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EXPLORING A THREE-DIMENSIONAL NARRATIVE MEDIUM: THE THEME PARK AS  
“DE SPROOKJESSPROKKELAAR,” THE GATHERER AND TELLER OF STORIES

by

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B.A. Chapman University, 2006

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
at the University of Central Florida  
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Major Professor: Rudy McDaniel

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the pervasiveness of storytelling in theme parks and establishes the theme park as a distinct narrative medium. It traces the characteristics of theme park storytelling, how it has changed over time, and what makes the medium unique. This was accomplished using a mixed methods approach drawing data from interviews with creative professionals, archival research, fieldwork, and an analysis of more than eight hundred narrative attractions.

The survey of narrative attractions revealed the most common narrative expressions to be dark rides and stage shows. Source material tends to be cultural tales (legends, fairy tales) or intellectual properties (generally films). Throughout major periods and world regions, setting, scenes, and visual storytelling are the most ubiquitous narrative devices. Three dozen techniques and technologies are detailed in this project. Significant impetuses for narrative change over time are the advent of technologies, formalization of the industry, explicit discourse on storytelling, formation of design philosophies, and general convergence of media. There are at least a half dozen key distinctions in theme park narratives compared with other mediums: dimensionality, scale, communality, brevity, a combinatory aspect, and a reiterative nature. Also significant is that creative professionals view themselves as storytellers, purposefully design with narrative systems, embed them in spaces, and participate in public dialogue surrounding narrative and design principles.

This study was initiated to expand the literature on emerging media and narratives within the Texts and Technology approach and to fill a gap in the scholarship, as designer standpoint is rarely considered in analysis. This is the first large-scale study of storytelling in the global theme park industry. It uses underrepresented creative voices as participants and recognizes their contributions as storytellers. Finally, the project lays the groundwork for future inquiries into theme parks as storytellers and spatial narrative mediums.

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I appreciate my colleagues who have cheered me on or shared their graduate school war stories. Thanks to my family members who have supported me, especially my mother and mother-in-law, who can't wait to call me Dr. Baker. First and last, to my husband Joshua, my best friend, life partner, fellow world traveler, and research assistant. Thank you for reminding me what makes me smile and for making my dreams come true. Where shall we visit next?

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
LIST OF TABLES .....	x
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW .....	1
Research Questions .....	2
Methodology .....	3
Positionality .....	3
Purpose and Epistemology .....	5
Research Method .....	7
Coding .....	10
The Central Metaphor of “De Sprookjessprokkelaar” .....	11
Significance of the Research .....	13
Definitions .....	17
Amusement Park versus Theme Park .....	17
Dark Rides .....	21
Narrative and Story .....	23
Storytelling Debate .....	26
Themed Entertainment .....	33
Chapter Organization .....	36
CHAPTER TWO: SURVEY OF THEME PARK NARRATIVES .....	38
Why Storytelling? .....	38
Pre-Theme Park Narratives .....	50
Disneyland: Birth of the Theme Park (1955) .....	57
Walt Disney Imagineering .....	63
Disneyland Opening Year .....	65
The Chicken and Egg Question: Disney and Storytelling .....	71
Theme Park Narratives Overview .....	81
Early Theme Park Narratives (1950s-1970s) .....	84
Maturing Theme Park Narratives (1980s-2000s) .....	85
Current Narratives (2010s) .....	87
The Pervasiveness of Narrative in the Theme Park Industry .....	89

CHAPTER THREE: EVOLUTION OF NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES AND TECHNOLOGIES .....	100
Story Development Process .....	100
Technology Development Process.....	112
Traditional Narrative Techniques and Technologies .....	116
Architectural and Landscape Storytelling.....	116
Implicit Storytelling, Tableaux and Dioramas, Walkthroughs .....	131
Cinema Influence, Dark Rides and Films .....	137
Theatre Influence, Shows and Parades .....	162
Auditory and Musical Storytelling.....	174
Audio-Animatronics as Narrative Devices .....	183
Graphic Design .....	187
Modern Narrative Techniques and Technologies .....	193
Edutainment .....	193
Explicit Artificiality .....	196
Simulators .....	199
Interactive Dark Rides .....	203
Fireworks and Spectaculars .....	209
Montage .....	215
Environmental Storytelling.....	220
Contemporary and Future Narrative Techniques and Technologies .....	224
Explicit Storytelling .....	225
Transmedia Storytelling and Vast Narratives .....	230
Original Narratives.....	239
Interactive Quests.....	245
Live Role-Playing, Interactive Theatre, and Improv Storytelling .....	253
Virtual and Augmented Reality .....	258
Immersive Worlds and Total Immersion .....	266
Other Themed Entertainment Types .....	289
The Use of Themed Entertainment Design in Museums and Heritage Sites.....	297
The General Character of Theme Park Narrative .....	318
CHAPTER FOUR: THEME PARK AS DISTINCT NARRATIVE MEDIUM .....	323
Comparisons to Other Mediums as Explored in Texts and Technology Literature .....	323

Oral and Written Narratives.....	326
Theatre and Film Narratives .....	330
Video Game and New Media Narratives .....	339
Remediation and Convergence .....	353
Designers on Theme Park Medium Uniqueness.....	361
The Theorizing and Teaching of Narrative in Themed Entertainment.....	381
Theme Park as “De Sprookjessprokkelaar” .....	391
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION .....	394
Summary .....	394
Implications of the Project.....	399
Limitations of the Project.....	401
Suggestions for Future Research .....	402
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWEES AND QUESTIONS.....	404
General Interview Questions.....	405
List of Interviewees.....	406
List of Archival Sources .....	407
APPENDIX B: CHAPTER TWO INTERVIEWS .....	411
APPENDIX C: CHAPTER TWO LISTS .....	416
APPENDIX D: STORYTELLING ATTRACTION LISTS.....	423
APPENDIX E: CHAPTER THREE INTERVIEWS.....	427
APPENDIX F: CHAPTER FOUR INTERVIEWS .....	429
APPENDIX G: IRB LETTER .....	435
REFERENCES .....	437



## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: De Sprookjessprokkelaar in a coloring page, in the stage musical, and walking in the park (Photos: two on left ©Efteling, used with permission; on right, Moniek Hover) .....	12
Figure 2: Haunted Castle at Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, a recent traditional dark ride; Under the Sea - Journey of the Little Mermaid at Magic Kingdom, a recent modern dark ride (Photos: Author).....	23
Figure 3: Tivoli today (Photo: Author).....	51
Figure 4: Knott’s Berry Farm’s Ghost Town in the ‘40s (Photo: Orange County Archives, Wikimedia Commons).....	56
Figure 5: Children's Fairyland in Oakland, CA (Photo: Author).....	57
Figure 6: Scene in Disneyland’s Peter Pan’s Flight (Photo: George Landis, Flickr Creative Commons).....	68
Figure 7: “Here you leave today” plaque from Hong Kong Disneyland (Photo: Author) .....	71
Figure 8: Themed paving at Magic Kingdom and Disney’s Animal Kingdom (Photos: Author) .....	120
Figure 9: Taron roller coaster going through Klugheim at Phantasialand (Photo: Author) .....	127
Figure 10: The Tree of Life at Disney’s Animal Kingdom (Photos: Author) .....	128
Figure 11: Doktor Allwissend (Doctor Know-All) attraction from Europa-Park's Märchenwald (Photo: Author).....	132
Figure 12: Narrative panels in the queue for Islands of Adventure's High in the Sky Seuss Trolley Train Ride (Photo: Author) .....	147
Figure 13: Pirate ship and beach outside of Pirates of the Caribbean at Disneyland Paris (Photo: Author).....	148
Figure 14: The Fairy Garden area of Dreamflight (Photo: Author).....	151
Figure 15: “it’s a small world” exterior and interior, Hong Kong Disneyland (Photos: Author).....	153
Figure 16: Rob, a glass artist at Dollywood (Photo: Author) .....	164
Figure 17: Puy du Fou's Cinéscénie (Photo: Pierre Andre Leclerq, Wikimedia Commons).....	165
Figure 18: Prince Phillip battling Maleficent in the Festival of Fantasy parade, Magic Kingdom (Photo: Author).....	170
Figure 19: The fire shaman Aditya from Rivers of Life at Disney’s Animal Kingdom (Photo: Author).....	172
Figure 20: Genie from Sindbad’s Storybook Voyage at Tokyo DisneySea (Photo: Author).....	186
Figure 21: Poster before riding Mystic Manor at Hong Kong Disneyland (Photo: Author) .....	190
Figure 22: Sign in the queue of Na’vi River Journey (Photo: Author).....	192
Figure 23: Flash Flood on the Studio Tour at Universal Studios Hollywood (Photo: Rob Young, Wikimedia Commons).....	197
Figure 24: Concept art for Let’s Dream underwater unit (Photo: ©Goddard Group, used with permission).....	213
Figure 25: “Gift Giver” from Tree of Life Awakenings at Disney’s Animal Kingdom (Photos: Author).....	215
Figure 26: The Fairytale Tree at Efteling (Photo: Author).....	235
Figure 27: The first show scene of Mystic Manor at Hong Kong Disneyland (Photo: Author). .....	241

Figure 28: Concept art for new characters at Monster Mansion (Photo: ©Goddard Group, used with permission).....	242
Figure 29: “Enlistment Quarters” for A Pirate’s Adventure at Magic Kingdom (Photo: Author) .....	248
Figure 30: Charlock animatronic from Guardians of the Realm Portals, explicit narrative from Rise of the Totem Masters (Photos: Author) .....	252
Figure 31: The <i>Calico Gazette</i> , Ike Mayfield locked up at Knott’s Berry Farm’s Ghost Town Alive! (Photos: Author) .....	257
Figure 32: Hogwarts Castle, exterior of Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey at Universal Studios Hollywood (Photo: Breakfast221, Wikimedia Commons).....	281
Figure 33: Pandora’s floating mountains and Flight of Passage queue area (Photos: Author) ..	282
Figure 34: Leonardo da Vinci-inspired room at Hotel Colosseo, Europa-Park (Photo: Author) ..	295
Figure 35: Donna Wolf as Anne Crosby, Carpenter Yard of Colonial Williamsburg (Photo: Author).....	303
Figure 36: Personal Stories of the Revolution at the American Revolution Museum (Photo: Author).....	307
Figure 37: Static scene from The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck from The World of Beatrix Potter (Photo: Author).....	310
Figure 38: York Castle Museum costumed character on Victorian Street, projected character in prison exhibit (Photos: Author) .....	314
Figure 39: Everland's Aesop's Village (Photo: Konggaru, Wikimedia Commons).....	356
Figure 40: Designer Joe Rohde’s post on detail (Photo: ©Joe Rohde, Instagram) .....	384

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: List of Society of Explorers and Adventures Characters.....	244
Table 2: Personal Stories of the Revolution at the American Revolution Museum .....	308
Table 3: Snapshot of Borrowed and Medium Techniques and Technologies .....	319
Table 4: List of Interviewees .....	406
Table 5: List of Archival Sources .....	407
Table 6: Interviewee Comments on Storytelling in Culture .....	412
Table 7: Designer Joe Rohde Comments on Storytelling in Culture.....	414
Table 8: Walt Disney Imagineering Comments about Storytelling's Importance .....	414
Table 9: Disneyland First Year Attractions .....	417
Table 10: Sixty-Six Top Theme Parks.....	420
Table 11: Responses Related to Preference of Story over Technology.....	428
Table 12: Interviewee Comments on Theme Park Uniqueness .....	430

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

When examining the fundamental scholarship in the approach of Texts and Technology, there is a perceived path of communication changes leading from oral to print and from print to electronic. Another possible manifestation of medium, one that adds the crucial component of space, is the theme park. The theme park, one of the world's popular leisure concepts with hundreds of millions of annual visitors, was influenced by other forms: pleasure gardens, World's Fairs and expositions, trolley and amusement parks, cinema, and theatre. Ray and Pat Browne define a theme park as "*A social artwork designed as a four-dimensional symbolic landscape, evoking impressions of places and times, real and imaginary*" (qtd. in King, "The Theme"). This implies the multifaceted nature of theme parks and themed spaces in general. Mark Gottdiener elaborates, noting that themed environments are "material forms," "social processes," and cultural processes that "use constructed spaces as symbols" (5). This denotes the complex forms and functions of these parks. It is evident that theme parks are texts that can be studied and technologies for the purposes of leisure and more profound things like meaning and uplift. They are also art forms. As Margaret King states, "Theme parks are a total-sensory-engaging environmental art form built to express a coherent but multi-layered message" ("The Theme," 3). One of the common ways that theme parks evoke messages is through storytelling.

Within theme parks, there is a storytelling presence in every phase of the relationship between the visitor and the park. This includes marketing or branding before one visits, attraction storytelling within the parks (in rides, shows, films, meet and greets, or atmosphere entertainment), and narrative items when one leaves (tangible merchandise or media like videos and music). The quantity and variety of techniques used to tell stories in parks have increased over the years. Though there were instances of storytelling in these venues from the beginning,

the theme park model has evolved from the milder story installations of Disneyland, the park that sparked the contemporary industry, into today's paradigm, one that frequently employs explicit storytelling and immersive worlds. This added emphasis on story "grew out of a natural maturation of the theme park as a medium" according to designer David Younger (157). Likewise, the visitors' role in theme park stories has changed over time from one of passive viewers of spectacles to role-playing participants in elaborate narratives. The theme park has become a more story-centric medium, and it continues to use specially designed or appropriated technologies to tell stories. This dissertation traces the evolution of theme park storytelling over time and expands the conversation about the unique qualities of the narrative medium.

## **Research Questions**

The primary focus of this dissertation is the theme park as a distinct narrative medium and the ways that it arrived at that status. The two overarching research questions are:

1. *How has storytelling in theme parks changed over time?*
2. *What makes the theme park a unique narrative medium?*

In this dissertation, I describe how the implementation of storytelling has changed over time and how technology contributed to the alterations. The theme park is a purposive narrative medium, but I want to distinguish it from other narrative mediums and determine its most defining attributes. The answers to these questions will be primarily answered by creative professionals themselves by way of personal interviews and archival research. The role of designers in the creation of storyworlds and narratives is a significant part of this research. Disney designer and creative executive Joe Rohde calls theme parks "some of the most complex and challenging theatrical forms ever known" and actor Ron Schneider calls themed entertainment "the most

challenging of art forms” (qtd. in Younger 535; Schneider 251). This dissertation will confirm and explain one critical component of this form, storytelling.

## **Methodology**

### *Positionality*

Gretchen Rossman and Sharon Rallis admit, “All researchers enter the field with a perspective” and that “objective interpretations are impossible” (274, 337). There are different orientations scholars have including objective/“distanced observation” or more situated participation like aca-fans or ethnographers (Jenkins, *Textual x*). Scholar-interpreters in theme park criticism occasionally stand so far at a distance from the artifact that it is clear they have not visited the subjects of scrutiny, while others have extensive experience. Henry Jenkins insists that it is important to be “transparent about one’s positionality” (xiv). In addition to scholars, disciplines and approaches also have positionality, or an orientation inherent in the theory or revealed when applied. This section is a brief overview of my positionality and influences related to my academic and personal background.

My Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts degrees are in literature, I have been a college literature professor for a decade, and I am a lifelong avid reader. This gives me a background of textual analysis using multiple literary theories as well as a passion for written fictions. Like Mark Edmundson, I see in the humanities and literature a chance for “expanded consciousness” and “human transformation” (4). I am a long-time creative writer, so I also appreciate the act of crafting texts. My doctoral program, Texts and Technology at the University of Central Florida, is an interdisciplinary track that is closely aligned with digital humanities and new media studies. Technologies have changed both humanity and humanities scholarship, according to Dave Parry: “The digital changes what it means to be human and by extension what it means to study the

humanities.” The courses in this program have deeply influenced my perspective and allowed me to take knowledge out of defined categories. Theme parks are easily identified as both texts and technologies within this approach, and Chapter 4 will highlight the many avenues of inquiry possible within a transdisciplinary field. Nonetheless, humanities values remain at the core of Texts and Technology. Johanna Drucker notes that though humanities are not monolithic, “we can fairly say that the intellectual traditions of aesthetics, hermeneutics, and interpretative practices (critical editing, textual studies, historical research) are core to the humanities.” Lisa Spiro proposes values for digital humanities including “collaboration, cross-disciplinarity, innovation, participation, and openness.” Common to all of my academic pursuits, then, is an essential grounding in the humanities including an acceptance of the world as an ideological, diverse, messy place. One intrinsic belief would be the power of storytelling, an idea that particularly motivates this project.

Just like I was a reader before I was a writer, I was a fan before I was a scholar. Before I formally wrote on theme parks, I enjoyed them as a visitor, an employee, and a fan. This would position me in the scholar-fan or “aca-fan” category. Jenkins defines an aca-fan as “a hybrid creature which is part fan and part academic” (qtd. in Evans and Stasi 14). This allows for a different perspective of both insider and analytical examiner to help “break down barriers between object/subject” (15). Over the years, I have visited more than one hundred theme and amusement parks around the world in addition to other forms of themed entertainment; my observations at these places have assisted in my understanding of them as an academic. For a period of years, I worked in theme parks (Disney and Universal on both coasts, primarily Attractions with one stint in Merchandise), and the knowledge gained by employment in operations and witnessing daily guest interactions was useful to me. There are also twenty years

of considering theme parks as fascinating texts behind me. My first paper in my freshman year of college (1997) was on “Disneyism” including the pilgrimage tendencies of theme parks. My first conference presentation in graduate school (2007) was an environmental literary analysis of Disney’s Animal Kingdom. The underlying warrant for this dissertation would be that theme parks are an important and exceptional art form worthy of balanced study. As this is a work of scholarship, disciplinary standards and the qualitative research paradigm are followed, but no project is totally devoid of bias.

### *Purpose and Epistemology*

The primary use of this dissertation is *enlightenment*, which has three primary characteristics as defined by Rossman and Rallis. Enlightenment use is where the research: “contributes to general knowledge,” “enhances understanding,” and “offers heuristic insight” (Rossman and Rallis 21). It is a *descriptive study* that aims to “describe social phenomena and contribute to understanding about them” (15). In this case, both storytelling and theme parks are social phenomena, as are the interactions between the two. This work aligns with the qualitative research paradigm of learning about “some facet of the social world” of which understanding more will have some benefit (5). Storytelling and leisure are significant cultural practices, so it is valuable to understand the phenomenon of theme park narratives in more depth.

The research genre represented here is the *socio-communication study*, which “examine[s] how people ... communicate with each other” and “explore[s] the meaning participants make in social interactions and settings” (92, 100). This is the genre most focused on language (verbal and nonverbal, or “communicative acts and sign systems”) and it is “grounded in the sociolinguistic and semiotic traditions” (102, 100). The key questions in this genre relate to intended meaning as well as the “process by which meaning is transmitted,” an essential



aspect of studying the techniques creators use to tell stories (100). Though there are individual storytellers represented within the chosen participants, storytelling is communal and collaborative. Theme park creative professionals craft in teams and present to a collective, as Rohde notes: “I design for groups. I don’t design for individuals” (“Narrative”). Creative executive Scott Trowbridge agrees: “We design these experiences to be shared” (“Legends: Adapting”). There are thus many individual instances of communication in each storytelling unit or interaction within a theme park, but all of them contribute to the whole experience.

The epistemological paradigm my work most identifies with is *critical humanism*, as while there are “ideological superstructures” and systems that constrain individuals, consciousness can still be an “agent to empower, transform, and liberate” (Rossman and Rallis 46). The predisposition of the researcher here is that storytelling can be empowering in most spaces, even commercial venues like theme parks. It is a fundamental human activity that can activate imagination, imaginary worlds, and transformation. Another epistemological belief reflected in this research is *sociocultural relativism* wherein “knowledge is shaped by the specific social and cultural circumstances of those making knowledge claims” (Vogt, Gardner, and Haeffele viii). Storytelling seems universal, but the processes of it, the reception of it, and the interpretation of it are often individualized. It is comforting to talk about a “collective consciousness,” and there are certainly underlying dramatic structures, character archetypes, and conventions of theme park design. Nonetheless, designers and visitors are influenced by societal and institutional cultures that are not the same everywhere. There are debates within each of the fields represented in this work as well, so while the goal of research as a whole may be “systematic investigation aimed at producing generalizable knowledge,” the term generalizable is applicable only within specific contexts and parameters (Rossman and Rallis 267). The

purpose of this study is to aim for finding, as designer Tony Baxter argues for, the “patterns” instead of “elusive formulas” (qtd. in Younger ix).

### *Research Method*

This dissertation is a combined research design employing interviews and archival research in addition to fieldwork. The first part of the research is comprised of personal interviews (in person, over the phone or Skype, and via email) with creative professionals. Since a primary aspect of this study is determining the interpretation of story in the creative part of the industry and the ways designers reflect on their role or theorize narrative, the majority of interviews are from creative professionals who tell stories through various means, rather than management, fans, visitors, or scholars. The interview questions are *descriptive/exploratory*, a common qualitative research approach of gathering as much information as possible about the subject matter from participants, who are inherently diverse in responses (Vogt, Gardner, and Haeffele 38). Interview questions were structured; approximately the same questions were asked to each participant, though some variation occurred, especially during the in-person interviews. Some disparity can be accounted for between in-person, phone or Skype, and email interviews; responses are perhaps more carefully given in email correspondence, but some might argue that it is “less genuine” than face-to-face interviews (42). Face-to-face interviews end up more tangential, but it is easier to ask for clarification. Based on location, time constraints on the part of the participants, or interviewee preference, several interviews were conducted via email. Twenty interviews were conducted for the purposes of this study.

The target population is creative professionals currently or formerly in the theme park industry or other forms of themed entertainment. Creative roles range from lead designers to show writers to composers. Disney is the dominant force in the industry, but I purposely sought

out participants who are outside of Disney so that the results would have more variety.

Admittedly, Disney's sixty-year supremacy influences other creative professionals, design philosophies, parks, and visitor expectations. As Salvador Anton Clavé explains, "Disney's dominance of the theme park industry brings about additional difficulties in the study of theme parks" (xvi). Disney's dominance may impede progress in the industry, as companies may shirk innovation in favor of "replicating what Disney does," so design attributes may be influenced by Disney as well (Christopher Stapleton qtd. in Sasha, "Interview").

The sampling method here is non-random and purposive (selected for particular creative roles and at a diversity of companies), but it was subject to accessibility. I did not have access to a representative sample of industry creative professionals. Neither did I have awareness of all professionals in the region; others chose not to participate. The idea behind the interview design was that it would yield "jointly constructed knowledge," or "co-construct[ed] meaning," with my project being informed both by my theoretical approaches or research and the participants' lived experiences (Vogt, Gardner, and Haeffele 44; Rossman and Rallis 180).

Because of the difficulty reaching theme park creative professionals, personal interviews were supplemented with archival research including books or articles professionals have written, audio or visual presentations, and interviews on news sites or fan sites. This allows for a greater assortment of informants in terms of background and discipline. Because of the public popularity of theme parks in addition to various fandoms, there are many existing sources that are relevant. These sources still include primary data, but it is primary data collected by secondary sources and not for the purposes of my work. Thus, the coding process was more challenging because often these sources do not directly address my questions. Also, there is "no such thing as a completely neutral collection" of archival data; my interpretation is "built into" this collection of

sources whether it be because of search parameters, locations I use (generally fan websites or popular media sources, though there are a few design texts included with different audiences), keywords I focused on, or other factors (Vogt, Gardner, and Haefele 87). Not being able to follow up with most of these previously published interviews or presentations means that the analysis relies solely on my interpretations without their clarification. Despite these limitations, I was able to locate a large quantity of applicable sources that discuss storytelling within theme parks and I use them to augment the primary interview research. Numerous sources exist in this area, so there will be more of this source type than personal interviews, another limitation. Nonetheless, Rossman and Rallis remind, and I intend to remember, that, “no studies are perfect; that findings are tentative and conditional; that knowledge is elusive and approximate; and that our claims should be humble; given the extraordinary complexity of the social world we want to learn more about” (134). It would be impossible, in other words, to capture the perspectives of every theme park creative professional or even every way that parks tell stories, but this study can still lend valuable insight into the topic and provide groundwork for future examinations.

