

is an attempt to invert the movie-going experience. Rather than sitting still as the reels of film move, the dark ride moves its riders through the various sets and tableaux of a horror picture. It is this carnivalesque attempt to reintegrate the audience-sphere within the play-sphere and deliver the rider through an experience with the help of illusions and mechanical ingenuities which opens the second section of this thesis. But now to bring our concerns in this section to an illusion of closure.

Kurt Marek's description of Mélies's work equally defines the dark ride's random presentation of iconography: "His narratives of strange adventures...were arranged in tableaux; they were neither acts nor scenes, but numbers in a magic show; and what he created was neither drama nor comedy, but always—regarded from the standpoint of form—a series of sensational variety items" (1965:198). The dark ride disorients with not only its tightly winding track but also its pandemoniac assemblage of "strange adventures" with sights and sounds. The image of tortured galley slaves gives way to the image of a goggle-eyed pirate clutching a mermaid on his knee; recorded laughter crosses and recrosses the boundary between the infectiously humorous and the eerily maniacal mechanical. The dark ride is neither all dark nor all light. Its incongruous collection of horrors is softened by absurd and laughable imagery and its best gags turn on a reinvigorating surprise. A raggedy fluorescent skeleton lifts a bottle of whiskey to its chattering teeth; in a Wild West play on the *femme fatale,* a saloon girl opens her blouse to reveal a cobwebbed rib cage; an on-coming truck with death behind the wheel appears out of nowhere, blaring its horn and blinding with its lights to get the mind spinning and heart racing, the body never having felt more alive than in that fleeting instant of near-death. As it scoots along its narrow track the dark ride travels the line between some of the big opposites—life and death, comedy and horror—and allows us to reconcile them without giving them a thought as we go. By not making sense and not requiring contemplation, the

theater of the dark ride reveals the impositions of human order and erases those arbitrary divisions to show the middle ground where extremes can meet.

## *Engineering Thrills and Events Against Nature: The Mechanical Ingenuities of the Dark Ride*

A quick re-examination of Mangels' two-part definition will help to organize this discussion of the two-part technology of the dark ride. "In these [dark rides], passenger-carrying vehicles, which may be boats, cars, or small trains, pass through dark tunnels or closed-in passages at a very low speed. Along the way, surprise scenes such as mechanical ghosts, flirting devils, and similar devices pop out to scare or amuse the slowly passing riders" (1953:141). Necessary then to offer some history of the technical development of the themed "ride," the first part of Mangels' definition, and the modern mechanical origins of figurative "darkness," the second portion. Because both elements are bound up intimately in the development of the outdoor amusement industry, description of the former involves some description of the latter, and *vice versa.*

In preview, then, the structural origins of the dark ride can be found in the "scenic railways" and "tunnel railways" of the late-19th century and the elaborate "illusion rides" constructed for early 20th century expositions. Passengers of scenic railways coasted through tunnels and past exotic scenes and other-worldly tableaux at the leisurely pace of a sight-seeing tour; passengers on illusion rides were led through rooms and into an area or car around which choreographed images were projected to give the sensation of movement through scenes and space. In the early twentieth century, fun houses were constructed in the form of dark mazes; these walk-through rides featured darkened interiors, angled passageways, moving stairs and floorways, fake cobwebs and blasts of compressed air. The dark ride consequently adopts the architectural elements of the scenic railway, illusion ride, and dark maze while continuing a secular tradition of iconography. In terms of

secular iconography, the dark ride's ancestors include those magic lantern and ghost shows discussed at some length in the previous section, as well as waxworks, and its contemporaneous kin were and are Hollywood films and their special effects. Essentially, the dark ride is defined as moving seats within a stage. Ultimately, the dark ride's combination of structure and iconography reintegrates, through technology, the audience within the drama and stage in an updating of Carnival's theatrical atmosphere.

Our first concern is to outline the development of rides with "theming," that is, rides decorated to appear exotic, other-worldy, with facades and ornamentation inside and out. Appropriately, then, we begin with a ride called the switchback railway, a progenitor of the roller coaster which, but for the magnificence of its skeletal structure, was unembellished. Despite several Parisian developments in the early 19th century, the roller coaster was only fully realized by American inventors who were perhaps inspired by the Mauch Chunk (Pennsylvania) switchback railway, a clever means of transporting coal by carts from the top of a mountain to a canal at its base by means of rails. Empty carts were then "switched back" onto a separate set of tracks and hauled to the mountaintop again by mule-power and readied for another descent. Though efficient in 1844, the system eventually was unproductive and, the mine nearly depleted, unnecessary; by 1870, after conversion to steam power, the Mauch Chunk switchback railway had become an attractive vehicle for sightseeing. In 1873 alone 35,000 tourists enjoyed a panoramic view of Mount Pisgah as their cars gently glided down the mountainside by gravitational forces. This intriguing translation of industrial technology into entertainment summarizes the modern amusement park's appropriation of work machines, reapplying their technology to objects of leisure and then recontextualizing them within places of recreation. In 1884, LaMarcus Adna Thompson borrowed from Richard Knudsen's switch-back railway-inspired 1878 patent for a compact "inclined-plane railway" (never built) in order to construct a similar

gravity railway at Coney Island. Between 1884 and 1887, Thompson patented thirty improvements to his original design in response to the technological advancements of his competitors; by 1888, Thompson had built nearly fifty gravity rides in the United States and Europe (Adams 1991:13-15). Technology in the outdoor amusement industry, as in every other setting, matures and evolves by constant and successive reactions to actions in the spirit of competitive one-upsmanship.

Meanwhile, during these early experiments with gravity railway forms, an English steam engineer by the name of Frederick Savage was altering his roundabout (carousel) technology to improvise a portable, smaller version of the lucrative but immovable switchback railway for use by traveling showmen. Savage (1828-1897) received some fortune for his significant innovations with steam in agricultural machines. However, the King's Lynn engineer's enduring fame and cultural importance result primarily from his manufacture of fairground machinery. Inspired by Sidney George Soame's application of steam power to a local carousel in the 1870s, Savage further refined and expanded the basic ride technology. Among his later ride innovations was the circular Gondola Switchback, first built probably in 1885. The name, referring directly to its American cousin, capitalized on the idea and fame of Thompson's gravity ride. In the ride, eight gilded cars ran over an undulating railway which sought to reproduce the stomach-fluttering thrills of the installed switchback railways (Clark 1975:20). The portable circular switchback was brought to America in early 1890 by Frank Bostock, the brother of a ride manufacturer; however, the weight and complex construction inconvenienced traveling showmen. The roller coaster consequently remained the faster, scarier, and therefore more popular attraction at permanent amusement sites (Weedon and Ward 1981:150).

We take a quick back-step in history to note that mechanical roundabouts, in one manually operated form or another, were standard attractions in fair grounds in the early

years of the 19th century and represent some of the earliest commercial amusement rides. Significantly, by the 1830s, rides actually had replaced the various theatrical shows as the primary spectacle and entertainment of the fair. Important to recall then that, in 19th century England, the growth of the amusement park was coincident with the Industrial Revolution. If overtly providing an alternative to the mechanized world, the parks with their landscaping, buildings, lighting and diverse mechanical amusements were as manufactured as the products of that dehumanized world (Adams 1991:4). However, these products, while employing familiar forms, were emblematic of not drudgery but leisure-time escapism. Scientific improvement to human life came most generally and symbolically in the form of diverting amusements, mechanical toys built of the same technology whose efficiency allowed additional time for leisure. Consequently, early forms of steam-propulsion rides required little additional adornment to attract attention to themselves. Simply by exposing their awesome mechanisms—suitable and sufficient showfront ballyhoo—they could draw customers into their tangled mix of science, technology and recreation. Fortunately, as interest in the bare forms waned, even newer technology appeared which allowed the operators to add weight to the ride without losing speed or efficiency. These advances let designers and builders decorate and embellish their various machines with attractively carved running boards overhead and center truck columns to the point of grandiosity; also, over successive years, elaborate chariots and ornamental landscapes were added to sustain public interest (Weedon and Ward 1981:7-8) and draw attention away from the commercial competition of exotic dioramas and idyllic panormas so popular in the 19th century. Coincident with the ever-growing pervasiveness of—and the ever-growing threat to a romanticized past way of life from—public and industrial technology, the rides ironically used that superior technology to conceal their more thorough mechanisms under a cover of fantasies, landscapes and exotic themes. In the outdoor amusement industry, theming is the artful application of technology to deny

technology.

Theming became a means of changing the experience of the ride without changing significantly the ride's basic structure or mechanical operation. Gravity railways, newly themed with tunnels and tableaus which disguised them as the mountains which they imitated and improved upon, were rechristened "scenic railways." Along with other amusement devices of increasing sophistication, the scenic railways became standard features of both larger amusement parks and also expositions, those staged spectacles which optimistically showcased advancements in technology. The scenics were lucrative because of their promises of exotic experiences (or at least the idea of an exotic experience). In America, Dreamland Park opened on Coney Island in the spring of 1904 boasting the scenic railway Coasting Through Switzerland as its central attraction. One of the grandest scenic railways was built in 1908 for the Franco-British Exhibition in Paris. This mile-long coaster was decorated and disguised with mountain scenery, lakes and bridges; viaducts illuminated caves and waterfalls (Weedon and Ward 1981:160). For the Panama-Pacific Expositions in 1915, LaMarcus Thompson erected two great scenic railways with exciting and mysterious showfronts: The Dragon's Gorge in San Diego and The Safety Racer Scenic in San Francisco (Fried and Fried 1978: 27-28). The World A Million Years Ago was a scenic railway that, from 1925-1930, toured the Chicago World's Fair, the Golden Gate Exposition and the New York World's Fair. Its central feature was at once an engineering triumph and a financial success with a public ever hungry for new sights: a towering brontosaurus, made of muslin, felt, and rubber over a rattan frame, was animated by seventeen motors and an elaborate series of shafts, gears, cams and cables (Gresham 1953:164). Today, the closest relatives of the scenic railways include themed roller coasters whose goal is to thrill (the runaway train being a popular motif, updated in the Indiana Jones Adventure ride unveiled at Disneyland in early 1995) and also the various

animatronic-stuffed tram-rides at the Disney resorts and other tourist parks whose apparent goal is to blur the boundaries between education and entertainment, merging them into one high-concept experience called "edutainment."

Combined with the concept of tours through exotic locales, the electric drive made possible the development of the traveling scenic railway. Like the portable switchback, which was influenced by the installation switchback, the portable scenic railway was inspired by its sprawling namesake. Mimicking the scenic illusions, traveling scenic railways disguised their central mechanisms with woodlands and waterfalls that pumped circulating water (Weedon and Ward 1981:160). Today's manifestations of portable scenic railways are still enormously popular in both the traveling carnival circuit and established amusement parks. The ubiquitous Himalaya ride—sometimes called the Matterhorn—features the same undulating track around scenes of snow, ice-capped mountains and skiers; like its newer twin the Musik Express (themed psychedelically with notes and good-lovin' graphics), the Himalaya ride is a portable disco in which spotlights, strobes and mirrored balls work in unsubtle choreography with sirens and thumping music as the operator invites ecstatically, "Do you wanna go faster!?"

Scenic railways engendered the themed "ride" in the dark ride, but it was a combination of the tunnel railway and the dark maze—an early variety of walk-thru fun house—which supply the first half of the name. The tunnel railway, introduced by Frederick Savage in circa 1885, employed a small steam locomotive which drew two or three carriages round a circular track partially enclosed within landscape scenery (Sellman 1975:34; Clark 1975:24; Weedon and Ward 1981:10). Evident from this description is the similarity between the portable scenic railways and the tunnel railways—their difference deriving from their means of propulsion. Certainly the later development of electric drives, by eliminating the mess of belching smoke drifting back into faces, made the entire riding

experience much more clean and comfortable. While the eventual use of electricity in both scenic railways and tunnel railways certainly marks a convergence between the two rides, the tunnel railway established the concept of individual cars traveling independently along a track. While steam power required an engine to pull a train of carriages, liberating electricity enabled individual, motorized cars to progress one at a time through the tunnel. This relative isolation from other riders gives the dark ride its power: solitude is more scary and, for couples, privacy more attractive.

While on the topic of tunneled tours, we should note the importance of tunneled boat rides (variously called Old Mills or Tunnels of Love) which have been themed into a popular variety of dark ride. The progenitor of all boat rides and water flumes appeared in France in 1817. Named the Saut du Niagra and located in the Parisian amusement park Jardin Ruggiere, the ride was an application of roller coaster principles to a sliding boat that could be precipitated down a steep incline into a deep basin of water. An American version of this prototype did not appear until seventy-two years later when, in 1889, almost simultaneous installations occurred in Watchtower Park (Iowa) and Electric Park (Kansas City, Missouri). These loose translations of the water ride concept were unsuccessful with the public. However, also in 1889, Paul Boyton installed a new ride in the first of the Coney Island amusement centers, Sea Lion Park. Boyton's Shoot-the-Chute employed the same general idea of a boat and a slide but introduced a thrillingly novel idea: an upcurve at the base of the incline forced the "downrushing" boat into the air before striking the water's surface. The effect was to rattle its passengers thoroughly as the boat hopped and skipped until it slowed (Mangels 1952:120-21).

Two years later, in London in 1891, Arthur Pickard invented the serpentine sluiceway whose current was generated by a series of propellers mounted in the canal. George Schofield in his Coney Island version replaced Pickard's propellers with a large

paddle wheel that kept the flow of water steady and, in his most significant addition to the design, built tunnels over the ride and filled them with fantastic scenes. Reminiscent of scenic railways and first named the Old Mill, Schofield's creation soon became known more familiarly as the Tunnels of Love (Mangels 1952:121-22), a name which reflects the opportunity it gave would-be lovers under the cover of darkness. Stylized depictions of monsters and other such horrific fare suitable for a journey into the cavernous underworld further tighten the knot of life-taking death and life-giving sexuality. Blurring the boundaries between the two opposites occurs not merely iconographically but also architecturally. Recall that a second tributary to the dark ride—the source of its illusions and shocks—is the fun house. Constructed in the form of dark mazes in the early 20th century, fun houses featured darkened interiors, angled passageways, moving stairs and floorways, fake cobwebs and blasts of compressed air to lift the skirts of ladies (Weedon and Ward 1981:247). All effects, as they assault the body and disorient the mind, combine skin-crawling fear of the unknown with voyeuristic glimpses at the source of human being.

With this accounting for the structural appearance of the dark ride in place, we must now examine the wedding between iconography and mechanics. Emblems have always been powerful; the signs and symbols of the medieval mind, when reviewed with modernist incredulity, evoke the quaintness and delicious mystery of the past. The evocation is best appreciated and understood when put into a cultural context of literary and artistic reactions against the Western Enlightenment. By casting light on the natural world with proofs, experiments and formulas, scientists dispelled the supernatural but threw innumerable shadows as well, darkening the past into obscurity and thereby turning the past—this new unknown—into an object of derision, mystery, fascination and nostalgia. Unwilling to give up the benefits of advances in science and medicine, the public simultaneously sought a means of reconciling the inclination for "progress" with the yearning for the "past," two words so pregnant with meanings and vagueness that they

required constant public definition. Such reconciliation came in the form of popular entertainments, born of the tension between looking backward into an age of uncritical wonder and looking forward into an age of scientific explanation (Altick 1978:5).

The future and the past were two attractions which pulled simultaneously, resulting in a nagging historical consciousness. Both impulses—and their consequences—are evident in the scientific mechanization of ancient iconography. Examine for instance an advertisement for "Merlin's Necromantic Cave" by John Joseph Merlin, a Belgium-born gadgeteer and inventor of clockwork novelties and scientific toys, who in 1783 established in London his own "Mechanical Museum":

> Under the Entrance to the cave will be a dark subterraneous Cavern ten Feet deep, wherein the Author will make Use of his supposed Necromantic Power, in imitation of the celebrated AMBROSIUS MERLIN, called the NECROMANCER. A Variety of Phantoms, red and white Dragons, Rattle-snakes, all Sorts of Reptiles, creeping Animals and nocturnal Birds, will be seen and heard making the most horrid mournful Shrieks and Noise, so as to strike the Beholders with the utmost Astonishment; the Goddess of Darkness will also appear in a sable Habit, wearing Bat's Wings. By an extraordinary Display of Mechanical Ingenuity, the Prince of Darkness and Chief of the Devils, will be discovered in a deep, extensive and tremendous Cavern, which will also contain all the Furies and infernal Harpies (from a pamphlet reproduced in Scholes 1948; as printed in Altick 1978:75).

Unfortunately, Merlin's ambitious cave with its haunted automatons and animated relics never did materialize, and similar subsequent plans died with him in 1803. However, similar varieties of popular mechanical and projection shows throughout the following century did provide infernal spectacles and conversations with the dead in response to the public's curiosity for innovation and simultaneous—but never incongruous—appetite for historical remnants (Altick 75). Indeed, few truly wanted to return to a past way of life if it meant sacrificing the opportunities and benefits of the present and the promises of the future. Merely sampling the past as realized through the sanitizing processes of modernity was sufficient enough and patronizing exhibitions ensured the best of both worlds.

Tony Bennett calls the dark ride "a journey through an enclosed universe where you encounter all the imaginary terrors of the Gothic novel and horror film before coming into the light of day again" (1983:150). More importantly, the dark ride belongs to that family of products of an 18th, 19th and 20th century attitude which, by Walter Kendrick's understanding, relates fear of deadness to the fear of the past. Collecting and cataloguing the remains of the past was a way to sanitize its disease-ridden mess through enlightened and careful ordering; consequently, the acontextual affects that represented the past became, to the minds of early collectors and cataloguers, the past itself. To the visitors and tourists of this Age of Collection, the relics and remnants were delightful things on which to gaze with wonder and amusement; to poets and artists, the things of the past became the formal props and clichés with which to season their works. Whether referring to poetry, plays, architecture or decorations, the very loose term "Gothic," as understood by 18th century fashionable and affluent collectors and artificers of antiquities, described anything very old and neither Classical nor neo-Classical—that is, any curiosity marked by the "delicious patina of age." Such afficionados of medeival and Catholic relics and reproductions were guided by the strong feeling that such moody, gloomy, archaic items evoked. "They called 'Gothic,'" concludes Kendrick, "anything that gave them a delicious, melancholy little chill." The relative shortage of genuine or authentic antiquities occasioned a flurry of literary[6] and architectural forgeries in the 18th century. Characterizing the latter, Horace Walpole, the idle and comfortably wealthy son of Lord Orford, transformed his small Twickenham house into a Gothic castle in miniature. Walpole's Strawberry Hill was renamed "Strawberry Castle" and, with the help of artisans and architectural mimicry,

[6]Among the most notable literary forgers are Thomas Chatterton, who archaicized his own poems, footnoted them, and attributed them to Thomas Rowley, a 15th century secular priest, and James Macpherson, who in 1760 advertised his *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland and Translated from the Gaelic or Erse Language* as the discovered corpus of Ossian, a pre-Scottish bard (Kendrick 1991:47-51).

became a formidable tourist attraction for distant Londoners (1991:xxi, 38-42). Further exemplifying this trend of material fakes were the Paris "catacombs," spectacular bone grounds for the delight of the living. These alleged "catacombs" were in fact abandoned quarries turned into a vast ossuary in the then-faddish imitation of the Roman world. From 1785 to 1787, two million bodies were moved by nightly processions of carts led by priests and flanked by torch-bearers; the ritual relocation was itself something of a popular spectacle. Visitation to the skulls and crossed tibias (piled six and one-half feet high and in some places a hundred feet thick) began in 1800; evidencing the great traffic of tourists, the catacombs had to undergo restoration and enlargement within ten years of the original opening; in 1832 they were closed on account of deterioration but reinaugurated in 1859 (Ragon 1983:61-63).

Indeed, the past could be faked by idealized representations. Faking the past, however, was and continues to be a very real phenomenon of Western culture. The Romantic demand for a strong feeling, Walter Kendrick suggests, links "the rage for an artifical past" to the contemporary appeal for being shocked into a sensual response. Recall Edgar Poe's "weak and weary" narrator of "The Raven" (1845) who fashionably ponders "Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore" to drown his sorrow of a lost love in the even moodier set pieces of a by-gone age. Loss of a way of life approximates the loss of life itself. Little wonder then that the most popular exhibitions of the 19th century were devoted so often to the aching romance of death. Consequently, spooky exhibitions of the supernatural from the 18th century onward were efforts to reenchant a disenchanted—that is, scientific—world with the fantastic effects of technology. They marked attempts to realize publicly, with an artful application of scientific principles and precise reason, the products of fruitful imaginations and superstitious minds. Contrivances not for deception but for spine-tingling illusion, they became entertainment for its own

sake.