Finally, field research was undertaken for this research to supplement years of informal observation. This included going to themed entertainment venues, taking notes, partaking in storytelling expressions, and conducting interviews. The Texts and Technology Dissertation Research Award from the University of Central Florida helped with trips to Georgia, Tennessee, and Virginia. Seminole State College of Florida, Breda University of Applied Sciences, and Efteling theme park assisted with research in the Netherlands. Other locations were visited with my own funds. In general, there is no substitute for on-site experience.

## *Coding*

After collecting all of the data and organizing it in an index, it was coded, synthesized, and analyzed. Coding involves not just organizing or labeling data but filtering data, linking it, finding patterns, “generating categories, themes, and concepts, grasping meaning, and/or building theory” (Saldaña 8). The coding progression followed the process in W. Paul Vogt, Dianne Gardner, and Lynne Haeffele: begin with the research questions, determine concepts within the research questions, specify by breaking into “variables, categories, or attributes,” create definitions from these, and split these into things like components, symptoms, causes, and proxies (326). The coding followed the paradigm of *qualitative content analysis*, which is “used to interpret meaning from the content of data” (Hsieh and Shannon 1277). This study involves *directed content analysis*, which begins with “relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes” (1277). In this case, concepts from existing literature were applied for the first round of coding (things like “implicit storytelling” or “transmedia storytelling”). As Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah Shannon explain, once these terms are applied to the data, the remaining information can be coded as a new category or as subcategories of existing concepts. They observe that this approach is useful as research can be “supported and extended,” but it also has the limitation of the presence of bias (entering the data with preconceived notions) (1293).

Of coding methods associated with content analysis, the one that made sense for the “first cycle” of coding was *structural coding*. This method applies a phrase to “a segment of data that relates to a specific research question” (Saldaña 66). Structural coding is advantageous because it “both codes and initially categorizes the data corpus” (67). Structural coding does not allow for the same kind of line-by-line discovery, but by focusing on answering the research questions, the coding is driven by what the project is setting out to learn. For this process, structural codes were

assigned for attributes like “philosophies,” “observations,” or “techniques.” These aspects were then color coded based on which chapters they belonged in.

Once the initial cycle of coding was complete, a “second cycle” coding method, *pattern coding*, was used, which helps “identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation,” or find patterns from the initial data groupings (Saldaña 152). For instance, all of the philosophies regarding storytelling’s importance to human culture were grouped together to search for commonalities and differences. After the coding process, the study proceeded to analysis and synthesis of the data, with its results peppered throughout the dissertation based on its logical fit. As Johnny Saldaña posits, though coding and analysis are different steps, “coding *is* analysis” when it is used as an “analytic tactic” (7). However, I have kept it in my mind throughout this practice that despite the systematizing quality of coding work, the process and analysis are still fundamentally subjective.

### **The Central Metaphor of “De Sprookjessprokkelaar”**

The primary metaphor I employ to convey the idea of theme park as storyteller is taken from the Dutch theme park Efteling (1952). One character, “De Sprookjessprokkelaar,” or the gatherer and teller of fairy tales, originated in a book developed in conjunction with the theme park (see fig. 1). The book *De Sprookjes-Sprokkelaar* (2014) was written by Paul van Loon, a celebrated Dutch children’s writer, and Princess Laurentien van Oranje, a member of the Dutch royal family who champions literacy. It was illustrated by artist Alessio Castellini, Efteling’s character designer. The book emphasizes the power of storytelling and fairy tales to individuals and communities. “Everything has a story,” according to character Grandpa Anders, and “stories are important.” A central aspect of the written tale is the Fairytale Library, the “most beautiful library in the world,” filled with “books and stories from around the world” collected by Count

Stanislav, the missing owner of Castle Libersteyn. The in-park character carries magical branches (“tovertakken”), which represent these gathered stories. These stories are passed on to Grandpa Anders, to a little girl (Star), and to multiple people in the nearby village.



Figure 1: De Sprookjessprokkelaar in a coloring page, in the stage musical, and walking in the park (Photos: two on left ©Efteling, used with permission; on right, Moniek Hover)

Within Efteling, the Sprookjessprokkelaar lives in the Fairytale Forest and collects tales he then communicates to visitors. Website language from early 2016 clarified that “he hopes that fairy tales and stories never get lost and always will be told.” The website calls him “one of the oldest inhabitants of the Fairytale Forest” despite his being only a few-year old character. However, the phrase makes sense, as the character is an embodiment of the spirit of storytelling. He represents the idea of communal authorship. Not only does the character collect tales from all around, but he was composed by the standard industry practice of collaborative work. The original book itself is composed by entities connected to the culture of the Netherlands, and the theme park iterations (the walk around character and the theatre show *Sprookjessprokkelaar: de Musical*, continuing the transmedia property) were created by an even larger group. I use this character and his functions to symbolize the creative process, the collaborative authorship of theme park stories, the collecting and disseminating of tales, the family connection within parks, the community setting, and the innate human desire for storytelling. In the book, storytelling is

shown in both individual and communal settings, and stories heal everything from loneliness to anger and jealousy. In the park, the public setting and community spirit remain, with visitors from young to old partaking in the ritual of sitting around listening to a story.

### **Significance of the Research**

Robert Scholes observes that in the literature field, there is a hierarchy that preferences literature over non-literature and the academic over the real world. Importantly, he asserts, “we privilege consumption over production, just as the larger culture privileges the consuming class over the producing class” (5). He denotes that the act of interpretation is part of consumption, whereas the creation of the text itself is production. Johanna Drucker and Emily McVarish concur that “the gap between thinking and making is crucial to all forms of design” (6). This binary has particularly manifested itself in the discussion of theme parks, which are seen most positively as “industrial art” or “commercial art” and most derisively as indoctrination tools, merely business, and not art at all. There came to be a “distinction between a work of fine art and a commercial product, or more specifically between the creative artist and the commercial artist or designer” despite compelling commercial art or the presence of the patronage system in many great works (Kluver 225). The interpreter is privileged over the creator (and usually over the visitor) in most approaches related to themed entertainment. Thus, in addition to the description of theme park storytelling and the exploration of the theme park as a narrative medium, this study seeks to fill a gap in the literature. To answer questions about techniques, design styles, and storytelling philosophies, I use the words of those in the profession of creating themed entertainment rather than rely solely on scholarship or observation.

King argues that theme parks are “not well studied or positioned intellectually,” and Greil Marcus confirms that the “real literature remains to be written” (“The Theme” 2; 207). Disney



legend Marty Sklar agreed that theme parks are not traditionally seen as “legitimate subjects” (qtd. in Marling 13). The representation of creative voices is a particularly weak area in the scholarship. While there are books and articles written by creative professionals, they tend to be directed towards a popular audience, fans, or fellow professionals. It is clear that creative professionals in themed entertainment see themselves as storytellers and possess narrative philosophies and values. As evidenced through quotes by Walt Disney or the first important work on theme park design by John Hench, there is a sixty-year history of self-reflection and disciplinary perspectives to take into account. Before scholars or fans recognized that the theme park is a new medium, designers themselves did so. Designer and creative executive Bob Rogers outlines that creative professionals see the theme park as “art,” “science,” and “enterprise” (qtd. in Niles, “An Insider’s”). Despite this amalgam of statuses, academic engagement generally concentrates on the “enterprise” without recognizing the theme park as an interesting form of art or a technology filled with technologies. Design director Taylor Jeffs admits that theme parks have “long been a marginalized industry widely dismissed as an art form.” He and his colleagues want to “elevate the medium” and help it realize its “full potential,” but scholarship and public discourse about the medium can assist with this task.

In Robert Ray’s essay on how to start an avant-garde, he emphasizes the “role of theory and publicity” (79). Publicity is certainly common to theme parks, but the theory of theme parks appears to be essentially unknown to all but the designers themselves and the most dedicated fans. As King confirms, “Here is a new artform with ancient roots, widely appreciated and supported by the public but not well understood at an intellectual level” (“The Theme” 1). Cartoonist Ian Kay would agree with the more specific focus of this dissertation: “Theme parks and narratives have been revolutionizing one another for the better part of a century, and the

results have been fascinating. Despite that, their relationship is barely being studied” (“Bi-Narrative”). Standard visitors are largely oblivious to theme park design theories, and scholars often omit these voices in favor of an interpretation that fits their own theoretical standpoints rather than reflecting the actual intentions of the designers. Interpretation of Disney parks especially becomes about “illustrations of pet ideas” (Bryman, *Disney* ix).

Artists and authors throughout the ages have theorized their own work and the principles of movements or cultures they are a part of. It is evident from the interviews of, presentations by, and pieces written by creative theme park personnel that they seek to theorize their own work. In literary studies, the perspective of the author is often essential for understanding the text, especially in biographical criticism, gender criticism, and other approaches. It might be harder to grasp a particular interpretation in collaborative development like theme parks, but though the process and interpretation might be muddled, it is still worth considering. In much the same way that not all film studies scholars believe in the voice of a single “auteur,” it is even harder to pinpoint a single creative vision in theme park projects. Nonetheless, Espen Aarseth states that “To be an ‘author’ (as opposed to a mere ‘writer’) means to have configurative power over not merely content but also over a work’s genre and form” (*Cybertext* 164). Though it is a collective, this is indeed what creative professionals do in theme parks, though, like with most art and culture, they may conform to the expectations of the audience and the industry. In this case, it is valuable to listen to a multitude of voices to grasp the contexts of artistic creation in visitor attractions. One limitation in looking at this population is that it is usually the most prominent creators who get press, and more minor roles might be forgotten or absent. That does not take away the crucial role of creative voices and their active construction of not only design techniques but philosophical systems and paradigms.

In Ray's conception, formal, external criticism can be an impetus for creative understanding; as he explains, "theory and publicity turn out to be the principal tools for influencing the ways in which art will acquire meaning" (82). The artistic movement combined with public or scholarly understanding can help to co-create art. However, with theme parks, this is a gap that has taken a long time to close. More constructive standpoints in academic spaces have started to emerge in the last decade. Only a small handful of scholarly sources related to theme parks actually acknowledge or quote creative professionals. Relationships between academia and industry are beginning to materialize, with a few theme parks (i.e. Dubai Parks and Resorts, Efteling, the Orlando theme parks) working with academic institutions and the Themed Entertainment Association (TEA) actively cultivating this with their SATE series (Storytelling + Architecture + Technology = Experience), whose program includes theoretical perspectives from multiple voices. Nonetheless, theme parks are undertheorized as an art form, likely because of scholarly biases against commercial or industrial art, mass media, or what might be recognized as byproducts of the theme park experience ("bread and circuses," consumerism, consumption of popular art and culture). There are valid points in these interpretations, but it remains that theme parks are an art form that, like fine arts, have design techniques, story structures, and creative standpoints. Janet Murray offers, "A new genre grows from a community of practice elaborating expressive conventions" ("From Game" 10). Rohde mentions not only that theme park design is a profession with a "body of knowledge" but that "Art requires discipline, structure, and a standard by which it is recognized to be art" (qtd. in Younger 535). If designers and fans recognize this as a complex art form, it is about time for scholarship to do the same. Recent trends in scholarship have given academic attention to new media including video games or

creative hypertexts. The theme park, essentially a contemporary media form with traditional roots, is a relevant subject for these approaches.

Theme parks are leisure spaces visited by hundreds of millions of people annually and they contribute to the human practice of storytelling, so it is valuable to understand this phenomenon in more depth. This work attempts to trace the history, form, and nature of the medium. To date, there has not been a comprehensive look at the connection between the world's most common pastime and one of the world's most popular leisure activities despite its pervasiveness. It is also an undertheorized area within Texts and Technology fields despite the emphasis on emerging media and narratives. Other contemporary narrative mediums like video games or interactive fiction have been studied, but I am unaware of any large-scale look into theme parks and storytelling. Additionally, themed entertainment venues are rarely theorized as an art form, but in their environmental storytelling and architectural features, they are a unique genre of spatial art. There are numerous fruitful areas to explore when considering theme parks and their narrative or artistic features and capabilities. I hope that this dissertation will be an original contribution to these areas and that it will inspire further research.

## **Definitions**

Before beginning the detailed look at theme parks and attractions, it is vital to establish key definitions. These are listed here in alphabetical order and related surrounding debates for terms are included.

### *Amusement Park versus Theme Park*

The *Travel Industry Dictionary* defines an amusement park as a “recreational attraction featuring mechanical rides and other forms of active entertainment.” The site differentiates this from a theme park, which is an amusement park that “follows a particular motif.” Birgit

Pikkemaat and Markus Schukert narrow this further: “What seems to distinguish theme parks from other amusement parks or from attractions is a core theme of the park which runs through all or many park attractions. The theme becomes the main part of the experience” (201). This generally means a site that is based on a particular theme or a park that has multiple themes within the single place. Over the last half century, parks evolved from the amusement park model to “popular mass-market, multi-activity, themed destinations” (Hollinshead 270).

The amusement park is a longstanding concept, with some well over a century old. The term tends to be associated historically with old European parks (i.e. Dyrehavsbakken, Tivoli Gardens, Vienna Prater, Blackpool Pleasure Beach), early attractions in Coney Island, New York (e.g. Luna Park, Dreamland, Steeplechase Park) and traditional parks that have survived the advent of theme parks (Lake Compounce, Cedar Point, Six Flags New England, Kennywood, etc.). There were over 2000 amusement parks in the United States during their heyday, but they faded out due to the Great Depression, relocation into suburbs, sites becoming impoverished or razed for land value, the advent of television or cinema, and the continual peril of fire (Adams; N. Harris; Rabinovitz). Though there were other attractions that involved theming (or the building of a setting or idea), theme parks are nearly universally associated with the opening of Disneyland in 1955, which late industry economic researcher Harrison “Buzz” Price called a revolution that “sparked a chain reaction that still echoes through the industry today” (83).

It is fruitful to understand what a “theme” is to grasp the difference between amusement parks and theme parks. As insinuated in Pikkemaat and Schukert’s description, in many cases, theme is closer to “motif,” a concrete, reoccurring image within spaces or attraction media, instead of “theme,” which is a “more generalized or abstract concept that is suggested by, among other things, motifs” (Abbott 237). For instance, pirate objects are a motif, but they could

suggest a theme of adventure. Keith Hollinshead denotes theme as a “unifying idea,” closer to the literary definition (269). Nonetheless, it is still common to say “that ride is themed to pirates,” and symbolic details are often used to help visitors comprehend either an attraction theme or a narrative. There is some debate here with Rohde asserting that theme is a noun, not a verb (“Disney’s Animal Kingdom”). As he argues, “You cannot theme a thing. A theme is the underlying value system upon which a story is built” (“Disney’s Animal Kingdom”). Again, though, it is common practice to use phrases like “that land has excellent theming” and mean details or artifacts related to setting rather than an underlying value. To make it easier to discern, Younger differentiates between the *manifestation theme* and the *dramatic theme*. The manifestation theme refers to the “setting or subject a land presents,” or the more common usage of the word theme with what the space presents in terms of time, place, and topic (Younger 47). On the other hand, the dramatic theme is focused on what the visitor will experience, from a “single emotion the designer wishes to evoke in the guest” to a more weighty topic such as the “intrinsic value of nature” (65). In either case, like literary themes, the themes are usually purposefully inserted by designers and subject to the interpretation of visitors.

Over the years, scholars and those in industry have increased the philosophical division between amusement parks, with amusement parks using roller coasters and thrill rides as the primary draw and theme parks having sometimes elaborate theming, storytelling, and other kinds of experiences as the main attractions. Despite this now stark contrast, theme parks still contain thrill rides and roller coasters while amusement parks have been systematically adding more narrative experiences like dark rides. Ady Milman argues that contemporary guests actually prefer a “thrill experience blended with a story” (“The Global” 232). Nonetheless, designer Eddie Sotto finds immersion to be what separates a place like Disneyland from an amusement

park (“Why”). Concept developer Ross Osterman agrees, as while amusement parks are “fun,” they do not “deliver the level of immersion or storytelling that a theme park does.” Baxter believes that this art of “making it an experience where you go to a world” is creating a “different audience” than at an amusement park, and he points to the staggering gap between attendance at theme parks and amusement parks in the Los Angeles region (qtd. in Padva). Design coordinator Kirsten Kischuk draws the example of an amusement park shoot-the-chutes ride versus the adventure experience of Pirates of the Caribbean (personal interview). Pieter Cornelis avows that while the primary purpose of amusement parks is “amusement and pleasure,” the theme park’s objective, as it is closely related to culture and symbolism, is “meaning” (32). Schneider extends meaning to emotion, saying “It is the desire for this emotive experience that has set theme parks apart from amusement parks” (272). Creative director Henry Corrado agrees: “An amusement ride provides sensations, while visitors are also asking for emotions and feelings; they are looking for attractions that tell a real story.” The dichotomy remains, so the majority of the examples in this project will be from entities that can be categorized as theme parks.

Some would claim that it is precisely *storytelling* that distinguishes a theme park from an amusement park. In his definition of themed spaces, Scott Lukas states they have “an overarching narrative, symbolic complex, or story that drives the overall context of their environs” (“Introduction” 3). Kay notes that unlike amusement parks, theme parks are unified by a “narrative concept” (“Bi-Narrative”). Osterman says that stories are what “help differentiate between what an amusement park is and what a theme park is.” Rohde defines a theme park as “a place where you walk inside a story” (“Rappler”). Creative executive Anthony Esparza notes that “Storytelling *is* the industry. Theme parks would just be amusement parks without it.” While

early parks used “slapstick,” theme parks became about the “narrative principles of storytelling” (Rabinovitz, *Electric* 143). Jacqueline Botterill finds that at Disney parks, “The storytelling element is as vital to the success of the theme park as the new rides added each year” (126). Kischuk likewise mentions amusement parks as “steel parks” with only “rudimentary” storytelling, whereas theme parks “present the guest with a narrative they can participate in” (*A Prototype* 4). Christina Harris makes a strong claim to this effect: “The term ‘amusement park’ means ‘a place to be amused’ whereas a ‘theme park’ means ‘a place for stories’. Generally, an amusement park has little or no theme and is simply a collection of rides while a theme park is like a three-dimensional story and its guests are active participants in the narrative” (50). Even spaces designated as theme parks have varying levels of thematic details and narrative expressions, but theme parks do tend to have more stories than amusement parks (including backstories for attractions, lands, and sometimes whole parks). Throughout this dissertation, I intend to illustrate that story is closely related to the designation of *theme park*.

### *Dark Rides*

Generally involving an enclosed, tracked ride that goes through dark spaces, *dark rides* originated with older concepts like ghost trains and scenic railways, old mills or tunnels of love, and Pretzel rides. Luna Park’s 1903 A Trip to the Moon, transported from the 1901 Exposition, was an early dark ride concept that included motion and effects. Rides like the River Caves at Blackpool Pleasure Beach followed the water tunnel model and eventually added elaborate themed rooms of various world landmarks. “Traditional” dark rides generally involved multiple gag elements and blacklit scenes with little to no narrative engagement; the “haunted” or scary/horror theme was the most common (Samuelson and Yegoians 68). Single-rail dark rides from Pretzel Amusement Company were of these type; there were “over a thousand Pretzel rides



during the golden age of amusement parks in America” (“First Laff”). These were different from the traditional Old Mill ride (a dark canal ride) because they were “dry” and had a “single electric track through a darkened pavilion” (“Laughter”). Some traditional dark rides remain at traveling fairs and amusement parks. Though the Haunted Mansion at Knoebels dates from 1973, it is considered traditional because of its themes, effects, and Pretzel cars. The more recent Ghost Blasters model from Sally Corporation (part of an attempt to “rejuvenate dark rides and the regional theme park market”) represents the traditional dark ride at multiple amusement parks, but it adds the contemporary concept of interactivity, in this case shooting at ghost targets with laser guns (creative executive John Wood qtd. in “Sally”).

Disneyland’s “Fantasyland Classics” (Alice in Wonderland, Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride, Peter Pan’s Flight, Pinocchio’s Daring Journey, and Snow White’s Scary Adventures) represent a midpoint between traditional dark rides and “modern” dark rides, as they use similar sight gags and ultraviolet light but tend to have linear narratives. The *Themed Attraction* website confirms, “Dark rides are the staple of a theme park because they are story-oriented rides and generally focus on a storytelling experience” (MSS, “An Introduction”). Disney referred to “it’s a small world” as a dark ride back in the 1960s, and that might be the beginning of the modern dark ride, which is often elaborate and in more open or larger spaces than traditional dark rides. Shortly after “it’s a small world,” Disney’s rides Pirates of the Caribbean and the Haunted Mansion opened; they continue to be some of the most popular modern dark rides.

Contemporary dark ride concepts involve trackless ride systems, hybrid concepts (dark rides combined with other ride genres), and greater levels of immersion. An example of the latter is Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey, which carries the story before the queue (the standard term for an attraction’s waiting line), within the queue, and in the attraction. Perhaps because of

the market for interactivity, creative executive John Wood has seen the “resurgence of dark rides today” with a “worldwide” demand for them (qtd. in Palicki, “Justice”).



Figure 2: Haunted Castle at Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, a recent traditional dark ride; Under the Sea - Journey of the Little Mermaid at Magic Kingdom, a recent modern dark ride (Photos: Author)

The Darkride and Funhouse Enthusiasts group classifies an attraction as a dark ride if it has the following characteristics: enclosed, dark interior, lighting effects, ride vehicle on a track or flume, scenery used to “produce the ride experience” (they can be simple or complex, but there are specific scenes to look at), and sound effects (gags, music, narration, etc.) (“What Is a Darkride”). They use “darkride” as one word to denote the dark ride genre as opposed to rides that happen to be dark; this project will stick with the common usage, “dark ride.”

### *Narrative and Story*

Narrative can be defined as being the pair of *story* and *narrative discourse* as established by narrative theory. Story will be taken in the narratological sense of a sequence of events in chronological order understood only through narrative discourse, or the telling of story through particular methods. H. Porter Abbot defines, “Narrative is the representation of an event or a series of events” (13). Simply, the story is what is being told (the *fabula*, or raw material) and the narrative is how it is told (the *szujet*, or its organization). The word *plot* can be distinguished from both story and narrative as the “underlying causality that binds [story] events together,”

whether they are narrated or not (Cobley). Another term that can be associated is *storyworld*, or the place and conditions in which the story is set. A theme park can be a *narrative text*, or “a text in which an agent relates (‘tells’) a story in a particular medium, such as language, imagery, sound, buildings, or a combination thereof” (Bal 5). Theme parks would be described by the latter, as they are an amalgam of forms.

Abbott explains that a few theorists have specific rules for calling something a narrative including how many plot events occur, how related the events are, or how long the work is. N. Katherine Hayles says “chronology, intention, and causality” are “intrinsic” to narrative (229). Marie-Laure Ryan finds that while narrative used to refer to simply the representation of events, others have added rules about “change,” “causality,” “logical relation,” and “conflict” (“Toward” 23). However, these constraints would be difficult to maintain in theme park settings. For this dissertation, a dark ride that traverses show scenes with story content or even a still life scene that is symbolic of or alludes to a known fairy tale (a use of *synecdoche*, a substitution of a part for the whole) will be considered narrative, as it is meant to recall and represent a series of events. Also, King explains that while rides can be “narrative experience,” theme parks are “cultural narratives” that provide an “index to culture in themselves,” expanding the definition of the narrative space (“The Theme” 3, 6).

Yiannis Gabriel distinguishes between storytelling and narrative, saying “not all narratives are stories” (one could narrate a nonstory) and that “entertainment distinguishes stories from other narratives” (5, 10). Gabriel continues, “Stories are emotionally and symbolically charged narratives. They do not present information or fact about ‘events,’ but they enrich, enhance and infuse facts with meaning” (135). Cornelis makes a differentiation when he details what Disney does in their work: “Disney not only applies narrative in a very detailed way, but it

also practices storytelling” (127). Gabriel notes Aristotle’s suggestion that storytelling is a “*poetic activity* involving the symbolic elaboration of narrative material” (10). Gabriel, in fact, cautions us not to conflate story and narrative when he asserts “by obliterating distinctions between stories and other types of texts and narratives, stories lose precisely the power that they are meant to possess – namely, the power to generate and sustain meanings” (6). Despite these strong words, “narrative” and “storytelling” will be used interchangeably in this work as this is keeping in line with the narratological sense and because themed entertainment designers widely do this. As clarified below, designers, while they might use these terms frequently, tend to mean plot-, character-, or setting-driven narratives; they rarely mean other kinds of narratives (simple statements of facts or informational speeches, for instance), though themed spaces occasionally employ these non-story narratives.

One notable distinction might be that a narrative implies a “narrator,” an obvious entity relating the story. Hayles asserts, “The word *narrator* implies a voice speaking, and a speaking voice implies a sense of presence,” though she admits that stories have become more virtual with less emphasis on the human voice or space (conversely, space is essential to theme park narrative) (43). Abbott finds other scholars who argue it “cannot be a narrative without someone to tell it,” but he agrees that this would exclude art forms like drama or film (238). The quality of *narrativity*, or the “the degree to which a text generates the impression that it is a narrative,” is often clear in some theme park attractions while not in others, and some of this feeling may be related to the degree of narrator presence (238). However, like with movies, the narrator of a theme park attraction is not always evident to a visitor. The creators of an attraction might be the hidden narrator, as they interpreted the story through architecture or effects, but many attractions

do not have explicit narration. Many do, and these will be noted, but attractions will be called narratives and examples of storytelling regardless of the presence of an overt narrator.

### *Storytelling Debate*

Theme parks frequently tell stories, and this is a foundational concept for the rest of the dissertation, but it is an idea that does have a surrounding debate. Storytelling is not the only quality present in theme parks; certainly architecture, technology, and human resources are all part of the “show” (though components that might assist with narrative). Osterman lists environment, immersion, thrill, and fun as components other than storytelling. Several people perceive storytelling as a distinguishing feature of theme parks. Disney legend John Hench considered themed environments “places designed so that every element contributes to telling a story” (1). Deborah Philips says, “A major strategy for theming is the employment of story” (95). Alan Bryman concurs when he deems “theming” to be “the application of a narrative to institutions or locations” (*Disneyization* 15). In some perspectives, theming is distinct from storytelling. Something could have minimal motif applications and have no implicit or explicit connection to a story. However, in the view of those most aligned with storytelling in themed environments, something should not be just themed; the themes and motifs should be symbolic of the story the space is trying to tell. Clavé mentions that when designing a theme park attraction, “Everything starts with a story” (181). According to Lukas, story is the “basis of the theme park” (*Theme* 189). Writer and creative consultant Larry Tuch argues for story underlying all themed entertainment, acting as the “Bible” that drives the design process (personal interview). Likewise, creative executive Drew Hunter states, “We start everything on story and go from there.” Creative executive Bob Allen agrees: “the story has to come first” when designing an attraction; it “all starts with story.” He answered the question of what his

organization does with “we tell stories.” Even when story is not visible to guests, it can be “used as a strategic outline in guiding the design process” (Littaye and Didier 32). Esparza says storytelling is the “foundation of everything we do” and its “DNA.” Rohde likewise advocates for a “rigorous application of narrative design principles to all aspects of a project” (“From Myth”). Younger calls story the “differentiating factor for the theme park” (83). Many in the industry privilege story above other aspects of themed design.

Others, however, do not agree. Disney legend Marc Davis once indicated that theme parks are “not a storytelling medium” and that rides are “experiences” but not “stories” (qtd. in Merritt, “Interviews”). Younger infers in this quote that Davis was referring specifically to plot structure; Davis preferred guests feeling “part of a world” instead of overlaying a plot (personal interview). This makes sense when considering that Davis said, “You don’t have a story that starts at a beginning and goes until the end” (qtd. in Merritt, “Interviews”). Younger also attributes Davis’s viewpoint to the difference in technology: “They didn’t have the control over show action that modern designers have. Show action now can be used to deliver to-the-millisecond triggered effects that allow the communication of story” (personal interview). Project manager and engineer Michelle Hicks discusses how The Gruffalo River Ride Adventure illustrates that kind of control: “The boats flow through the water freely, and their speed varies depending on the number of guests in each boat. To combat this, we have used triggers throughout the ride to change the lighting and start audio and animatronics, so that every guest has the same experience” (qtd. in Gilling, “Merlin’s”). This recent ride has similar features to Pirates of the Caribbean, the attraction Davis meant in his commentary, but technologies and design have ensured that designers have control over narrative beats and story events.

However, there is less interpretation to be found in other detractors of story-based design. King admits that “the term storytelling may be overused” (qtd. in Lukas, *Immersive* 44). Ride designer John Wardley contends that storytelling is “overemphasized” by designers and that visitors tend to “overlook” the narrative aspects of the parks (qtd. in Younger 84). Design director Tim Kirk explains that there are three levels of guest desire for story engagement: “The Waders just want to walk around and see pretty pictures. The Swimmers want to get a little deeper; they might want some backstory, they might want to get into it a little more. And the Divers really want to know every shred of information that exists about that particularly subject” (qtd. in Younger 84). Regardless of preferences, guests might feel “story apathy” (84). Rogers believes his company (BRC Imagination Arts) is “rooted in creating immersive, story-based experiences,” but he also argues that many cannot tell the difference between “story or a plot or a building,” with many things being described as story and the word being thrown around a lot (qtd. in Lukas, *Immersive* 216; qtd. in Korkis, “Bob”). Producer and creative director Christopher Stapleton finds that while there can be stories in theme parks, they might be “shallow” and lack the “breadth and depth” of stories in other contexts like education (qtd. in Sasha, “Interview”).

Theme park fans have also grappled with the issue. According to Louis Proserpi, “Overuse of the term story and the strong emphasis on story and storytelling employed by WDI is considered somewhat controversial on some internet blogs and discussion boards” (23). An example of this is fan analyst Foxx Nolte who finds story to be a “lie” perpetuated by Disney; she notes that “aesthetics,” “experience,” “emotion,” and “architecture” are the more important operators in the themed environment (“Elements”). One of her posts illustrates why environmental design can be a “substitution” for a storyline (“In Doorless”). Nonetheless, Nolte confirms that some attractions purposely tell stories, and she refers to them as “morsel size

‘storylets’” with lots of conflict (“Conflict”). Nolte’s earlier criticism deals with Disney’s overuse of the term story; the medium is narrative but may not be plot-based. Her reflections include that theme park architecture can “suggest narratives,” there may be narrative “inherent” in certain designs, plot elements are not always necessary because the main character in the theme park is always the visitor, and the inciting incident “already happened when we entered the park” (“Conflict”). Prosperi refers to arguments that the constant discussion of story simplifies what creative professionals do and that some early Imagineers did not see themselves as storytellers, like Davis (23). I would argue that many designers now use story as a *modus operandi* and that some fans conflate “story” and “plot.”

Other designers remark on the overuse of the word. Jeffs admits that Disney is preoccupied with the term story but newcomers to the industry do not always understand the definition in the theme park context; it is “one of the most commonly misunderstood aspects of design.” Creative director Charlie Otte agrees that Disney and others have emphasized that it is “all about story” and the word is “tossed around a lot” and “overused,” which has diminished the term somewhat when applied everywhere. He associates storytelling with meaning, a dramatic theme, and characters who have “effected change,” not merely overlaying a plot on an attraction or slapping décor on it. Engineer and executive Steve Alcorn makes the connection between other fiction and theme park stories: “In fiction, story is a character’s emotional journey of change. It’s about a character having to overcome an internal flaw in order to solve an external problem. A good theme park attraction takes guests on this same emotional journey” (personal interview). He observes that rides are not always the best container for storytelling; shows are better at this. Esparza designates “having a purpose” and “evoking emotion” as essential to storytelling. Show writer Darryl Pickett finds “meaning” to be vital to any theme park story



(“Story... Writing”). Kischuk finds the industry occasionally being “locked into things needing to be a certain way,” namely traditional linear storytelling, when in reality, “the media form that we use actually leaves the structure and storytelling techniques a lot more wide open than with traditional media” (personal interview). She notices that “we may put too much emphasis on the need for there to be a well-packaged story when what we are giving guests is really an experience within a story world” (personal interview). Thus, even for those invested in theme parks, there is a healthy debate.

A divided viewpoint exists about the very definition and layers of storytelling possible. Humorously, Allen offers that asking a half dozen storytellers what the components of story are would yield “thirty-six answers and a fist fight.” Moniek Hover explains *explicit* storytelling, or stories told through oral or written narrative, and *implicit* storytelling, or stories told through visual cues and architecture (“The Efteling”). However, she too notes that some in the industry have used storytelling as a “container concept” that encompasses “all kinds of theming and decoration” and not just traditional storytelling; creative director Alex Wright notices the same problem and calls it “applying ornament” (personal interview; *Disney’s Animal* 41). Younger denotes three primary types of storytelling in parks: 1. *Experiential*, where only the “high concept” of the attraction is related to story and the attraction is about the visitor experiencing the place; 2. *Implicit*, which sets out to “establish a rich story-world, but tell little if any explicit story within it” (99); and 3. *Explicit*, the most direct form of communicating story to the guest, “leaving little room for interpretation” (100). These different expressions are often found at the same theme parks or even within single themed lands.

Pickett usefully observes that industry professionals have varying definitions of storytelling. He distinguishes them as follows: 1. *Narrative*, with a beginning, middle, and end

that often retells a story; 2. *Literary*, with overriding, archetypal stories that may establish full-park narratives like Disney's Animal Kingdom ("humanity versus the environment" or "technology is out of balance"); 3. *Setting*, with an experience being located in a particular background (akin to delivering a storyworld but not necessarily the narrative); and 4. *Guest experience*, with an attraction being defined by what the guest will participate in (especially applicable in thrill attractions and interactive shooter rides, according to him), similar to Younger's experiential storytelling (personal interview). Pickett states that the same designers may define the term differently "depending on the nature of the project" or based on the client they are working with (personal interview).

Similarly, Tuch observes those who see narrative in the story-driven experience sense and those who see it as either part of the architectural programming process or as just an "applique" that can be applied to an existing project. Tuch identifies three levels of story commonly used in themed entertainment: the *storyworld* (setting, placemaking, "atmosphere," and the more active process of visitor "evocation"), *backstory* (often more implicit), and *story-driven experience* (which correlates more with explicit storytelling). Creative executive Phil Hetteema describes the most common form of theme park storytelling as *situational*, or "placing the viewer into a world where much of the story is already understood or in place" (qtd. in Palicki, "Phil"). This could be done with an environment that conveys story messages or by utilizing an intellectual property where visitors already know the backstory.

Overall, Younger calls how much plot or narrative should be added to an attraction the "biggest debate in theme park storytelling" (98). Wright clarifies that the meaning of story depends on the venue (park, attraction, restaurant, etc.) and the goals of the project. He notes, "The ratio of narrative plot explication versus experiential can fall anywhere along a very broad

spectrum” (Wright, *Disney California* 49). Wright sees that the park is a “storytelling environment” and a “place where stories can happen,” emphasizing the dimensional elements of the theme park (49). It may also depend on the designer, as Younger finds that the debate consists of designers who believe attractions should provide “building blocks” for guests to create their own stories within a world while others see it as a storytelling medium where “the theme park should endeavor to tell rich, orchestrated, fast-paced stories equivalent to film” (98). Most parks, however, seem to contain a diversity of these approaches.

Despite the lack of consensus, it is necessary to prioritize one of them or the criteria for this project cannot be established. This project will focus primarily on intentional attraction narratives with mentions of settings, motifs, and all-land or all-park themes or narratives whether explicit or implicit. Similar to Younger’s “experiential storytelling” or Pickett’s “guest experience” notion, creative executive Olaf Vugts emphasizes that all attractions have a story if bringing in social, personal, emotional, physical, and others contexts to the experience (personal interview; Hover and Vugts). Tamberly Husson clarifies that theme parks can create “memory and personal narrative” (14). Even postmodern theorist Louis Marin found Disneyland to be a space for “thousands and thousands of narratives uttered by visitors.” Main Street. U.S.A. is a place that begins the visitors’ attempt to “tell a story” or “narrate their story.” Similarly, Murray says, “In environments based on the amusement park model, the story and the visit can be tightly meshed” (*Hamlet* 109). These notions illustrate that there are many layers of storytelling occurring at all times in the cultural sites that are theme parks. I accept this and will consider it more in future work, but this dissertation concentrates on the purposeful storytelling of designers, not the simultaneous narratives of guests.

Nonetheless, there are occasionally times in which multiple stories in one space are intentional. Kay explains that an attraction like Disney's Splash Mountain operates on two levels, or a "Bi-Narrative Structure." This includes an *Observable Story* and an *Experiential Story*; the former is the third-person story that the guest views other characters going through, and the latter is the second-person story the guest is experiencing by traveling through a series of events simultaneously. As he explains it, "The Observable Story builds an environment around us, and the Experiential Story lets us explore it. This relationship is the very basis of the art of theme parks" ("Bi-Narrative"). Younger's levels of theming, mentioned earlier, encompass the dramatic theme, the theme if looking at it as a literary work with overarching meaning and the manifestation theme, the physical manifestation of this theme, or theming in the medium-specific sense (1). Rohde endorses the idea of "various levels of meaning" in stories and experiences where guests looking for a larger story will find it ("From Myth"). These intentional multiple layers of storytelling will be explored within the dissertation, though there will not be space to interrogate the ways in which designers or visitors might interpret these same stories and layers.

### *Themed Entertainment*

While most of the examples in this dissertation will focus on spaces labeled "theme parks," it is important to note that many other forms count as "themed entertainment," "location-based entertainment," or "experiential entertainment" and employ principles of themed entertainment design. These include certain casinos, cruise ships, dinner shows, escape games, events (e.g. seasonal like Halloween), heritage sites, hotels, interactive theatre, malls, restaurants, retail shops, themed mazes, and waterparks. Other visitor attractions like museums, zoos, and even homes, whole towns, and spaces within cities are starting to employ themed entertainment design. Some entertainment offerings use the same intellectual properties and principles of theme

design, for instance London's Warner Bros. Studio Tour – The Making of *Harry Potter* or the touring exhibit *Avatar: Discover Pandora*. Timbalaya utilizes these principles in its narrative riff on the “adventure play” (playground) model; it is a “concept that takes a child into its story and, through outdoor physical play, they then become the story” (Merlin). Annual attendance reports from TEA/AECOM entitled the *Global Attractions Attendance Report* include theme parks, waterparks, and museums. The International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA) includes amusement parks and attractions, family entertainment centers, museums and science centers, waterparks and resorts, and zoos and aquariums. Museums and heritage attractions will be covered in this work, and zoos have begun to “incorporate storytelling and simulations in their operations” for immersive experiences despite immersion being seemingly antithetical to some of the “messages” and “priorities” of zoos (Shani and Pizam 283-84).

As creative executive Monty Lunde attests to, “We’re now designing things not just for theme parks, but museums, retail centers and even military and fire training centers” (qtd. in Eades, “Disneyland”). Stapleton explains that the military found use for his entertainment simulation technology: “The simulation technology invented for one industry transcends its original application” (qtd. in Sasha, “Interview”). Design expressions have made their way into homes as well, as Pickett attests to: “People are emulating what Imagineers do in their homes. People put on elaborate parties or elaborate themed haunted house or whatever. They’re emulating the tools and the techniques that they see in the parks. Some of them emulate it very well. Some of them really study” (personal interview). They do this with not only “creating a space” but with “telling a story visually,” so these practices have had widespread influence (Pickett, personal interview). Theme parks may have generated this branching out, but now these spaces have reciprocal influence.

The pervasiveness of theming has been discussed by scholars including Cornelis, who explains that previously unthemed locations are now implementing a “thematic identity” (50). Gottdiener traces the increases in the “theming of everyday life” and in spaces throughout the country (112). Drawing on the theming of everyday life notion, Brian Lonsway observes the “infusion of entertainment-industry models into the world beyond the theme park” (226). Show producer Mark Nichols too observes, “The infusion of themed entertainment from parks into many aspects of our culture’s leisure life: restaurants, bars, museums, casinos, cruise ships... even grocery stores” (qtd. in Emerson, “Mark”). Decades ago, Paul Goldberger detected that Disney “may have more influence on the shape America’s cities will take than any planners, architects or urban designers could ever hope to.” King confirms that “few urban spaces remain untouched by the Disney Effect,” an application of Disney’s “design vision” to new contexts (“The Disney” 225). She states, “There is hardly a space remaining, including our own homes, where the telltale imprint of the theme park has not left its colorful and varied impression” (“The Theme” 3). Multiple articles exist about the Disney-designed though no longer owned city of Celebration, and creative director Mark Anderson describes the theme design spaces of The Villages retirement community. He remarks, “While the history and the town was fabricated, it became the backdrop to these people’s lives.” Not much could illustrate the power of themed entertainment (for better or worse) than its transformation of actual community spaces.

Joseph Pine and James Gilmore’s concept of the experience economy and businesses staging experiences as a kind of theatre is explicitly based on Walt Disney’s model (3). Bryman defines “Disneyization” as “the process by which *the principles* of the Disney theme parks are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world” (*Disneyization* 1). The ideas he references are theming, hybrid consumption, merchandising, and

performative labor. While the more cultural aspects of the latter three are not the focus on this work, theming as a design principle is now being applied with more frequency to various institutions, so an industry has grown to facilitate this. A Master of Fine Arts degree related to this profession is offered at Savannah College of Art and Design, and the degree is termed Themed Entertainment Design; now, other institutions have similar programs. Many in the industry refer to the umbrella term of themed entertainment design and Jeffs cautions that students need to go beyond only theme parks to comprehend the industry.

### **Chapter Organization**

The remaining chapters of the dissertation are arranged as follows:

Chapter 2: A survey of theme park narratives, this chapter traces the prevalence of storytelling in the historical and current theme park industry. It establishes the prominence of storytelling within the industry, marking it as a defining characteristic of the theme park. The chapter looks at Disneyland, the impetus of the contemporary industry, and which attractions made it distinct from earlier entertainment venues. It examines the kinds of stories told and the expressions of storytelling in various time periods: the early period (1950s-1970s), the maturing period (1980s-2000s), and the current period (2010s). It focuses on three key regions: Europe, the United States, and Asia. More than eight hundred attractions are analyzed for the presence of key features of narrative, attraction types, and source material.

Chapter 3: This chapter is a consideration of narrative techniques, focusing on particular trends and paradigms established over time. It interrogates the connections between narratives and technologies. Twenty-one separate techniques and technologies are broken into three areas: traditional, modern, and contemporary with explanations as to how each is utilized in the theme park industry. Where possible, creative professionals are interviewed about that technique or

technology; these impressions are synthesized with the work of scholars. The large-scale look at these aspects describes the evolution of narrative within the industry, with techniques and technologies continuously being used to express story.

Chapter 4: An attempt to get at what makes the theme park a unique narrative medium, this chapter triangulates data from creative professionals, my research, and that of scholarship related to other mediums. Defining features of the medium are denoted as well as the features borrowed from inspirational mediums like oral and literary storytelling, theatre and film, and video game or new media narratives. Once those comparisons are made, six significant characteristics of theme park industry narratives are detailed: dimensionality, scale, communality, brevity, a combinatory aspect, and a reiterative nature. The elaboration of these attributes posits the theme park as a medium that remediates previous storytelling platforms but likewise develops and presents its own models of narrative.

Chapter 5: This chapter briefly summarizes previous chapters and synthesizes them. It makes claims about the implications of the project, acknowledges the study's limitations, and suggests avenues for further research.



## CHAPTER TWO: SURVEY OF THEME PARK NARRATIVES

In this chapter, I establish the presence of storytelling in theme parks around the world, in fact its dominance in themed entertainment spaces. Lena Mossberg suggests a general research path: “A first step would also be to distinguish thematic environments based on whether they are built on narrative techniques and dramaturgy” (208). This makes sense, as Scott Lukas believes theme parks to be “some of the strongest elaborations of storytelling in space” (*Immersive* 54). This chapter will organize these elaborations by time, region, and type. The section details the kinds of stories being told in parks and the basic narrative elements they possess. Before this categorized analysis, though, we will reflect on storytelling’s importance as a whole and its connection to pre-theme park narratives and the theme park Disneyland.

### **Why Storytelling?**

There is little doubt that it can be proven, regardless of the discipline one is in, that storytelling is vital to human culture. Storytelling is how we communicate with one another and how we relate to each other. It is how we see the world, how we make patterns of what we see, and how we understand those patterns. It is a way we form our identities, how we learn themes and values that can make an impact on our lives. Storytelling is how we shape our culture and comprehend the human experience. Through stories, fundamental transformations can take place. As much as a story can assert the status quo, it can offer resistance to it. There is great power in storytelling, as is evident daily when we hear talk of the current “narrative” in media or in the texts we hand children so that they are enculturated within societies.

There is a lot of commentary related to the importance of story, but this section is limited to texts on my reading list or industry professionals. First, storytelling is cognitive and related to organization. Narrative, according to H. Porter Abbott, “existed long before people gave it a

name and tried to figure out how it works” (xv). He argues that next to language itself, it is “*the* human trait” (1). A key purpose of narrative is that is “the principal way in which our species organizes its understanding of time,” which consequently infers history and individual lives (3). It is also “one way of creating order out of chaos” (102). Game designer Chris Crawford says:

Storytelling isn’t an idle leisure activity that humans developed to while away the hours: It evolved for serious purposes, as a necessary component in the development of human culture. Without storytelling, humans could never have communicated complex information. Storytelling isn’t merely characteristic or even definitive of the human condition – it’s absolutely necessary to the existence of human culture. (3)

Like others, he calls it a universal and sees stories as “the vehicle by which cultural knowledge is communicated from one generation to the next” as well as the basic patterns that work well with our “pattern-recognizing mental modules” (6-7). Frank Rose notes, “Stories are recognizable patterns, and in those patterns we find meaning. We use stories to make sense of our world and to share that understanding with others. They are the signal within the noise” (1). Abbott refers to narrative perception; as he defines it, “Narrative is so much a part of the way we apprehend the world in time that it is virtually built into the way we see” (6). Even more simply: “We think with narrative” (193). We remember our lives in stories, but we also actively construct stories as we go through daily life.

Next, narrative is a cultural universal related to communication and interpretations of the world. According to storyteller Carolyn Handler Miller, “Scientists believe that storytelling can be traced back to sometime in the Pleistocene age (1.8 million to about 11,000 years ago) and was developed as a critical survival tool” (5). She argues for its power:

Storytelling is a magical and powerful craft. Not only can it transport the audience on a thrilling journey into an imaginary world, but it can also reveal the dark secrets of human behavior or inspire the audience with the desire to do noble deeds. Storytelling can also be pressed into service for other human goals: to teach and train the young, for example, or to convey important information. (4)

According to Mossberg, stories are linked with meaning making: stories “speak to our human needs and make our lives meaningful. Our values and principles are transferred from generation to generation through stories. Stories give continuity to our lives and reveal our background and history. They stimulate our imagination, involve us emotionally and amuse us” (196). They are an essential part of what it means to be human.

Writer and creative consultant Larry Tuch mentions that stories “interpret some aspect of the human experience” and are a “human universal” (qtd. in Lukas, *Immersive* 12). Henry Jenkins affirms this, stating that “stories are basic to all human cultures, the primary means by which we structure, share, and make sense of our common experiences” (*Convergence* 121). Margaret King and J.G. O’Boyle observe, “Stories were the original human art form. They embody the general theory of everything that is important to a culture; they are the lifeblood of its values. They tell us why we are here, who we are, what our purpose is” (“Disney” 213). Also indicating the significance in culture, Yiannis Gabriel summarizes:

The place of stories within culture has been widely discussed. Stories help communities pass their spiritual, moral, and cultural heritage from generation to generation, they are vital for the instruction of young people, they generate behavioural expectations, and they offer models of emulation and avoidance. In some respects they resemble symbolically endowed material artefacts; like symbolic artefacts, stories are repositories of meaning, a

meaning that both changes and is timeless. Like artefacts, they sustain a set of values and form part of wide networks through which meaning travels. (88).