Several hundred years did little to change what Karl Mantzius calls the medieval demand for witnessing as realistically as possible the coarsest details of real life (1937:75-76). Waxworks commemorating historical, religious, and criminal events and personages were sensational entertainment in England by the early 1830s (Weedon and Ward 1981:122). In America during the 18th century, P.T. Barnum operated a waxwork chamber of horrors; later, the Eden Museé at Coney Island presented an articulated torture scene of a pioneer woman—complete with heaving chest, tossing head, and rolling eyes—being burned at the stake by Indians. Despite noble origins in Egyptian funereal statuettes of gods, Roman death masks for patrician families and Renaissance sculptures of organs in wax for anatomical study, "the art of the waxworks," William Gresham reminds us, "never loses the common touch. It is fundamentally and intrinsically corn—and the toiling masses eat it up." One showman to capitalize very successfuly on this fact was George Messmore, an actor by training but set-builder and prop-designer for profit who in 1914 and with Joseph Damon established a business constructing settings and props for theaters, amusement parks, carnivals, fairs, and circuses, as well as department store displays and parade floats (Gresham 1953:159-64).

During a life-changing visit to Madame Tussaud's wax museum on London's Baker Street, Messmore realized that the exquisite and artistic executions in wax of famous and noble personages were overshadowed by the grisly portrayals of execution of infamous villains and other tortures in the basement Chamber of Horrors[7]. Thus inspired, he returned to America and, collaborating with Damon, developed a Chamber of Horrors show (created not out of fragile wax but with durable paper maché) which opened

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[7]Tussaud's, of course, has entered the tourist park industry in the United Kingdom with Alton Towers in Staffordshire and Chessington World of Adventures in Surrey; each park features an elaborate, high-end dark ride (McFarlane 1994:35).

at the Chicago World's Fair in 1932. Interestingly enough, the show premiered in the fair's Century of Progress exhibition hall. A souvenir booklet describes the marvelous attraction scientifically, positively gushing over the near-pornographic realism afforded by clockwork technology:

> It [the Torture Chamber] stands as one of the most unique exhibits of the Century of Progress. The figures are all life size and are filled with gears, cams and levers, operated by electrical motors, and yet so well has the task been performed that in reality they seem to breathe, move, and actually live as they did hundreds of years ago.
>
> The costuming and details are worked out with the greatest accuracy and all the tortures shown are exact copies of the fiendish forms used in the Middle Ages. In some cases the actual implements that were used are shown. So life-like are the figures and so exact in reproduction that many people have been forced to turn away in horror, unwilling to witness "man's inhumanity to man." The effect is heightened by the close synchronization of sound to motion, made possible by the latest development in the sound engineer's art. Thus in the Torture Chamber you not only see the tortures as they were practiced in the Middle Ages, but you hear again the questioning of the inquisitor, as well as the screams and groans of the unfortunate victims.

The show was undoubtedly a success (How could it not have been?), running for ten years in Chicago before being moved to Coney Island and, subsequently, Rockaway Beach until it was dismantled, its individual scenes and figures sold to various traveling carnivals and amusement parks and scattered throughout the United States in midways, fun houses and dark rides (Gresham 1953:164-65). Safe to surmise that public interest stemmed less from contemplating the complex inner-workings and "latest developments" of the illusion and much more from experiencing the emotional effects of the illusion itself. As artful as the process of building such a creation may be, public appreciation derived from the final product is based on the delight of being disgusted—or the disgust of being delighted—by such grotesques. The dark ride inherited the art and technology of the Chambers of Horror but bested them by transporting its audience both mentally and physically, sending them on a journey through graphic scenes and surprises before safely delivering them into the open air again. In this aspect of real transportation through an idea, the older dark ride connects

the "illusion rides" of the early 20th century expositions to the "themed experiences" and "immersion rides" of contemporary parks. In all forms, the dark ride fulfills the cinematic promise to "really" take the viewer somewhere.

Russell Nye, noticing that one way of looking at an amusement park is by comparing it to a movie set, notes that "This recent trend in amusement parks, the device of unifying themes, is chiefly the result of the transfer of Hollywood stage-set skills of illusion, developed over a half-century of movie making, to the park locale" (1981:67). The author implies a mistaken causality, however, in suggesting that amusement parks copy movie sets and have only begun to do so recently. The modern amusement park and film—the two most significant cultural developments of the 20th century—grew and matured in tandem, both originating from one impulse or source: the desire for and the ability to produce leisure-time experiences. Their growth and maturation reflect continuous exchanges of influence and only in recent years have the two divergent forms overtly reunited. Present and future developments only promise to intensify the alliance, merging one seamlessly into the other until the boundary is rightfully blurred—recall the expansion of film corporations (Walt Disney, Paramount, Universal Studios) into the amusement industry. The primary vehicle of this confluence is the dark ride.

"There's a concerted effort by the industry and themed entertainment section of the industry to bring movies to the amusement park," notes John Wood, executive vice president and chairman of Sally Corporation, a producer of contemporary dark rides (Muret 1993a). Of course, since their inception movies have been at the amusement park, the latter being one of the primary locations for the exhibition of early cinema (Rabinowitz 1990:71). And, as suggested previously, the dark ride and movies share common dramatic roots; by the 1890s, London's own Professor Pepper was including primitive cinema in his ghost illusion shows (Weedon and Ward 1981:123). The dark ride improves upon film by

adding a third dimension—by attempting to penetrate the celluloid wilderness which rapidly expands the frontiers of someone else's imagination. From the standpoint of special effects, the dark ride's development is intertwined inextricably with that of the horror and science fiction movie. As the latter have become more sophisticated dramatically and thematically, the dark ride has been expected to keep up. As Hollywood special effects have undergone a radically accelerated maturation within the past twenty to thirty years through rapid computer advancements, so too has the technology of the dark ride. The state of the art now involves reflected images to produce free-floating ghostly visions, lasers, new fluorescent paints effective in white light and fibre optics. The immersion ride, completely merging the dark ride with film, uses a complex system of hydraulics to lift, lower and rock the audience while the concave movie screen remains still to create the illusion of audience involvement within the activity on the screen. However, true motion through an imaginary landscape appears to be regaining popularity with the design and construction of newer, very sophisticated dark rides that simulate supernatural and other-worldly experiences.

To provoke the desired effect of besting nature, illusion requires realism, the semblance of reality. Even in the production of fantastic landscapes, realism (belief in the events immediately surrounding you while suspending disbelief in the over-all idea) is the measure of success. And while artificing is not exclusively a 20th century impulse but belongs historically to civilization as a whole, the 20th century marks the growing sophistication of capitalizing on the need and perfecting the techniques of illusion. The most popular and lucrative attraction at Buffalo's Pan-American Exposition in 1901 was Frederick Thompson's Trip to the Moon via the Airship *Luna,* an attempt to offer passengers all the sensations of such an adventure and the first of the great illusion rides. Drawing on his background in architecture (he'd been trained as a draftsman in Nashville,

Tennessee) and experiences with showmanship (in lieu of payment for designing several buildings for the Tennessee Exposition, he agreed to take over several small shows as a concession), Thompson developed, designed and exploited A Trip to the Moon. Staged in a high-ceilinged building, the green and white, cigar-shaped *Luna* rocked and swayed on its tower to give an illusion of flight to its thirty passengers, each of whom peered out of port holes to watch scenes and light effects projected on the interior walls. "Launched" from the Expo and risen above Buffalo, the *Luna* apparently soared over Niagra Falls before rocketing into the tumult of an electrical storm in outer space. After a momentary blackness which allowed its passengers a pause to catch their breath, the rocketship then crusied over a lunar surface riddled with volcanic and mineral formations shaped out of paper maché, canvas and paint. Following a gentle landing, passengers disembarked at the Castle of the Man in the Moon. A gangplank lowered into the lunar interior (staged in an adjoining building) gave entrance to strange grottos and weird passages peopled with giants and midgets. The Man in the Moon sat enthroned, surrounded by dancing Moon beauties. A final chamber had walls lined with real cheese from which uniformed midgets offered tasty morsels to the tourists. The integrity of the illusion of flight was so great that some passengers were led to believe that the ship actually had left the building, while others fainted. Said Senator Chauncey Depew of the show to Thompson: "I have traveled a great deal, but of all the wonderful things that I have seen and of all the trips I have made that is the most extraordinary." Within minutes of the senator's full-hearted endorsement, such critical acclaim was incorporated into sandwich board advertisements and posters for ballyhoo. Thompson moved A Trip to the Moon to George Tilyou's Steeplechase Park (Coney Island, New York) in 1902 and there operated it as a concession. With the money earned in Coney Island, Thompson and the ride's original funder, Elmer Dundy, took over Paul Boyton's declining Sea Lion Park and added $800,000 worth of improvements. The

result became Luna Park (McCullough 1966:54-57).

Because the rule of the marketplace is to imitate the tried and true, Thompson's successful venture led to a modest explosion of illusion rides and derivative illusion shows. 1904's Louisiana Purchase Celebration in St Louis boasted several shows of catastrophes and historic events on its midway: The Creation, which later moved to Coney Island to form the nucleus of Dreamland Park; The Galveston Flood, a "scenographic" reproduction of the disaster; Under and Over the Sea, a journey in a submarine and then an airplane; and the mysterious Hereafter, whose descriptive details, unfortunately, have been lost to time (McCullough 1966:64). The mechanical spectacular shows were produced through a complex choreography of moving scenery, lighting effects and projecting machines to dramatize the events described (Mangels 1953:167-68). Such shows, however, were not the only means of compressing mechanical travel into the optical illusions of cinema.

Hale's Tours and Scenes of the World, produced by George C. Hale of Kansas City, Missouri, in 1905, imitated a darkened railway car traveling through scenery using technology very similar to that of the airship Luna rocketing through space. "Through the open end of the car," writes William Mangels in his description of the technique and effect, "the audience could observe the projected scenery passing before them, while scenic curtains rolled past the windows." Landscape features included Niagra Falls, the western United States, European vistas and remote, pre-Industrial lands in tourist programs which changed weekly (Mangels 1953:165). By 1908, at least five hundred of Hale's illusion rides were operating in the United States, capitalizing on the innovations of cinema and railroad—two varieties of transportation which turned travelers into passengers and which radically reoganized senses of self, space and time with the new paradox of sustained motion combined with stillness (Rabinovitz 1990:79-80; Schivelbusch 1977). On a train or in a car, one sat and watched the world unspooling before his or her eyes with a feeling of detachment—the passing landscape may as well have been an image colored on celluloid.

Though rapid transportation has since progressed from novelty to necessity, the disorienting effects of long-distance travel have multiplied with the technological advancements.

Alfred Pitzer's Haunted Swing made effective use of stationary seats within shifting surroundings to produce the deceptive sensation of movement. First operated at the Midwinter Fair in San Francisco in 1909, the Haunted Swing consisted of a "swing" mounted by passengers and which then appeared to rock and then roll, eventually completely turning over itself. The utterly disorienting illusion was produced by keeping the audience stationary while the room rotated about a suspension bar. "All furniture and fixtures in the room were securely fastened in place, and the kerosene lamp was electrically lit. Even though one was informed of the secret before entering the swing, the deception was so complete that passengers involuntarily seized the arms of their seats, to avoid being precipitated below" (Mangels 1953:166). The varieties of illusions discussed above are the ancestors of the crossbred forms of the dark ride.

The development of film is a course characterized by attempts to not only tell a story with moving images but also immerse the viewer in the total experience of that story. Certainly the most obvious of these attempts at immersion consist of the gimmicks employed by inventive Hollywood showmen to lure audiences away from television—the common enemy of the film and outdoor amusement industries since the 1950s—and back into the theaters. Three-dimensional movies, from *Bwana Devil* and *House of Wax* in the 50s to *Jaws 3-D* and Epcot's *Captain E-O* (starring Michael Jackson—something of a dark ride in and of his grotesque and protean self) in the 80s, have been invented and reinvented *ad nauseum* in the sure-fire, can't-lose effect of hurling spears, fireballs, arrows, claws, knives and laser blasts into a screaming audience squinting through and fumbling with their special polarized spectacles. Following the decline of the first wave of

three-dimensionality came widened screens and stretched film formats (Cinerama and Cinemascope) which extended the visual impact of film (Allen 1979:207). Perhaps the greatest Hollywood showman was William Castle, the King of Ballyhoo and Self-Promotion who turned the movie theater into a virtual dark ride. For his *House on Haunted Hill* (1959), Castle rigged plastic skeletons on wires which at the push of a button would soar out over the audience and called the gimmick "Emergo." For *The Tingler* (1959), he outfitted several theater seats with electric joy buzzers with which to shock unwitting patrons and named the illusion "Percepto." "Illusion-O," Castle's enticement for *13 Ghosts* (1960), was a variation on the 3-D glasses theme in which audience members could participate in the movie by, at selected moments, wearing special glasses to perceive the invisible ghosts on the screen. Similar novelties and lackluster effects are the stuff of the older dark rides, dating both movie and ride as the doctored schlock of by-gone years. Further bonding the traditional dark ride to 50s bad film in the current popular imagination is filmmaker Tim Burton's homage to director Ed Wood, Jr., creator of such low budget turkeys as *Bride of the Monster* (1955), *Night of the Ghouls* (1958) and, most famously, *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959). In Burton's atmospheric *Ed Wood* (1994), the director as played by Johnny Depp becomes quite excited by the sight of a "spook house" or carnival dark ride inside of which, eventually, he confesses his transvestite impulses to his sympathetic girlfriend. Like Wood's films, the traditional dark rides are simultaneously doomed and saved by technical ineptness: they're "so bad they're good."

Creating a third dimension for film, and participating directly in it, is being trumpeted somewhat myopically as the wave of future entertainment. One of the most tantalizing tendencies of popular culture is its indeliberate near-repetition of itself (albeit a repetition differentiated from its predecessor by greater technological sophistication).

Recalling the forms of illusion rides of the early 20th century, IMAX® ridefilms™ and IMAX® simulator rides attempt to "get you into the movies." In appropriately boastful rhetoric, recent ad copy promises that

> IMAX movie rides are the most immersive simulators on the market. IMAX SIMULATOR RIDE, like Universal Studio's *Back to the Future®—The Ride* and *Galaxy* (Asteroid Adventure movie ride) at Phantasialand, Germany, are giant-screen IMAX DOME theaters with multiple simulators for high impact, high capacity entertainment.
>
> IMAX RIDEFILM, like *Secrets of the Luxor Pyramid* in Las Vegas, is a compact, 15-seat simulation theater with a 180° spherically curved screen. Designed to fit existing retail spaces, multiple modules combine to meet any requirements. IMAX, Douglas Trumbull and RIDEFILM—three of the most prominent names in movie rides—have now become a single creative compnay combining the best in simulators, feature filmmaking quality, installation and service. Currently in development and production for IMAX movie rides are six new Hollywood-style simulator films with drama, suspense, characters and special effects to really get you into the movies! (IMAX 1994:20).

Indeed, the immersion rides are no longer mere spin-offs from current big-budget features but are themselves independent films with their own plots, settings and characters. Of course, film tie-ins are still immensely popular, exhorting one, now that he or she's seen the movie, to ride it as well. Paramount Parks' *Days of Thunder Turbo Tour* and *RoboCop: The Ride* as well as Universal Studios' *Back to the Future Ride, E.T's Adventure* and the brand spanking new *Casper Ride* exemplify the standard immersion concept of programming moving seats in precise choreography with images on the screen to simulate being within the two-dimensional adventure itself.

The immersion ride is related to the dark ride in that both theaters attempt to perfect the illusion of experience by seemingly surrounding their audience; whereas the immersion ride tosses its audience about on hydraulic lifts but literally travels nowhere[8], the dark ride is a transportation through real space lined with scenes and tableaus either deliberately

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[8]Tony Bennett suggests that this ability of the immersion ride to hurtle vision through space while keeping the body stationary is its claim to superiority over the thrill ride. The immersion ride can "reproduce all the thrills and excitement of the big rides by means of a more advanced, simpler and safer technology" (1983:151).

reminiscent or blantantly derivative of movie sets. New dark rides at Universal Studios include *Kong-frontation*, a tram ride through a devastated New York and featuring a literally face-to-face encounter with the rampaging audioanimatronic ape whose breath is redolent of bananas. Another tram ride capitalizing on a Universal Studios feature film is the *Backdraft* ride, which gives riders the experience of fighting an out-of-control conflagration in a highly combustible industrial complex. *The Big One*, ironically, seems to tempt fate by simulating the forthcoming ruin of Los Angeles and the entire California coastline by the much-anticipated earthquake. These three experiences, invoking the morbid fascination with destruction and catastrophe, recall directly the films of early 20th century midways which presented reenactments of famous floods and train wrecks to provoke audiences with their own worst fears of nature and technology far beyond their control. What comes around goes around. Of course, the development of entertainments is shaped less like a circle than an outward-growing spiral in which themes reappear again and again but the style or technical sophistication of the presentation is vastly improved.

A second intriguing element of these newer attractions suggests not only a cathartic harrowing through experience but also a "revelation" of the behind-the-scenes special effects of the movies. Certainly these rides are not a true revelation of a film-in-progress but a curious instance of a contrived and well-ordered "behind-the-scenes" peek developed out of Universal Studios' "backlot tours" of past and present years. They are, in the words of Dean MacCannell, modern settings of "staged authenticity" in which what is revealed in the back "is only another show" (1976:91-107). The popular inclination to understand the technical goings-on of Hollywood's grand illusions, to see "how it's done," suggest the further idealized deconstruction of the performance barriers between audience and stage/screen. The breakdown of the event and the dissolution of roles are very much incomplete, however. The viewer participates only on the level of eyewitness interpretation

of the official themed experience; he/she has no physical influence on the given experiences. Perhaps that eventual and final boundary of influencing one's themed experience will be broken by the much-hyped realm of virtual reality which replaces actors with inter- and transactors; this vision of cyberspace would seem to mark a return to Bakhtin's boundary-crossing Carnival, a liberating and ideal world which "does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators...Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people" (1984:7). I will dispense with the futuristic predictions so that we may proceed with a discussion of the present state of the dark ride and the issue of official presentations of experience. The fourth and final section of this study concerns the various rider interpretations of that presented experience.

"Dark rides provide thrills, a story line and adventure," notes Greg Mastriona, the executive director of Hyland Hills Water World (suburban Denver, Colorado). A description of the park's recently built (1993) dark ride—the $2 million Voyage to the Center of the Earth—in which an enclosed white-water rapids ride is themed into a dinosaur adventure suggests a plotline of causal events 1,600 feet long:

> The ride's theme is based on a construction accident which led to discovery of a bottomless pit. The ride begins through a cave entry into the underground chasm. Following a 30-foot plunge, riders enter three large caverns.
>
> The "Sea Monster cave" is highlighted by a 14-foot reproduction of the upper body of an Elasmosaurus, a large sea serpent, which suddenly pops out over the heads of riders.
>
> Foliage, small dinosaurs and pterodactyls fill the "Prehistoric Swamp." The last and most spectacular grotto, the "Earthquake Cavern," has falling rocks and trees; a Tyrannosaurus Rex guards the exit.
>
> The attraction finishes by creating the illusion of passing through a waterfall, down an incline and through thunder and lightning before surfacing to sunlight.

New dark rides are not merely themed and outfitted with gimmicks but also constructed around a central concept—a conflict, if you will, which the ride resolves[9]. Padded with

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[9]Such development of a story to flesh out or complicate the image is evident even in the dark ride's

a montage of sights and sounds, the dark ride aims for a measure of coherence in order to duplicate the tension and resolution of a movie. Indeed, Voyage to the Center of the Earth capitalizes less on the Jules Verne novel of similar name but more on the recent Steven Spielberg dinosaur blockbuster, *Jurassic Park.* Admits Mastriona, "We knew the book [by Michael Crichton], and that Spielberg was doing the movie. We did a survey among school kids and they all mentioned dinosaurs as one of their favorites" (Muret 1993a). In short, the ride can't fail because it simultaneously works an angle of the dinosaur fad, simulates being propelled through an exciting and successful movie, and coasts on the momentum of someone else's all-out media hype. Consequently, the newer dark rides, depending on fleeting trends and specific summer blockbusters, can expect shorter life spans than the older models which ride through the vagaries of popular taste on a cushion of traditional iconography and general association. A dark ride based on Casper the Friendly Ghost™ will not be timely once the film fades from fleeting public memory but a haunted house dark ride filled with uncopyrighted ghosts will have lingering appeal.