Story as a meaning-making practice is one of the closest things humanity has to a universal. Narrative is a “universal tool for knowing as well as telling, for absorbing knowledge as well as expressing it” according to Abbott (10). Roland Barthes maintains that there are “countless forms” of narrative in the world; it is “international, transhistorical, transcultural,” which is evidence of its “universality” (237). To Barthes, narrative is present in everything from written mediums to visual mediums like painting or film to daily conversation; it is extant “at all times, in all places, in all societies” (237). Marie-Laure Ryan agrees that “*narrative* is a universal structure that transcends media” (“Beyond” 581). Most media types, it can be said, are at least sometimes driven by the desire to tell a story. Theme parks use this universal tool to create experiences for visitors each day.

A few have commented on the poignant combination of theme parks and stories. Tuch connects storytelling to “human desire” and “human curiosity” as well as a “sense of adventure, a sense of delight.” It can be used, like the best of fictions, to be “transported into another world” (Tuch). In our conversation, we talked about the potential for stories at parks to bring up multiple emotions. When I mentioned that one theme park story upset me because I remembered its sadness, Tuch replied, “I’ll suggest to you that the emotion you had was sadness, but it was a real human emotion. It was really more of an engagement, an empathetic engagement with human experience.” In hearing the same anecdote, creative executive Olaf Vugts agreed that whether drawing on happiness or sadness (or even fear), theme park stories bring emotion. As he says about the power of attractions: “It’s about the feeling, not about what you saw.” The humanity of storytelling thus extends to theme parks.

Karen Jones and John Wills find even in manufactured parks the utopian ideals of sense of “greenery,” aesthetics, fantasy, “inspiration,” and “social uplift” (171). Parks in general, they argue, offer a “narrative of hope” (171). Theme parks are epitomes of Yi-Fu Tuan’s conceptions of place and space, as they are both. They are the wide story of space, large and myth driven. They are the more intimate and “humanized” place. Theme parks further his idea of place becoming emotional landscape: “Place can acquire deep meaning for the adult through the steady accretion of sentiment over the years. Every piece of heirloom furniture, or even a stain on the wall, tells a story” (Tuan 33). In the case of theme parks, places come to tell many stories for visitors. As Lukas confirms, “Personal narratives are often projected back onto visitors as they associate experiences from their own lives with memorable theme lands, attractions, or rides” (*The Themed* 12). They often represent childhood to adults, as Moniek Hover speaks to: “By using pre-existing stories theme parks can tap into people’s (childhood) memories which further strengthens the feelings of being a child again” (personal interview). Producer Nina Jacobson likewise finds that “these attractions are deeply engrained in our childhood memories,” so it becomes a reciprocal effect (qtd. in Surrell, *Haunted* 104). This is a powerful feeling possible with these kinds of three-dimensional, generational stories. Vugts concurs: “You want to escape from your world and feel like a child again. Because then the world was fantastic.” Like earlier discussion from scholars such as Gabriel, then, story is specifically related to meaning and theme park stories in particular connect to the meanings we discerned as children. Walt Disney said, “Everyone in the world was once a child,” so it is one real commonality and one reason the theme park might connect with many people (qtd. in Williams 67).

Storytelling is important for children, one of the most common audiences for theme parks. As Jenkins notes, children “use stories to escape from or reaffirm aspects of their real

lives” (*Convergence* 182). Seymour Papert affirms that “Like other builders, children appropriate to their own use materials they find about them, most saliently the models and metaphors suggested by the surrounding culture” (414). This includes stories in the public consciousness and theme parks themselves. Lukas says story is “absolutely key in creating an association between the space and that child’s experiences” (*Immersive* 157). If stories are powerful tools for adults, they are even more compelling for children, whose identities and cultures are being formed. They are significant for generations of families, as Hover and Vugts attest to.

Abbott connects stories with meaning, and design legend John Hench argued that theme park attractions are “meaningful experiences” that allow people to “transcend their everyday experience” (38, 9). Story attractions are not only playful and sensory but places where visitors can actually “feel more alive” (14). Emotion is a “heightened form of life,” one that themed design can contribute too (1). Hench noted that Walt Disney “chose to develop the art of animation and the theme parks around classic tales that appeal to all of us and transcend our differences” (145). Creative executive Phil Hetteema agrees: “When we tell our stories with quality and integrity they are powerful and can change lives.” He believes, “We experience stories that move us, and we can see them and experience them in different ways, and that is profound” (qtd. in Martens, “Themed”). Economics researcher Harrison “Buzz” Price had an optimistic view of the global theme park industry’s social potential, also tied to storytelling: “Theme parks will unify...diverse populations by finding and telling the stories we can all identify with, reminding us of the values we hold in common” (66). Though there are valid ways to interrogate this notion (power relations, who tells the stories, etc.), the underlying idea of theme parks as places where a diversity of people come to listen to meaningful stories is accurate.

Storytelling experts I spoke to underscore the impact of this art. Storyteller Kiran Sirah notes that humans are naturally drawn to components of story including conflict and resolution. Storytelling, according to Sirah, is a tool that we can all use to “make sense of the world,” to create art, to “make meaning of our lives,” and construct our everyday experience. Hover believes storytelling is powerful because it “adds a layer of meaning to an experience. Stories are better remembered than facts, they allow for identification and feelings of immersion/escapism” (personal interview). Lukas, who views storytelling from the discipline of anthropology, offers a detailed description of the values of story:

In addition to our brains being hardwired to tell stories, we look to the fact that stories serve real and significant purposes for people in all cultures. Understanding some of these reasons can assist us in developing more involved and meaningful stories in design spaces. As we just learned, stories help *bring people together*. They give us a sense of shared purpose. You can imagine what it must have been like ages ago to be huddled up with your family around a campfire. Predators of every sort were around you but stories gave you something that you could share with others, amidst the uncertainty of early life. Especially in tough times, even in our world today, stories *help preserve the foundations* of a society. In Mali and other African nations, praise singers or griots tell the age-old stories of their cultures. Many of the ideas wrapped up in these stories *reflect the core values* of the culture. In this sense there are two other closely related values of storytelling. Stories help us *understand the history* of a group of people and they also allow us to *learn* about those people. Stories also allow us to *more fully perceive the world*. Stories, especially when told persuasively, can fill in the details that are otherwise lost in other ways of thinking about the world. (*Immersive 49*)

Many mediums, including theme parks, can fulfill some or even all of these storytelling values. Bringing people together is especially relevant to the theme park medium, but they likewise reflect cultural values and sometimes include educational and historical connections.

The original storytelling was oral. Linda Degh's ethnographic work on the Szekely people of Hungary revealed the "social role and cultural values of narration" (vii). She details the role of oral storytellers in society including performer demographics, forms, techniques, and values. To observe oral storytelling in a more recent (albeit more commercial) context, I visited the International Storytelling Center in Jonesborough, Tennessee, site of the National Storytelling Festival that gets 10,000 visitors per year now according to Sirah. The festival was mentioned by more than one themed entertainment professional, so there is likewise a connection between storytellers in the industry and the traditional form of storytelling. The International Storytelling Center recognizes the "powerful, universal appeal" of story and specializes in "advancing the performance, preservation, and professional practice of storytelling" ("About ISC"). In our conversation, Sirah emphasized storytelling as an essential aspect of humanity and a powerful way to enact social change with both positive and negative possibilities (as either a "dividing" or a "binding force"), thus his appeal to using it for "peaceful purposes."

While at the Center, I attended the storyteller-in-residence program, a live storytelling performance with no technology besides a microphone and basic lighting. Liz Weir, a noted children's book author and senachie (Irish storyteller), told a joke, wonder tale, historical story, and original story during the presentation. Like Degh's storytellers, she acknowledged where she had learned each tale, told all of them from memory, selected particular stories each day based on whims and moods (not a set list), and wove the experience together with tangents and threads that would increase meaning and personal connection. Weir mentioned the privilege of getting to



“keep the stories alive.” The audience seemed enthralled by the performance, laughing or being serious in turn; Weir said “storytelling is a magical thing,” and this was obvious in its most basic, oral form. Degh explains that “the special gift of any storyteller consists in his being able to shape a tale,” and this is possible in any medium but particularly evident in oral tradition (171).

Through this research project, I discovered that storytelling in general is frequently considered by creative professionals in the themed entertainment industry. Though many of the interview questions I asked had an amazing diversity of responses, those on storytelling as a whole yielded fairly similar responses about the importance of storytelling in human culture. The questions asked were:

- *Why do you create stories?*
- *Why is storytelling so powerful, and why has it had such an impact on the theme park industry?*

Appendix B, Table 6 catalogs the responses to these questions. Creators mention connections to emotion, cognition, human history, connection, identity, communication, and culture. Though functions mentioned were diverse, there was consensus on the value of storytelling as a whole.

Archival research on theme parks also found designers discussing the importance of stories in human culture. Show writer Kevin Rafferty says, “Storytelling is as old as humankind because humans always have new stories to tell” (qtd. in Sklar, *One* 206). Newton Lee and Krystina Madej have a lengthy discussion in their book, so key points are extracted here:

People’s drive to share stories has been with us since time immemorial. ... stories are an integral part of who we are as human beings. ... Stories are the way we link our daily activities into a whole and provide for their significance within the entity that is our life... Stories are important to us because they connect new knowledge that we come in contact with, with past experience; this gives it context and makes it more understandable

and more memorable. Stories are not only a way we make sense of the world however. They are also the fundamental way in which we communicate with each other: the way we tell each other what we've done, who we are, and what we believe in. We hear stories, we participate in stories, and then, we pass stories on. ... Stories are ubiquitous in the world and, more than ever imaginable, stories are common to us all. (6-7)

Designer and creative executive Joe Rohde has multiple mentions of this concept, so his thoughts are organized in Appendix B, Table 7. His responses indicate the necessity of story structure and the complexity and “functions” of narrative.

All of these comments reveal that creative professionals think about storytelling and its connection to things like emotion, communication between people, immersion, imagination, understanding of the world, deeper meanings, and what it is to be human. Multiple interviewees suggested additional books to me about storytelling, usually related to cognitive sciences. It is no surprise that stories are common in theme parks, as they are common to the people who design them and visit them. What was surprising perhaps is just how dominant the idea of story is that each participant had an instant answer about the value of storytelling in humanity. It was clear to me that many if not all of those I interviewed or found through archival research consider themselves to be storytellers though they work in a medium not always considered by the average visitor or scholar to be storytelling.

Additionally, theme park makers are generally corporations, and there is a concept of corporate storytelling, which is a “strategic utilization of stories and storytelling...to create coherence and progression concerning the companies’ or organizations’ brand, identity and development” (Norlyk). Gabriel concedes that “few organizations are spontaneous storytelling cultures,” but there are some good stories in these contexts (240). Corporate storytelling was

especially evident at Disney, where the training program consisted of videos on The Walt Disney Company's story (especially the life story of Walt Disney) and games related to well-known stories. Even on-the-job training in the theme parks emphasized the individual's role in the "show"; they use stage terminology to reinforce what Lukas calls the "performance culture," which is itself a corporate story ("How the" 188). As Hench noted, employees ("cast members" at Disney) live in the story environment and "validate" it (29). The "personnel" become the "teller of the story" or the "co-narrators" (Mossberg 205-06; Norlyk). Creative executive Ron Logan observes that storytelling is different in the industry based on the "brand of the company." Thus, the stories may vary based on the orientation, values, and cultural narratives of the brand.

One company whose creative professional (Bob Allen) I interviewed, IDEAS Orlando, in fact works with organizations to develop their corporate stories through a trademarked process called StoryJam, which includes StoryAnalytics and six specific storytelling principles or "narrative assets" that are drawn out during the process (setting, voice, character, emotion, conflict, and plot) ("Storytelling"). It is just like an engineering process, he asserts, with research and foundations and strengthening tools; it is just done with story. Their own brand identity is grounded in story, which their website describes as "the heart of the human experience" and "our native language, helping us to make sense of our universe" ("Storytelling"). The existence of this company is predicated on storytelling philosophies.

Mossberg argues that "Story can act as a framework for tying together an entire business" (207). She mentions that not only can organizations be "conceptualized as stories" and use "storytelling and dramaturgy" to operate, but that particular organizations can be, especially if they are part of "servicescapes," physical environments of service, with the most effective ones being those whose purpose is escapism rather than utilitarianism (196-97). To create brand

narratives, according to Mossberg, the organization needs a point to make, ordered and relevant events with established causes, and “demarcation signs” or clear organizations like beginnings, middles, and ends (199). Utilization of storytelling in brandscapes has benefits: “The main advantage is if the company succeeds in communicating a good story, consumers might become involved and want to join in and create the experience for themselves” (206). Thus the brand stories of corporations assist with both employees and visitors conceptualizing the entity as a story that they can contribute to. It is possible to conceive of a theme park operating with multiple layers of story from the organization, the designers, and the visitors all at once.

Many things have come to be conceived of as storytelling. Even qualitative research, according to Gretchen Rossman and Sharon Rallis, is connected to interpreting the data as a story, and there is a form called “narrative research.” In this paradigm, they explain, “All hold in common the assumption that storytelling is integral to the understanding of our lives and that it is ubiquitous” (99). Ryan likewise mentions that there has been a “narrative turn in the humanities,” which in turn motivated a narrative turn “everywhere” (“Toward” 22). Even the study of history, earlier a “declared adversary” to this practice, “came to acknowledge” oral history and personal narratives (Gabriel 3). Francesca Polletta et al. find a similar “narrative turn” in sociology and the social sciences. They found that “Interest in narrative has swept fields as diverse as law, urban planning, cognitive science, anthropology, and organizational behavior” (110). Notions of narrative have appeared in more and more disciplines within universities.

Outside of academia, Polletta et al. see the narrative turn in journalism, psychology, law, medicine, politics, and business. Sujatha Fernandes considers what is outside of academia the “storytelling turn” or “boom” that relates to advocacy, legal, political, and social life. Gabriel finds that those who focus on organizations and storytelling can now “mix research with pleasure

with no fear of marginalization and derision” (240). However, he cautions that there is a danger in “allowing our current fascination with text and narrative to occlude deeper issues of justice, politics, and human suffering” (240). This jives with the concerns of Fernandes, who contends that storytelling movements “that confronted power” were redirected into the “model of the market” with characteristics of “transaction and negotiation.” In this view, movements with storytelling labels have led to attempts at consensus, “scripted performance,” and “carefully curated narratives” rather than resistance, social change, and individualized or culturally distinct stories. There is no doubt that many theme parks are associated with corporatized practices, but it would be unfair to diminish the decades of hard work and creative processes that go into developing the stories in these spaces or the cultural and emotional impact they have had. Understanding that there are legitimate critiques of the storytelling turn, then, we will look at the presence of and characteristics of narratives in themed spaces around the world.

### **Pre-Theme Park Narratives**

There were thematic spaces or “telling stories with space” before theme parks, though they were not as elaborate (King qtd. in Lukas, *Immersive* 44). These were generally within pre-theme park forms like parks in old Europe, world’s fairs, American amusement parks, and kiddie parks. A few relevant points about these pre-theme park forms will be expanded on here.

Europe has a tradition of amusement parks, but Tivoli Gardens (1843) is particularly interesting because it is old, an influence of Walt Disney’s, and still prosperous. Inspired by much older garden spaces like London’s Vauxhall Gardens, Tivoli is a well-landscaped, clean, and architectural small park (fig. 3). After visiting Tivoli Gardens, Walt Disney “settled on the idea of stylized and themed ‘lands,’ paying special attention to architecture and landscaping” (Samuelson and Yegoiants 11). Disney “felt that [Tivoli] best represented what he wanted to

achieve with Disneyland” in terms of space organization and cleanliness (Moran 63). The place still has an evident style and a communal picnic feel. The park that inspired Disney has nevertheless been inspired in turn, as they now have a unique dark ride entitled The Flying Trunk, which draws on the many stories of Hans Christian Andersen. Walt Disney World is also designing an “it’s a small world” parade float for Tivoli’s 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary parade to commemorate “deep mutual respect” (Kubersky, “Walt”). Like at the Disney parks, there is an interplay of nostalgia and progress at Tivoli.



Figure 3: Tivoli today (Photo: Author)

Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, world’s fairs were known for themes and motifs even in attractions without storytelling. The fairs themselves had themes, generally related to progress and technology. As Jacqueline Botterill discusses, spectacle and the “use of specialized architecture” became a highlight of these temporary events (74). The 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago was deemed the “White City” because of its neoclassical motif with buildings that were “alabaster white, ornate, decorated with gold, and separated by canals” (Botterill 75). Botterill notes the visitors’ perception of the “sterile” and “grandiose” qualities of this landscape, but visitors were offered amusement park-type rides in addition to multiple

attractions (buildings, displays, shows) with the style of particular countries and time periods (76). The 1900 Paris Exhibition also included attractions that illustrate themed design and even multi-sensory effects like the Mareorama, a simulated sea voyage that brought in live seaweed and tar to enhance authenticity (Younger 159). These older concepts provided opportunities for “park-specific narratives,” “interactive stories,” “convincing fantasy worlds,” and “fantasy architecture” (Jones and Wills 99-100). According to Neil Harris, fairs as a whole shaped tourist culture by starting the middle class pilgrimage model and “national assumptions about the social functions of public spaces” (19). Though Botterill deems the country attractions “wholly fantasy” and a “series of stereotypical motifs,” they still provide influences for theme parks (77). After all, Walt Disney would later design attractions for the 1964-65 World’s Fair, and coming nearly a century after the 1893 Exposition, the Epcot theme park represented a permanent one, complete with nation motifs, technology exhibits, and a modern “white city” look.

One of the most influential attractions that started at expositions was Hale’s Tours of the World (1904). This “illusion ride show” had a motion base and simulated train travel (Rabinovitz, *Electric* 73). In its most popular days, there were 500 copies of this, then reduced to none within a decade (Gennaway, *Universal* 2). A Trip to the Moon (1901), which was at an exposition and two amusement parks, was also influential, as it had a more complete and “narrative experience” than many rides (Cross and Walton 84). It included a form of a pre-show, a cyclorama, a simulated journey on a ship that goes from the United States to the moon, a papier-mâché walk around space that looked like the moon’s surface with costumed “Selenites” or “moon people” characters, and even related merchandise. Created by pioneer Frederic Thompson and inspired by Jules Verne, it is considered one of the first dark rides and had elementary lighting, sound effects, and fans to provide a wind effect. It is described as a location

that “completely immerse[s] visitors,” “places visitors into a story,” had “themes,” and had narrative elements including setting and basic plot (Potter; Cross and Walton 176; Ndalians 64).

Lukas describes Coney Island (and its legendary parks Steeplechase Park, Luna Park, and Dreamland) as being an “influence on contemporary immersive consumer spaces,” though he recognizes that it was not a “linear path” from the amusement park to the theme park, and Walt Disney himself was against the seedier and wild aspects of that kind of park (*Immersive* 15, *Theme* 22). In fact, Margaret King and J.G. O’Boyle assert that theme parks are “the multi-dimensional descendant of the book, film, and epic rather than the spawn of the roller coaster and Tilt-a-Whirl” (“The Theme” 6). Nonetheless, Disney did visit these types of parks and key ingredients of later successes were found in the “dark rides and technologies that simulated other times and places” (Lukas, *Immersive* 15). Lukas mentions Luna Park (1903) experiences including A Trip to the Moon, Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, The War of the Worlds, and themed buildings as “spectacles” that would rival current theme parks (15). Some of these experiences were narrative or at least had symbolism that reflected well-known stories. As Jenkins explains, Coney Island “restaged narrative events” including “journeys depicted in Jules Verne novels, the destruction of Pompeii, [and] the Chicago fire,” which assisted with the notion of visitors being freed from “the norms and roles we observe outside the park, giving us parts to play within the large experience” (personal interview).

Though later theme parks like Disneyland attempted cohesive storylines, Luna Park had a consistent architectural style and thematic presence. Jones and Wills observe that “While Disneyland is widely acknowledged as the original theme park thanks to its unique medley of fantasy worlds, earlier amusement parks also featured themed areas” (99). Luna Park is one of these examples. Luna Park was itself modeled after the aforementioned 1893 Chicago



Columbian Exposition, which is cited in a multitude of sources as being essential for the development of the American amusement industry because of it having the first midway, architectural consistency, and a values system. Luna Park inspired dozens of amusement parks worldwide. It would go beyond the architectural norms of the times to produce “fantasy-like styles of curves and spirals and fountains,” an “integrated architectural fantasy” (D. Sullivan; Cross and Walton 45). These were versions of detailed settings before the formalized industry. Its successor, Dreamland, had areas with motifs like the Canals of Venice or Coasting through Switzerland ride and themed attractions (many Biblical) such as The Creation, The End of the World, the Pharaoh’s Daughter show, the Hell Gate boat ride, Touring the Yellow Stone (similar to Hale’s Tours), and the San Francisco Earthquake show. While considered amusement parks, Coney Island venues had early examples of what would become themed entertainment design.

Pier amusement parks and traditional midway attractions are early influences of the industry, or at least examples, as Disney and his crew went to parks like the Long Beach Pike to time dark rides such as the Laff in the Dark model (Pierce 118). Dark rides, however, were rarely integrated into the surroundings in early amusement places, something that would become a standard at Disney parks. As engineer and executive Steve Alcorn observes, Disneyland later became successful not merely because of rides but “the space between attractions” (172). This is exemplified by Hench, who explained, “Nothing in a theme park is seen in isolation. Story threads help us to coordinate the relationships of adjacent attractions” (107). Creative director Alex Wright clarifies that “area development” is specifically about these “interstitial spaces between the attractions, restaurants, and shops” (*Disneyland* 12). Jeff Morosky, a landscape architect, clarifies that with area development, “It is essential to create an environment that is

evocative of the time and place where the story takes place” (“Making Disney”). This is the physical embodiment of *storyworld*. Tuch elaborates on this concept:

The whole rationale for why things look the way they do and which activities are available to you comes from the story. Story is the deep well, it’s the foundation. Once you have the story, you understand which ideas relate to the visitor experience and which don’t. We’re creating a wrap around so that wherever you go in this world, the story world is continuous. So story underlies the entire fabric, the rationale for the entire fabric of the space, the different spaces within the space. What they offer is thematically drawn from story.

Bobby Schweizer and Celia Pearce affirm, “What set the Disney theme park apart from earlier amusement parks such as Tivoli Gardens and those of Coney Island was the tighter integration of narrative with attraction” (97). More simply, “stories weave the park together” (Forrec). There are many available influences for theme parks, but it is likely that elaborate storytelling within controlled spaces is the eventual mark Disney made and perhaps the delineation between the amusement park and theme park.

A few other parks had at very least themed environments before Disneyland, with one notably being the nearby Knott’s Berry Farm (1940), which had a “storied heritage in its Old West offerings” (Jeffs). At the time Walt Disney saw it, Knott’s was a Western town complete with authentic (relocated) buildings, a stagecoach, train, and mules, all things that would end up in Disneyland’s Frontierland. Walt Disney reportedly said, “I’ve been thinking I’d like to have something like that” (Pierce 35). Old photographs of Knott’s Berry Farm (fig. 4) show that its Ghost Town was very indicative of what would be known as “placemaking,” the presentation of setting through architectural and other details.



Figure 4: Knott's Berry Farm's Ghost Town in the '40s (Photo: Orange County Archives, Wikimedia Commons)

In the explicit sense, Knott's did not have much storytelling, but it represents experiential storytelling (the visitor traversing another place and time) and implicit storytelling could be drawn from buildings and workers posing as characters. Though it did not add its first ride until right before Disneyland opened, the lessons on Western motifs were useful. They would be considered a theme park with the addition of attractions like the Calico Mine Ride (1960), an immersive dark ride, though they have continued to straddle the line between amusement park and theme park, with recent offerings preferencing the latter.

Finally, in the United States there were multiple "kiddie" parks, which are small parks for the "amusement of children" (Younger 10). The "kiddieland wave" materialized in the 1940s-50s ("IAAPA"). Dale Samuelson and Wendy Yegoiants call these venues "storylands" or "fairy tale parks" (146). These places usually have small rides, shows, and themed playgrounds. There are still many of these parks remaining including Children's Fairyland (1950, fig. 5), whose "fantasy architecture" Walt Disney visited when researching for Disneyland (Lukas, *Theme* 77).



Figure 5: Children's Fairyland in Oakland, CA (Photo: Author)

Children's Fairyland is known for its puppet theatre, oral storytellers, and Talking Storybooks. This is a system wherein a "magic key" is inserted into a box that narrates a fairy tale when activated. Bruce Sedley held the patent on the Talking Storybook with its key activation; multiple zoos and a few kiddie parks had this technology installed ("Magic Key"). Though they were installed in 1958, after Disneyland opened, they are still an interesting and unique storytelling contribution from this earlier park genre. When I toured Children's Fairyland, these Talking Storybooks were still in use, and the government-run park retains its fairy tale theme. Manager Barbara Griffin explained that the entire place is about engaging in "dramatic play" and the symbolic architecture there is conducive to this play. Because of kiddie parks' often more rudimentary set ups, children rely on the imagination to fill in the gaps, a precursor to the more implicit forms of storytelling seen in later theme parks.

### **Disneyland: Birth of the Theme Park (1955)**

It is disputed which theme park was first, as places like Knott's Berry Farm, Holiday World, and Efteling all predate Disneyland. Some argue that Disneyland is first because it was planned to be one and the first to be called one according to some sources. Scholars note that

Disney is “widely credited with the invention of the theme park,” but there were clear influences in earlier concepts (Jones and Wills 103). A few, like Lauren Rabinovitz, want to “rewrite the history of Disney first,” but it is their influence, rather than being first, that created an industry (*Electric* 22). While Salvador Anton Clavé cautions not to wholly focus on Disney, he concedes that “The concept of theme park cannot be detached, nowadays, from the idea materialized by Walt Disney when on 17 July 1955 Disneyland opened its doors in California” (1). Even if they were not first, they are the most “emulated, imitated and envied” (3). There would be multiple parks “in imitation of Disney’s coherent fantasy approach” (Rabinovitz, *Electric* 171). At very least, it was a “new genre of park that separately presents specific themed areas” (23). Jones and Wills affirm that while Disney may not have invented the theme park, Disneyland “increased the scale of theming to new levels of immersion” (104). They say “modern theme parks appropriated both Disney and Coney entertainment models,” but Disney’s model was more persuasive (114).

Samuelson and Yegoians argue that Disney did not invent the theme park, as earlier things like Knott’s had a theme, but Disney invented a new genre, and it would be the most replicated one and the one that brought awareness to the genre. As ride manufacturer Ed Morgan notes, “No one had heard of a theme park at that time” (qtd. in Reynolds 36). A good comparison might be with animation. Roger Ebert noted that Walt Disney did not “invent” animation, but he “nurtured it into an art form that could hold its own against any realistic movie” (qtd. in Williams 133). Theme parks would develop into an art form and have come to equal or even surpass more realistic entertainment genres. Historians Gary Cross and John Walton assert, “Disney’s park is universally recognized as the model of modern theme parks, a creation of the Hollywood dream machine that turns cartoon characters and movie scenes and stories into mechanical rides and fantasy spaces” (8). This quote speaks to Disneyland as an extension of cinema but hints at some

of the unique attributes that later areas of this project explore. Designer Jack Rouse relates it to the amusement park genre: “Disneyland took an area of activity – the amusement park – and lifted it to a standard so high in its performance that it really became a brand new thing” (qtd. in “IAAPA”). Disneyland was an extension of existing genres, but it was also an evolution.

The 100-year old industry group, the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA), references early parks including The Great Escape, Knott’s Berry Farm, and Holiday World as “themed amusement parks,” but they likewise find Disneyland to be “something wholly different than what came before” (“IAAPA”). They elaborate: “In 1955, Disneyland showed the country what a fully realized theme park could be, and the industry has never been the same since, changing in ways no one could have predicted. Under Walt Disney’s meticulous care, imagination and fantasy became the most important ingredients in the amusement park experience” (“IAAPA”). Furthermore, IAAPA refers to Disneyland’s opening as the “most important line of demarcation” in the history of the industry (“IAAPA”).

Thus, Disneyland as the most influential theme park in the world is less likely to be debated. Price, the economic researcher for nearly every major theme park company, believed the “shockwave” from Walt’s “revolution” was the first stage of the modern industry (9). The opening of Disneyland “marked a turning point in the amusement industry,” as it organized the park by themes and was the “antithesis of the old amusement park” (Milman, “The Global”). Even now, Disney is the “reference for the rest of the industry” with Universal, another hundred-plus year old company, often the only other organization in the conversation (Clavé 98). Others have similar perspectives. It was a “new species” of amusement park according to King, and a “form of symbolic landscape” (“The Theme” 4). Walt Disney “rethought the amusement park, transforming it into the theme park” (Finch 7). Designer and creative executive Bob Rogers says

that “Walt Disney ignored the conventional wisdom of his day and re-invented our business. ... Today that revolution has become the establishment.” Sam Gennawey goes further when he states, “Walt Disney invented the theme park industry” (*Universal* 7). This “revolution in attractions started by Walt Disney” is what would end up driving growth and influencing other entities like Universal or SeaWorld (O’Brien 8). Stephen Wanhill confirms: “Disneyland set the agenda for the theme park developments that are so familiar around the world today” (62). It would be a transformation that sparked a multi-billion dollar industry and spawned a “great proliferation of American theme parks” (Pierce 47). Disneyland had a “profound impact on the construction of themed environments across the country by blending mass culture symbols and appealing physical design” (Gottdiener 110). The Disney Effect or Disneyization, in other words, was initiated by the creation of Disneyland.

Disneyland was likely the dawn of the recognition of such public spaces as art. As Pat Williams describes, Disneyland was a “radically innovative form of three-dimensional art” and the “world’s largest art object” (368). Jorge Arango states that Disneyland should be studied because “it was designed with storytelling in mind, so it has rich semantic and narrative layers that separate it from most other built environments.” Likewise, creative director Jeff Kurtti asserts the artistic impact of Disneyland:

The result was the first total theme show, a designed entertainment experience in which every element – the architecture, landscaping, attractions, entertainment, colors, sounds, employees’ costumes, and even the food and merchandise – were carefully orchestrated to tell a three-dimensional story. (viii)

Many aspects that form the basics of theme park design and immersion will be talked about in Chapter 3, but it is significant to note that Disneyland is considered the first of this type of experience. Joseph Pine and James Gilmore elaborate:

Rather than create another amusement park, Disney created the world's first *theme* parks, which immerse guests ... in rides that not only entertain but also involve them in an unfolding story. For every guest, cast members ... stage a complete production of sights, sounds, tastes, aromas, and textures to create a unique experience. (3-4)

Even the later paradigm of immersion, then, can be extrapolated as having been at least inspired by Disneyland.

For some, this revolution is precisely because it went beyond “theme park” to be a “story park.” Allen mentioned that it would have been easier to just refer to them as *story parks*, and this makes sense because the core of that park is story. Designer Tony Baxter considers there to be three kind of parks: amusement parks, theme parks, and “storytelling, Disney-style parks” (qtd. in Niles, “Theme”). Now, though, theme parks have taken note that storytelling is a key component of theme park success, partly due to the success of Disneyland. Instead of surface decoration, Disneyland used “narrative as a means of theming” (Lukas, *Theme* 76). Cher Krause Knight sees that the parks achieved viability because of the opposite causality or “theming as an effective means of storytelling” (154). Robert Pettit similarly connects theming and storytelling as reasons for Disneyland’s success: “What made Disneyland unique and transformative was its structuring of the park experience with Disney stories and characters – the first and still most effective use of immersive ‘theming’” (qtd. in Hetter). At Disneyland, theming and storytelling were inextricable. Kurtti notes, “In conceiving Disneyland, [Walt Disney’s] concept was to immerse the visitor in living storytelling scenarios” (47). Priscilla Hobbs agrees Disneyland was



the first theme park to put visitors “into the story” (3). The visitor is “placed directly into the story alongside the characters,” making it three-dimensional (17).

The imagination of individuals is the fourth dimension in Hobbs’ conception. This is similar to an article on *Themed Attraction* that delineates imagination as the sixth sense, which is developed by designers through “the use of theming, storyline, and the creative use of story-reinforcing iconography” (MSS, “Themed ... Three”). Hench said it is important to “understand the power of storytelling when translated from two to three dimensions” and Kurtti talks about the park as “the advancement of three-dimensional storytelling” (6; vii). Tuch admits that Walt Disney did not invent theming or three-dimensional storytelling and that even ancient Rome had these things. However, Walt Disney “shifted the game from two-dimensional storytelling on screens to three-dimensional storytelling. He was the first one to take muscular, robust, story environment, storytelling, story, story thematics, and added a sense of three-dimensional space and theatre” (Tuch). Over the years, designers and scholars alike have come to realize how significant that transformation was.

By all accounts, Walt Disney was “disgusted” by the carnival and amusement park scene and wanted to create a “clean family park” (artist Harper Goff qtd. in Peri, *Working with Walt* 199-200). There are multiple places that he or his team researched including Children’s Fairyland, Coney Island, Griffith Park, Knott’s Berry Farm, Long Beach Pike, Los Angeles Fair, Luna Park, Madurodam, Mt. Vernon, Palisades Park, Tivoli Gardens, and Williamsburg. At these places they did research on capacity, guest traffic patterns, landscaping, and ride timing. There is no doubt, then, that Disneyland was constructed with the knowledge of what worked and did not work at other places. However, there would be some differences aside from the target audience and cleanliness of the space. First, Disneyland would translate two-dimensional stories

to three-dimensional ones, which much of this project will illustrate. The second crucial difference was the construction of a creative think tank, WED Enterprises (eventually Walt Disney Imagineering), that would master plan the park. It is standard practice in the industry now to have either in-house or contracted creative minds, but at the time, the addition of new attractions or space was done haphazardly. Disney did use other contractors, especially Arrow Development, to solve engineering problems and design ride systems. However, as Arrow's Ed Morgan and Karl Bacon noted, "the show elements were pure Disney. They founded the theme ride business, no question of that" (qtd. in Reynolds 129). The formalization of creation is a key reason why they did have such an impact on the industry.

### *Walt Disney Imagineering*

Walt Disney Imagineering (WDI) creates the physical spaces within parks (rather than the media or shows). This now standard process was new at the time. As Disney legend ride designer Bob Gurr recalls, "We literally had to teach ourselves the operations of what would become a theme park industry. We didn't realize we were doing it, but we were literally writing all of the how-to in the entire industry" (qtd. in Moran 79). Tuch observes, "Disney really wrote the book on 'this is how you do it.' He created the concept. He created the disciplines that made it." Others including Sklar say early Disney parks mark when the "language" of theme park design or the "Disney theme park vernacular" started to develop including the now industry norm of describing rides as "attractions, adventures, immersive experiences, stories" (*Dream 90*; qtd. in Marling 16). Wright finds that the "language of visual communication" combined with research is what now backgrounds the stories in the parks (i.e. the process of design) (*Epcot 113*). Show writer Rick West believes the "core of this industry was born mostly out of WED

Enterprises,” so their importance is evident (“A Call”). Today many companies are populated by those who have worked at Imagineering or whose principles were formed by those who did.

Many early “Imagineers” were filmmakers and animators, but the concept of story remained prominent. Books from Walt Disney Imagineering (WDI), most published by Disney, mention the supremacy of story. A sample of quotes on this topic is collected in Appendix B, Table 7 to illustrate that WDI makes it a particular point to communicate the centrality of story in their process to theme park guests and fans, the primary audience for these books.

Texts from WDI link nearly every design job or trade to storytelling including architecture, background and set design, engineering, graphics, interior design, landscaping, merchandising, models, music and sound, pyrotechnics, rockwork, and research. As one WDI coffee table book attests to, “All Imagineers are storytellers, whatever their chosen medium – architecture or electrical engineering, sound design or hydraulics” (*Walt... Magic More* 26). Louis Prospero remarks, “The specific ways in which story is expressed in Disney attractions span a wide range including graphic design, nomenclature, color, and character print and plaster. Every detail of every attraction designed by the Imagineers is informed by its story” (22). Suzanne Rahn also notices that storytelling is “embedded” in everything the Imagineers do (87). Lukas states that the purpose of Imagineering is to “transform the theme park into an effective story” (*Theme* 142). Show writer Adam Berger summarizes: “At the heart of the Disney Guest Experience is storytelling” (qtd. in J. Young, “Every”). Truly, storytelling is embedded in the identity of WDI (or at least the mythos of WDI projected to guests), who remain the most well-known themed entertainment professionals. The next best-known professionals at Universal Creative also say that their parks are “known for taking guests into timeless stories” (Thierry Coup qtd. in

“Q&A”). Other companies and individuals will say similar things, so the notion of theme park designers as storytellers may also owe some debt to early Disneyland’s philosophy.

### *Disneyland Opening Year*

It is useful to look at the list of Disneyland’s opening year attractions (Appendix C, Table 9) to get an idea of what offerings were so successful. In this list, and in later lists, some basic storytelling terms will be used to denote the presence of narrative elements: *allusion, character, conflict, narrator, plot, scenes, setting, symbolism, theme, and visual storytelling* (definitions provided in the table). Looking at content, most of the stories being told in the first year of Disneyland were based on genre traditions or, most commonly, Disney films and television shows. They were “generalized, abstract and fantasy-based” more than later specific and explicit stories would be (Lukas, *Theme Park* 82). These were in turn derived from fairy tales, children’s literature, and popular legends. In terms of form, Disneyland had some traditional forms including museum-like exhibits, movies, show genres like the revue or the circus, and transportation rides. It is immediately discernible that *setting* is a common function of space in the theme park. *Setting, symbolism, and motifs* were used in earlier physical spaces as well, so while executed well at Disneyland for the time, they were not necessarily new.

The “most different” of their attractions are the dark rides, which were, as we will see in Chapter 3, essentially three-dimensional movies. These form the “backbone of Fantasyland’s entertainment experience” (Dehrer). They used traditional narrative elements in many cases including *character, conflict, plot, and scenes* riders were conveyed through; their combination of so many narrative techniques was another important development. In earlier dark rides, “narrative and cognitive levels of engagement take a back seat to more primal mechanisms that place the senses at full attention” including a focus on figures popping up, sound effects, and

split-second images of horror (Ndalianis 58). Instead of simply being a series of gags, as many of the traditional amusement park dark rides were, however, the Disneyland installations were Younger's definition of attractions that "convey a self-contained story experience" (389). Hensch too discussed Walt's desire to have a "story told visually" and rides that were "progressing through a narrative" in addition to park stories and spaces linking all of the experiences together (2). The purpose, according to Sklar, was to "create great stories, present them in unique ways" (*Dream* 170). Disneyland's dark rides were rudimentary in comparison to the decades that followed, but the expression of basic narrative structures and occasionally the bringing in of the rider as a character would make a lasting impression on the industry.

Alcorn asserts that "story is the key ingredient in any great themed attraction" and even the "most important element" (*Theme* 17). It is the narrative qualities of the dark rides at Disneyland that paved the way to this reality and possibly this viewpoint amongst designers and critics. Significantly, Disneyland designers had a debate about whether storytelling was best achieved through "creating a sense of place" or "character" (Kurtti 32). Designers Alex Wright and Jason Surrell both indicate the struggle between these two perspectives (embodied by Imagineer Claude Coats, who valued environment and atmosphere, and Marc Davis, who preferred character and humor) even in later attractions like Haunted Mansion or Pirates of the Caribbean, which go back and forth between immersing riders in a setting and painting interesting characters to observe. Disneyland assisted with the understanding of mediums for storytelling, as Sklar explained that this was a "new medium of storytelling that Walt Disney created with Disneyland" (*One* 3). It was not just the medium that was created then but a potential new form of narrative, which we will be tracing through the decades that followed.

Others have noted the importance of the Fantasyland dark rides to the development of the theme park as a storytelling medium. Rahn understands the presence of narrative in Snow White's Scary Adventures when she deems it "a work of children's literature" (87). She does wonder how much "narrative and thematic coherence" is needed for something to be a story, but in this case, it has clear story references and the visitor moves through the events of the film story (96-7). Multiple designers (Bob Allen, Drew Hunter, Darryl Pickett, and Alex Wright) remind that this original iteration of the ride did not include Snow White because the rider was supposed to be the titular character encountering the terrifying things she does, which makes this an original role-playing attraction. Kischuk explains,

Most heavily-themed attractions attempt to center on the guest as the key participant and character in the attraction's plot. For example, several Fantasyland attractions at Disneyland and Disney World have had the main characters, such as Peter Pan or Snow White, minimized so that the guest can imagine themselves in the main role. (*A Prototype* 16)

Later, a figure of Snow White was added, making it a third-person point of view though still one that utilizes motion and sensory details to contribute to the setting. Hunter calls it a "simple storytelling ride" but the original version still got guests "involved," making it a precursor to the interactive dark rides that would become so common.

Peter Pan's Flight is the most distinct and influential of the original dark rides because of its novel suspended track and symbolic ride vehicle of a flying ship. Even today, it is possible to see what appealed to visitors of the time, and even today, the lines for it are lengthy. The visitor is taken directly inside the animated landscape of the 1953 film and get to "fly" over its scenes (fig. 6). A slowed down, instrumental version of "You Can Fly" plays throughout the ride,

reinforcing the act of flying. Perspective is used, with the city of London appearing small below and Captain Hook's pirate ship towering over the riders. According to Sklar, Peter Pan is the "most popular 'dark ride' ever created" (*One* 52). Peter Pan was a "great original storytelling ride" according to Allen, but it does not "tell the whole story." The audience had to make mental "links" to the content through their familiarity with the content. Even a person with no familiarity would find a "story about flying in a pirate ship" (Allen).



Figure 6: Scene in Disneyland's Peter Pan's Flight (Photo: George Landis, Flickr Creative Commons)

Though most of the discussion of technique is in Chapter 3, it is relevant to note that Hench considered the design of Peter Pan's Flight to be what he called "three-dimensional staging" (39). In addition to being a three-dimensional space, the attraction has three stages that connect to the rider. The attraction delivers a *representation* of the filmic version of *Peter Pan*, *sensory information* in the participatory story of the guest seeing London from the perspective of Peter Pan, and *symbolism*, a semiotic story about the meaning of flying (both a theme and a manifestation of such with a flying ship ride vehicle) (39). The ride transformed the "passive viewing" of the film to the "multisensory experience" of riding through the story; the "three-

dimensional site...gave physical depth and reality to a set of stories and symbols” (Cross and Walton 176). This ride shared multiple elements with other dark rides (darkness, ultraviolet light, movement through scenes), but it also utilized new elements including three-dimensional instead of two-dimensional sets, the suspended track system, and an intentional layering of storytelling elements. Rides such as E.T. Adventure at Universal, Dreamflight at Efteling, and Pianeta Winx (Planet Winx, from the *Winx Club* animation) at Rainbow MagicLand are direct descendants of this ride. Overall, most contemporary dark rides at theme parks continue to be associated with storytelling more so than any other ride genre, and many of the same principles are employed.

Finally, there are a few dozen books and articles that discuss the themed lands of Disneyland in detail. Adventureland, Fantasyland, Frontierland, Tomorrowland, and Main St., U.S.A. are still well-known in popular culture and lands like them are at dozens of parks around the world. Botterill states: “themes of the park drew upon the rich history of folklore, fairytales, American history, children’s literature, and carnival” (108). According to Lawrence Lessig, Walt Disney wanted to “re-create the past for the future” (115). Others have commented that the park was essentially autobiographical (Disneyland was a “roadmap of Walt Disney’s life or mind”), a snapshot of Walt Disney’s background and interests (training developer Van Arsdale France qtd. in Peri, *Working with Disney* 143). Wright goes as far as to say the park was metanarrative, with lands explicitly “specific genres of story – encompassing adventure, fantasy, the past, and the future” (*Disneyland* 16). Either way, the lands were successful for a couple of reasons. One is that the themes and motifs within them resonated with their audiences of the time.

The more relevant explanation for the success of the lands in this research is the skill in storytelling. As Alcorn argues, “If story was important in an individual attraction, it’s even more important for an entire park” (*Theme* 191). First, each park land was explicitly presented on the



1954 *Disneyland* television show as being connected to particular stories (i.e. *True-Life Adventures* in Adventureland, fairy tales in Fantasyland, *Davy Crockett* in Frontierland). This both consciously and subconsciously linked the physical lands the viewers would see with properties they already identified with. It likewise established a link between each land and the idea of storytelling, so that the visitor might venture, “this is where Davy Crockett’s story happened or could happen.” Second, the physical space itself had to deliver. While 1955 Disneyland is not the elaborate immersive theme park of today, it was surprisingly complete in its vision and execution. The symbols of those stories were present in the land, and the motifs were in the settings, making each land a storyworld from the beginning.

Over the years, Disneyland has maintained most of these storyworlds, adding stories within that match the core themes of the land. When I conducted three studies of theme parks and their connections to themes and narratives, I was perhaps most surprised by the fact that so many theme parks still have similar themes to Disneyland. The plaque at the entrance to Disney’s castle parks (fig. 7) reads “Here you leave today and enter the world of yesterday, tomorrow, and fantasy.” This is explicit storytelling, as it tells visitors that they are about to enter a different world. It reflected an earlier desire of Walt Disney to “immerse the guest into the various stories being told within Disneyland” (Morosky qtd. in “Making Disney”). Designer and creative executive Eddie Sotto finds this one plaque to be the “biggest cultural breakthrough in theme design,” and that would not be a surprise considering its lasting effect (“Why”).



Figure 7: “Here you leave today” plaque from Hong Kong Disneyland (Photo: Author)

Yesterday themes like Americana, turn-of-the-century Main Street, crafts culture, Old Europe, Victoriana, and the Wild West are still prevalent. Tomorrow themes such as progress, modernism, space travel, and technological utopianism persist despite needing to be constantly updated. Fantasy themes including cultural legends, fairy tales, and magic are the most ubiquitous in the world even now. According to Ady Milman, tourists want to visit a “believable fantasy world,” one where they can be “immersed in fantasy, adventure, or unique experiences offered in an enclosed secure environment that allows them to be liberated from their everyday lives” (“Guests” 72, 79). Instead of realism, visitors want a separation between the “fantasy environment” and the “real world,” so storytelling through the establishment of cohesive themed lands is a potent aspect of a park’s success or failure (79). It is hard to know whether these are the prevalent themes because of Disneyland’s success or because they are the most compelling themes to visitors, but this question will be addressed in the section below.

### *The Chicken and Egg Question: Disney and Storytelling*

One of the salient questions in theme park history is whether Disneyland was successful because it used storytelling as a modus operandi or whether storytelling became prevalent in the

industry because Disney created the modern theme park industry and they used it as a tool. It is possible to infer the reciprocal nature of this relationship.

First, it has been mentioned by many that Walt Disney himself was a “consummate” storyteller (Wright, *Epcot* 20). Animation historian Charles Solomon elaborates: “Although he had little formal training in literature or narrative structure, Disney was a spellbinding storyteller, with an innate understanding of plot, characterization, and pacing” (10). King and O’Boyle say something similar: “Walt Disney never studied narrative as an academic subject, but he had a keen understanding and deep appreciation of the importance of stories in the lives of humans” (“Disney” 213). These quotes seem to indicate that he operated on intuition, but he did develop this into a skill. An art director who worked with Walt Disney, Ken O’Connor, agreed: “The main thing was his story ability...my main impression was that he was a great story man” (qtd. in Peri, *Working with Walt* 102). Animator Leo Salkin said “everything he did was rooted in storytelling,” while animator Xavier Atencio noted “Walt was a storyteller above all” (qtd. in Solomon 16; qtd. in Williams 88). Walt Disney was quoted as saying, “I honestly feel like the heart of our organization is the Story Department” (qtd. in Lee and Madej 57). Many sources recount the anecdote of Walt Disney acting out every part of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to convince his team that the wild idea of a feature-length animated film was viable.