The description of dark ride layout as a plotline applies to both old and new varieties (though the newer dark rides suggest a much more rigorous attention to logical causality, the older being full of side-tracks). For example, The Bucket O' Blood, a dark ride discussed in the following section, followed a line of logic in its layout of rooms and tableaus: from an antechamber decorated with a skull warbling *ad infinitum,* "Sixteen men on a dead man's chest, yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum," the ride progressed through a

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ancestors. In Messmore and Damon's Chamber of Horrors, one favorite tableau was the fantastic Chinese-inspired *Chest of Celestial Bliss.* George Messmore explains the device and the underlying concept that turned the gruesome image into a short-story: "It was a box with bars at the sides like an animal cage and a lid which was depressed into the box by turning a crank. This lid was studded with knives. In the show we had an old mandarin sitting watching, and a Chinese girl turning the crank. The idea was that this girl, the mandarin's daughter, has defied her father and married a man of inferior rank. That was the bridegroom inside the box. The cruel mandarin forces his daughter to turn the crank and execute the man of her choice. It was a real nice feature of the show" (Gresham 1953:167).

revolving tunnel and onto the maelstrom-besieged deck of a ghost ship; then, by way of a whale's fluorescent digestive track, the ride descended into the belly of the ship on a deepening tour of galley slaves and psychedelic rooms; finally, the ride surfaced in a Polynesian enclave, complete with waterfall, in which a goggle-eyed pirate leered at the mermaid curled seductively on his lap. The Haunted House at Knoebels Amusement Resort progresses similarly, moving riders from the outer limits of a mansion by circuitous turns and shock effects into the dungeon at its darkest core before moving outward again, ending finally with an incongruous transposition to an African jungle out of whose foliage jumps a bellowing cannibal of sorts. Of course, in this ride the impression of moving inward is—as is the illusion of descent through a ship in the Bucket O' Blood—a result of careful arrangement of scenes appropriate to location to conceal the winding but generally up-and-back layout of the track. The Haunted House, for example, opens with an exterior scene in a graveyard before leading into an interior scene of an axe-carrying hag running down a flight of stairs presumably near the front entrance of the house.

Though tightly conceived and organized, the dark ride contains enough simultaneous details and events to ensure that each individual, through the subjective observation or experience of stimuli, experiences the ride differently. Commenting on the effects of disorientation on observation, Hyland Hills' director Greg Mastriona summarizes, "When you're spinning around, you may miss something the first time." It is, of course, the ride's receptivity to many views (by different individuals on the same ride, and by the same individual on different subsequent rides) that makes it interesting and a viable commercial entity. That park guests will want to ride it several times in order to experience it thoroughly interests owners and operators whose business it is to keep customers coming back for more. John Wood, chairman of the dark ride company that produced the animatronics and special effects for Water World's dino-rama, explains the

reason for the complexity of plot and the thoroughness of illusion: "The idea is to get people involved as things happen around you and surround you. There's an earthquake as you approach the end of Voyage to the Center of the Earth. Rocks flip over, trees crash and then T-Rex comes up and over the riders. That creates an emotion." (Muret 1993b). Maintaining customer interest is management's ultimate intention—their sole objective—and the best means to that end, same as it ever was and always will be, is the awe-inducing, all-consuming spectacle.

Ultimately, the demand to evoke feeling links the Gothic novels and theatrical melodramas of the 19th century—mere mood pieces assembled from standardized details and clichés—to the horror paperbacks and spectacular films of today (Kendrick 1991:64-65), all of which are popular tributaries to the dark ride. The older dark rides, because they suggest a closed period in the outdoor amusement industry and America as a whole, appeal to both tendencies for feeling: the emotional responses (either nostalgia or derision) from gazing on a vestigal past and the visceral reaction from being shocked and thrilled. In many of these rides, the former feeling threatens to consume the latter, reducing the experience to a trip down memory lane. Amusement park operators, confronted with such a possibility, have been forced to reconcile the nostalgic appeal of older attractions with the customer's demand for a truly thrilling ride. The following section of this thesis, in dealing with structural changes made to numerous dark rides over time, deals with the different means of reconciliation.

If familiarity breeds contempt, then unfamiliarity breeds sentimentalization. Nostalgia is the emotional product of reformation and secularization, cultural processes which interpreted time not as repetition in which the sacred history could be reenacted through worship but as an irreversible direction of development. Time was envisioned as a line whose beginning recedes far, far into the past and is irretrievable. Indeed, secularization, expressed in the awareness of the past as irrevocably gone, concentrates

exclusively on the present age, the fleeting moment that spools from the future to be absorbed instantly by the past (Sommerville 1992:26-33). Unfamiliarity with the past always breeds nostalgia, the attempt to refamiliarize oneself with the past by reconstructing or faking it with an overwhelming, often incongruous, assemblage of details with little concern for historical accuracy. Indeed, nostalgia requires less historical fact than historical semblance. The idea of history or historical significance alone is powerful enough to conjure the strongest and most satisfying feelings of being "in touch with" the past.

In discussing modern dramatic origins of the dark ride, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the influence of the *Grand Guignol,* Paris's celebrated live theater of blood and guts which from its late-19th century origins until degeneration into self-parody by the early 1960s was renowned for its "live realistic and gory enactments of mutilation, rape, torture, and murder." Throughout its nightly programs, the spectacles of bloodshed were understandably interspersed with comedies and farces to relieve tension (Kendrick 1991:201-3), further preserving the essential combination of horror and humor. Designed to offend and stun the senses to alleviate *fin-de-siecle* French *ennui,* the *Grand Guignol's* simultaneous preoccupations with occultism and Edgar Poe, Catholic effects and blasphemy, reveal its sources in the literary movements of Decadence and Symbolist poetry. The *Grand Guignol* was, as avant-garde theater, a somewhat isolated phenomenon; attempts to establish *Grand Guignols* in cities other than Paris and in countries other than France were unsuccessful. The iconography and attitudes forwarded by the more pervasive waxwork chambers of horror and illusion shows, meeting a similar if diluted taste for blood and intense feeling (a commercialized Decadence for general audiences), suggest stronger influences on our subject. Certainly the dark ride belongs within this commercial tradition of presenting lurid and horrific scenes as invigorating entertainment. However, traditional dark ride scenes no longer fit the pattern of

grotesquerie set by the likes of Marie Tussaud in her 19th century waxworks and torture chamber and, later, Phineas T. Barnum's New York museum of curiosities and authentic reproductions of natural abnormalities because the older dark rides no longer represent current state-of-the-art but, like a brittle and yellowed photograph, suggest a stopped moment in time. Their arthritic technology is no longer emblematic of the future but, as a fixture of the old amusement park, signals a long gone, quaint American way of life. Indeed, the traditional dark ride is a wedding between the iconography of hell and death and the iconography of the past. The obvious marriage may be viewed by management as either a commercial liability or advantage, a decision intimately linking the park's self-conceptualization and economic goals with the fate of its dark ride structure.

Newer dark rides are directed at the future; older dark rides are directed at the past. While the older dark rides' scenes are derivative of the torture chambers, crime shows and horror films of early 20th century entertainment venues, they become colorful cartoons through rider reinterpretation. Though originally offering verisimilitude in graphic, anatomically correct likenesses of freaks and mangled corpses, the older dark ride inadvertently works the edges of human horror into comic smoothness and thus place itself in the greater carnival folk tradition of conquering fear by laughter. The source of horror is not a paper maché demon but the demonized past. Examine an excerpt from a letter written in 1538 (the height of Reformation antagonism against Catholicism) from Geoffrey Chamber to Thomas Cromwell regarding the puppet-like Rood of Boxley:

> This shall be to advertise the same that upon the defacing of the late monastery of Boxley, and plucking down of the images of the same, I found in the image of the Rood called the Rood of Grace, the which heretofore hath been held in great veneration of people, certain engines and old wire with old rotten sticks in the back of the same, that did cause the eyes of the same to move and stare in the head thereof like unto a living thing; and also the nether lip in likewise to move as though it should speak..... Further, when I had seen this strange sight, and considering that the inhabitants of the country of Kent had in times past a great devotion to the same, and to use continual pilgrimage thither, by the advice of others that were with me, [I] did convey the said image unto Maidstone this

> present Thursday, then being market day, and in the chief of the market time, did show it openly unto all the people there being present, to see the false, crafty, and subtle handling thereof, to the dishonour of God, and illusion of the said people, who I daresay, that if in case the said monastery were to be defaced again, the King's Grace not offended, they would either pluck it down to the ground, or else burn it, for they have the said matter in wondrous detestation, and hatred (Sommerville 1992:24).

The primitive mechanical wonder, once a device for illusions of miracles, has become an obvious, raggedy ruse. In the spirit of public iconoclasm, the crucifix is destroyed in the market square like the devil himself, unveiling symbolically the mistaken illusions of the past and dramatically revealing the sham ventriloquism of the Catholic hierarchy who dared put words in the mouth of Christ. Widespread desanctification, however, imbued relics, images and icons with a strange new power of attraction. Cromwell's crusade against monasteries from 1535 to 1540 created a collection of curiosities for the Tower of London which inevitably found their way into the hands and closets of collectors. Reduced to mere curiosities, the formerly sacred and powerful objects became profane, utterly secularized (Altick 1978:6-7). To the medieval mind, scattered relics reinforced immortality; to the reasonable mind, they had become images of "times past," visual representations of the forgotten attitudes and activities of a "false" and "crafty" but long-gone way of life. Immortality is forever, but so is the past; both saints and time are martyred and mythologized publicly. Spilling its dust and entrails of wire shamelessly, the traditional dark ride and the ousted Rood of Boxley share cyclical fates: initially objects of reverent fascination, both become objects of contempt and then, eventually, of curiosity and reverent nostalgia. They are emblematic of old ways of looking at things old.

In conjuring demons and ghosts in each passage through the dark ride, we inadvertently conjure the past. By laughing at the obviously older dark ride's plastics and paper maché, we are laughing at the past, that unfathomable hell hole always at our heels which threatens to swallow the present and us with it. On one level the deep-seeded iconography of the dark ride turns us into actors playing Jesus Christ, harrowing archaic

horrors of hell to defeat them with laughter; on another we become the devils themselves, laughing the mean-spirited laugh that poet Charles Baudelaire considers utterly satanic: raising oneself by lowering others into a state of ridiculousness, advertising their flaws and frailties while hiding our own. Suggests Baudelaire of the cruel joke: when we laugh too hard at the dark ride's grotesques, primoridal remnants which were once revered and understood with seriousness, we reveal only too clearly our alienation from and discomfort with a past which consumes all former certainties (Harpham 1982:70, 72). The past is unknown—dead and irretrievable but for its scattered fragments and remnants which can be pasted together into some shabby coherence. Collected, preserved, changed, insulted and assaulted, the uncertain past can be defeated.

## *Changing to Sustain: Renovation and Destruction in the Dark Ride*

Before commencing with an investigation of specific traditional dark rides, I offer further definition of the dark ride by making several generalizations. A dark ride is an amusement park ride that delivers passengers in cars along a winding, electrified track (often composed of a single rail) and usually through various rooms; a second form often takes the shape of an Old Mill boat ride which has been themed especially "dark." Conventional, cartoonish depictions of supernatural beings and grotesque scenes, as well as optical illusions, frightening noisemakers and unlit gloom, contribute to the atmosphere of real and figurative darkness. Typical of many other commercial structures, the traditional dark ride's most significant and embellished feature is its front facade (Longstreth 1986:15), which simultaneously identifies the theme of the ride and provides the ballyhoo necessary to attract customers; subsequently, the facade receives the most renovation over time. Within this facade area is the quay, the front area for loading and unloading passengers. The sides and rear, betraying the characteristic superficiality of commerical architecture in general and amusement parks in particular, are simple and unembellished. Suitable at this time to discuss in greater detail the dark ride's use of ballyhoo, a commercial tradition of superficiality which determines the ride's success (or, possibly, its failure).

Members of the outdoor amusement industry employ a colorful and private parlance to describe all aspects of commercial life from its customers and physical structures to its money-making techniques. The term "ballyhoo" is the rehearsed and theatrical speech that

a showman makes in order to persuade customers to gather before the front stage or "bally" of his/her tent. Hyperbole verging on outright deception characterizes ballyhoo because the showman's goal is to catch and hold the customers' interest until he or she feels that the time is right to "turn the tip," or compel the crowd to enter the tent by "grinding" out a monotonous barrage of repeated promises of the sights to be seen inside. While ballyhoo is a modern commercial phenomenon full of gimmicks and boasts, its use hasn't changed significantly since the earliest medieval carnivals and trade fairs. The commercial sphere is still a world of outright deceptions and magic mirrors that distort the truth in the salesman's favor. Incidents of ballyhoo run the gamut of culture. From movie ads to commercials for pain relievers, and from political campaigns to sexual come-ons, exaggeration and hyperbole appear wherever and whenever someone is selling something. Mikhail Bakhtin, discussing the medieval Carnival tradition, asserts that the superlative, or ironic exaggeration, prevails in its marketplace language (1984:160-61; Dargan and Zeitlin 1992:33). Whatever he or she is selling, the showman salesman will always stretch the truth—and hide the deception with a flashy gimmick—to make a buck.

Not exclusively a linguistic tool, ballyhoo exists pictorially in the fairgrounds or traditional amusement park in exaggerated banners and show fronts. Indeed, architectural ballyhoo is the "best salesman" for those hidden attractions which rely on the preservation of their mystery to lure the customer inside with curiosity. The attraction inside rarely is as attractive as the showfront promises: freaks, even if alive, are never as freakish, magic feats never as magnificent. This differentiation between the external depictions and the performances inside comprises the traditional relationship between showman and customer. "The purpose of the front was to stimulate such excitement that to resist paying the entrance fee would be unbearable," note folk art historians Fred and Mary Fried. Importantly, the authors add that "What one actually saw did not always match one's fantasies or the

depictions up front. But at least to the showman, the show front served its purposes well" (1978:24). Its ultimate purpose, of course, was to draw the crowd away from the other attractions with which the showman competed and convince them to spend their money on his or her own. In the world of concessionaires, ballyhoo was and still is a matter of survival. Survival means change and, in the amusement park, little is more mutable than the plastic architecture of traditional dark ride ballyhoo.

The most profound characteristic of the traditional dark ride is its ability—or, rather, its absolute necessity—to be changed in continuous reflection of the faddish tastes of its riders. The previous section of this study discusses how the dark ride in general is a development in the industry responding to exterior changes in technology and public taste; the greater concern here is to reveal how each dark ride evolves over time. Without destroying the shell of its housing structure, a dark ride's facade is renovated, its track relaid and its interior rethemed in a commercial passion play of sacrifice and resurrection. This continuous evolution situates it simultaneously within the traditions of Carnival and of commerce in which change is the only constant. From the 16th century onward, sacred rhythms and sacred history were dispelled by new conceptualizations of measured time: work time and national (as opposed to religious) holidays, time bought and sold in the form of legal usury; time clocked in minutes and tallied by daily editions of newspapers (Sommerville 1992:43). Indeed, secularized cultures are those primarily governed by the laws of the marketplace, laws of misrule which governed the licenses of Carnival and which informed popular tastes. Mikhail Bakhtin characterizes Carnival as a grotesque body—the fluid shapeshifter engaged in a never-ending process of addition and subtraction: "The grotesque body...is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world" (1984:317).

This vision of the grotesque body of medieval Carnival, highly stylized though it is, is kin to the art and architecture of the amusement park, a commercial institution traditionally and economically trapped in the act of becoming, never reaching culmination and completion for fear of depleting its lifeblood: the flow of patrons through its turnstiles. In commercial ventures, change itself becomes the ultimate—though unattainable—goal[10]. Subject to the greater tradition, then, dark rides (as well as other amusement park structures) must be consumed by that accelerated process of change which originally created them. So important is this process of change to the industry that it receives official definition. According to ASTM Standards on Amusement Rides and Devices, a "major modification" is "any change in either the structural or operational characteristics of the ride or device which will alter its performance from that specified in the manufacturer's design criteria"; a "minor modification" is any change which will not (1992:3). The changes or modifications discussed in this section are of both types.

Subject to consumer demands for novelty which are interwoven in the rapid changes in popular culture at large, a dark ride ages in years only if and when it is altered. Within the context of the amusement park or any other commerical entity, age is less a rigid measurement of an object in years and more a fluid idea which shapes itself to the variables

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[10] For poignant criticism of this profane, never-ending cycle of change we have only to look to Dante, whose Infernal Malebolgia—a Carnival of exaggeration and excess—incorporates images of endless transformation to describe the punishments of the morally disordered false prophets and soothsayers. Strangely, but not ironically, both Church and Carnival share an affinity for redemption through change, renewal through transformation. The difference is Church offers transformation to a spiritual end while Carnival (the marketplace of popular taste) offers only endless material transformations. A contemporary example of the latter offering is Michael Jackson, the so-called "King of Pop" and doctored changeling extraordinaire. In Jackson, artistic and physical evolution merge in the embodiment of the market demand for change. Black skin bleached, afro straightened, face resculpted several times over, Jackson is a *manufactured monster* as over-produced as his music. In the public mind he is inhuman—in turns a tabloid freak, a Jehovah's Witness, a pedophile, the husband to the daughter of Elvis Presley in a plot for world domination hatched by the cultish Church of Scientology. We have seen the enemy and he is, we are too afraid to admit openly, *us*.

of consumer taste and market economy. Evaluated in relationship to the major trends of amusement park history, the dark rides of this study evidence the design, setting, materials, workmanship and feeling of a by-gone era. Chronologically, a dark ride may be a mere twenty, thirty or forty years old; yet when judged by industry standards, these dark rides are "ancient" in all aspects. Commenting on the state of the industry, John Wood, a high-tech manufacturer of "themed ride experiences," notes that dark ride technology has advanced beyond its "paper maché," "bump in the dark" phase (Muret 1993b). Dark rides continue to be built, but their newest incarnations make extensive use of sophisticated animatronics, lasers, fibre optics, and other million-dollar special effects. Still packed with paper maché and providing bumps in the dark, the dark rides documented here provide direct physical and sensual testimony to the continuous line of dark rides; they connect the rides of the past century with those of the next.

My interest does not necesarily lie in comparing one dark ride directly against another to discover the differences in material appearances and measurements; indeed, one would find few conclusions in a list of comparisons or contrasts besides the fact that, like other commerical forms, structurally similar dark rides are dispersed across regional boundaries. Rather, my intention is to interpret each ride through its amusement park setting and then evaluate the history and evolution of each ride within such a context. By doing so, one can not only discover what has changed, but also understand why such changes were made. The context of the amusement park (its location, market-base and profit margin) explains the dark ride's existence and appearance better than the dark rides themselves. Additionally, I hope to suggest how each ride holds different commercial and regional meanings for the persons who use and enjoy it.

## The Haunted Pretzel at Bushkill Park

The Haunted Pretzel is a single-level, small-scale dark ride operating in inconspicuous Bushkill Park, Forks Township, Pennsylvania (Illustration 4). The ride features an overhanging front gable which shelters the quay area of the ride. This gable is of plywood, painted with vertical, variegated stripes: blue, red and yellow. Across the gable reads the invitation "RIDE THE PRETZEL." Emblazoned across the center of the gable is a monstrous pretzel; in a wonderful reinvention of the hellmouth, the twists of the pretzel form eyesockets and a gaping mouth complete with fangs and tongue (Illustration 2). The exterior of the lower quaying area is of plywood painted to resemble gray stones and white mortar. The wooden doors giving entrance into and exit from the ride are bright red and embellished with painted iron hinges and the warnings "'No Smoking'/Keep Hands & Feet In Cars." Delineating the entire quay area is a picket fence painted in Halloween orange and black. The ride's sides and rear, unadorned, evidence the primarily cinderblock construction of the rectangular building that houses the track and scenery.

The smaller-than-standard size of its five steel passenger cars reveals the smaller scale of its younger habitual riders. Its electrified track is set directly on the ride's cement foundation. The ride's interior is not defined by individual rooms or labyrinthine walls; rather, this unique ride makes excellent use of tight turns and convolutions in concert with spot lighting and noisemakers to direct its riders' attention to a variety of painted and sculpted creatures. This feature intimates architectural evidence for the origin of the frequent term "pretzel ride" to describe the twisted and concise layout of older dark rides which made the best use of limited space (as it now stands, the Haunted Pretzel gives us the best idea of the appearance of some of the other dark rides in this study before they were enlarged and complicated). A 1927 surveyor's map of Bushkill Park, outlining the

location of a "Pretzel Ride," includes the earliest documented reference to the Haunted Pretzel. It appears that the ride has not been moved from that initial location.

Significant for not only its age but also its strict historical integrity, the Haunted Pretzel has been altered relatively little ("relative" to the other dark rides in this study) since its original construction and preserves much of the original external iconography. An undated black and white photograph—estimated to be from the late 1920s—displays a similarly gabled facade. Inscribed across a vertically elongated, salty pretzel painted in the middle was the invitation to "Ride the Pretzel." Flanking this central motif were two rakish monster heads. Similarly delineating the quay was a picket fence. Doubtless that such little external change depended less on any deliberate effort on the part of owners and managers and more on the tiny park's scanty financial resources. Of course, it is difficult to assess how much renovation has occurred in the interior, although Curtis Beam, manager of the park since 1978, asserts that "We're always fixing them [the rides] up, making them better and safer. It's for the kids, the little ones. They're the ones who keep us in business" (Ross 1988:A-2). We can safely assume that much has changed. On my last ride through the Pretzel in 1993, I noticed a fiberglass and paper maché skeleton which bore a close resemblance to those that had populated the Gold Mine, a semi-dark walk-thru which recently was dismantled in the near-by Dorney Park. The exchange of props, mechanical parts and entire rides between parks is not an uncommon practice. Many smaller parks, for obvious economic reasons, choose to buy attractions or components of attractions from other parks rather than construct their own or purchase them new.

Possessing only a handful of attractions, Bushkill Park is today overgrown with weeds, camoflauged to the point of near-obscurity. A small recess in the woodlands of Bushkill Valley three miles west of Easton, Pennsylvania, Bushkill Park still opens to the immediately local visitor (persons from the neighboring Lehigh Valley are largely unaware of the park's existence) during the summer months. Picnic pavilions sink into the mud

and, droning with shrill crickets, a thick cover of vegetation conceals the rusted remnants of dismantled rides. In the words on one newspaper writer, the park "looks like it's been here forever" (Ross 1988:A-1). Though not so old as "forever," Buskhill Park does have a century-long, convoluted history.

Though an independent amusement park in its own right since the 1920s, Bushkill Park's local claim to fame derives in part from its connection to the larger and more elaborate Island Park, an end-of-the-line amusement complex established in 1893 on the opposite end of town by the Easton Transit Company. Eventually featuring a roller coaster, Old Mill, theater and bandshell, Island Park operated as "Easton's Only Amusement Park" until flood waters destroyed the island-seated oasis of pleasure in 1920. The connection between the two area parks is the Long Carousel, a mechanical menagerie hand-carved by Thomas Long (1885-1965) and his father in Philadelphia in 1903 for Burlington Island Park (New Jersey) and which Long brought to Island Park in 1910 when he began managing the Easton complex. Fortunately for Long, the year before the disastrous flood, he moved his carousel to Oakland Park in the neighboring city of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where it operated from 1920 until 1933. In 1933, Long leased Bushkill Park and relocated his carousel once again, eventually buying the park in 1939 and operating it for the remainder of his life with his wife, Mabel "Mom" Long, who operated it until her death in 1989. The Long family sold the carousel to an anonymous Ohio buyer in 1991 who has yet to fulfill the sales agreement by operating it, in whole, as a public commercial attraction (Klabunde 1994:1-2). The sale of the carousel, considered a local treasure by many, excited some controversy, and the months-long battle of secret bidding between an Easton fund-raising organization (established to "save" the carousel) and numerous outside buyers gave Bushkill Park a shot of rejuvenating publicity. Local devotion to a regional and much-cherished symbol is not surprising; with such popular

symbolism kept in mind, it is interesting to examine more closely the very unique iconography of the Haunted Pretzel's gabled facade.

The multi-valent symbolism of the central pretzel graphic of the dark ride gives the traditional hellmouth an ethnic/regionalist spin, a symbolic blending between regional and popular cultures. Certainly the pretzel icon refers obliquely to the formal type of dark ride ("pretzel ride") which the Haunted Pretzel is. However, more directly, it is a distinctively ethnic and regional symbol immediately recognized by the constituency of park patrons (pretzel-eating German-Americans or, more generally, pretzel-eating Pennsylvanians). The pretzel's gnashing front teeth present a Carnival inversion of the natural order of consumption in which the traditional foodstuff threatens to eat the traditional eater. Extending the image of consumption and its inversion to the realm of regionalism or ethnicity presents rich implications for the definition of individual identity. Indeed, the battle between the individual and his/her ethnicity or relation to a place is a constant struggle between loyalties in which, at various times and in different settings, one aspect of a person threatens to swallow the whole.

Further unraveling this bound-up metaphor of ethnic/regional foodways and the fooodways of ethnicity/regionalism contained in the Haunted Pretzel is beyond the immediate scope of this thesis. However, it is relevant and significant to note that many of the dark rides discussed in this thesis are local landmarks of experience with extensive attachments and personal associations. For example, when I first contacted William Hogan, co-owner of Bushkill Park since 1990, to gather some preliminary information about the Haunted Pretzel, he could not provide an exact date of construction but he could state with absolute certainty that it'd been built before 1942, the year that he took a memorable whirl on it with a favorite girlfriend. Also, in a local newspaper article informing its readers about the re-opening of Bushkill Park under new ownership, the

reporter reassures his audience that the favorite contents of the park are still there, including "Dapper Dan," a particularly ragged corpse/Frankenstein's monster who rises from a coffin just before one exits the ride (Ross 1988:A-2).

## The Kastle at Lake Winnepesaukah Fun Town

The Kastle is a single-level (originally multi-level) dark ride located in Lake Winnepesaukah Fun Town, Rossville, Georgia (Illustration 5). Built on a wooden pier, it is situated in the amusement park's former swimming pool. The Kastle's exterior features a large, plywood front facade elaborately and appropriately painted as a castle in hues of green, blue and gray; a painted sky, turbulent with colors, alludes to Van Gogh's famous *Starry Night.* A ring of fire, decorated with red and yellow electric lights, frames the ride's name (the exotic spelling suggests the linguistic influence of the park's immigrant decorative painter). Its sides and rear, unadorned, evidence the wooden plank construction of the entire building (Illustration 6). Along the base of the structure are green fiberglass "stones" which the water level reaches when the pool is filled. Along the ride's semi-enclosed loading area are two inner plywood surfaces decorated with cosmic imagery: the lower decorates the antechamber at eye-level and conceals the former second level; the higher, set behind, adds a dimension of depth. Two sets of swinging doors, set side-by-side, give entrance and exit to the ride.

Twelve plastic and fiberglass cars run the course of an electrified track which follows the interior perimeter of the structure. Decorating its black walls are paintings of devils, ghosts, and skeletons; stationed in corners and hung on walls along the route are three-dimensional paper maché and fiberglass sculptures of skeletons, skulls, and monsters. Characteristic of dark rides of the 1960s, all artwork is fluorescent and glows

under the many blacklights that dangle above the route. Other prominent interior features include a cavern that makes use of the surrounding water source, a standard "oncoming truck" gag, and a revolving barrel illusion. Originally designed, created and installed by the late Bill Tracy of Amusement Display Associates, Inc. in 1969, the Kastle has since been significantly altered on several occasions by Sergi Danilov, a freelance commercial artist.

The Kastle now stands within the great concrete swimming pool which was built in 1926 by the park's founder, Carl Dixon. Hailed in a 1940s-era park brochure as "the South's Largest," the 105 feet by 210 feet swimming pool was the sight of many activities, promotions, and special events until 1963. By then, no longer a local novelty, the pool was converted into a motor boat arena. For the 1969 season, the pool became an effective water-filled context for the park's newly acquired Dentzel carousel (later replaced by one manufactured by the Philadelphia Toboggan Company) and the Kastle. The dark ride incorporates this body of water into its design: the pool acts as a moat to surround the building and physically separate it from the rest of the park, contributing to its sense of isolation and other-worldliness. The pool also penetrates the ride, forming an interior cavern. Before substantial renovation, the ride further incorporated the pool as a source of water for the waterfall curtain that embellished the second level.

The original facade's flourishes included rakish gables and exaggerated spires, definitive characteristics of Bill Tracy's architectural aesthetic. A promotional flier provides the only official photograph of the Kastle's front as it appeared in 1969 (the photo was used in a park brochure in the same year) as well as an itemized list of the ride's main features:

> The Front is primarily fiber-glass with animated units. The Ride contains illusions: Revolving Barrel, Endless Corridors, Knocker Boards, Jumping Room, Psychedelic Jail Maze, Spinning Discs, Dips, Falling Barrels, and a Water Curtain exit, a large central waterfall Cavern, and five animated Display units.

Today, the two-dimensional front is now constructed entirely of plywood. The only remaining illusion is the revolving barrel which, unfortunately, no longer revolves. All animated display units have been removed. Six static sculptures, repainted and vandalised several times over, contain traces of original work, as well as a skull sculpture that forms an archway for the interior cavern. Significant alterations since 1977 include the reconfiguration of the track, the removal of dividers and doors between rooms, the sealing off of the second level, and four complete reconstructions of the facade.

Bill Tracy, the original designer of the Kastle, resided in Cape May in southern New Jersey, where in 1952 he established his company, Amusement Display Associates. His business was developing and theming dark rides and other original attractions as well as re-theming existing rides for amusement parks and amusement piers. In 1964 or 65, after Tracy ran into financial difficulties, A.D.A. was co-opted by the New York City-based "Dragon Factory" of Messmore and Damon. Tracy, however, retained creative control over his projects. The prevalent themes in his dark rides are haunted castle or house, western ghost town, and pirate ghost ship. While Tracy's rides are famous for their paper maché sculptures and painted illusions, they also are renowned for their inability to meet structural and electrical standards for amusement ride safety which were rightfully imposed in the years following his death (for reasons of legal liability, Messmore and Damon have quietly disassociated themselves from Tracy and his projects). Many of his creations have been destroyed by accidental fire; many others have been torn down due to park owners responding to changing tastes and safety requirements in the amusement industry. Glenn Bergethon, general manager of Lake Winnepesaukah Fun Town since 1977[11], has attempted to preserve the purpose and integrity of the Kastle while modifying it for fire safety regulations (although Bergethon readily and sadly admits that there is "no

[11]Following the 1974 operating season, Evelyn White (daughter of the park's founders, Carl and Minette Dixon) announced that she was retiring and closing the park. In 1977, Fun Town Inc. (a Tennessee-based outdoor amusement company run by J.D. Floyd) began leasing the 250-acre park (Vass 1977:G-1).

comparison" between the Kastle of today and that of yesterday). Literally a shell of its former self, the gutted ride's second level has been sealed off because of lack of fire door access; the track, which once twisted and turned through various rooms, has been reconfigured to run along the perimeter only; dividers and doors between rooms have been removed; fire doors were constructed at many points along the course of the track. All electrical components, including the animated display units, were removed due to sub-standard wiring.

To complete necessary decorative projects throughout the season, Lake Winnepesaukah Fun Town employs Sergi Danilov, a Russian-born immigrant and free-lance artist. Trained at the Stroganoff Institute of Art in Moscow, Danilov paints idyllic portraits and scenes for baroque rides and redecorates newer attractions, pavilions and game buildings. Danilov, working for the park since 1977, has redecorated the Kastle on four separate occasions. Each time, he's had the previous front razed and a new plywood facade installed for fresh designing. He paints over the old figures which line the inside walls of the ride with new spooks and monsters. Whereas Tracy was primarily a sculptor and mechanical engineer, Danilov considers himself a scenery painter; however, the latter's extensive work, enhanced with fluorescent lights, captures the character and feeling of the original. Like Tracy before him, Danilov works the edges of human horror into comic smoothness.

In technical and figurative simplicity, the Kastle remains a vestige of the amusement park of the 1960s in a period which now marks the advent of expensive, technologically sophisticated "themed experiences." However, the Kastle's apparent quaintness is appropriate to the park's deliberate attempt to capture the by-gone era of local or traditional amusement parks which had, in the 1920s, numbered two thousand in America. Notes Gene Goforth, Lake Winnepesaukah's advertising and promotional director, concerning

the park's mission: "We're a laid-back, old-fashioned park. We're not tourist oriented and we're not a theme park. We don't want to be. Our people come from a 100-mile radius of Chattanooga—from Cleveland, Athens, Knoxville and as far south as Atlanta. We're one of the few remaining family type amusement parks left in the world" (Parker 1988:M-2). Other attempts to maintain the historical feeling of the 70-year-old park are the preservation of two other extaordinary and significant attractions.

Lake Winnepesaukah Fun Town boasts the nation's oldest operating miniature golf course (the third "Tom Thumb" course ever built, constructed in 1925 in competitive emulation of the now-defunct mini golf course which operated atop near-by Lookout Mountain) as well as the last original functioning Shoot-the-Chute, hand-built by Carl Dixon in 1927. "People come from all over the world to see the thing [the Boat Chute]," remarks Goforth about the park's greatest claim to fame among amusement park historians (Parker 1988:M-1). Though renovated with replacement parts over the years, the ride retains its original location, characteristic tunnel and, of course, its thrilling, splashing descent into Lake Winnepesaukah itself. These attractions are cradled in the context of an amusement park which preserves its past mission as an amusement park through both subtle and overt changes to its contents over time.

## The Haunted House at Knoebels Amusement Resort

The Haunted House[12] is a single-level dark ride embedded in the woodsy heart of Knoebels Amusement Resort in Elysburg, Pennsylvania (Illustration 8). The modest exterior facade, constructed of wood siding painted a pale yellow, features three false-

[12]Employees at Knoebels refer to the ride as both the "Haunted House" and the "Haunted Mansion"; while both names seem to be officially interchangeable, the ballyhoo sign outside the ride declares it to be the "Haunted House" and I will refer to it as such.

windowed gables which suggest an American Gothic flavor. The tall facade suggests multi-stories within the ride, an illusion of grandiosity which characterizes several dark rides in this study. The house's covered porch serves as the quay for loading and unloading. Three sets of doors are spaced across the length of the porch: the doors furthest to the left are for maintenance crews; those in the center give entrance to the ride; those on the far right give exit. The unadorned left side of the Haunted House reveals the over-all cinderblock construction of the structure (Illustration 9). A row of souvenir and game stands lines the right side of the ride. Spooky theming extends into the courtyard, demarcating the ride's boundaries. Both the ticket booth and canopied waiting line in the courtyard are coordinated architectually with the house. A stone and iron gate encircle the courtyard and, directly outside the gate entrance, stands the ride's sign. "Haunted House," it announces with an Old English flourish and promises "A Terrifying Adventure in Darkness." A looming vulture, invariably attracted to the stench of death and decay, perches on the sign, his claws gripping a gargoyle ornament which completes the unmistakable iconography of horror.

The ride's interior features a cemetery which makes effective use of false perspective, a grand entrance to the mansion complete with floating candelabra and articulated organist, the library laboratory of a necromantic wizard, a fluorescent "skull room" with rising and falling skulls (their number multiplied by mirror reflections), a torture chamber and jungle nightmare. Some illusions include a "living" picture which elongates in synch with a shrieking buzzer and a very successful on-coming truck shocker. The most significant structural changes to the ride since its opening in 1973 have occurred here in the interior. Scenes and figures have been added and subtracted, renovated and rearranged. The inside track has undergone some rearrangement as well, explains David Wynn, maintenance man with the park since 1972 and currently its maintenance manager.

For decorative renovations at the park, Knoebels employs Matthew Risnak, a self-employed commercial artist who worked part-time for the park throughout his entire career; since his retirement in 1987, Risnak has worked at the amusement resort full-time to touch up older projects and begin new ones, calling his efforts a "labor of love now" and noting that he will retire for good as soon as painting and sculpting become "too much like work." Born and raised in the anthracite region of central Pennsylvania, the artist has enjoyed a lifelong fascination with the outdoor amusement industry—as a child, Risnak crafted model circus wagons while his friends were piecing together the more conventional cars and trains. Some sixty years later, he marvels at his fortune to have a job which coincides so closely with his early interests: "Where else can you be so creative and get paid for it?" he asks. "It's like having a hobby with someone else who foots the bill." Despite his enjoyment in working at the park, Risnak complains that the job never ends when one has a fertile imagination. "Every time I come in I get a new idea," he says about the Haunted House, reflecting the view of many artists and artistic maintenance personnel who are inspired continuously to change the ride by little bits here and there. During my fieldwork, I found him in the dark ride's dungeon, putting the finishing brush-strokes on a prison cell which had been moved for greater scary effect for the up-coming season. Risnak echoes the frequent lament of rushed amusement park artists and mechanics: far too little time and help to develop and realize an idea fully. To protect his imagination from outside influences, he doesn't visit dark rides or any other attractions at other amusement parks. Instead, he allows ideas to "pop into [his] head just live a vast tv screen." By continuously updating and renewing the decoration of the rides, he hopes to sustain the interest of the park's mostly local, repeat guests.

The Haunted House, designed and built by park maintenance crews and outfitted with the creations of local artists and with cars and effects purchased through amusement novelty companies (most of them now defunct), has special symbolic meaning for the

sixty-nine-year-old Knoebels Amusement Resort. The ride gives physical testimony to the park's triumph over a flood casued by Hurricane Agnes in late-June of 1972. The storm swelled the waters of the two streams which run through the park, driving the creeks beyond their banks. The devastation was enormous, drowning twenty-four of the park's twenty-five rides, innundating two hundred electric motors and buckling the floor of the roller rink beyond repair. In its wake the receding floodwaters deposited 3,600 tons of mud over everything, including a layer six feet deep at the bottom of the park's Crystal Pool, a natural water swimming pool which had long been the "backbone" of the operation. Many of the park's famous cottages suffered damages ranging from complete ruin to debilitation which rendered them useless as living quarters. The loss of these structures was a significant blow to Knoebels' proud sense of history. Before the official incarnation of Knoebels as an amusement park, the summer cottages, constructed from 1917 and into the 1920s, were prevalent at the popular recreational site. "Summer cottages at the Grove became a part of the scene even before the arrival of the pools and rides," notes an official brochure describing the park's history. "There were privately owned cottages that ranged from slab buildings to comfortable summer residences. Most of them were built along the creek and served as summer retreats." Many of the structures were unique novelties built to resemble covered wagon, trolley car, school house and boat ("Knoebels: A Brief History" 1991).

The brochure mentions further that the park, with the help of employees, friends and neighbors, reopened within nine days of the flood with eleven of the rides operating. Park history briefly describes how Knoebels desired to make a show of rebounding for the following season with the introduction of the Haunted House:

> While the basic recovery from the flood was quick and exciting, there was still much to be done. In response to the tragedy, the decision was made to come back stronger than ever in 1973. Something spectacular was needed. The

> Knoebels staff put their heads together and designed and built the Haunted Mansion. The ride opened in 1973 to rave reviews and has since been named in several publications as one of the best dark rides anywhere (1991).

This final assertion is not without some support. In its most recent annual survey of members, the National Amusement Park Historical Association declared the Haunted House at Knoebels "Favorite Dark Ride," rating it higher than the more sophisticated Haunted Mansion at Walt Disney World (1994)[13]. Matthew Risnak, comparing Knoebels' ride with Walt Disney World's, suggests that the latter, being designed for a general audience comprised of a wide range of age groups, is less frightening. He designs the characters in the Haunted House for older riders (the many teen-agers, for example, whose church and other social organizations sponsor dances at the park's facilities) who find frights a more enjoyable experience than does a child. In fact, Risnak doesn't like to see children riding the Haunted House at all, observing that too often they come out crying. Smiles, not tears, are his intention. The official intention of the park in its expansions and renovations, meanwhile, stresses a tangible continuity with its past.