Even in the new medium, Walt Disney was a storyteller. As Disney legend art director Marvin Davis remembered, “He would throw himself into a story and he would visualize himself going through this ride” (qtd. in Pierce 77). Michael Mendenhall, an executive, notes that it was Walt Disney’s skills as a “great storyteller” that allowed him to connect with the public on television to sell the concept of Disneyland (qtd. in Cellini, “All”). Walt Disney was successful as a whole, according to show producer Tim Delaney, because of his storytelling focus (qtd. in

*The Imagineering Way* 72). Hunter concurs that Disney was “pivotal” in terms of storytelling being a key part of the industry. While the world’s fairs and other attractions might have had story to some extent, he admits, it was “nothing like he did” where “everything was based on story.” Whether in animation or physical space, Walt Disney “felt empowered to design and create new worlds” (Zipes, “Breaking” 351). To Walt, Disneyland was a “logical step in a lifelong career of storytelling” (Kurtti viii).

Since Disney’s staff, who already utilized storytelling in animation, were the ones who created Disneyland, they would use similar principles to design the park. Rogers states that “Disneyland was the first major attraction planned by storytellers rather than engineers, architects, operators or curators.” Disneyland, Alcorn agrees, “was designed by storytellers” (*Theme* 172). Rafferty clarifies: “Our story began when Walt Disney asked his filmmakers to expand upon what they already knew about storytelling and moviemaking in order to help him invent the theme park industry” (qtd. in *The Imagineering Workout* 12). The use of storytelling as an organizing principle added uniformity to the actual space. As J.G. O’Boyle confirms, “As storytellers, they ‘wrote’ the park, giving it consistency of narrative that is matched by few other public spaces” (qtd. in Kurtti xi). The application of story to space was impactful, as is evidenced by the replication of the practice in theme design and public spaces.

Many indicate that Disney brought story to the forefront. According to Pieter Cornelis, “Storytelling is the one thing that has made the Disney brand what it is today and it will be the fundamental basis for the future success of the company....It is the fundamental building block of everything the company does” (127). Andrew Nelson finds that the “importance of story” at Disney is evident in their attempts to “deploy an attraction’s featured elements into a coherent, causal narrative.” Allen goes further and says that storytelling is “the only reason there is a

theme park industry.” He continues, “The whole industry was premised on great, immersive storytelling.” I asked Allen, who heads an organization that uses story as its primary tool, whether he believed what he did about story because he worked at Disney or whether he was effective at Disney because he had that already. He was not completely sure but knew that his industry experience illustrated that it was right to privilege story; he guessed that it was being taught these principles at Disney that first led him to adopt them. Disney “set [him] up for it.”

Creative executive John Lasseter ties together what is powerful about the theme park with the creators of it:

It’s wasn’t until years later that I realized what was so special about Disneyland and all Disney theme parks. It was that each attraction, each ride, each land told a story. Leave it to Walt Disney, the master storyteller, to get even a *place* to tell a story! Of course, the notion that places have stories is a time-honored one. But the idea that you could design a place to tell a story, just like a film, is one that Walt really pioneered – and the discipline he invented to refine this art was Imagineering. (qtd. in *Walt...Magic More Real* 183)

This perspective showcases a great storyteller who led other storytellers to create three-dimensional story art with the purposeful process of creative design. Pickett notes that there were certainly earlier examples of themed experiences including at Coney Island. He says that what Disney did was provide an “expansion of what we can do” because of Walt Disney’s large amount of capital and his “vision” (personal interview). Pickett elucidates: “I think Disney innovated or at least expanded the vocabulary of what you can do in terms of telling a story in a location, bringing it to life in a lived experience. They weren’t entirely the originators of it, they were just really sophisticated” (personal interview). The contributions of Disney “paved the way in how we think about it and how we approach it” (Pickett, personal interview).

It can be argued that storytelling became the staple of theme parks because of Disneyland, as it is obvious that the park's attractions did preference storytelling. "From the beginning," Christina Harris says, "Disneyland set out to tell a story" (48). As Price confirms, "Walt's major investment would be committed to creating a storytelling environment. Rides would be subordinate to story and setting" (27). According Karal Ann Marling, "narrative" is precisely what separated Disneyland from earlier parks, especially through their dark rides, where storytelling is so essential (74). Kurtti considers the theme park an "extension" of storytelling (viii). One of the main reasons they used narrative is because it was the gift the company had and infused in their primary industry at the time, film. "Visual storytelling" was already the "foundation" of Disney (*Walt...Magic Real* 90; Hench 2). Allen mentions that Walt wanted to tell the stories they used on the screen "and tell those stories in a different way." Walt Disney "transitioned the Disney stories into other media," and this included both television and theme parks representing early versions of corporate synergy and transmedia storytelling. Marvin Davis explained that "No one before Walt had used movie making experience and techniques to tell a story visually in a three-dimensional park setting" (qtd. in Mannheim 16). As noted, Disney moved away from gags in animation to story, a similar transformation of a medium to what they would do with the amusement park (Lee and Madej, Solomon). The traditional animated short or dark ride is closely associated with gags, but Disney prioritized narrative. Lee and Madej summarize: "For Walt, the park offered a never-ending story opportunity" (88). This is made evident by the many stories one can extrapolate from the space and the frequent interpretations of these stories by guests or scholars. Lee and Madej go as far as to assert that Walt Disney constructed a Master Narrative related to Mickey Mouse that would become "everyone's story":

He orchestrated a Master Narrative, a system of interrelated stories he developed with the purpose of establishing audience expectations for entertainment that was the image of happiness and based in the family values which Mickey, whose character was still evolving, eventually came to represent. (68)

While Hobbs argues that the park does not necessarily have a “hidden narrative,” she agrees that purposeful techniques including the “language of myth” are used (33). In this viewpoint, it is Disney’s use of strategic storytelling that held the power at Disneyland.

The opposition to this argument is that Disney was so successful *because* they called upon the basic stories of humankind. Many of the attractions at Disneyland were based on the animated films, and these films are “slight variations on winning themes; retellings of ancient stories” (Lessig 23). Abbot calls these stories *masterplots*: “there are stories that we tell over and over in myriad forms and that connect vitally with our deepest values, wishes, and fears” (46). He notes that these are “coded narrative formulas that end with closure” (58). So many of Disney’s early stories were based on masterplots, with fairy tales and children’s literature being the most common subjects. These “great masterplots,” Abbot mentions, “are narrativized over and over again because they engage conflicts that seem to be a permanent part of our circumstances as human beings” (195). According to Degh, the “same stock of motifs” is used in the “heroic legend, the myth, and the folktale,” and clearly Disney drew from this catalog (63). Gabriel explains the power of the fairy tale: “Very few of the stories collected combine the emotional, symbolic, and narrative complexities and wide dissemination to be comparable with folk tales and fairy stories” (149). Narrative structure is similar in many of these forms, and Gabriel observes that even the most emotional stories are generally formulaic. Rafferty concurs: “The best and most memorable stories always have a fundamental, common structure at their

core” (qtd. in Sklar, *One* 206). Berger goes beyond the cultural masterplots to the cognitive aspect of stories in his mention of “brain scripts,” or “story patterns that you’re already familiar with” (qtd. in J. Young, “Every”). He comments that creators use these as tools in the design process, and as the earlier section on storytelling insinuates, our brains may already be programmed to recognize them. The prospect of seeing these stories could serve to make a place more appealing to visit.

There is a claim that Disney parks especially are about the hero’s journey or *monomyth*, something Joseph Campbell deems “mankind’s one great story” that is “widely distributed over the world” and that Carl Jung expanded on with the notion of *archetypes* (Campbell xi, 198). The monomyth is the formulaic cycle of departure from home due to a call to adventure, initiation through multiple trials, and return to society with new knowledge. These myths are metaphors that embody the “great themes” and “ageless archetypes” of the human race, or as Hobbs calls them, “the collective soundtrack of humanity” (Campbell 119; Hobbs 6). Walt Disney’s “work draws heavily from fairy tales, myths, and folklore, which are profuse in archetypal elements” so again it is difficult to surmise whether archetypes were intentional or whether they are just symptomatic of their popular source material (Giannetti 366).

Berger writes about “Disney’s mythic storytelling” and the “mythic source code” that is found in Disney theme parks (1, 4). He contends that the monomyth (sometimes the full cycle, sometimes only small parts of it) is the “narrative foundation” of the parks, with Disneyland being one of the “most archetypal” theme parks (11, 51). According to King, “These places have the powerful ability to evoke because they bypass the conscious mind to plug directly into our pre-conscious cultural matrix. This matrix is built up over centuries of symbol-making, imagery, and iconography” (“The Theme” 6). The spaces are appealing to something in the



subconscious, as Campbell or Jung would agree with. Terence Young adds, “A theme park’s landscape gives form and narrative to a myth, but it also gives it a place. Typically the myth’s disparate parts do not coalesce at any one location but are scattered across the larger territory or in many media” (6). Berger infers that at Disney parks, though one is “surrounded” by stories, there is one myth at the foundation: “And it may seem like there are *hundreds* of stories. But once you look a little closer, you’ll discover that, in very fundamental ways, they’re all really just a single story expressed in many variations through many different formats and mediums” (qtd. in J. Young, “Every”). His book elaborates on disparate attractions that contain this story or at least fragments of it.

It can be avowed that much of this is not conscious, as Campbell thought the monomyth was part of a collective, universal psychology. However, Berger claims that “today’s Imagineers are well versed in Campbellian theory” with some designers having Campbell books on the shelf (32; qtd. in J. Young, “Every”). One of those Imagineers, Hensch, did refer to Main Street, U.S.A. as an “archetypal truth,” remarks on the park’s attempt to express a “child archetype,” and mentions that architecture is tied to symbolic “associative forms” that were developed from a “kind of group dream, a group aspiration” (qtd. in Dunlop 129; qtd. in Mannheim 58; qtd. in Haas 18). Hensch was even explicit in that “I suppose some of our thinking stems from Jung” (qtd. in Haas 17). Rogers too finds that the Pirates of the Caribbean ride “follows the Jungian process of how you know you are in a dream” (qtd. in Korkis, “Bob”). “Story making” and storytelling are “archetypal” according to Allen, based on “classical stories design” or Joseph Campbell. Wright refers to why *Star Wars* worked in Disney: “They recognized that, at their core, the Star Wars stories were built upon the same elemental mythologies that formed the foundations of the best of Disney storytelling” (*Disneyland* 112). Nevertheless, it was not likely

an explicit choice from the original Imagineers. Allen says that “a lot of designers, they don’t do that consciously.” Berger agrees: “they did it all *intuitively*, as artists have done for thousands of years before Joseph Campbell and his theories came along” (qtd. in J. Young, “Every”). Berger reflects that when he writes attraction stories, he does not purposely write parts of the hero’s journey story; they just materialize from the subconscious (qtd. in J. Young, “Every”).

Purposeful or not, this is at least one argument that it is the human connection with myth that made Disney’s work so prosperous. We respond to these stories because of our own connection to the human journey or our (subconscious) desire to want to walk inside of and live the monomyth.

Others have argued that the stories at Disney appeal because they are a part of specifically American myths and values, not only the monomyth. As Don Peri notes, “There are certain values that are in Disney stories and films and in Disneyland that touch people subconsciously. They seem to be part of the whole myth of American life or maybe life in general” (*Working with Walt* 97). Christopher Finch sees purposeful correlation between areas like Main Street, U.S.A. and “archetypes of the American imagination” (437). Clavé concurs that Disney’s castle parks have “mythic structure” and relate back to American myths (186). King and O’Boyle indicate that theme parks are grounded in “collective cultural memory” (“The Theme” 17). Multiple scholars connect Disneyland with expressions of American values and culture (Judith Adams, Stephen Fjellman, Karen Jones and John Wills, Scott Lukas, Karal Ann Marling, Lauren Rabinovitz, et al.). Theme parks helped visitors interpret the “American experience” and are an “index to American culture” (Francaviglia 65; King, “The Disney” 226). Price argues that there was a change from the “darker, repressed energies and anti-establishment

values” of the amusement park or carnival to the “safe, conservative celebration of heartland values” in the theme park, which led to telling different kinds of stories to the public (65-66).

The 1950s in general had a different perspective and set of values. Erika Doss notes that the culture of that time had an “obsession” with fantasy, myth, and archetype (180). Hobbs concurs that the Disneyland of 1955 “captured the idealistic mythos arresting America” (16). She breaks down the American myths Disneyland represents including adventure, consumption, doubt, frontier, innocence, Manifest Destiny, nostalgia, progress, and utopia; the park is a “map of the American psyche” (23). Like Berger, Hobbs sees the hero’s journey throughout the park and finds American myths to be “all versions of the same story,” though the old tales are adapted to “fit an American sensibility” (18, 151). Deborah Phillips provides the counterpoint to this argument, as she notes that the tales told in parks are from “the cultures of the world” (105). She specifies that the Disney castle parks “recreate European folk and fairy tale” modes (95). Robin Allan traces the importance of European culture to Disney films and places and finds a “complexity of dialogue” between European and American sources as well as a “mixture of the old world and the new” (261). Whether primarily American or American with European influence, Disneyland provided particularly meaningful stories to its audience.

Alternatively, it could be that Walt Disney’s synergy between the *Disneyland* television show, which aired overtly connected programming and the park, that allowed visitors to walk inside those TV and movie stories, made it difficult to fail. Television was an emerging medium at the time, and there were captive viewers who happened to be the target audience for the park. Baxter confirms that “Walt was a genius at cross-promotion” (qtd. in Niles, “Theme”). J.P. Telotte mentions the “narrative uniformity” between Disney films and television, and this continued with Disneyland (*Disney* 22). There is an “easy shifting across different media” with

Disney because of their approachable stories (40). He explains that the massive success of the *Davy Crockett* series, for instance, was because it was the “right sort of story at the right time” (*Disney* 35). Many of the successful stories at theme parks come from this kind of audience and time awareness. According to Telotte, the connection between Disney and television “heralded the start of a larger transformation of the entertainment industry itself in the United States and perhaps of American culture itself” (*Disney* xxiii). If this was such an important change in a few mediums, it is logical that it would spill into Disneyland, the new entity, which was really a media park. Business choices, in other words, could have played a major role in the achievement.

It would make sense to conceive of a linear progression from important cultural myths to Walt Disney to his crew who would become Imagineers to Disneyland, which was successful enough to spark an industry. However, art and culture are a bit messier than that. The question is still up for debate and the answer is probably somewhere in between. Nonetheless, it is obvious that the use of story did influence the industry and beyond. Disneyland became the model for “adding theme and story to countless other enterprises” (Price 66). Concepts like Disneyization or the Disney Effect have been referenced, but it is not merely corporate practices that were influential. The narrativization of space would make a big impact on the future of media forms.

### **Theme Park Narratives Overview**

There are quite a few possibilities of ways to organize the theme parks in this section. Price sees waves of themed entertainment with theme parks, world’s fairs and exhibitions, globalization of the industry, museums, location-based entertainment, and casinos. Wanhill outlines four types of visitor attractions in general: grand inspiration (innovative concepts like Disneyland), “me too” (capitalizing on popular concepts like Disney’s Hollywood Studios), new version (clones or updated clones like Tokyo Disneyland), and wonder (high-risk, large,

expensive projects like Epcot). Botterill recognizes parks in the categories of urban (city based, like Tivoli), regional (larger populations than local, like Busch Gardens Tampa), destination (pilgrimage attractors like Disney and Universal), and niche (small and focused like Discovery Cove). Younger usefully distinguishes particular design styles that will be touched upon (traditional, presentational, postmodern, new traditional, and themed amusement park), though parks may encompass many of these styles. While all of these are possible ways to organize theme parks, I am choosing a simpler, chronological format, as that is most conducive to being able to recognize patterns over time. The parks in this case are broken into three basic periods: early, 1950s-1970s, when theme parks were just getting established; maturing, 1980s-2000s, where theme parks begin to become globalized; and contemporary, 2010s, where the industry is now at global scale and impacted by technological advancement. The parks are divided into regions so that it is possible to identify regional variations and trends. Particular focuses of the rest of this chapter will be the most common story content, ride types, and narrative elements.

Because there are a multitude of theme parks and resorts around the world, it is difficult to select a dataset to work with. How I have chosen to do so in this list of sixty-six parks (Appendix C, Table 10) reflects earlier studies where I looked for the trends related to themes and narratives within the top twenty parks in the three most popular regions: the United States (with one entry in Canada), Asia, and Europe. The Middle East is industrializing and modernizing so the themed entertainment industry is in its infancy there, so it is not included in the sixty-six parks, but it is represented in the data analysis.

I used recent numbers from the only instrument that measures theme park attendance, the annual *TEA/AECOM Theme Index and Museum Index: The Global Attractions Attendance Report*. The positive of this sample is that it represents roughly 330 million visitors. It includes

primarily successful parks (admittedly focused on larger parks), which is relevant when looking at the prevalence of storytelling and attempting to prove that it contributes to success. The sample is usable because it includes the three major global regions, thus representing a more balanced perspective.

Nonetheless, the sample is limited in some ways. Parks rarely release attendance numbers, so the TEA/AECOM figures are estimates. As the only instrument of its kind, however, this risk was unavoidable. The other issues are related to the selection of parks themselves. Most of Europe's highest attended parks get less visitation than dozens of parks in the United States and Asia that did not make the list. In other words, to get a representative cross-section of parks, the list cuts off some more attended parks. To allow for the more global perspective, I kept this format but for good measure added in six popular parks that were left out in the other two regions (three in each). Also, the population density in China especially means that some parks may achieve high attendance because of this fact rather than the particular techniques used by the park. Finally, as is no surprise, the list is heavy on Disney and Universal parks, as they dominate the industry. This has long been the case because of multiple factors: year-round operation with weather influence, master-planned parks, global marketing campaigns, brand loyalty, capital outlay, precedent, and destination status with resort hotels and other entertainment on property.

Again, this list has flaws in representation, as it preferences large parks, destination parks, and parks in high population density areas. A small park could still be successful as it has a local audience, but because of the limitations of data, the discussion of storytelling is primarily focused on these bigger and more notable parks that tend to drive the industry. Chapter 3 will fill some of these gaps, as discussions of attraction techniques will not be limited to the parks on the list. As indicated, theme parks are the majority of the list and are concentrated on, as they have

more storytelling elements than amusement parks or themed amusement parks. For ease of reading, the tables related to theme park storytelling attractions are linked in Appendix D. These tables are referred to throughout the rest of this section.

### **Early Theme Park Narratives (1950s-1970s)**

This section summarizes early theme park narratives in two regions: the United States and Europe (using the information from Appendix D, Tables 1 and 2). Some parks on this list were open before Disneyland: Tivoli Gardens, Cedar Point, Gröndal, Hershey Park, Liseberg, Efteling, and Knott's Berry Farm, though some of these have remained amusement parks. Multiple parks opened during this period after Disneyland (ordered by opening year): Legoland Billund, Busch Gardens Tampa Bay, Universal Studios Hollywood, Nagashima Spaland, Phantasialand, Magic Kingdom, Six Flags Magic Mountain, Kings Island, SeaWorld California, SeaWorld Florida, Six Flags Great Adventure, Europa-Park, Gardaland, Busch Gardens Williamsburg, Six Flags Great Escape, Everland, Ocean Park, Dollywood, Heide Park, Puy du Fou, and Thorpe Park. This was the early period of the theme park industry, and the theme park began to differentiate itself from the amusement park. Disneyland and Magic Kingdom remained the most successful theme parks during this earlier period, but most of the parks cemented their identity within their respective regions.

During this time period, the source material for attractions were concentrated into three categories: culture (primarily fairy tales and cultural motifs), intellectual properties (IPs, primarily films), and genre traditions (i.e. fantasy, horror, Western). There were a handful of attractions in the science and technology concepts category. By far the prevalent storytelling attraction type was the dark ride, though other attraction types were represented multiple times: walkthroughs, stage shows, architecture stories, transport rides, and boat rides. Of the ten

narrative terms the attractions were analyzed for, the most common is *setting*. This establishes that even in the beginning of the industry, there was an awareness of space as a critical difference in the medium. *Scenes* are frequently used as well, perhaps demonstrating the influence of film. *Symbolism* is the third most frequently used device, often tied to architecture and physical space. The least common term is *plot*. At this time, storytelling was less explicit, and the grounding of attractions in plot had not been solidified in design. Implicit and environmental stories were the more common expressions during the 1950s-1970s.

Some of the most successful and still popular attractions were created during this time period. These include (ordered by opening year): Fairytale Forest (Efteling), Peter Pan's Flight (Disney parks), Calico Mine Ride (Knott's Berry Farm), the Studio Tour (Universal Studios Hollywood), "it's a small world" (Disney parks), Pirates of the Caribbean (Disney parks), Haunted Mansion (Disney parks), Cinéscénie (Puy du Fou), and Craftsman's Valley (Dollywood). These have become an integral part of the identity of the theme parks they are in and serve as the roots of the contemporary industry.

### **Maturing Theme Park Narratives (1980s-2000s)**

This section summarizes maturing theme park narratives in three regions: the United States, Europe, and Asia (using the information from Appendix D, Tables 3, 4, and 5). The parks that opened during this period are as follows (ordered by opening year): Alton Towers, Canada's Wonderland, Epcot, Tokyo Disneyland, Futuroscope, Chessington World of Adventures, SeaWorld San Antonio, Parc Asterix, Lotte World, Disney's Hollywood Studios, Universal Studios Florida, Disneyland Parc (Paris), OCT Window of the World, Port Aventura, Legoland Windsor, Hangzhou Songcheng Park, Disney's Animal Kingdom, OCT Happy Valley, Islands of Adventure, Changzhou Dinosaur Park, Disney California Adventure, Tokyo DisneySea,



Universal Studios Japan, Parque Warner, Walt Disney Studios, Hong Kong Disneyland, OCT Happy Valley, Chimelong Paradise, OCT East, OCT Happy Valley (Shanghai), and OCT Happy Valley (Chengdu). This period is characterized by international expansion for the biggest companies and the globalization of the theme park industry in general; it represented a maturation of the design process and product. Magic Kingdom and Tokyo Disneyland were the most visited theme parks of the period. The maturing period saw not only global branding but an increased guest awareness of international theme parks. In the eyes of visitors, the theme park became more distinct from the amusement park; they were cognizant of the theme park as a distinct entertainment genre. In multiple countries, the theme park became more connected with pilgrimage including in the United States, where Disney parks were synonymous with the “transformation of the Great American Vacation” (Jackson 104).

During this time period, the source material for American attractions was concentrated on IP, especially films. Culture, genre traditions, and science had representation as well. European attractions favored cultural representation over IP, but there was still a large amount of IP. In Asia, IPs and culture were roughly proportional. There was a diversification of storytelling attraction genres, with special effects theatres, simulators, cinemas, and nighttime spectaculars particularly represented. Nonetheless, during this period, the stage show replaced the dark ride as the most prevalent narrative attraction. This is likely due to the fact that stage shows are less expensive to produce, less permanent, and easier to integrate current IPs into. As a result, there are more of them created during within the same interval of time. Dark rides were still produced at a major rate, with nearly two hundred built.

Of the ten narrative terms the attractions were analyzed for, the most common were again *setting* and *scenes*. *Visual storytelling* became even more utilized during this period perhaps

because of focus on attractions using new canvases for storytelling (e.g. film and nighttime spectacles). Far more common during this maturing period were *character*, *conflict*, and *plot*, illustrating that storytelling became more explicit and formalized within design philosophy. The least common term of this time was *narrator*; this is especially the case in Europe and Asia. While there were still over one hundred narrated attractions, the visual orientation of the medium was privileged during this robust creation period.

There are many successful attractions during the maturing period, too many to name here. One reason for this explosion of attractions is the dozens of theme parks were built during this time including many that opened with a slate of storytelling attractions. By this time, the companies that produced theme parks had decades of industry experience and trends to draw on and the more formalized industry was simultaneously rife with emerging technologies. Vendors formalized their catalogs, making it easier to bring new technologies to the market.

### **Current Narratives (2010s)**

This section summarizes contemporary theme park narratives in four regions: the United States, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East (using the information from Appendix D, Tables 6, 7, 8, and 9). Some theme parks on the list of sixty-six opened during this time (ordered by opening year): Universal Studios Singapore, Fantawild Adventure, Chimelong Ocean Kingdom, Songcheng Lijiang Romance Park, Fantawild Oriental Heritage, and Shanghai Disneyland. Also opened during this time were Ferrari World, IMG Worlds of Adventure, Motiongate Dubai, Bollywood Parks Dubai, and Legoland Dubai. As evidenced, Asia and the Middle East are the two expansion markets that are still in the maturing period. The contemporary period is connected with high-capital expansions, often with single IPs, and technological development. Magic Kingdom and Disneyland are the most visited theme parks, but the Wizarding World of

Harry Potter lands have been a boon for Universal Parks and Resorts. Additionally, regional theme parks are more frequently leveraging the strategies of destination theme parks.

During this time period (which is ongoing), the source material for attractions in all regions is concentrated on IP, especially films. There has been a further diversification of storytelling attraction genres, with new technological concepts including projection shows, interactive quests, and augmented or virtual reality. More hybrids of roller coasters or thrill rides with dark rides are being built, showing that the expectation of storytelling is increasing even in genres that did not previously emphasize story. Both dark rides and stage shows are still well-represented, especially in the regions with new parks. The cinema dropped off considerably during this period, possibly because of enhancements to the film concept (simulators, motion theatres) and the advent of hybrid rides (screens within other kinds of attractions). Of the ten narrative terms the attractions were analyzed for, the most common were again *setting*, *scenes*, and *visual storytelling*. Because of the predominance of IP, *allusion* was even more utilized. The traditional storytelling techniques of *character*, *conflict*, and *plot* remained popular, and *narrator* remained less so. The term *theme*, here used in the literary sense of a recurrent underlying message, is the least common technique during this period. Perhaps this can be accounted for by the gradual decline of edutainment and explicit artificiality (e.g. behind-the-scenes attractions) and the advent of the paradigm of *immersion*.

While the theme parks in the Middle East are not yet on the attendance reports (though TEA expects this to change in the next five years), this is an emerging if currently struggling market, so a similar attraction list from their parks is included (Appendix D, Table 9). Theme parks in the Middle East have used similar IPs, ride types, and narrative elements to the other three regions represented within the contemporary period. They are trying to gain a foothold in

the market, and if anything, storytelling attractions and dark rides are overrepresented in their offerings. The future of these markets will be to move past existing IPs and focus on “creating original work” (designer Gary Goddard qtd. in Kleiman, “Goddard”).

### **The Pervasiveness of Narrative in the Theme Park Industry**

After synthesizing all of the data in the theme park narratives section and tracing the early, maturing, and current periods, it is evident that stories are told at theme parks during each era and in every region. They are told with a variety of attraction genres and use a number of common storytelling elements. There are different kinds of storytelling in theme parks including both techniques and design philosophies about how stories should be told, but it is nonetheless present at the majority of theme parks and some amusement parks. This section draws several conclusions about theme park storytelling as it is now.

According to Crawford, there are multiple possible “data sets” that can be used when determining how to tell stories. This includes the most common way to categorize folk tales or fairy tales, the Aarne-Thompson classification systems, which look at tale types as well as motifs within these tales. He indicates the Campbell or Jung archetypes alluded to earlier. Crawford refers to Vladimir Propp’s functions of folk tales (the actions taken in most tales) as well as a similar list of dramatic situations from Georges Polti. Many stories follow the basic components outlined in Aristotle according to Crawford: plot, character, thought, diction, and song spectacle. Brenda Laurel contends video games follow Aristotelian dramatic structure and include action, character/agency, thought, language, melody/pattern, and spectacle/ enactment (“The Six” 564-65). In this conception, theme park stories too would follow the drama model as they have action within stories and a physical body moving through it, agents acting in the work, agents having thoughts (making choices or displaying emotions), often the use of language even if minimal, the

melody of speech or music, and visual spectacle including “sensory dimensions” (565). Theme park stories use an assortment of these story data sets or tools of composition.

Scholars like Deborah Philips, Scott Lukas, and Mark Gottdiener find that theme parks continue to tell “specific sets of stories” (Philips 95). There is a “restricted typology of genres that recur throughout theme parks” (96). Talmadge Wright agrees, though he leaves some elements out: “Themed environments depend upon a specific limited narrative using film conventions, stereotypes, and fantasy constructions in order to be successful” (247). Philips finds the most common types to be: fairy tales and folk tales, Gothic, chivalric romance, explorers and treasure islands, science fiction, and Westerns; she posits that this is because those types of stories come with messages (generally of conquest) that theme parks want to express, something that I disagree with (97). Instead, these are the popular stories of the times; familiar stories resonate with a larger number of visitors, so they are repeated for emotional impact. While Osterman agrees that there are some “basic” storylines (good versus evil, boy meets girl, etc.), these provide only a “foundation” for storytelling. Pickett identifies thirteen major story tropes within theme parks: step through the magic portal, the journey is the thing, rider’s digest, be one of us, like the real thing only better, something has gone terribly wrong, confront the beast, search and find, escape/survive, shoot and score, racing, back in time, and a peek behind the scenes (“Story... Interactive”). Younger considers four plot types in theme parks: no plot, passive plots (customer, demonstration, performance, tour), active plots (battle, compete, escape, explore, find, protect, rescue, solve, test, or train), and “something goes wrong” as its own category (105). King and O’Boyle explain the broader sets of stories at work in society: primal stories (powerful, universal stories with “emotional pull” often about mortality), cultural stories (stories within cultures, generally about values), contextual stories (stories that put people into

new contexts like history), and personal stories (stories about the life and beliefs of the storyteller) (“Disney” 214). Theme parks rely on the first three quite frequently, with the fourth being less common. All of them can “tap directly into the mind of the visitor” and connect to the humanity of the listener (216). The story catalog and narrative elements used in theme parks are less unique than the techniques used for telling these stories.

A majority of theme park attractions are derived from a popular intellectual property (IP) whether from film, television, books, or oral tradition. The frequency of well-known IPs makes sense as “A familiar property with a powerful, simple storyline or concept can help tie everything together and provide a cohesive guest experience” (Gennawey, *Universal* 148). Alcorn believes that storytelling strategies in places like the queue work best “when the riders already know the story,” which is why, as he says, “licensing successful Intellectual Properties is so important” (personal interview). Designer Tony Baxter confirms that at Disney parks, the majority of content was from IPs or at least structures or tales “embedded in the public mind” (qtd. in Niles, “Theme”). Creative executive Louis Alfieri explains some of the appeal of the IP: “Audiences crave new ways to interact and engage with the content they love. They actively anticipate their favorite franchises expanding to new mediums, ones that offer new levels of immersion.” Using popular IPs like *Harry Potter* or *Star Wars* lends to this condition:

People relate to places in a special way. An IP-branded destination offers visitors the opportunity to explore the universe of franchise in a way that is tactile, personal, and communal. An experiential story environment engages the hearts, minds, and senses of guests as no other medium can. Guests can essentially become “citizens” of an IP’s world. Inside, they can merge their story with the brand’s story. By doing so, they retain a deeper sense of connection to the property. (Alfieri)

This gets at some of the unique affordances of this medium that will be discussed later as well as the benefit of choosing an IP for source material.

While it is generally easier to incorporate these well-known or well-loved IPs, there are a couple of examples where this was not necessary. Wright mentions that though the book *Wind and the Willows* and the short film *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* were not particularly known in the United States, Mr. Toad's Wild Ride was still worth creating: "For us, if a film...offers compelling characters and an attractive setting, it can become a story that can be told in a different medium" (*Disneyland* 85). While the *Avatar* film was less in the public consciousness by the time Pandora – The World of *Avatar* opened, the film's setting and message still worked effectively in Disney's Animal Kingdom. Though the film *Waterworld* is generally considered unsuccessful, Universal's shows based on it have lasted decades.

Younger finds five common ways that IPs are translated into theme park attractions: retelling the story (third person reiterating of the story, occasionally called a "book report" or "trailer" attraction, phrases usually used derogatorily as being an "inferior" adaptation, example Snow White's Scary Adventures), recreating a moment (a single moment or a few moments recreated, example multiple stories in the Fairytale Forest), expanding the story (a new story taking place in the IP's storyworld, example Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey), reapplying the characters (putting the IP's characters in a new context or storyworld, example A Frozen Holiday Wish), and going behind the scenes (taking the IP out of the fiction and looking at the world's generation, example Indiana Jones Stunt Spectacular) (116-18). Adaptation is such a common thing in our society, but it is particularly prevalent in theme park contexts.

Fairy tales and cultural stories are the other the most common content. A few parks are based on the fairy tale tradition. Moniek Hover and Olaf Vugts say fairy tale content and Efteling

theme park are “inextricably woven,” but the park does try to update them as needed (273). Art director Kim Irvine says a similar thing about Disney: “Our goal is to make sure we always keep original stories and intent, but always ‘plus it,’ as Walt used to call it” (qtd. in Woloski and Woloski). Kischuk observes that smaller parks “tend to tell stories that have a regional flavor,” including those “that draw from the local history and folklore,” whereas large parks “often use stories and characters that are popular worldwide” (personal interview). Dean MacCannell refers to the adaptation of books into other mediums: “Our masterpieces are remade in each new genre” (12). Theme parks are a new genre, but they continue to remake the classic stories of the past. Stephen Fjellman sees the process of taking already familiar tales, making them into films that “retell classic stories,” and then porting those into the theme parks, which must maintain “simplicity and clarity” needed in a mixed audience (259). Hover finds that “The structure of fairy tales has been reinforced as well as changed in the course of time as a result of the Efteling ‘narrating’ fairy tales. As a fairy tale narrator, the Efteling fits into the dynamic tradition of telling fairy tales” (11). The theme park in this case becomes a cultural producer and distributor, but also the quintessential storyteller, changing stories to fit the audience as well as making dynamic choices about creation.

Though IPs and cultural stories are the most frequent source material for theme parks, there remains a tension between the need to repeat these for visitors and coming up with original stories or at least modifications of cultural content. On the one hand, Efteling and Disney rely on recognizable stories that have created brand loyalty over the years, but they also want to find new stories, as Hover explains: “I have the idea that also other storytellers at other theme parks face the same dilemmas that the storytellers at the Efteling do: that is wanting and needing to respect the cultural heritage (of fairy tales) and on the other hand from a creative urge seeking to



innovate/to create something new and original” (personal interview). Parks are often a mix of both, but creators in later sections speak to the desire to create new stories for guests to enjoy.

Stories at theme parks may also be targeted towards both children and adults at the same time. For instance, Hover and Vugts explain of the Sprookjesboom (Fairytale Tree) that: “The layered construction of characters and stories is meant to make them attractive to both children and parents, so that Fairytale Tree content is something you can experience together and extract meaning from at different levels” (274). It is known that there is a generational element to theme parks, where families experience them together and the culture of the park may become part of familial identity. Nonetheless, the experiences need to appeal to a wide audience, as singles and couples without children enjoy going to theme parks, especially in some places like Japan, where “young Japanese women” are a target audience (Raz 169). It is also worth noting that if the contemporary industry was derived from Disneyland’s success, Disneyland was inspired by Walt Disney’s notion of a multi-layered experience: “We believe in our idea: a family park where parents and children could have fun – together.” This quote is displayed on the Walt Disney with Mickey Mouse statue in front of the Disney castles as a constant reminder of this early goal.

One essential point is that the stories told in theme parks may not be the same because of cultural and regional variations. A common complaint when Disney brought over the Cinderellabration show from Tokyo Disneyland to Florida was that it had no storyline; it did have scenes and a plot event, albeit sans conflict, but it did not follow Western dramatic structure. Regional variations cannot be generalized, but values are at play with the differences. An example of designing for cultural appropriateness is found in Mystic Manor at Hong Kong Disneyland, meant to be a successor to the Haunted Mansion. It could not be a clone, however, because designers “wanted to be sensitive to any cultural concerns regarding ghosts or the spirit

world with our Asian guests” (show producer Mark Schirmer qtd. in Rath). Similarly, show writer Fangxing Pitcher says of creating for Shanghai Disneyland, “When we developed the stories, we had to make sure they would resonate with Chinese visitors” (qtd. in Feiran). Robert Rath compares this to the localization process that video game companies have. Mystic Manor does have the Monkey King, a legendary figure there, but it excludes ghosts, something that is part of “mainstream folk religion” and would bring real fear according to anthropologist Joseph Bosco (qtd. in Rath). This is an illustration of stories being modified or created to fit within cultural contexts, though the Meet the World attraction at Tokyo Disneyland (where an American company narrated the history of Japan but was accused of glossing over “dark” periods in history like WWII) might have illustrated that it is not always successful. Mark Anderson, a creative director, denotes the challenge of using something like the Monkey King in attractions as familiarity can lead to differing versions of the same character in the imaginations of visitors; the legend can become a cliché despite inclusion for cultural leverage. More positively perhaps, characterization may connect foreign audiences to a culture. In the Circle-Vision films *Wonders of China* and *Reflections of China*, the poet Li Bai narrates and bookends the otherwise travelogue presentation. This utilizes an important cultural figure and allows the material to be more accessible as he acts as a familiar human connector and symbol of the arts.

Despite the more recent attempts at cultural localization, one criticism that could be issued about theme park storytelling is its generally Western focus. Theme park stories are heavy on European fairy tales, Campbell- and Jung-inspired mythic and archetypal storytelling, and stories that are linear and filmic. The overrepresentation of these characteristics is likely accounted for by the training of Disney and Universal, the most successful companies in the industry, both couched in the Western tradition. These notions may cloud the perception of fans

and visitors as well; this was demonstrated by the disconnect between standard Western shows and the thematic shows brought over from Japan. Hetteema similarly argues for diversity in design teams: “We can’t expect our stories to be heard by the whole world if our teams telling the stories don’t mirror the full spectrum of our audience.” Additionally, Western narrative bias was illustrated in the assumption of several fans that Na’vi River Journey was not storytelling because of its exclusion of standard plot and dramatic structure or its *in media res* beginning and open-ended conclusion. The assumptions about this attraction presupposed that linear narrative is expected in theme park attractions rather than more environmental, symbolic, and poetic discourse. In general, this is an area that could be investigated, as theme park design can learn from Eastern, non-linear, and poetic forms to produce a greater variety of attraction experiences.

As explained earlier in the chapter, there were some commonalities throughout the time periods and regions other than just the source material. Though there are many kinds of narrative genres within a park, dark rides and stage shows were the most frequently used. It can be said that Europe and Asia follow dramatic structure less and perhaps use more symbolism in cases, but they still use similar genres to tell stories. Indeed, Abbott says “all genres pre-package the world,” so most stories are symbolic if looked at in that way (154). The prevalence of terms like *setting*, *scenes*, and *visual storytelling* start to indicate the medium difference presented by the theme park. Stories are visual and spatial, regardless of region or time, but they tend to retain the show scene model. Philips claims that “stories are imposed upon the space...rather than intrinsic to it,” but many designers would disagree with this assertion (94). Though narrative can be conceived of as a separate layer of park space, it seems that designers purposely build stories into spaces and construct spaces as stories. Even the Mad Tea Party, a “flat” ride with few narrative elements, is *synecdoche*. The tea cups represent the Mad Hatter’s tea party in both the Disney

film and in the novel, and the soundtrack recalls the Disney film. Theme parks literally and figuratively embody and enact stories.

The thread between all of these characteristics is that they provide opportunities for engaging stories. Those who work with theme parks emphasize what makes these stories stick. Hover and Vugts say people respond to stories that do the following things: entertain, captivate, teach, encourage imagination and fantasy, offer a solution for problems, and provide abilities to identify with characters (273). Rohde comments on what makes a story engage the audience:

What makes a story interesting is the contrast between the pattern — which should be predictable enough that you can recognize it as a pattern — and the interruptions in this pattern, which are surprising enough that you keep looking to see where is this going and what is going to happen. Stories should be predictable enough to be [recognizable and familiar], yet different enough to hold your attention. (qtd. in Jacques)

Anderson calls character, setting, and platform (essentially attraction type), the “touchpoints of good storytelling.” Conversely, Lukas elaborates on what might “break” a story: unclear stories, elements within a space that are not integrated into the story, story lessened with a space to make room for other elements (or theming as a substitution for story), a story sticking out from other elements showing it does not fit, a bad story, bad transitions, a story that tries too hard to sell itself, bad actors, a shallow story, or a story that asks the guest to do too much to comprehend it (*Immersive* 212-13). Despite the spatial dimension or technologies, theme parks still have to employ the basics of good narrative.

It would be easy to fall into Espen Aarseth’s concerns about “*story fetishism*” or “narrativism,” finding narratives even when they are not intentional or overemphasizing the essentiality of story (“Genre Trouble” 49). Gabriel references the “current trends of seeing

stories everywhere” and the “danger” of the “tendency” to “regard everything as narrative,” which is reductive and eliminates differences between “text and context, narrative and meta-narrative, fact and fantasy” (5, 151). Despite this legitimate concern, I would argue against those who deny storytelling as an essential attribute of the theme park. It is evident from every interview I conducted that creative professionals purposefully embed stories or design using narrative. My previous projects indicate that this is the case, as the most visited parks tend to employ story and theme. Cornelis studied attractions at European parks and found that storytelling is a key facet of theming and that large parks as well as the most successful parks employ it more frequently. Parks that utilize storytelling have lower levels of “distraction” and higher levels of “meaning” (132). To be successful in the current industry, at least, narrative engagement is required. Abbot argues that “more expensive public forms of narrative invariably eliminate the subversive and counter-culture,” but there are many examples of storytelling that can be used to teach and inspire (127). Pockets of resistance may arise in fandom as well, positioning theme park stories as dynamic processes.

When talking about the Efteling theme park, Clavé explains that it is filled with values important to the Dutch like childhood memories and fairy tales and part of “cultural heritage” (43). An executive confirms that “In the Netherlands, Efteling is a cultural thing” (Coen Bertens qtd. in Ralph, “Efteling”). Their enchanted forest area contain more than thirty tales, and they have come to see themselves as the “narrator of fairy tales” (Hover 2). Another executive goes as far as to say that “Efteling is all about storytelling” (Fons Jurgen qtd. in Gilling, “Dark”). Hover describes a process that allows tale interpretation from walk around narrators as well as the reception of fairy tales with presentations including shows, rides, static or technological scenes, books in front of these vignettes, and a large animatronic tree that narrates stories. The stated

purpose of the Efteling organization now is to be the “guardian of fairy tales” with an interest in “preserving the cultural history of fairy tales” (10). This is a proud heritage and estimable mission, but I extend the significance here to theme parks as a whole. The theme park is indeed a narrator of stories, the story gatherers, and the purposeful storytellers of popular culture.

Efteling’s Sprookjessprokkelaar character is an apt metaphor for this section. He gathers tales from around the world and sets them in his library. They may not all be original tales, but they contain meaning and express values. He then passes them on and lets children and adults alike unlock the magic of this ancient art.

## CHAPTER THREE: EVOLUTION OF NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES AND TECHNOLOGIES

In this chapter, I describe multiple narrative techniques and technologies that are used within theme parks. Special attention is paid to how technologies of particular times influenced the ways that stories are told. It should be noted that theme parks do not tend to replace more traditional storytelling methods when they find new ones; instead, a diversity of approaches lends variety to attraction experiences. This chapter does not represent an exhaustive list; it focuses on particular strategies employed to demonstrate the most common techniques and technologies used through the sixty-year life of the theme park. Unlike the last chapter, examples can be drawn from any park, not only large theme parks. Also, while these will be grouped into three general periods, contemporary parks still often use earlier methods, so attractions are mentioned in this section within the technique or technology, not within time periods.

### **Story Development Process**

Before narratives exist at the park, they need to be created. As Ady Milman states, “Successful development of a themed attraction is a combination of writing or story telling, creative design, financial projections, audience analysis, and planning” (“The Global” 231). This section will detail storytelling processes related to project development phases. The themed entertainment industry has many purposeful story development techniques. Themed entertainment is highly collaborative, with nearly every project developed on teams and then handed over to other teams. A finished attraction has usually passed through the hands of hundreds of designers, engineers, and tradespeople. For larger projects, hundreds of professionals will touch the product before it opens to the public.

Storytelling in theme parks is collaborative. Writer and creative consultant Larry Tuch talks about the strength of the *charrette* model, which is common practice in the industry. Charrettes are “intense” and “multi-disciplinary” sessions where designers and stakeholders hash out ideas (“Design”). Tuch mentions that during the blue sky phase, it is best to not “shrink the universal possibility.” It should start “wide” and “wild”; as he says, “after the charrette, reality will come in and create constraints.” Creative executive Mark Woodbury supports the “brainstorming” model and emphasizes that collaboration and acceptance of even the “craziest ideas” is what brings good work (qtd. in Niles, “Interview”). Show writer Darryl Pickett concurs that in the end, the project is “not gonna match anyone’s initial vision of it,” but he still suggests that a charrette is the “quest for big ideas,” something I experienced when participating in a theme park design charrette (personal interview; “Story...Interactive”).

There is an interdisciplinary nature to theme park collaboration. Tuch and Woodbury emphasize this interdisciplinarity, with each field playing a different role. Disney states that there are 140 disciplines within Imagineering, and there are that many in most projects (Korn). Creative director Alex Wright names disciplines that are part of Walt Disney Imagineering (WDI): show/concept design and illustration, show writing, architecture, interior design, engineering, lighting design, graphic design, prop design, sound design, media design, landscape architecture, show set design, character paint, character plaster, dimensional design, fabrication design, special effects, production design, master planning, research & development, project management, construction management (*Disneyland* 8-11). Game designer Chris Crawford expounds upon the “two cultures” of science versus arts and humanities, but these cultures are combined on every theme park development team (103). A good example of this collaboration and specialty fields is in the explanation of Justice League: Battle for Metropolis (the versions at



Six Flags St. Louis and Six Flags Over Texas specifically). Creative director Rich Hill notes that Sally Corporation created the animatronics and helped Six Flags with the story (based on DC Comics), Oceaneering provided the ride vehicles and track, Lexington Scenic built the static sets, Alterface made the game scoring system, Techni-Lux did the lighting, BOSE installed the sound system, and RealD did the 3D system (qtd. in J. Young, “An Interview”). This is a single ride, but it illustrates the amazingly collaborative nature of the industry. Operations managers and staff are involved before and after the completion of the project as well, and operations and maintenance employees will operate the attraction after handoff. There are teams of people in each of these companies and trades who install it.

Multiple creative professionals I talked to mentioned both upsides and downsides of this process and industry reality. Designers Ross Osterman and Darryl Pickett declared that while it is enjoyable to be collaborative, it does remove artistic individualism. Tuch states that creative people are “working for an audience” anyway, but it is more limiting than some art forms. The reality is that unless the creator is a very top person, as Tuch admits: “the vast majority of my creative work is stuff that never gets built.” On the other hand, Tuch says it is “always rewarding” to be collaborative, as the people in the room are “bringing a whole life of experience” to learn from. Creative executive Anthony Esparza finds working with various people from many disciplines one of the most enjoyable parts of the work. Nonetheless, as Morgan Korn comments, in the themed entertainment industry “loners need not apply.” Tuch says, “If you want to do something that’s totally your own, you just have to do it in another arena.” Multiple industry panels have referred to the importance of relationships and networking, perhaps a reminder that it is situated within the business world. Designer and creative executive Joe Rohde confirms that “The ability to collaborate as a group is a must” and that “All ideas go

through a process and it's not exclusive to one person" (qtd. in Korn). He has presented on creative collaboration at more than one event, possibly because it is an unconventional way to create art installations. Designer Tom Morris points out that "grudging" collaboration or "yes if" is not useful in the way "yes and" collaboration is, something he says he learned from improvisational theatre (qtd. in Sklar, *One* 119). He calls this "additive collaboration," and it is about "not being afraid to make someone else's idea work or to enhance an idea of your own by incorporating others' ideas and designs into it" (119). The natural ego of creation has to be muted for effective teamwork in themed design. There are still leadership roles on the team, as creative director Charlie Otte notes that the creative director specifically has to focus the team, be sure the story "stays on everyone's mind," and must "be aware of the full arc" of the storyline. The story, then, often guides the collaborative process. He also finds it difficult to separate the story from the "generative process."