Billing itself as "Pennsylvania's Hometown Park" and promising "Good Old-Fashioned Family Fun" in its advertising, Knoebels deliberately cultivates a sense of the past through both landscape and architecture. In terms of landscape and compared to other amusment parks, Knoebels has changed very little. The history of Knoebels Amusement Resort is typical of American sylvan parks which organically grew out of pleasure groves. What remains so untypical about the 292 1/4 acre-enclave is how, serenely nestled—nearly hidden—in the woods of central Pennsylvania's anthracite-rich mountains, the park has managed to retain its solitude through only a natural barrier of trees. In a period of

[13]This rating may reflect a regional bias because the Chicago-based N.A.P.H.A. has a member concentration in the amusement park cradle of Ohio and Western Pennsylvania, but I would not go so far as to argue that picking the older-style ride over the newer reflects a sentimental bias as well. Though its official mission is to "preserve the past," the N.A.P.H.A. readily celebrates the newest advances in amusement rides and devices, recognizing that the preservation of purpose is the preservation of tradition.

amusement complexes bounded by unfriendly gates and walls, Knoebels remains one of the last open parks in the country; that is, the unfenced park, bisected by a public access road, charges no general admission but still operates on a pay-per-ride basis with tickets. This informal approach to operation descends from the park's origins as farmland and eventually the site of spontaneous picnics and swimming during the early 20th century. In 1828, the Reverend Henry Hartman Knoebel purchased the land (originally deeded to John Salter in 1775 but exchanged through numerous owners over the years) for $931. The Reverend's grandson, also named Henry but better known as "Ole Hen," farmed the land and operated several saw mills on the densely wooded property (the mill still operates independent of the park but providing lumber for new construction—the Haunted House included). At the turn-of-the-century, the Knoebel farm became the destination of "tally-hos," Sunday afternoon hayrides which concluded with picnics and bathing along the farmland creeks. "Ole Hen," recognizing the potential of profiting from these excursions, began servicing his visitors' horses for a slight fee. Later, the Knoebel grandson constructed picnic tables, hired a lifeguard for the swimmers' safety, and added sales of ice cream, popcorn, peanuts and soft drinks to the burgeoning enterprise.

Throughout the redesigning of structures and areas, Knoebels Amusement Resort attempts to maintain a physical attachment to its own rich past. This tangible continuity of time is emphasized repeatedly throughout official description of the current manifestation of the park. Local historians and park management cite 1926 as the formal beginning of the modern Knoebels. In this year the giant swimming pool, fed by natural waters, opened, in addition to several food and game concessions. The park's first restaurant also appeared at this time, "located at the site of the current Alamo," a contemporary restaurant. The first ride arrived in 1926 as well: a stream powered carousel operated as a concession by a Philadelphia man named Joe Gallagher. "This Philadelphia Toboggan Company-carved machine operated under a canvas roof [until 1941] at the same site as the current Grand

Carousel," explains the park's historical brochure. In 1943, the PTC machine was replaced with a ride built in 1913 by George Kremer. The carousel was outfitted with sixty-three horses and three chariots carved in the "Coney Island Style" by Charles Carmel and given musical accompaniment by two German organs manufactured in 1888 and 1900. Thus the Grand Carousel, situated in a historical area but being of historical significance itself[14], connects the park to not only its remote past but also decades within living memory. Even those structures changed in the past twenty-five years carry strong ties to the park's sometimes turbulent history. For example, of the cottages which remained after the 1972 flood, "Some cottages became something else, for example, Caldwell cottage became the Old Mill ice cream stand" (1991). Another *memento diluvium* is the Haunted House, a ride which operates as a reminder of the park's simultaneous resilience to change and its utter embrace of it through the preservation of the tradition of presenting amusements. In an environment of commerical structures in which success is bound up with architecture, artistry and economics, the Haunted House at Knoebels stands as one of the most successful dark rides in this study because of its supreme adaptability. The ride remains because it is perfectly suited to its environment.

Change is the marketplace's method of defeating commercial death (that is, economic obsolescence)—a lesson of token sacrifices reiterated variously throughout this section and throughout this entire thesis. But like a tree whose extraneous dead branches must be pruned for the good of the entire plant, a commercial site must be trimmed of its lifeless organs for the economic health of the whole. While a dark ride's adaptability is its survival mechanism, the adaptability of its setting is the more important mechanism of

[14]The Grand Carousel, one of two beauties operated by the park, is featured prominently in *Fairground Art*, the lavishly illustrated history of the subject (Weedon and Ward 1981:84-85). All artistry aside, the Grand Carousel at Knoebels is one of only four American machines which still incorporate the catching and tossing of brass rings into the riding experience.

survival for the entire amusement park of which a dark ride is only one part. With this relationship in mind, we now turn to a more thorough examination of numerous dark rides within two different commercial contexts to understand why some tradtional dark rides must die and why others may thrive.

## "We're not a museum here, we're an amusement park": The Bucket O' Blood and Journey to the Center of the Earth at Dorney Park

The Bucket O' Blood was a single-level dark ride operating in Dorney Park, a medium-sized amusement park in suburban Allentown, Pennsylvania. Themed in a pirate ship motif, the ride's exterior featured a quay resembling a ship's bannistered deck; a fiberglass front affected a rotten wood grain made baroque with a relief of fiberglass skulls and crossed tibias. A continuous soundtrack of creaking boards, dinging seafarer bells and washing waves—coupled with sudden eruptions of disembodied laughter—contributed to the atmospheric invitation to a frightful otherworld of pirate mayhem. Crowning the ride's facade were a reduced-scale pirate ship and, looming in the forefront, an enormous fiberglass pirate fancifully dressed in crimson and ruffles who bore more than a passing resemblance to Captain Hook in the Disney feature animated film *Peter Pan* (1953). The right side of the ride was painted with a mural which advertised the ride: an unscrolled piece of crumbling parchment dripped with the name, "Bucket O' Blood," and a pirate captain's head festooned the corner. The left side of the ride was connected to the rear of the park's open air theater. The ride's interior boasted the standard illusions of the ride's renovator, Bill Tracy: revolving barrel, psychedelic jail maze and blacklights for a supernatural glow. Other interior features included appropriately themed animated display units and a waterfall cavern immediately before the ride's exit.

Journey to the Center of the Earth was a dark water ride located beside the park's

original wooden roller coaster (the building which supported the dark ride's marquee and housed the quay was attached to the building which contained the coaster's quay and an arena for Dodgem cars). An extensive marquee, supported by timbers filigreed with metal spider webbing, hung over the quaying area. The central panel of this marquee contained the ride's name in bright yellow letters against a deep red background. Framing all the panels were blue-gray stones and stalagtites. Rising atop the marquee was a great, green fiberglass dragon which attracted riders with its claws and menacingly unfurled wings, toothy maw open wide and poised to gobble up passengers, and the beams of white or red spotlight which glared out of its eyesockets.

To the right of the ride's front was the line area and the side of the coaster/Dodgem building. To the left of the marquee was the hill (a replica in miniature of the coaster's "big dip" in whose shadow it stood) adorned with a white picket fence (a thematic incogruity betraying the ride's former incarnation as an Old Mill) where the ride concluded. After splashing down, boaters drifted down a sluiceway to return to the quaying site. As a backdrop for this sluiceway and giving further enticement for prospective riders was a long facade of green fiberglass stones. Three animated displays, set within stalagtite-framed boxes, decorated the wall: a picture window with a skeleton voodoo-hag charming a revolving, coiled snake was flanked on either side by window boxes containing identical fanged spiders made of fiberglass and wood which rocked back and forth. Fiberglass stones lined the back of the quaying area; interspersed in the gaps in the stones were woodcuts of bulbous spiders painted bright orange and yellow. Entrance to the ride was given by a simple rounded opening that swallowed boat after boat every twenty-four seconds and that testified that, as Jules Verne writes in the ride's literary namesake, "There is nothing more powerful than this attraction toward an abyss" (1979:72).

Journey to the Center of the Earth's original interior afforded glimpses into a

netherworld constructed largely of plastic, fiberglass and paper maché as its nine heavy boats (originally leaky wood, but later more durable aluminum replacements, all manufactured by the Philadelphia Toboggan Company) bumped along the winding canal, occasionally lifted by the wave (created by the splashdown of another boat) which swept through the channel. Intentional gaps along the way offered sights of a volcano and large bloody skull with red lightbulb eyes nestled in the overgrown and insect-inhabited spaces between the covered channel and the naked backside of the facade. At the end of the tunnel but before the final hill, passengers met a usually congenial ride operator who braked their boat until he or she received the radio signal that the previous boat was safely out of the way; finally released, the boat passed through a tin-foil lined, strobe-lit room of lightning before mounting the rickety hill by way of a clickety-clackety chain. In 1984, the ride's interior was completely renovated and outfitted with trolls, man-eating spiders and flashing demons projected onto plate glass.

Notice the use of the past tense in the above descriptions. These two dark rides no longer exist; Bucket O' Blood was consumed accidentally in a fire in 1983 and Journey to the Center of the Earth was consumed deliberately and officially by the spirit of change in 1993. The function of the latter, because it reflects a series of management decisions, will occupy most of our attention; however, the fire which destoyed the former remains a key variable in our understanding of the relationship between an amusement park and its individual structures. Consequently, Journey to the Center of the Earth's functional significance lies embedded in both its existence and non-existence. Constructed originally between 1884 and 1900 to duplicate the success of Coney Island's Tunnels of Love, Dorney Park's dark boat ride endured for sixty-five years; it endured that long in large part due to a massive renovation undertaken in the early 60s by Bill Tracy. In retheming the ride's exterior, Tracy practiced the tradition of "ballyhoo," or grandiose showfront, with

the construction of the impressive marquee. While in the park's formative history such aggrandized surface decoration served its purpose—the selling of tickets—in recent years it detracted from the modern image of improving technology which the park, growing in terms of both sophistication and revenue, now strives to produce. In accordance with commercial tradition, the anachronistic boat ride was consumed by that process of change by which it originally had been created.

Scott Bluebond, current spokesman for Dorney Park and Wildwater Kingdom, cautions against letting nostalgia interfere with the successful operation of a park. "We have to move into the 90s," he says, explaining the park's decision to remove the ride: "Everybody is trying to bring guests in. You do that by adding new attractions. We're going to be adding a major attraction every season. At the same time, we're going to keep as many of the historic rides as possible. It's not always possible. We're not a museum here, we're an amusement park." Former park president Robert Ott concurs and admits, "I got a tear in my eye when I heard it [Journey to the Center of the Earth] was coming out. I'm a sentimentalist, but I'm also realistic. Nothing lasts forever. If I was still in the park, it's very well I would have done the same thing"(Todd 1993:A-5). Himself a lover of traditional attractions and a member of several amusement park historical associations, Ott brings to this discussion the knowledge that every master showman professes: "I always relate that the bottom line is what counts. And if you keep getting things that are in the red, you soon go out of business"(Ott 1984). An amusement park's lifeblood is the stream of customers waiting in its ride lines, and for two decades the power of suggestion attracted the crowds and Journey thrived with popularity; however, people's expectations change, and the amusement industry, always aiming to please, changes as well. The ninety-year-old ride was renovated as often and as best as could be done until it could be altered no more.

Dorney Park's Journey to the Center of the Earth was a renovation of their original Old Mill. Originally constructed by the Philadelphia Toboggan Company, the Old Mill, in keeping with its own timely aesthetic of faux rustic, was unadorned but for a water wheel; the ride remained unchanged in the park for almost forty years until the early 1960s when park management decided to update the ride's appearance in order to stimulate business. Although the ride retained the basic structure of the Old Mill, the renovation changed the premise and theme of the ride so significantly that as Robert Ott recalls, the park was able to inflate the admission price: "Way back in the 50s, we were getting fifteen cents a ride for this [the Old Mill]. When we redesigned it, working with Bill Tracy, we doubled the price, which at that time was terrific—going from fifteen cents to thirty cents, and, with the value of the dollar being more than it is today, certainly was a big step"(1984). That "big step" was the first the park was to take in its development over the next thirty years in its own journey from a small sylvan or "picnic" park prized for its lush wooded groves to an amusement complex competitive with its tourist park neighbor, New Jersey's Six Flags/Great Adventure.

During the next two decades, Tracy's work represented a colorful, tangible memento of this transitional stage in the park's history. For subsequent ride projects commissioned by the park, Tracy flaunted his particular style which was characterized by the use of fluorescent paints, blacklight, and tape recordings to enhance dramatic effects and which was also, Ott noted with a measure of pride in a telephone conversation, frequently imitated by other designers. Tracy's additional projects throughout the entire park included the alteration of an unsuccessful skating rink into a walk-thru fun house called the Whacky Shack in 1962 (itself a victim of conflagration in the early 70s) and the creation of the Gold Mine, a walk-thru 19th century ghost town/haunted mine converted from an unused storage space in the late-60s. Between these two projects, Tracy was hired to renovate the Devil's Cave, a dark ride that had existed at the park since at least 1937, the

year Ott began working at the park as a ride operator (his first responsibility, coincidentally, was running the Devil's Cave). With Tracy's imaginative artwork, the ride was reincarnated with a more specific and coherent pirate theme and rechristened as the Pirate's Cove. Ott explains the physical and conceptual evolution of this ride as a commercial response to popular tastes and expectations.

> What we try to do with our rides with ingenuity is to give them new appearances, new face-lifting. A case in point is and was the Devil's Cave. The Devil's Cave was a pretzel ride, then it was re-themed into what we called the Devil's Cave. And then some years later, a gentleman by the name of Bill Tracy...themed it into the Pirate's Cove with a pirate theme. And then, later on, we enlarged the entire structure, added more track, added cars to its—to get more revenue—and we changed it to the Bucket O' Blood. At first, that was a turn off to a lot of people—the name—but it caught on and became a very popular ride until we lost it in the fire in 1983 (1984).

Thus, during this twenty-year span from the early-60s and into the early-80s, Dorney Park's style reflected the style of Bill Tracy. It was during this "Era of Bill Tracy" that Dorney Park became traditionally carnivalesque in its liberal use of exaggerated facades and grotesque or frightening imagery.

As discussed at the outset of this section, traditional dark ride facades are misleading, promising sights and sounds more fabulous than could be produced. The exterior of Journey to the Center of the Earth was in accordance with this tradition of aggrandizement with its dramatic spikes of stalagtites framing the promise contained within its erratically lettered name, and especially with the fiberglass monster that stretched its wings as it rose ominously from the marquee. And the ride, because of its particular breed of architectural ballyhoo, served its economic purpose well by attracting a crowd and sustaining their patience as they waited in line. Ott attributes the ride's attractive ability to its exterior. "That marquee drew the people," he remembers vividly: "On a heavy day, there was a line there that was unbelievable" (Todd 1993:A-5). Such an appeal would have

been necessary in the years immediately following the renovation in which the park included attractions and rides which were operated by concession, a method of organization and ownership that created a modicum of competition for visitors' money. Even during the late 60s and throughout the 70s, years in which the park maintained full ownership of all attractions and used a general ticket system, ballyhoo was still an essential tactic for encouraging ticket sales.

In his description of the pictorial exaggeration of side-show banners or "valentines," William Gresham notes that this technique of hyperbole eventually caused suspicion and distrust in the patrons. "The overselling of attractions," he writes, "finally caused the crowds to stay away in crowds." The result of falling attendance figures was "a general toning up of the acts within and a toning down of the banners without"(1953:156). Journey to the Center of the Earth suffered a similar fate in the early 80s when, in an attempt to have its interior equal its exterior, Dorney Park renovated Tracy's renovation, removing all his original artwork and replacing his delapidated monsters and scenes with newly-designed trolls and giant spiders of slightly higher mechanical sophistication. Despite this updating, the ride's refurbished interior—still largely unscary—conformed to the parodic essence of the carnival grotesque and its insistence on laughing outright in the face of hell rather than cowering in fear from it. Slipped through a hole in the world, the riders drifted down the cool, damp channel to allow the netherworld to present the most nightmarish visions it could muster. The wonderful irony was that hell, with a trio of listless, cross-eyed octopuses guarding its gate, was incapable of intimidating anyone.

While Robert Ott, still presiding over the park as president, was able to assert in 1984 that Journey to the Center of the Earth was "Still a very popular ride because of fascination with the tunnel, the water, and the slide," by 1992 the ride had become, according to current park officials, an outmoded and embarrassing obstacle to Dorney Park's progress. With the complete disassembling of the ride in January, 1992, the last

remaining vestiges of the renovations he completed during the 60s, Bill Tracy's artistic legacy at Dorney Park came to an end. Impermanence, however, is the most traditional aspect of all carnivals and amusement parks. Success in any commercial endeavor follows change and modernization, and "permanent" installations or attractions in the amusement park setting are never permanent but are only recreated and eventually removed altogether. An investigation of Dorney Park's dark rides thus requires a recapitulation of the park's two-part history. Its original status as a "picnic park" was characterized by what I call environmental openness, or inclusion, that lasted from 1884-1979; its current condition is one of closure, or seclusion, that began in 1980 with the closing of the public road that had bisected the park and around which the park had grown. Seclusion from the community-at-large permits autonomy and control, and Dorney Park's new-found seclusion abetted its dramatic expansion throughout the 1980s. Tracy's work bridges this period of change and necessarily had to be removed if the park wished to advance along its desired course of becoming a formidable presence in the east coast amusement industry.

During the height of the Bill Tracy era of transition, a souvenir booklet published to celebrate the 85th anniversary of Dorney Park claims that the Dorney family was established in the Cedar Creek area of Lehigh County since at least 1745. The booklet continues to describe the development of the park out of Solomon Dorney's trout hatchery or "Fish Weir," built in 1860, which attracted tourists from as far away as Philadelphia and New York City. Between the two lakes on Dorney's land, later constructions included refreshment stands, gardens, conservatories and amusements such as Bowling-on-the-greens, Quoits, Russian Ten Pins, Bird Target, Croquet Grounds, and a single mechanical ride, the Flying Coaches. 1884 marked the introdution of many more mechanical amusements and thus the company recognizes this year as its official date of inception (1969:3-9).

The earliest significant step in the development of the park came in 1899 with the construction of a double-track road by the Allentown-Kutztown Traction Company. "With a five cent fare from Allentown, Dorney Park really became the picnic spot of Eastern Pennsylvania and in 1901 this same Allentown-Kutztown Traction Company bought out Dorney Park from its founder Solomon Dorney and thus started another and more modern era for the 'Natural Spot.'" Whereas Judith Adams notes the correlation between the construction of amusement centers as end-of-the-line trolley stops to increase business (1991:57), increasing volume of traffic to Dorney Park required just the opposite. Rather than an amusement park built for the trolley line, Dorney Park was a destination of such increasing popularity that, as the brochure proudly boasts, it occasioned the building of a trolley line to accomodate the heavy flow of traffic in and out of the park. Jacob Plarr, during this initial period of growth, moved from Philadelphia and erected and operated the park's first merry-go-round in 1901(Dorney Park 1969:11); he opened further concessions and his increasing importance in the success of the park linked the Dorney and Plarr families in its operation, a bond that would survive until the last years of the 1980s.

In her recent and comprehensive survey of the amusement park industry, Judith Adams states that, during the post-WWI boom in amusement parks, approximately two thousand parks were in operation. Such success was not to last long, however, and Adams cites increased mobility due to the automobile and decreased finances due to the Great Depression to explain the parks' slow decline throughout the next two decades. Even with economic resurgence during the 50s, the number of parks continued to fall because television replaced the hands-on entertainment of rides and picnics as the leisure activity of choice. The number of amusement parks has never again reached the high level of the early twentieth century; however, with the opening of Disneyland in 1955 and later in 1961, the opening of Six Flags Over Texas, the first park to approach repeating

Disneyland's success, the amusement industry discovered the lucrative slant of theme parks. Amusement centers constructed to duplicate historical or exotic locales and cartoon worlds could compete successfully with television by promising to turn guests from passive observers into active adventurers. "Theme parks cleverly exploit the traditional American romance with adventure and travel," Adams says to describe their formula for success: "At the same time they provide at least the illusion of an educational experience in cultural history." As a result, consumers began to include the sanitized adventures of the theme parks in their vacations or even make them their sole destinations. Bolstered by the spirit of one-upsmanship, Disneyland and the post-Disney theme parks introduced increasing technological sophistication into their amusement experiences—coming in the form of computerized scenic adventures and the steel and modern high-end thrill rides—which other ambitious amusement parks would be expected to emulate if not imitate outright (Adams 1991:66, 105-10).

Journey to the Center of the Earth with its chunky dragon on top and dusty, static monsters inside looked absolutely innocuous and anachronistic[15] in comparison to the new breed of creatures now engineered by American, Japanese and West German manufacturers. Thrill rides came to dominate the big tourist parks of the 70s and 80s, with each competitor trying to outdo all the others by touting its rollercoaster or other newest ride as the fastest, tallest, wildest, or cork-screwiest. In these years, the rides were stripped of extraneous ornamentation and were designed to bare their awesome system of hydraulics and electronically engineered innards in a blatant display of clockwork technology. With some rides, their very structure and size constitute their best advertisement. Usually these were the more modern and thrilling rides and they required

[15]John Waters, tasteless filmmaker and cataloguer of kitsch, shot scenic locations in Dorney Park in 1988 for *Hairspray*, one of his more mainstream offerings. For this period film, set in Baltimore in 1963, Waters chose the park for its historical resonance. A lingering shot lovingly focuses on the grand tacky entrance to Journey to the Center of the Earth.

little adornment, save lightbulbs to dramatize their form, to enhance their appearance of safe danger and excitement (Weedon and Ward 1981:173). Journey to the Center of the Earth was upstaged in 1983 by the park's new log flume, Thunder Creek Mountain. Carved into an existing hillside and virtually camouflaged with artful landscaping, Thunder Creek Mountain incorporated verisimilitude with its "log" boats sent through rapids and a "dangerous" final plummet, rather than nature parody like its carnivalesque kin. Its sophisticated technology masked with a veneer of rusticity, Thunder Creek Mountain posted brightly colored notices along its maze-like waiting line which warned, "You Will Get Soaked, And That's No Joke!" Indeed, the signs were no exaggeration but a promise eventually and abundantly fulfilled and given testimony by scores of thoroughly drenched guests exiting the ride. Dorney Park's new attraction for 1993 was White Water Landing, a boat ride whose appeal stems from the size of its boats that seat fifteen and the tremendous splash at the end of its steep plunge (curiously, the simplicity of the ride's concept—passengers being raised to the top of a hill, then dropped down it—marks an approximate return to the earliest, crudest form of boat ride). In this litigous age when amusement parks have taken each other to court over truth in advertised claims, Dorney Park's 1993 brochure trumpets the new attraction with claims which have been substantiated by scientifically correct measurements: "There's a new world record holder at Dorney Park this summer! It's White Water Landing, and along with its twin at our sister park, Cedar Point, it's the highest, fastest, wettest waterfall plunge ride in the world!" (1993). In terms of thrills, Journey to the Center of the Earth couldn't compete with the likes of these technological monsters.

With the raising of technological standards came the raising of people's expectations of what constituted a satisfactory ride experience. One result of this "Disneyfication" of the amusement industry is a tacit promise that what one experiences on

the inside is as good as or better than the ornamentation outside. Visitors no longer accept the exaggeration of ballyhoo, and they condemn rides whose experience is significantly less than the implication of its showfront. Michael Crowther, marketing official for Dorney Park and Wildwater Kingdom, asserts that the primary reason for the ride's closure was that "Journey to the Center of the Earth did not deliver. The marquee made the ride look exciting, but it disappointed." The ride was an anomalous detraction from the more recent and sleeker additions to the park and, rather than risk offending customers whose expectations had been raised by the great green dragon outside, Dorney Park decided against a third renovation of its interior and razed the entire structure. This decision stemmed from architectural pragmatism as well. "It was wet inside," says Crowther. "We couldn't keep the trouph from leaking. It was a ride that was basically worn out" (Todd 1993:A-5). Renovation of the old structure would have required the complete reconstruction of its cement foundations and its wooden trough that sat above ground level.

A second influence on the diminishing of ballyhoo is its unimportance in closed parks in which all attractions are jointly owned and operated. Competition inside the park is obsolete and, with the change from individual ticket sales to a one-price general admission to all rides and attractions, ballyhoo as an encouragement for ticket purchases became unnecessary. In the case of Dorney Park, this change in admission policies directly resulted from the closing of the public road that ran through its property, and occasioned the sealing off of the park's boundaries to create an independent environment. A close investigation of these two changes which Dorney Park experienced during the end of the 70s and the beginning of the 80s shows how the park necessarily had to remove Journey to the Center of the Earth in order to assert visually the continuously renewed direction in which it was and is moving.

Dorney Park, in its 1969 souvenir brochure, while boasting of its increasing

number of attractions and rides, carefully promotes itself with its traditional image of "The Natural Spot," a sylvan oasis ideal for family get-togethers and summer picnics:

> Dorney Park is recognized from coast to coast as one of America's greatest amusement parks. And rightfully so, for, during these past 85 years, Dorney Park has been continually growing. More and more amusement rides, bigger and better equipped picnic groves, more and more picnic tables. Yet the "Naturalness" of Dorney Park still remains, with its thousands and thousands of beautiful shade trees, and the clear, cool, and winding Cedar Creek through the park, and the two lakes making it the ideal setting for every summer outing—for a small family of four or five, to a special picnic of 10,000 or more (19).

During this picnic period, simultaneous with Tracy's renovative work, Dorney Park's environment was one of natural openness or inclusion. Sections of the park's boundaries were fenced off for purposes of safety and security; however, a public road that ran through the park prevented the complete sealing off of the land from the community. Dorney Park was all-inclusive because it remained essentially open to anyone, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days per year. In keeping with its openness—because it could not choose to do otherwise—the park maintained an admission policy in which there was no charge to enter at the gates. Revenue was generated by sales of foods and novelties and, as mentioned previously, individual ride tickets. This situation, however, was not one which park officials relished. The state of inclusion prevented not only a lucrative source of revenue in the form of admission prices, but also autonamy and the chance to decide who can and who cannot enter their grounds. Robert Ott and other Dorney Park officials wisely recognized that the success of any plans for expansion, and the development of substantial acreage recently gained in a trade with the county, depended on seclusion from the world outside, that is, the creation of an environment wholly controlled by prescribed park rules.

During the 1970s, Dorney Park tried repeatedly (and unsuccessfully) to convince the officials of South Whitehall Township that the closing of the public road would be mutually beneficial. In 1980, however, after a legal battle that forced the issue up to the state superior court, Dorney Park got its wish and the public road that ran through the park

was closed. The closing signalled a new direction for the park, one marked by severance and autonomy from the surrounding community. The park secured its boundaries with a fence and could now regulate its population. Because of its new empowerment, disruptive patrons could be ejected from the private grounds immediately and without refund; the admission policy discouraged loitering gangs as well. A paid admission was introduced quickly, and the use of ride tickets was phased out with the establishment of a pay-once/ride-all policy. Revenue increased tremendously when each visitor paid an admission price. Due to the reinvestment of its earnings in park development, the 1980s represented a boom of expansion in Dorney Park's history.

In retrospect, Ott cites the combination of increased acreage and new fence as one of his most successful business coups: "With this turn of events, I always said, with the acquisiton of these thirteen acres adjacent to the park and the road closing, made the entire change for Dorney Park. It put us in the upper bracket in amusement parks. Before that we were just an old fashioned picnic park, but now we could be considered, truly, one of the better parks in the country of the traditional concept of amusement park." Ott insists that Dorney Park and Wildwater Kingdom is neither a tourist park nor a quaintly traditional park, but rather an "overgrown traditional park." A walk through Dorney Park's crowded grounds offers the sense of organic growth, the chaos and claustrophobia of almost too many attractions placed to fit the limited space rather than the precision and serenity of an environment designed and sculpted around the rides. And this organic creature was subject to the disorder of nature itself. In September of 1983, an accidental fire that started in a Mexican food stand raged out of control, destroying some of the park's most cherished rides, including a Philadelphia Toboggan Company carousel and the unique Bucket O' Blood.

Fire and amusement parks are no strangers historically; the consequences of

flammable structures and so much electric wiring seem almost inevitable. No fewer than six times were portions of Coney Island engulfed in flames; and on each occasion, after selling tickets to see the smoldering ashes, park owners not only rebuilt their dreamlands but aggrandized them, adding more lights and building higher towers. Like a great phoenix rising from its ashes, amusement parks emerge from their charred ruins, invigorated, to grow into something greater than their former selves. Such was the case of Dorney Park in the years following 1983. Doubtless that the park experienced significant and irreplacable losses; however, in true amusement spirit, a park sheds tears while keeping its eyes on the future. Robert Ott remembers the fire as a mixed-blessing, an event terrible for its destruction of several rides and attractions but fortuitous for the development that was made possible by that destruction. He laments the fire and the charred ruins left in its wake,

> However, we were able to rejuvenate that whole part of the park and make it like a brand new operation. And, reflecting on it, and being philosophical—true, it was tough losing the merry-go-round—but there was no question that it did improve the entire picture of the park. We put in new attractions, new midways far better than we ever anticipated...This also made a new direction for Dorney Park...The fire was a traumatic experience, but I think we came out smelling like a rose (Ott 1984).

Such growth, funded through insurance monies which completely remunerated Dorney Park for losses incurred, sparked continued development: Dorney Park stretched into adjacent acres with new rides and in 1985 opened a water park, Wildwater Kingdom. Ott personally regards the water park as his family's "swan song" as, during that year, he decided to retire as president and sold his shares in the business to real-estate developer Harris Weinstein. In 1992 in a somewhat controversial decision, Weinstein sold Dorney Park to Cedar Fair, an Ohio-based company which owns and operates the traditional amusement parks Cedar Point (Sandusky, Ohio), Valleyfair (Shakopee, Minnesota) and, most recently, Worlds of Fun (Kansas City, Missouri).

In its age and history of development, Cedar Point somewhat resembles Dorney

Park. In 1870, the park was a summer resort consisting of a beer garden, dance floor and bath house operated by Louis Zistel. George A. Boechling acquired the property in 1897 and constructed a midway with rides and other amusements. The result was a midwestern but Coney Island-inspired hodge podge of spires, domes, and minarets that, in the buildings underneath, housed the usual carnival offerings of vaudeville theaters, freak shows, and penny arcades. Like its fellow amusement parks, Cedar Point declined throughout the middle decades of this century. George Roose refurbished the park in the 50s by importing new rides and attractions. In subsequent years, park presidents have modernized and improved the existing park; such efforts have resulted in what Judith Adams considers a superimposition of technology over the traditions of the old-style amusement park (1991:81-83). Their past regard for historically significant attractions—an attitude lauded by Ray Ueberroth, president of the American Coaster Enthusiasts (Todd 1993:A-5)—suggests that Cedar Fair will preserve the integrity of those older structures and rides which still stand in Dorney Park and amuse its increasing number of visitors each year (two recent acquisitions include updated versions of old-fashioned rides, the Paratrooper and Monster; Dorney Park maintained earlier versions of these carnival rides throughout the 60s and 70s but eliminated them during the 80s). Preservation and/or restoration of historic structures, at a time in which cultural change is generally felt to be accellerated to a dizzying extreme, may be a traditional amusement park's best means of economic success. Certainly this sophisticated approach is best exemplified by the conservative dark ride renovations undertaken by Kennywood, a 97-year-old traditional amusement park located just outside Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and carved in the mountainside above the Monongahela River.

## "Proud to be a National Historic Landmark": The Old Mill, Le Cachot and The Gold Rusher at Kennywood

The Old Mill is a single-level dark water ride operating at Kennywood (West Mifflin, Pennsylvania). The ride's exterior facade suggests a blending of themes: the rustic flavor of an old, abandoned mill seasoned with a haunting skeleton emerging from an open window (Illustration 9). Less provocative with electric lights or bold colors than simply evocative of times past, the Old Mill features warped and weathered boards, broken windows and the traditional water wheel to affect a muted patina of age. Floodlights at night enhance the eerie effect. A grassy, landscaped space separates the quay from the facade. A large opening on the right side gives entrance to chunky, black boats manufactured by the Philadelphia Toboggan Company. The left side of the ride continues the architectural theming; a covered exit extends from the ride, curving as the canal makes its final turn before the quay. The interior largely reflects a renovation project completed in 1974 by Ed Hilbert, in which 19th century scenes of the Old West are populated by skeletons. At that time, the Old Mill had been named Hard Headed Harold's Horrendously Humorous Haunted Hideaway, an alliterative if exhausting title which represents only one of numerous incarnations and appellations throughout the ride's ninety-four years.

Originally constructed in 1901 as Kennywood's first substantial amusement ride, the Old Mill incorporated a mill wheel to propel boats and flashing lights to illuminate interior scenes. In his detailed history of the park, Charles Jacques, Jr. notes that "One of the first displays was Old Saint Nick emerging from the fires with a flock of his chosen elves." In 1911, the ride was rethemed and renamed the Panama Canal to capitalize on the current international event and engineering feat. By 1914, however, the ride again became the Old Mill and featured, as promotional literature of the time attests, "gorgeous grottoes"

and "musical caves." Within twenty-five years of its initial construction, the dark water ride was completely rebuilt to refurbish its decaying channel and also accommodate additional boats. In 1926, maintenance crews replaced the wooden canal with sheet iron. Gravitational forces, in addition to the turning water wheel, ensured the circulation of water: "To make sure the channel dropped slightly its whole length, [supervisor Charles Mach] rolled a bowling ball into the tunnel before it was flooded. Everyone waited with baited breath. Finally, the ball rolled out of the exit to cheers from the construction crew." In 1957, the Old Mill contained nine new scenes to reflect its new theme as a tour around the world. In 1974, the ride received its last significant renovation, becoming the Haunted Hideaway until the mid-80s when the ride returned to its original name (Jacques 1982:7, 29, 45, 136). This reversion back to the original may have been incited by federal recognition of the park's historical significance as a whole. In 1988, Kennywood was designated a National Historic Landmark and the name change may have been in literal keeping with commemorating the history of the United States. It would be incorrect, however, to suggest that only within the past ten years has Kennywood's management become aware of the park's historical importance. Rather, Kennywood's practice throughout its ninety-seven years has been one of a constant balance between innovation and preservation. Current trends in the outdoor amusement industry suggest that the idea of preservation is a lucrative innovation; parks like Kennywood which can blend the idea of preservation within a modestly preserved environment are poised for future success.

Kennywood exemplifies the shapeshifting nature of viable commercial traditions. "We know the importance of tradition and we try and preserve as much of it as possible," explains Charles Henninger, Vice President and General Manager of Kennywood. "Even when changes are made we try and keep them as inconspicuous as possible" (Jacques 1982:195). Of course, as discussed earlier, amusement parks are in a continuous state of architectural flux from season to season; strict preservation is still absolutely antithetical to

the nature of traditional marketplace commodities. The individual amusement park evolves both slowly and suddenly over time and Kennywood is no exception. As Henninger states, however, park officials consciously and conscientiously attempt to integrate as seamlessly as possible the new within the old. Being inconspicuous may involve yearly and gradual renovations to slowly alter the appearance or update the mechanics of a ride over time, an approach reflected in the subtle yet progressive changes to the exterior of the Old Mill. At Kennywood, being inconspicuous may also take the form of architectural exchange and rearrangement, or a decorative give-and-take. The changing appearance of the Old Mill's boats suggests such an approach; handcarved in the 1920s by the carousel craftsmen of the Philadelphia Toboggan Company, the unique gargoyle heads which adorned the front of the boats for years now decorate the park's much newer Oriental pagoda ("Kennywood: A National Historic Landmark, 1898-1988"). This recontextualization of historic artifacts implies a spreading of the tangible components of Kennywood history throughout the park's entire grounds. The distributed Kennywood gargoyles are a fitting allegory for the development of an amusement park in which current appearance and landscape are defined by the collective influences of the past. Finally, being inconspicuous may require the complete removal of one attraction or structure and the construction of something new in its place. Even with reconstruction, however, park officials have attempted to preserve the old by preserving its purpose with the new. Even though the current Old Mill represents the 1926 construction, rebuilt in the same location as the 1901 structure, it preserves the function and idea of the original ride. For ninety-four years, park guests have come to that particular spot to enjoy that particular type of ride. A similarly abstract approach to preservation helps to describe the park's newer dark rides, Le Cachot and the Gold Rusher.

Positively reeking of a bygone America, Le Cachot is an exquisitely overwhelming

single-level dark ride located somewhat centrally in the park. Constructed of wood, plastic and fiberglass and painted in pastel colors, the exterior facade reflects the unmistakable stylings of Bill Tracy, who renovated the ride both inside and out in 1967 (Illustration 1). The exterior is a groovy assemblage of flowing curves, sloping forms and distorted perspectives outlined in clear white lights. Rakish spires and cartoonish yellow, blue and white turrets (decorated with hippie crescent moons, hearts and flowers) adorn the higher portion of the facade. Two jousting motorcyclists—skeletons dressed in armor and bearing battleaxes—face off in an imaginative and memorable blending of haunted castle and outlaw biker movie motifs. Contributing further to the rock and roll mix of diverse elements are a skeleton long-hair playing an acoustic guitar, a smooth-pated skeleton blowing a mean saxophone and a green, ghoulish maiden emerging from a window in the facade's central turret. Laminated above the quay is the ride's exotic name in bright yellow cut-out letters. Glossy fiberglass stones, painted dark gray and accentuated in black, line the back wall of the quay. Three cut-away picture windows dispersed along the wall suggest a dungeon with black bars and skeletal prisoners made of plastic and fiberglass. An effective illusion of depth characterize these latter embellishments. Entrance to the ride is through double doors on the left; exit is from identical doors on the right. The front portion of the sides of Le Cachot continue the illusion of fortified masonry with fiberglass stones (Illustration 10). The left and right sides of the dark ride are decorated boldly with a series of numbers "0" through "8" and topped with a jagged picket fence painted blue-gray. Interior scenes, reflecting a refurbishment and renovation project from 1976, present the expected array of articulated ghosts, monsters and torture scenes in vivid technicolors and psychedelic blacklighting effects (Illustration 3).

The location of Le Cachot has been the setting for numerous attractions since circa 1940 when the park purchased a Cuddle-Up manufactured by the Philadelphia Toboggan

Company and used by the New York World's Fair in 1939. The Cuddle-Up was removed in 1954, and the building which had housed this type of flat ride was renovated into a pretzel dark ride. Originally named the Mystery Ride, the dark ride was themed with an African flavor and featured apes, elephants and lions inside. To advertise the new attraction, Kennywood Park sponsored a local television contest to name the ride; "Zoomerang," a wonderful compression of words simultaneously describing the theme and mechanical action, was the winning entry. In 1961, reflecting a substantial renovation project, the Zoomerang became the Safari. The facade was fronted by a sixteen-foot tall African warrior. The jaws of a gargantuan ape formed the ride's entrance, and inside hid man-eating pygmies, enormous jungle snakes and assorted witch doctors. Bill Tracy completely rethemed the ride to suit its new name: "Le Cachot." Henri Pohl, contracted by the park in 1976, refurbished and created new scenes for Le Cachot's interior (Jacques 1982:104, 107, 139-40, 152). For over forty years, this dark ride changeling has been providing innumerable scares and laughs. Even without a trace of its former manifestations as Zoomerang or Safari, Le Cachot bears the indelible impression of those rides; its history is bound up intimately with theirs as well as the history of Kennywood as a whole. Perhaps the best example of how a dark ride is born of an amusement park's experiences is Kennywood's newest dark ride, the Gold Rusher.

The Gold Rusher is a single-level (originally double-level) dark ride attached to the rear of Le Cachot and beside the intertwining knot of two of the park's four roller coasters, 1968's wooden Thunderbolt and 1991's Steel Phantom. The exterior facade of The Gold Rusher, compared to other traditional dark rides, is rather inconspicuous and bears a strong thematic resemblance to the park's Old Mill (Illustration 11). A faux rock face suggests a mountain gold mine supported with extensive, "rickety" timbering. A water wheel for panning gold and a "Miner 49er" provide some ballyhoo in a narrow, landscaped scene

presented before the ride's unobtrusive facade. The styling of this 1981 ride anticipates that of the newer dark rides in which attention to interior details equals or exceeds that given to the exterior surface. The current quay for the ride is an elevated platform leading directly into and out of the ride's second-story; the original quay, however, was located at ground level, as were the original entrance and exit. Jason Belavic, an eight-year veteran of the maintenance crew and perhaps the park's best engineering historian, explains that the original layout involved an ascent into the ride and a final descent to its exit but that such a design quickly proved impractical and mechanically unsound. The ride's original exit, now partly concealed with boards and shrubbery, is still visible on the right of the facade.

While the ride's exterior represents a toning-down of traditional dark ride ballyhoo, its interior Wild Western scenes contain the anticipated stunts, standard illusions and graphic combinations of horror and humor. A dimly-lit bat cave features the wriggling rubber creatures and, lower, suspended strings which sweep across the faces of riders to create the sensation of brushing wings or spider webs. A ghostly locomotive roars out from behind a corner with a chilling blast of air; a leering, phosphorescent skeleton swoops out before the front of the death engine to add to the surprise. An amusingly malevolent pack of Wile E. Coyotes crowd around a kettle of boiling water—the Lone Ranger and Tonto emerge from under the lid as the black mining cars pass.

Understanding the importance of the Gold Rusher requires some understanding of its operation within the park. Converted out of the older Sportsland Building which had housed a row of games, and with the addition of a second floor, the Gold Rusher represents a belated replacement for a former dark ride, the Ghost Ship, which was destroyed six years earlier in a mechanical fire in June, 1975. As Harry Henninger notes, "The park likes to have two dark rides because they are high-capacity, family-oriented rides. Since they are covered rides, they are good rides to have on rainy days." The park has been operating two or more electric dark rides since 1954, when the previosuly

discussed Mystery Ride joined the Laugh-in-the-Dark, a Dodgem ride remodeled in 1930 into a dark ride with a facade which was restyled in the 1940s and again in 1960. In 1966, the Laugh-in-the-Dark was replaced by a Turnpike car ride; however, in the following year, Bill Tracy was contracted to renovate the Enchanted Castle, a dark ride recently created in 1964 in the former dance pavilion, one of the oldest buildings in the park (Jacques 1982:113, 150, 155, 192).

With the Casino and carousel house, the Dance Pavillion completed a triangle of buildings which greeted park patrons in 1899, the year that Kennywood opened to the public. In 1954, the open-air, wood frame building was converted into the Enchanted Forest walk-thru and in 1958 a closed-circuit television in the ride gave spectators outside a novel view of those inside bumbling about the illusions. The addition of track, cars and dungeon scenery turned the walk-thru into a dark ride in 1964, a conversion symbolized by a refacing of the facade with towers and spires and changing the name to the Enchanted Castle (though still literally resonant with its past incarnation). Within a season or two, the Enchanted Castle became the Tornado, a dark ride purchased from Freedomland in New York City which sported a facade reminiscent of an old west town. In 1967 (the same year he created Le Cachot), Bill Tracy changed the ride again into an immersive pirate experience. The Ghost Ship's facade suggests Tracy's propensity for effectively combining imagery. Its centerpiece boasted a grinning skull with mossy hair; an improvisation on the old skull-and-crossbones motif, the skull was crossed with a striking fan of crab legs and claws pieced together from bones. Recalling his Bucket O' Blood at Dorney Park, Tracy's interior delivered riders through "the hull of an abandoned ship wrecked on the high seas." Illusions included a rocking room and a waterfall. Like its thematic and unfortunate kin at Dorney Park, the Ghost Ship, in addition to several other rides and attractions, was consumed by fire incited by an electrical malfunction (Jacques

1982:4, 158, 168). Though not connected physically or architecturally with these rides, the Gold Rusher is attached abstractly to the former attractions by continuing the park's commercial interest in dark rides.

A dark ride like the Gold Rusher is so bound up with a park's economic and architectural devlopment that it can not be separated from the greater context of the whole history of its environment. Indeed, a dark ride is but one part of a much larger, interconnected whole; changes to a part induces changes to the whole, and changes to the whole induces changes to all the parts in a continuous exchange of actions and reactions which shape the amusement environment by gradual nudges. But as intimately involved with the park's older attractions as the Gold Rusher is, it responds equally to the present and the future by working within the frame of the park's intended progress. "We must put in the types of rides and attractions which will attract school, industrial, community and general picnics," notes Harry Henninger, alluding to the simple formula for success which had sustained Kennywood through the Depression, World War II and the mass media from the 1950s to the present. Kennywood survived these national developments (the ruin of lesser parks in the Pittsburgh area and the country as a whole) by forgoing the larger tourist trade and appealing directly to its local—and loyal—customer base. "The park must know its place," Henninger asserts: "Kennywood has always been a picnic park" (Jacques 1982:192-95). Indeed, a 1995 schedule of Kennywood's largest organized picnic events reads like a colorful roster of greater Pittsburgh's ethnic heritage: Carpatho-Russian Day (June 28), Serbian Day (July 14), Italian Day (July 18), Slovak Day (July 20), Greek Day (July 25), Byzantine Day (July 27), Polish Day (August 1), Hungarian Day (August 9) and Croatian Day (September 2). The city's outlining communities are honored as well on their own special "feast days": among them, Brookline (June 28), Belle Vernon Area (July 11), Monongahela (August 2), Bentworth (August 17) and Pine Richland (August 25). The

diverse groups are united under the leafy canopy of Kennywood's picnic groves, reaffirming the cultural importance of ethnic food intermingled with the national fare of hot dogs and french fries. Appealing to its immediate constituents is good business sense for a traditional amusement park.

Area families who came to Kennywood in the earlier parts of this century still come to Kennywood, the individual branches and extensions of bloodlines renewing the Pittsburgh summertime tradition with every generation. As these individuals change over time, the park necessarily reflects those changes in age and taste by changing its rides and attractions. Kennywood operates dark rides not only because they give shelter during a rain storm, but also because they are gentler than the physical assaults of the thrill rides. The less taxing experience of a dark ride appeals to the older rider, the aging Baby Boomer with a family who now represents the average amusement park patron—the industry's target audience. Says Henninger, "As our populations grow older, we must offer things for them like stage shows and more gentle rides like our new dark ride [the Gold Rusher]" (Jacques 1982:192-195). His statement, alluding to the shift in park demographics, anticipates an industry opinion which has become general by the 1990s. John Wood of Sally Corporation, a producer of sophisticated dark rides, explains the recent increase in dark ride productions: "We have to respond to the changing needs of families. Dark rides open up to family interaction" (Muret 1993b). Of course, Kennywood has discovered that older patrons are attracted to the park for reasons of nostalgia as well. "Old," in some contexts, can be effectively commercial.

The competitive days of the "newest, fastest, tallest, wildest" attractions will never pass, but now, more and more patrons are coming to traditional amusement parks asking not what's new but what's old. And Kennywood, to keep up with this recent change in the industry as a whole, has become quite adept at telling them. Several pithy brochures detail

park history; units for a historical audio walking tour are available at Guest Services; a 1987 National Park Service plaque on the grounds proudly announces that "This site possesses national significance in commemorating the history of the United States of America." For years "the most famous symbol of the park" has been its Noah's Ark, one of the earliest varieties of fun house (the Old Testament story was one of the more popular medieval pageant plays as well—but I won't go into that). Originally planned for 1929 but postponed on account of the Depression, Kennywood's walk-thru Ark has been at the park since 1936 and remains the last such structure in America. Built at a cost of $20,000, the Ark rocked back and forth on "Mount Ararat" as a fog horn moaned ominously; animal heads bobbed in open windows. Interior illusions included a rippling floor, a jail with rubber bars and a growling stuffed bear. Typical of early fun houses, the Ark made grand spectacle of those who ventured inside to be assaulted in amusing ways. Air jets, positioned strategically along the path leading to the Ark with one jet placed just inside the door, lifted the skirts of the girls. The patrons' screams and shouts from inside were broadcast over the park's public address system. A complete renovation occurred in 1969, entailing a reconstruction of the mountain and the creation of an exciting new ground-level entrance through the mouth of a bright blue whale; in 1976, Henri Pohl created some new interior stunts and scenes (Jacques 1982:94, 97, 162, 178). The amusement relic is a comfortable spot inside America's aggressive embrace of change which, taken to the extreme, is defined by destruction. The old must be leveled to make way for the new.

The successful preservation of such a structure as Noah's Ark fuels Kennywood's self-promotion as "America's Finest Traditional Amusement Park." Of course, the park's other, equally trumpeted slogan is "Roller Coaster Capital of the World," an appellation describing Kennywood's dedication to high-end thrill rides. Since 1898, the park has owned and operated twelve coasters; currently, four coasters—two from the 1920s, one from 1968, and the fourth from 1991—are among the biggest attractions at the park. Press

information on the history of the park explains that, "As Kennywood enters the 1990's, a balance of change and preservation of tradition are important to our survival. Keeping pace as the 'coaster capital,' the Laser Loop [1980-1990] was replaced by the new Steel Phantom coaster with the fastest speed of 80 MPH and the longest drop of 225 feet. Kennywood remains 'America's finest traditional amusement park'" ("Kennywood" 1995). The two opposite inclinations are not necessarily contradictory—especially in the amusement park setting which revels in, and is empowered by, seeming contradictions (the tendency toward incongruity is a trace of Carnival disorder that lingers despite a takeover by official, secular culture). Further still, Kennywood, in perhaps the industry's most intriguing market coup of recent years, has discovered an effective means of seamlessly resolving the opposite and simultaneous impulses in its newest expansion project, the largest in its history: "Pittsburg's Lost Kennywood."

A tantalizing description of the project fills its colorful 1995 promotional brochure:

> It's tough to improve on a National Historic Landmark, especially when it's been providing nothing but good times since 1898. But that's what has happened with the addition of a totally new pleasure zone..."Lost Kennywood."
>
> The largest expansion ever undertaken at this beautiful park, the Pride of Pittsburgh, "Lost Kennywood" takes on a special look after dark. Thousands of light bulbs outline the Victorian-style buildings as it takes on a whole new magic.
>
> Kennywood...it just keeps getting better! ("The Spectacular Days and Nights of Kennywood" 1995)

America's own "distant" and long-gone past has become exoticized—and the exotic in all its forms has been fodder for amusement parks since the 19th century. Little wonder then that the old-style amusement park should be cannibalized by those of the present. An industry precedent was created over two decades ago when Cincinnati's traditional "Coney Island," which had closed in the late 1960s, was relocated partially and partially reconstructed to form one of several themed areas in Paramount's King's Island, a tourist park outside of the city which opened in the early 70s. Kennywood, however, may be the

first old-fashioned amusement park to develop an area in which the theme is the idea of an old-fashioned amusement park.

Kennywood's new theme is, both blatantly and obliquely, itself. With architecture and attractions derivative of defunct amusement parks, Lost Kennywood pays homage to Pittsburgh's Luna Park and, in general, all of America's Luna Parks, those local parks of the early 20th century which copied the organization and architecture of Coney Island and world expositions. Not ironically, in 1995 Kennywood has incorporated the architectural styling and emotional atmosphere of a Pittsburgh park which, in the early 1900s, it consumed economically. At the beginning of this century, Kennywood competed with thirteen other local trolley or railroad excursion parks which had been established in suburban Pittsburgh areas. One of these, Frederick Ingersoll's Luna Park, was located in suburban Oakland and was only one of numerous copies of F.W. Thompson's Luna Park on Coney Island which were scattered throughout the country. By the 1920s, Kennywood was the strongest and largest among these small, suburban parks (Jacques 1982:10).

To the victor goes the spoils. Having gobbled up the competition, Kennywood now gobbles up local history, rightfully making it its own. "Pittsburg's Luna Park" becomes "Pittsburg's Lost Kennywood" (complete with the archaic and original spelling of the city which subtracts the "h") in a press package description of the expansion project which repeatedly compares the former to the present:

> Kennywood is proud that its newest and largest expansion, the six acre "Lost Kennywood," will again give life to Ingersoll's concept. Like the Luna Parks, Lost Kennywood will be anchored by a Shoot-the-Chute water ride. Its wooden structure will look very similar to the original's, but its high tech, computer-run operation will provide state-of-the-art thrills.
>
> Surrounding the Shoot-the-Chute lagoon are a variety of classic thrill rides. Kennywood's oldest "flat ride," the Whip, has been moved to Lost Kennywood. A refurbished Dipsy Doodle and a Roll-O-Plane will show today's youngsters that their parents really did experience excitement, and perhaps a little fear, back in the old days.
>
> In addition to rides, Luna Parks provided food and entertainment along the midway. Lost Kennywood will follow suit. From funnel cakes and lemonade to circus acts and

> games of skill (remember the High Striker?), it will all be there.
>
> Guests who were Kennywood patrons before 1970 will identify a replica of the fountain from the middle of the swimming pool. In fact, guests who patronized other amusement parks in the area will be able to see artifacts and pictures from many of those parks.
>
> Like the early Luna Parks, built in part to show off the electric light bulb, Lost Kennywood will especially come alive at night. Thousands of light bulbs will outline the eclectic buildings surrounding the lagoon—a spectacular sight then and now ("Pittsburg's Luna Park...Pittsburg's Lost Kennywood" 1995).

Of course, as described above, Lost Kennywood is not merely a thematic amalgamation of other former amusement parks, but a recombination of joint historical artifacts, Kennywood's included. The park's enormous Whip was painstakingly disassembled—its thousands of mechanical components numbered and catalogued—and reassembled exactly as it was in its new location. The Roll-O-Plane and Dipsy Doodle, hard steel rides linked to the past by their mechanically simple appearance, are not those which operated at the park originally but similar rides which the park acquired by various means. A type of airplane ride which allows the rider to control the height with an aileron or movable flap, Dipsy Doodles were at the park in the 1940s, painted in an Army Air Force motif, and again from 1954 to 1962. The newest Dipsy Doodle, now called the Phantom Phyler, was a vintage machine rescued from the storage shed of another amusement park, mechanically renovated and repainted to an attractive lustre to match its companion piece, the Roll-O-Plane. Kennywood's original Roll-O-Plane appeared in 1950 and was sold in 1969 (Jacques 1982:107, 136, 154, 162); because this type of ride has not been manufactured for nearly thirty years, Kennywood had its construction specially commissioned using the ride's original plans. Ultimately, Lost Kennywood is part museum (artifacts on display), part reconstruction (Roll-O-Plane, Shoot-the-Chute) but all amusement park. Though not literally claiming the expansion to be an "authentic reproduction," official description of Lost Kennywood with all its analogies certainly alludes to the similarity between the parks

of the past and the Kennywood of the present. Linking the two is the nearly identical amusement experience of sights, sounds and taste.

Postmodern theoreticians, anthropologists, folklorists and museum specialists have made much noise debating the existence of authenticity—that slippery abstraction—in America. Academics could learn a lot from an amusement park such as Kennywood. Anthropologist Edward Bruner, tackling the problem of historic reproduction by forwarding a constructivist argument, wisely asserts that "A historic site [like New Salem, Illinois, temporary home of Abraham Lincoln] is a good place to gather data on issues of reproduction, originals and authenticity because museum professionals struggle with these issues daily." Given that the constructivist point of view regards culture as fundamentally emergent (that is, never entirely original but invented and reinvented in a continuous cycle of reflection, imitation and change), I would argue that Kennywood as a historic site is a better place to investigate those issues precisely because there is not a museum professional to be found: the park bypasses any messy academic question of authenticity by abandoning the distinction between original and reproduction (Bruner's ideal goal) and immediately cuts to the important issues of identity, meaning and attachment through amusement. To Bruner's thinking, such personal issues are resolved at a historic site by learning about the past, playing with time frames, enjoying nostalgia for the past while appreciating the idea of progress, and, finally, celebrating America (1994:398). As the grotesque embodiment of the allegory "historic reproduction," Lost Kennywood in particular and, in general, Kennywood as a whole provide these opportunities for guests who can step through a grand Victorian archway to discover and experience an idealized, thousand-lighted representation of the past. This representation, however, is continuously and deliberately invaded by the Steel Phantom that tears by overhead. The ultra-modern coaster crosses and recrosses the physical boundary that separates Lost Kennywood from the rest of the park, its track and train of cars linking old to new to new-old and effectively erasing the

distinctions between them in the process. Of course, the historical process of reconstruction itself smashes our cherished beliefs in authenticity: the past (Pittsburg's Luna Park) which Pittsburg's Lost Kennywood represents was itself a copy of a Frederick Thompson's "original" and an idealized representation. Copying copies and artificing the artificial several times over makes us doubt the importance of originality, integrity or authenticity in the construction of meaning when both architectures are imitations composed entirely of facades and surfaces. Once again, the shapeshifting amusement park shows its Carnival colors to blur distinct boundaries and reveal the hazy truth: nothing in material culture is inherently genuine but disappears into an infinite regress of distorted copies like reflections of reflections in fun house mirrors. What is real are the momentary interactions of people with their environment and with others. The reality of Kennywood and Lost Kennywood emerges solely from its guests' moment by moment experiences there.

The official reality presented at the park is that people in the good old days enjoyed mechanical thrills, illuminated spectacles and sweets as much as today's patrons—that, despite a century of accellerated technological and societal change, human nature has stayed basically the same. The notion is a comforting one—and quite believable. It would seem that the traditional amusement park does allow its patrons to identify sensuously with the patrons of forty and fifty years ago: yesterday, today and tomorrow, nothing empties the mind of day-to-day concerns like a nauseating turn on the Roll-O-Plane and nothing is so transcendantly visceral as becoming one with the whirling airplane of the Dipsy Doodle. The two standardized rides offer standardized experiences and elicit standardized reactions. And how different can people's philosophical approach to making a big splash in a lagoon be? The great equalizer of American experience past and present, a thrill ride consumes the lines of time and space. In this powerful paradox, the amusement park (this profane Carnival-turned-capitalist commodity) recreates sacred space in which time is not a line

drawn from past to future but a circle of ever-presence. Taken to the abstract extreme, the amusement park suggests that time is a repetition in which sacred history can be reenacted through a form of official worship known as paid leisure. Has Carnival finally dissolved its own boundaries to not only become an expression of official culture, but also deny its own need to change? Let's not be too hasty to fall for the marvelous illusion. Firstly, this apparent denial of change reflects a greater change in the industry. Secondly, more than any masquerade of official culture, Carnival thrives in the spirit of tweaking the forces of order which strictly govern the amusement park. While the "official reality" of Kennywood is one of historical resonance, by providing an old-timey, congenial atmosphere for reminiscing and by promising future reminiscences, the park as it is really experienced is one of continuously renewed interpretations. In short, the amusement park is a public space that expands to accommodate the unofficial reality which always develops when people make use of their surroundings.

The amusement park is a land of architectural illusions filled with real people. The challenge facing the student of amusement parks is not to be blinded by the flashing lights or deceived by the evocative facades and false perspectives—not to mistake its architecture for its reality but to recognize the amusement park as the site of community building and human interacting. Therefore, our interest now returns to the dark ride, looking at it from the constructivist perspective to see it as a subjective experience which is interpreted and subverted variously by its riders. As an official location of leisure and recreation with origins in festival misrule, the dark ride sanctions a small degree of behavioral license. This investigator has examined the official interpretations of dark rides by way of intentional changes made to the structures over time; I now turn our attention to unofficial interpretations of the dark ride by examining how riders subvert the intended experience.

## *Rights of Passage: Subversions and Reinterpretations*

It comes as little surprise to the scholars relevant to this paper—symbolic anthropologists and semioticians alike—that the amusement park offers a variety of social and bodily licenses, physically and architecturally catapulting one into a realm of illusory disorder. The amusement park is an arena outlined by the allowances and liberties of that essential product of industrialized society, lesiure time. Victor Turner, borrowing from Isaiah Berlin, sugests that inherent to leisure time are two distinct varieties of freedom, namely, "freedom from" and "freedom to." Turner elaborates:

> Leisure represents freedom from a whole mass of institutional obligations prescribed by the basic forms of social, and particularly technological and bureaucratic, organization. It represents for each individual freedom from the forced, chronologically regulated rhythms of factory and office and a chance to recuperate and enjoy natural, biological rhythm again. Leisure is also freedom to enter, even to generate, new symbolic worlds of entertainment, sport, games, and diversions of all kinds. It is freedom to transcend structural limitations, freedom to play with ideas, with fantasies, with words, ...and with social relationships (1972:279-80).

Most readily emblematic of leisure time is the amusement park, a favorite haunt of semioticians who read in its literal and symbolic contradictions loaded descriptions of the abstracted interworkings of human culture and industrial machine. Recalling Turner's proscription for the transcendant possibilities of leisure time but redefining it in the mechanical imagery of the amusement park, Tony Bennett notes that the amusement park "addresses—indeed assaults—the body, suspending the physical laws that normally restrict its movement, breaking the social codes that normally regulate its conduct, inverting the

usual relations between the body and machinery and generally inscribing the body in relations different from those in which it is caught and held in everyday life" (1983:147-48). Liberating potential exists in the cool curves of the steel roller coaster which turn the body upside down and threaten to turn the body inside out. People come closer together, literally, at the amusement park. The centrifugal forces of the Scrambler, the Musik Express and the Tilt-A-Whirl press bodies closer together, allowing their riders to cross into the boundaries of another's personal space with impunity. The amusement park, while throwing people around, throws them together in a fleeting illusion of democracy, in which individual identity blurs into that of the group. Standing in line, waiting patrons are onlookers, voyeuristic spectators soon to be participants who will themselves be looked upon in the orderly, carnivalesque procession of people moving through two- and three-minute-long liminoid experiences.

Guiding our discussion again, Victor Turner asserts that "...the symbolic genres of industrial leisure are analogous, if not homologous, to rituals (particularly their liminal phases) in tribal societies. That is, they are similar in function, if not in structure." However, Turner suggests that the term "liminality"—a suspension or rearrangement of systems of order—is applicable to ritual proper in tribal and agrarian societies; to distinguish ritual proper from the modern symbolic inversions and expressions of disorder, such as those invited by amusement park attractions, he suggests the use of the term "liminoid" (1972:282-87). Individual amusement park rides, then, are liminoid possibilities which rupture day-to-day relationships and experiences and substitute for them temporary worlds either of radical, thought-free sensation or of fancy and nightmare. Standing near the foot of a roller coaster and looking up and up at its towering hill, or else slowly edging toward the front of the dark ride's line and noting car after car disappear into its vacuous doorway, one is emotionaly and physically charged by the prospect of an

experience—of terror, of fright, of pleasure. As Bennett is quick to remind us, "thresholds are important" in amusement rides because "once in, there's no going back" (1983:150)[16]. Once seated in place, the roller coaster's hill must be mounted and the dark ride's unknown terrors must be skirted. Back-of-the-mind reassurance tells us that conquering these inevitable obstacles is guaranteed by the price of admission. It is no mystery to anyone that amusement park attractions are successful because their perils are illusory; chaos has no welcome place in the amusement park. The semblance of danger gives everyone the chance to play daredevil, but few would dare if the rides truly were unsafe. Merely witness the dramatic drop in park attendance—and revenues—when an accident unfortunately does occur (though I don't doubt that more than a few souls derive some excitement from tempting dangerous fate by riding an attraction which was the recent scene of a fatality).

The dark ride's liminoid space is hardly a rite of passage; that is, one exits the ride little changed but for, perhaps, some hoarseness of voice from yelling and talking or smeared lipstick or rumpled clothes from hasty petting. In any event, the dark ride's circuitous passages do not substantially or permanently transform its riders; if everything goes correctly, people come out much as they went in. But the interior of traditional dark rides superficially alters its riders as it works its fleeting effects: dank passages drown riders in darkness; chilly and sometimes smelly air raises goosepimples on the flesh; light-colored clothing, teeth and the whites of the eyes glow an amusing shade of purple under

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[16]Bennett's mention of thresholds confirms what many already know about the importance of amusement park rides as secular rites of passage. As a child, one's first ride on a thrill ride or dark ride may be either an eagerly-awaited pleasure or a long-postponed ordeal. The eventual completion of the experience occurs when the child is old enough to brave the terrors (age being determined physically, by meeting height requirements, or psychologically, by making a choice or allowing himself or herself to be coerced). While the dark ride as rite of passage is a rich subtopic of liminoid experiences, I must pass over the connection to ritual in keeping with the issues of deliberate transformations discussed in earlier portions of this thesis. A child laughing at the horrors of the dark ride laughs in relief, knowing more than when he or she came into the ride, while an adult laughing laughs in disdain; consequently, my concern is not how a child is changed by the dark ride but how the dark ride is changed by adult reinterpretations.

blacklight. The signs are unmistakable: the inside of the dark ride is not the world outside, but a new (or old) world just as real. Accordingly with the changes in atmosphere, the ride gives opportunity for an immediate change to behaviors which are socially unacceptable in other contexts. The dark ride is a world of spontaneous and improvisational theatrics whose only written rules are that riders must not smoke and they must keep their hands and feet inside of the car. Outside of that, almost anything (within reason) goes: their hands and feet, safely in the confines of the car, may wave and wander wherever and onto whomever they choose in amorous advances, fiendish tickles and sudden movements calculated to frighten. The mouth may kiss or yammer on as much as it wants. Indeed, the rights of passage include unsubtle reinterpretations of the original purpose of the ride as an artery of traditional iconography.

An allowance for romance is the most obvious key to the ride's popularity (so intrinsic is this allowance that one might argue reasonably that the dark ride exists primarily to create an official romantic space). Like other rides which operate under the cover of darkness (the Caterpillar with its retractable canvas hood, for instance), the dark ride is a sanctioned occasion for the gropings of sexuality. One may employ the scenic frights as an excuse to snuggle closer, or one may simply ignore the environs and enjoy the temporary privacy. Appropriately, then, the dark ride in all of its forms sorts people into couples and takes them away from public view. The design of boats in dark water rides especially facilitates romance and courtship. In the earlier Philadelphia Toboggan models, deep bucket seats allowed couples to cuddle side by side; in the later types, a long seat that runs from front to back encourages women to sit between the legs of their boyfriends and lean back against his body while he rings his arms around her upper body as the boat rocked and gently swayed with the current. The passing scenes of hell and human torment, as young hormones begin to flow in the darkness, become inverted and the tunneled canal

changes into what Bakhtin calls an earth-affirming fertile womb "where death meets birth and a new life springs forth" (1984:395). Let's not forget that the vernacular for a dark water ride is "Tunnel of Love" and is itself, delivered with a wink, a juicy euphemism for the female sex. In all manifestations, the dark ride delivers its passengers back into summer skies with their faces flushed and pulses quickened in a dramatic enactment of rebirth. Indeed, the dark ride does not transform the riders, but the riders transform the dark ride, turning it into whatever they choose.

Of course, loving couples are not the only dark riders. Pairs of friends or single persons travel its route as well and, once inside, give vent to laughter, hollers, Bronx cheers, screams and shrieks. The dark ride is not a place to be frightened but a great place to be obnoxious and loud. One feels compelled to yell, simply because, away from scrutiny by everyone else, he or she can. It is allowed; it is part of the intended experience. And these are not the boisterous noises of dispelling demons, scaring them away with loud sounds as in "superstitious" days of yore, but belong to the modern folk tradition of Halloween noisemakers (Holmberg 1994) or disruptive Christmas mumming in which the year-long urge for social disruption is given a proper occasional outlet. In their case studies of disorderly conduct among "belsnicklers" or Christmas mummers in the La Havre Islands of Nova Scotia, Roger Abrahams and Richard Bauman conclude that behavior during the festival is not very different from behavior during the rest of the year. Order is continuously subverted throughout the calendar year; disorderly revelers are disorderly year-round. "If license and disorder are found to occur throughout the year," the authors maintain, "we cannot suggest that festival represents the antithesis of behavior at other times, only, perhaps, that it is the antithesis of behavior called for by the *ideal* normative system, which is a very different thing" (1972:195). Similarly, those dark riders inclined to be disruptive are those who are disruptive regardless of time or place; given to behaving

inappropriately, they are very likely the same people who chatter incessantly and kick the back of your seat during movies. In most other places of leisure, such as that aforementioned movie theater, the social ideal remains quiet courtesy, civility, dignity and respect. But the dark ride, to a relatively large degree, suspends social reality and loosens its normal contraints because it is a thorough mixture of commodified leisure activities and the disruptive playfulness of Carnival. Obnoxious behavior even enhances the illusions of the ride, just like children with noisemakers or reveling mummers help to conjure the other-worldiness of festival nights. Another's shrieks and whistles filter through the dark ride's maze of walls and mix with the continuous sound track. Boat riders rock the heavy vessel in the impossible attempt to sink it and with the intention of possibly terrorizing the other passengers seated with them. For a few moments at least, riders become the very stuff of the dark ride—vulgar clowns more frightening than the "official" demons in their attempts to liven things up a bit.

Of course, clowning riders are not the only passengers on the journey. The dark ride accepts all kinds and relaxed conversations occur between these folks as well. The smelly fathoms of dark boat rides are frequent sources for chilling or humorous tales about the corrosive nature or horrible inhabitants of the murky, circulating waters. Journey to the Center of the Earth at Dorney Park was said to be either poisoned with industrial sewage or stocked with exotic Japanese fish (the latter an assertion which was in some ways believable because the ride's waterway was fed by a natural source and the park did raise iridescent carp in a decorative fountain). In a similar instance, the dark tunnel of the Shoot-the-Chute at Lake Winnepesaukah Fun Town is subject to scandalous rumors. "It has been said that snakes have been known to jump in the boats while traveling through the tunnel while another tale has it that people riding in the boats have stuck their hands in the water only to have them bitten by water moccasins (Though the tales are *unfounded,* one park

visitor said it adds to the excitement of the ride.)" (Nazor 1989:M-1). Even a recent episode of the popular tv cartoon "The Simpsons" capitalized on the mystery of flume water: one drink of it incites a spell of extended psychedelic hallucination. A dark ride, in its riders' imaginations, even becomes the location of murders and fatal accidents—it is the place of real ghosts and secret doors and hiding places. It is where, as one story surrounding the Bucket O' Blood had it, an employee jumped out from an unspecified spot and rode on the back of the car beating people on the back of their heads. While this mysterious employee never appeared, the threat that he might was an unnverving presence which lurked about the static and dusty sculptures, turning the ride into something dangerous. As a rich inspiration for urban legends and the site of their telling, the dark ride occasions the negotiation of truths. In the uncertain dark ride, as in the changing and suddenly unfamiliar bodies of the adolescents who ride it, who knows what's gone on and who knows what's really going on right now.

The dark ride officially invites or at least accommodates all of these "disruptive" reinterpretations of its tawdry illusions because they enhance the riding experience; however, outside of the dark ride, many such allowances become forbidden lest disruption merge easily into destruction. The amusement park as a whole represents one of the most regulated and controlled of environments in American popular culture. It presents the appealing promise of chaos within the safety of control, never mediating the two extremes because the forces of control never deliberately relinquish their power. Amusement parks control who comes in and their behavior once they're inside. Tourist parks for Judith Adams signify "a pleasure zone completely engineered and planned down to the smallest detail. A safe, controlled leisure environment, cloistered by distance and barriers from the fearful, chaotic, and generally decaying city, is the result." The description sounds pessimistic to the extreme but, as we learned earlier during our visit to Dorney Park, any amusement center with aspirations for success must seal its boundaries from the

community at large and must, in a sense, become a regulated, predictable, artificial haven from an unregulated and unpredictable real world. Like Dorney Park's fence, George Tilyou's physical enclosure of Steeplechase Park at Coney Island at the end of the 19th century signalled a new era for the amusement complex, one of environmental and popular control (Snow and Wright 1976:967). Tilyou's fences kept in the respectable or paying customers and kept out those undesirables who had made the park a den for gamblers, drunks and prostitutes, the same variety of undesirables who had spelled the end of England's long-standing Bartholomew Fair. This earliest of recorded trade fairs, whose origins in Smithfield (Dexter 1930:5) have been traced back to 1133 and the August festival of Bartholomew's Day, endured for over seven hundred years as an annual event until unruly mobs and criminals overwhelmed the grounds and caused its demise in 1855 (Adams 1991:1-3, 109). Success, then, stems directly from eliminating susceptibility to society's destructive elements (the requirement is applicable even to cemeteries—recall the walls which sealed off those former centers of communal life by the 19th century, privatizing death and, in the process, fundamentally altering the Western mind's attitude toward it). From the 1920s to the 40s, the parks at Coney Island were invaded increasingly by local rowdies, scaring away the legitimate customers (Weinstein 1992:145) and inspiring a disgusted Walt Disney to create a new type of park which would maintain an illusory vision of America through unparalleled sanitation and crowd controls (Disney's refusals to admit un-American pinko hippies and, a decade earlier, certified Communist Nikita Khrushchev, are legendary). Walt Disney was not the innovator of cleanliness and respectability in the outdoor amusement industry, however; successful traditional parks had learned the formula decades before from the world expositions. During Kennywood's earliest days, advertising slogans promised "No fakes, no liquor, no gambling and no disorder," and "Anything not right will be made right." A 1914 brochure guaranteed that

"Courteous uniformed police are always present to suppress the slightest semblance of disorder" (Jacques 1982:20, 22).

Except for infrequent accidents, real chaos never even enters into the equation that balances the environment. In the traditional amusment park, all signs apparently point to chaos—Scrambler, Tilt-A-Whirl, Dipsy Doodle, Dodgem—but the disorder is only another of the amusment park's innumerable illusions. Whether the rides move on tracks or rotate about arms, their dizzying near-misses and near-catastrophes all follow a pattern of precisely calibrated and engineered order. Even the seemingly chaotic and independent movement of Dodgem cars are subtly controlled; riders enjoy a degree of freedom to move from left to right in bumping other cars, but all must follow a one-way pattern of traffic around the arena and head-on collisions are forbidden. Every ride comes with a set of rules governing it in the language of restrictions: no running, no spitting, no smoking, no line jumping. Remain seated while ride is in motion, the operator announces, and then fastens sophisticated seatbelts around your body to ensure that you do. These seeming paradoxes of disorder within an area of extreme control link the contemporary amusment park industry with the social performance of Carnival. The amusement park carries the oldest Carnival gimmick of using the illusion of disorder as a system of control. Indeed, the amusement park as a whole follows its own doctrine of accommodation, a method which obliquely reflects Pope Gregory I's attempt to harness the expressive and disruptive forces of Carnival by turning them into expressions of official culture.

Carnival's litany of language and symbols, described several times throughout this paper, is one of uncrowning or debasing official representatives of the dominant culture in a seemingly revolutionary inversion of order. However, Carnival is a masquerade not merely condoned but sanctioned by those in social control (that is, by those who are unwilling to relinquish their political power). Thus, Carnival's mockeries, while giving

vent to honest feelings of antagonism, are not permanent; Carnival's inversions in no way represent social revolution but rather a reconciliation between order and the forces of disorder. Much less than the idealized utopia Mikhail Bakhtin would have us believe, they are barely subversion. In an illusion of compliance with William Bascom's functions of folklore, Carnival apparently ensures social stability through the ventilation of social tensions. To paraphrase Bascom, Carnival in all its forms is a tawdry tease; it is that part of a network of social institutions which provides an outlet for repressions which the greater network imposes. The successful, controlling effects of Carnival should not be taken for granted, however. In reality, when tightly contained hostilities are released, even under culturally-sanctioned outlets of festival, the consequence often is violence in either a stylized burlesque or a spontaneous, dangerous reality (Kinser 1990; Linger 1992). In short, Carnival as practiced is a perpetually unstable balancing act between symbolic expression and civil disruption. When this balancing system eventually breaks down, disturbing social equilibrium, real violence erupts in its many forms among individual revelrers and between them and representatives of those in power.

While the performance of leisure is rarely as emotionally and politically charged as the performance of Carnival, the amusement park can be a location for violence in the form of destructive behavior. The well-ordered amusement park, to borrow from Tony Bennett, "is not a site of transgressions. It is a site to be transgressed but one which, to a degree, invites—incites even—its own transgression" (1983:155). Recall Dorney Park's attempt to seal itself off from the surrounding community in 1980 to cleanse itself of loiterers, trouble makers and other ne'er-do-wells; in subsequent years, with the establishment of economical season passes to encourage local patrons to attend several times in one season, came a distinct subculture of adolescent skateboarders who maintained the subversive tradition of roaming through the park, antagonizing other guests and security guards.

Subverting order in general and, specifically, destroying the illusions of the dark ride, becomes a kind of challenge to some who've spent the day in the hot sun waiting in long lines. Left alone in the dark for a moment becomes reason enough to make mischief, blow off some steam. In the same spirit that medieval rowdies disrupted actors, interfered with the performance, and destroyed the crafted illusions of medieval festival dramas, and with the same mischief that incited young moviegoers to turn William Castle's "Emergo" skeletons into irresistable slingshot targets and to pry loose "Percepto" joy buzzers, some dark riders involve themselves directly and destructively in the theater of horrors through which they pass. In the telling words of Matt Risnak, Knoebels' resident artist, "People, for some strange reason, it [the dark ride] brings out the savage in them." They spit on, vandalise and variously physically abuse the scenery and characters. More than a few creatures are embellished with injuries inflicted by kicks, punches, pulls and grabs.

Fortunately, outright vandalism and destruction of property is not the most frequent reactions to hell's creatures; more common is a playful inversion of the dark ride's illusions with a variety of creative techniques. For example, along the tunneled passage of Journey to the Center of the Earth were numerous maintenance doors which were unhinged and pushed open by riders, dispelling the darkness with bright sunlight and allowing inappropriate views of the happy park to invade the illusion. A skeletal ghoul in the Bucket O' Blood suddenly found himself outfitted ridiculously with a pair of glasses improvised out of plastic rings cut from a six-pack holder of soda cans. Near the end of the same ride, a poster of sex symbol Cheryl Ladd posing in a red bikini, won at one of the park's games of skill, had been stuck haphazardly to the wall. Oddly enough, this last humorous improvisation only reinforced the ride's already close association with sexual activity. In some instances, creative mischief by one can inspire mimicry by others. Over time during the last years of the 1980s, the interior tunnel of Jouney to the Center of the Earth became decorated with strange and colorful formations: wads of chewing gum of all flavors were

stuck to the walls and ceiling, forming disgusting stalagtites. The ever-growing and mutating decoration made more passengers cringe, cower and groan than any official monster. In some ways, the mischief going on inside the dark ride resembles those pranks of Halloweeen nights: besides both occurring under the cover of darkness and outside the eye of supervision, they are "inconvenient, as opposed to malicious, but they are not harmless—they are helpful" (Siporin 1994:56). Dark ride pranks contain a veiled message to remind officials of the ride's commercial obligations: change or be changed.

A dark ride will not be permitted to staganate. If the ride is not changed officially, updated with surprises, then riders inevitably will change the experience themselves. One reinterpretation of the dark ride's scariness involves jumping out of the continuously moving cars to quickly run about the scenes before jumping back inside. The action transforms the dwindling threat of paper maché monsters into the real possibility of being caught and ejected from the park. Such reinterpretations occur most frequently at traditional parks whose customers are more likely to be repeat guests, bored adolescents who've been there, done that and want something new for kicks. Park officials and maintenance crews are wise to the scheme, however, and have adopted several measures to subvert the subversion and regain control of the situation. The track layout of Kennywood's Gold Rusher generally encircles a concealed, central area in which a park employee can supervise every car at once; in the event of mischief or an emergency, the employee pushes a large red button on the wall to stop the ride immediately and raise the work lights. David Wynn, maintenance chief at Knoebels, notes that to combat unruly riders, the park occasionally stations an employee on the immediate inside of the Haunted House to scold any party which threatens to get out of control. "One warning," he says, "is usually all it takes" to keep them intimidated and "back in line" for the remainder of the ride. Other techniques which Knoebels employs to thwart vandalism is to set the displays

further back. Wynn notes that the distance detracts some from the ride and still doesn't guarantee the scenery's safety, but asserts that they would sooner do that than wrap chicken wire around the scenery. In Wynn's words, "Sooner put up with a little of that [vandalism] than ruin the entire ride for everyone."[17] Of course, the best and most recognized means of thwarting unofficial change is to make official changes from year to year: those renovations, alterations and replacements which have been the primary focus of the preceding section. In the restless culture of commodities and in the wisdom of showmen everywhere, keep it new, keep it interesting, keep it exciting.

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[17]Another material expression of this attitude is suggested by the covered pedestrian bridge which symbolizes Knoebels Grove: realizing that many can't resist etching their initials into the timbers of the newest "Old Covered Bridge" in the world (the bridge was built in 1975 out of timbers hand hewn in 1865["Knoebels" 1991]), maintenance crews have nailed planks to the largest posts to receive much of the graffitti.

# *Illustrations*

**Illustration 1**: Kennywood's Le Cachot, facade: Gothic outlaw bikers joust on planet Rock-N-Roll.

**Illustration 2**: Bushkill Park's Haunted Pretzel, facade. The pretzel gives the traditional hellmouth an ethnic/regionalist spin.

**Illustration 3**: Kennywood's Le Cachot, interior. The fluorescent kitsch of America's "innocent" past is protected from assault by a screen of chickenwire.

**Illustration 4**: Bushkill Park's Haunted Pretzel, exterior right corner.

**Illustration 5**: The Kastle at Lake Winnepesaukah Fun Town, facade.

**Illustration 6**: The Kastle, exterior left corner.

**Illustration 7**: The Haunted House at Knoebels Amusement Resort, facade.

**Illustration 8**: The Haunted House, exterior left corner.

**Illustration 9**: The Old Mill at Kennywood, facade.

**Illustration 10**: Le Cachot (Kennywood), exterior left corner.

**Illustration 11**: The Gold Rusher at Kennywood, facade revealing the ride's current second-story entrance.

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