There are several stages in the process of Imagineering to get from charrette to open attraction. Engineer and executive Steve Alcorn lists the stages as Blue Sky, Estimating, Facilities Design, Art Direction, Technical Design, Construction, Commissioning, Programming and Animation, Test and Adjust, Opening, Tweaking, and Renovation. It is in the early concept phases that the story is developed including a "detailed storytelling analysis of each attraction" (Sklar qtd. in Marling 17). This is a process that may take years and go through many iterations. Osterman gives an analogy about many post-its being on a wall and slowly being removed until the right stuff literally sticks. Large design companies may have in-house firms doing research and development. Walt Disney Imagineering has a Research & Development area, but there is moreover a large consortium of researchers at Disney Research that develop technologies and publish studies, some of which relate to or affect the parks. Design companies may employ

partner firms or third-party groups to develop technologies. At large design companies or organizations that have in-house creative professionals, stories are developed on site, while some parks employ vendors who offer turnkey solutions, which may include storytelling and content.

There can be various impetuses for new attractions as well as ways that stories are delivered in these attractions. Osterman includes attractions driven by stories, intellectual property (IP) acquisition, technologies, or park space and budgetary needs. Creative executive Ron Logan mentions company branding, technologies, target markets, and budget. Designer David Younger defines three kinds of content development methods: *aspirational design*, or the inside-out method, where a new experience is determined by the existing park themes; *popular design*, or the outside-in method, where well-known IPs are brought in; and *medium design*, where the park utilizes strategies that complement the theme park medium.

Some designers view theme as an essential building block for attraction design. As one Imagineering book explains, “Themes – the backbones of our stories – help inform every aspect of design, from the choice of a ride vehicle to the feel of the pavement underfoot” (*Walt... Magic More Real* 30). Wright concurs that themes “drive every one of our design decisions” (*Disney’s Animal* 41). Joseph Pine and James Gilmore agree that themes are “central to experience design”; they argue, “The theme must drive all the design elements and staged events of the experience toward a unified storyline that wholly captivates the customer” (78). Rohde explores this further in his definition:

Theme is centrally important to all narrative. A theme is the driving universal idea that each moment in the story revolves around. It is the philosophical premise that drives the storyteller to tell the story, the spine and bones of every tale. Developing a theme and

committing to it allows the subsequent story-building to proceed in a unified direction and achieve some coherent meaning. (“From Myth”)

Moving from themes to stories, Rohde argues that “Theme is the core basis of story” (qtd. in Jacques). Creative executive Bob Allen maintains, “The only thing I’m dogmatic about is, I think the story has to come first. You can’t start with the space, you can’t start with the physical gag, you can’t start with the effect, you can’t start with the ride system. You gotta start with the guest and you gotta add a story and then say ‘Okay, are we right about that?’” Show producer Mark Schirmer notes that especially for dark ride creation, designers “should let the story drive the decision making process” (qtd. in Alton, “Mystic”). The company Forrec has a similar position when they say that good theme park design is to “have a great story and tell it everywhere”:

One thing that unites children and adults, cultures and segments is that everyone loves stories. Great parks and experiences are built around compelling stories that do more than inspire your guests – they provide the logic for just about every choice you make in designing and operating your park. Get the narrative right and you’ve got a good solid foundation.

As mentioned previously, some creative professionals (Allen, Rohde, Sotto, Tuch, etc.) want narrative-driven attractions and use those principles to guide other design decisions.

However, it is important to acknowledge that not all attractions tell stories. Louis Prospero clarifies that while “every attraction is based on a story,” that does not mean that “every attraction tells a story” or that there is always a “fleshed-out narrative” (22). The idea is that there is a “strong concept” or “theme” that “informs their every detail” (22). Mark Wolf elucidates: “Worlds, unlike stories, need not relay on narrative structures, though stories are always dependent on the worlds in which they take place” (17). *Storyworld* informs space even

when plot does not. Henry Jenkins elaborates: “The amusement park attraction doesn’t so much reproduce the story of a literary work, such as *The Wind in the Willows*, as it evokes the atmosphere; the original story provides a ‘set of rules that will guide the design and project team to a common goal’ and which will help give structure and meaning to the visitor’s experience” (“Game” 123). Narrative is a “design system,” in the words of Allen, so even attractions without stories were developed through storytelling principles.

Another motivation Younger refers to is design style archetypes. These encompass *traditional* (implicit storytelling, less elaborate theming), *presentational* (expository, abstract), *postmodern* (openly artificial, non-immersive), *new traditional* (explicit storytelling, immersive), and *themed amusement park* (motifs and branding of amusement rides, non-immersive). Some parks are fully realized in one of these design styles so future attractions, creative decisions, and storytelling techniques will be driven by them (like Disney’s Animal Kingdom), while other parks employ various modes of design in one space (such as contemporary Epcot).

Pickett says of show writers, who compose many of story-related documents that “the story is the essential thing that we bring to a project”; a show writer is the “guardian of story integrity” and can write everything from a sign to a show guide (personal interview; “Story...Writing”). There are multiple documents composed in the development process related to stories including the high concept (a few sentences), the conceptual overview (a few paragraphs), the story treatment (a few pages), the actual show script, and a show guide for future designers and employees to understand the “design intent” (comprised of sections like the overview, backstory, story, design, employee role, and references) (Younger 125). Show writer Adam Berger adds to the high concept, conceptual overview, script outline, and show script a “guest experience outline,” which is a present-tense “description of the attraction from the point

of view of the guest” (“Stages”). Attractions have a set of requirements that call for some or all of these documents, usually constrained by client and project particulars.

Show guides can be formalized into bound books that exemplify stories, patterns, colors, and other design elements. One such design “Bible” from a Dollywood ride was shared with students in a lecture I attended. This had story information, ride specifications, color palettes, fonts, and other pertinent details. Sometimes original concepts and usable story treatments (not bound by non-disclosure agreements) can be utilized as portfolios to gain future work. Tuch shared such a document with me; it included story treatments combined with concept art, illustrating both writing ability and conceptual development processes to potential clients. Also, like the traditional writing and editing process, the documents will go through several stages. Hill, for instance, who did the “concept narrative” for Justice League: Battle for Metropolis, went through seven drafts in three months (qtd. in Niles, “Bringing”). The overall process will end with visuals, but it won’t start that way, according to Rohde: “We do a lot of talking, we do a lot of writing, we do a lot of story-based setup before we start to draw” (qtd. in Doyle).

However, not all story documents are written, as the storyboard has become the standard in the themed entertainment industry in addition to film, marketing, and other fields. The storyboard was an “important new technique,” “innovation,” and vital concept when the Disney studio invented it in the 1920’s (Thomas, *Walt* 111; Solomon 11; Moran 12). It was useful because “Animators had long been hampered in story sessions by the necessity of verbalizing what was essentially a visual medium” (Thomas, *Walt* 111). The tool is widely used to chart the story of an attraction. Disneyland’s being a “storyboarded environment” is a reason for its success (Hench qtd. in Haas 16). As an Imagineering book describes, “Everything we do revolves around the story, and storyboards are an essential tool in helping us tell the story” (*The*

*Imagineering Workout* 10). The storyboard is central to developing and presenting ideas to stakeholders as well as to artists to visualize a project (*Walt...Magic More Real* 57). Other tools include digital animation, animatics, and maquettes or physical models, which “are used as a three-dimensional storyboard” (*Walt...Magic More Real* 56). Though stories are so often thought of as oral or written, attractions are developed through both written and visual means. Concept art can help tell a story to designers, management, and to potential guests, as select pieces of concept art for major projects tend to be released in the press as a form of pre-marketing. The drawings of Magic Kingdom’s New Fantasyland are a good sample of this. These images were released to the public years before opening. The paintings expressed natural features through an almost impressionistic style. The beauty of the area and the fantasy quality of the land was emphasized in these renderings rather than particular attractions. They were trying to sell the experience with a story and setting before it was even built.

In addition to the front story, backstories are sometimes constructed. Berger notes that “In the creative process employed by WDI, every themed experience begins with a story,” and this means sometimes elaborate backstories (*Every* 28). Backstories bring a “level of attention to the art of storytelling” (28). Occasionally, backstories are given to guests through details in the space or in marketing media, as the story of Disney Springs at Walt Disney World was. This was the creation of a “unifying storyline” about a town that developed around a Florida natural spring that would “reinvigorate” the open-air shopping and entertainment area formerly known as Downtown Disney (Skees qtd. in Korkis, “The Story”). Creative executive Theron Skees says the background story is different from that of the parks, but it is still about bringing venues “to life”; in this case, they built an artificial spring (made of cement, colored glass, and paint) next to natural trees to support the storyline. Backstories are also meant to assist designers in their

understanding of a project. Skees notes, “the storyline that we developed gives us a background history for which to create everything on – our landscaping, our architecture and everything” (qtd. in Korkis, “The Story”). Wright mentions a similar concept with shows: “Story treatments like this [for Country Bear Jamboree] become the basis for our character designs, influencing the scenic treatment, and determining the specific show content” (*Magic* 55). Nonetheless, show writer Kevin Rafferty warns, “You simply cannot write a two-hundred-page backstory and expect anyone to understand how all of that factors into an idea” (qtd. in Sklar, *One* 213). Storytelling can get “too complex” because designers want to “tell too much” (Hunter). Younger mentions that detailed backstories can be used as a “crutch” and contribute to less experiential design (personal interview). Designer and creative executive Bob Rogers goes even further: “If a story is invisible, if you can’t immediately sense it, then you don’t have a story at all” (qtd. in Korkis, “Bob”). This highlights the theme park’s distinct focus on brevity.

One aspect of story development that merits attention is research. Many artists research before they create, but it is often part of a formalized process in the themed entertainment industry. To furnish more authenticity, select companies and particular designers do extensive research. Designer and creative executive Eddie Sotto says, “I’ve found that research as a step in the creative process still enriches every job” (“Bad”). He relates that artist and legend Herb Ryman “stressed the importance of doing in-depth research when it came to the creation of immersive worlds” (“Bad”). An Imagineering book confirms this: “Research enriches our storytelling” (*Walt ...Magic More Real* 118). Some research is conducted by librarians and archivists on staff. Research may be through personal development by way of reading, and multiple creative professionals over the years have mentioned their libraries or had them mentioned by others (e.g. John Hench, Joe Rohde, Ron Schneider, and Walt Disney himself).



Rohde quips, “If you’re going to call yourself a professional, it’s not about your opinion. It’s about your library” (“Legends: Adapting”). Research can be conducted by combing through archives of previous company work or undeveloped concepts.

It can also be done by building on the artistic traditions of the past. As Rohde explains, “The research that goes into these parks is not merely research into the real world. It is research into the great works of art of all those who have come before. That’s how it works. This is art” (qtd. in Martens, “Meet”). Rohde had a similar message at an art museum presentation entitled “Animal Kingdom, Pandora and the Great Masters.” In it, he argued that theme parks do not invent new philosophies or styles but instead continue the traditions of great artists, thought leaders, and works. He incorporated ideas like the picturesque, the sublime and the beautiful, cathedral design, softness, details, mountains as an idea, recycled art, large format painting, sculptural form, color, light, and texture. People covered included Gian Lorenzo Bernini, John C. Brown, Edmund Burke, Dale Chihuly, El Anatsui, Frederic Edwin Church, Thomas Cole, Caspar David Friedrich, Giovanni Battista Gaulli, William Gilpin, Claude Lorrain, Frederick Law Olmsted, Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Robert Rauschenberg, Hubert Robert, and John Ruskin. These figures had theories, traditions, approaches, or styles that in turn influenced the artists that create theme parks. Rohde calls theme parks an art form that “is connected to a traceable, describable pedigree of behavior that goes back hundreds of years and is study-able” (“Legends: Adapting”). Tellingly, Rohde’s “syllabus” presented at the IAAPA Legends Panel has a reading list on the evolutionary connection to storytelling and art, architectural and aesthetic theory, creativity, and a suggestion to read “lots of Dickens” (“Legends: Adapting”).

The theme park industry can be competitive, but the work of others within it is influential. As designer and creative executive Gary Goddard offers, “I continue to look to be

inspired by others' work" (qtd. in Kleiman, "Goddard"). He relates an anecdote of visiting Wizarding World of Harry Potter and sending a congratulations letter to a Universal executive. Quality work within the industry is persuasive, as he finds: "These types of experiences are what drive me and I think it's what drives the best folks in the industry" (qtd. in Kleiman, "Goddard"). Though fans might gripe that there are attraction copies within the same company or from one company to another, the adage "imitation is the sincerest form of flattery" would apply.

Other research is done in the field. Design legend Marty Sklar mentioned Rohde's penchant for this and calls it "travel advocacy"; various things can be done including on-site observations, field art, interviews, artifact collecting, and in general getting inspiration from places and peoples (*Dream* 301). Rohde confirms, "We're not making two-dimensional products. You need to know what places are really like" (qtd. in Korn). Additional authenticity at Disney's Animal Kingdom came from collecting artifacts from other countries, gathering stories from indigenous peoples, and hiring local artisans to come back to the Florida to decorate Discovery Village (Malmberg). In Nepal, Imagineers were "immersing themselves in the legends, lore, and heart of the place.... That experience allowed us to approach the project with an insight and authenticity we could only attain by being there" (Rohde qtd. in Surrell, *The Disney* 115). For Pandora – The World of *Avatar*, "Rohde took his team on field trips to Hawaii, Bali and China for design inspiration from real landscapes and cultural touchstones" (Harpaz). This research can have unexpected consequences, as Rohde shares how a monastery continued their collecting of stories about the Yeti (research for Expedition Everest: Legend of the Forbidden Mountain) for an oral history project ("From Myth"). Universal professionals Larry and Lorna Collins note regarding attractions at Universal Japan that "Creating the look, color and texture of scenes, sets and props... was not accidental," as it was extensively researched (51).

Previous experience is always a teacher, both achievements and mistakes. As design and production manager Björn Heerwagen affirms, “We’re allowed to fail a bit. It’s only through failure that you get success” (qtd. in Bolton). On-site research can also take place, as indicated by Sotto who participated in role-playing by sitting in a shop at night imagining being the proprietor character; this experience “brought the story to life” and assisted with the completion of the design (qtd. in Littaye and Ghez 65). Attractions get refined throughout the process and by multiple stakeholders. While working on this project, I was able to attend a proprietary presentation meant for executives that summarized the field research and extensive planning that went into a particular ride; the amount of time and detail in this lengthy demonstration alone indicates the hard work that goes into theme park design to develop lore and form.

### **Technology Development Process**

There is a historical connection between amusement and technology, and technologies remains omnipresent at the theme park. Technology is an extension of architecture and material culture and used for efficiency, immersion, and to “create more meaningful stories” (Lukas, *Immersive* 215). Theorists talk about the ideology of “technological utopianism” or “technostalgia” at theme parks, and certainly some theme parks showcase new technologies and laud them (Adams 99; Fjellman 217; Jones and Wills 103; Rabinovitz, *Electric* 168; Francaviglia 80). It is even more practical than that, as technology “plays a role in every designed space” and theme parks are “fully deploying technology in operations at all levels” (Lukas, *Immersive* 214; personal interview). Disneyland was a “technological wonder,” especially when it started using Audio-Animatronics, though they used very old techniques like Pepper’s Ghost too (Adams 99). Pickett concludes that “the tools that are available to us to tell stories or to create experiences

keep changing” (personal interview). While in some ways storytelling has not changed much, the industry has seen a “march of technology” (Esparza).

The entire development process of contemporary parks is related to advanced technology including design technology (CAD schematics, animatics, 3-D modeling, maquettes, etc.), engineering (“mechanical, architectural, structural, civil, electrical, software, ride control, show control, audio/video, lighting, special effects, systems, project, electronic, safety”), and other aspects of rides and shows (robotics, video games, virtual/augmented reality, pyrotechnics, film, graphics and signage) (Alcorn, *Theme 75*). Show producer Mark Nichols finds that now the computer has been introduced into “almost all aspects of backstage technology” (qtd. in Emerson, “Mark”). Companies also employ advanced on-stage technologies like admissions ticketing and ride reservation systems or virtual queues. Just like with storytelling in theme parks, “the delivery mechanisms are unique to each venue” (Wright, *Disney California 49*).

Technology has been used to tell stories since the beginning. Many narrative technologies exist, with some being invented and others being appropriated to help with telling stories. According to a book by Imagineers, “Many of our greatest inspirations have come from the creative application of existing technologies, re-imagined in the service of a great story” (*Walt...Magic More Real 94*). Storytelling techniques had been invented already according to Alcorn, but “what hadn’t been invented are the technologies we use today to tell those stories” (*Theme 18*). This entire chapter looks at theme parks in relation to these technologies. Disney developed technologies for film and continued with theme parks; now it is common for the industry to develop new storytelling technologies, not merely bring in the prominent technologies of the day, though that happens as well.

Nonetheless, many within the industry do not trust aspects of technology and believe it should be secondary to story. These comments were so numerous that it was easier to organize them into a table (Appendix E, Table 11). In these statements, designers express frustration with the technology race overwhelming storytelling, with all of them firmly in the camp of story-driven design. For an industry built on technologies that continues to employ them in more and more advanced ways, it is surprising how wary creative professionals can be of their use. Rohde poignantly represents the apprehensions of technology interfering with the human endeavor of storytelling: “This form of storytelling ... is really ancient and really grounded, and it’s grounded in these really human things. I still believe in the art, in the artists, and in this sincerity of reaching through the medium from one person, the artist, to another, the audience. All of this other stuff, it distracts” (qtd. in Martens, “Themed”). This reflects debates in other areas of Texts and Technology, where scholars worry about technologies eroding narratives and private lives.

Moniek Hover finds that “Variation in the narratives may also arise under the influence of technology” (11). Parades are one form that have been influenced by technology, with float technology getting more advanced. Earlier parades like SpectroMagic or Fantillusion used lighting and kinetics for scene changes or narrative, and recent parades like Paint the Night or Journey of Lights utilize state-of-the-art technology for similar purposes. While Festival of Fantasy has traditional dancers and characters, the parade uses high-technology costumes and float design including a fire-breathing, steampunk dragon. Osterman admits that in some cases, the technology drives the attraction development, as in the case where Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey’s form was based on the KUKA Robocoaster technology that became available. However, Tuch believes the attraction’s success was due to its beginning with the story of Harry Potter and the guest flying. While “the technology makes flying possible,” it is the

“symbolism of flying in Harry Potter’s world” that make the experience compelling (Tuch).

Pickett sees two approaches, one where the designer figures out a way to utilize new technology, the other involving the designer saying “here’s the story we want to tell. What tools can best help us to tell it?” (personal interview). He finds that the “latest and greatest tools” can be appropriate to the story, but often, the “simple ones” are the answer. Technology is generally conceived of as being a way to tell stories or assisting with it as creative director Paul Moreton notes:

The technology is a facilitator to enable us to tell stories. Ultimately, what we do here is tell stories, and we want the guest to feel like a part of the stories we create; to have a personal connection ... That’s our *raison d’être*. The more techniques we can use to do that, the better. Sometimes, that means modern, latest technology. Sometimes, it means Victorian techniques. It’s how you merge all of those together to create something really special that is the real skill. (qtd. in “Shrek’s”)

While the designers of this section are all from different backgrounds and companies, it is the consensus that technology should remain subordinate to storytelling.

Parks and attractions are generally conceived of as being all physical/practical sets, hybrid, or all virtual. Jessica Jelinski makes distinctions between Non-Virtual, “Mixed Reality,” and Virtual Reality rides. This illustrates that technologies may drive conceptions of attraction form. Some fans over the years have criticized the creeping in of more virtual elements. Allen observes about the industry that “We’ve gotten so good at our technology tools that I think there was a lack of attention to narrative, lack of attention to story.” Now, however, he sees a “big focus...on storytelling again.” Part of this is because the use of technology is not sufficient to bring in guests, as these technologies (3D film or virtual reality, for instance) are becoming more

common at home. As creative executive Thierry Coup confirms, “You can have VR or AR at home. We have an entire world” (“Legends: Adapting”).

Nonetheless, technology is the past, present, and future. Creative executive Shawn McCoy says, “The biggest trend that you’re seeing now and going to see is the ability to blur the lines between reality and fantasy through technology” (qtd. in Rodriguez). Despite the advent of a technological arms race within parks, however, to many designers, “story is still king” (Alcorn 18). Schirmer concurs: “The story truly drives what we do and then we work with current technologies or invent our own to deliver the creative vision” (qtd. in Alton, “Mystic”). Technologies continue to be the intermediaries by which stories come to life but should be used with restraint according to many in the industry.

### **Traditional Narrative Techniques and Technologies**

This section is grouped into seven separate techniques and technologies that were used in the first theme parks and continue to be deployed.

#### *Architectural and Landscape Storytelling*

Perhaps the most-discussed aspect of theme park communication is architecture and by extension landscaping. This section details some of the elements of architectural and landscaping storytelling. Before beginning this section, though, it is worth considering that some themed entertainment professionals see a difference between theme design and architecture. Producer Peter Alexander states it this way:

In a theme resort, store, restaurant or any themed entertainment project you are creating a “show,” a three dimensional movie you can smell and feel. You are not creating a “place” as architects do...you are creating sets, and populating them with actors, as in a film. In a theme entertainment project, the role of the actors is played by the visitors (called guests)

and employees (called “the cast”). You enhance these actors’ performances with props, special effects, lighting and theme architecture...the sum total of the experience is called “the show.” The “show” is everything the guest sees, hears and experiences during his or her visit. The architecture can be seen as the “stage” upon which the “show” is performed.

Even architecture, then, is established as part of theatre in this conception. Beth Dunlop quips that “at Disney, even an avant-garde architect has to tell a story,” and engineer Tom McCann says “one can think of engineers as story makers”; these both sound amusing, but storytelling architecture is in fact the touchstone of theme design (91; qtd. in *The Imagineering Workout* 65).

### **Master Planning**

Some theme parks are master planned, and narratives can be embedded in these spaces. The hub and spoke or “radial” organization of the park is commonly referred to, as is the presence of forced perspective or change of scale, and what Sklar called “wienies,” or visual magnets that draw the visitor’s attention (Pierce 119; Sklar, *One* 34). Urban planner Sam Gennaway describes the “building blocks” of Disney parks as the berm (a physical and even ideological separation between the outside and inside worlds), a wienie (visual magnets like the castles at Disney parks), virtual reality (created, simulated experiences), and spatial manipulation (*Walt* 139). Rogers notes that one reason Disneyland was so successful is because they “planned the circulation patterns first.”

This design structure also allows for the preplanning of narratives. Alan Bryman observes how the Magic Kingdom “retains the integrity of the narrative enveloping each themed land by restricting the visitor’s views of other lands” (*Disney* 72). Charlie Haas references Hench’s take on the spaces between lands: “Hench refers to the interstices between lands as cross-dissolves,



after the filmmaking term for overlapping scene transitions” (19). It would be interesting to look at interstices in each of the narrative genres to see how they are similar or different. Furthermore, Hench clarified that “In the conceptual phases of design, it is necessary to consider the dynamic relationship between spaces and forms and the visual impact of movement on guests” (6). Prospero calls the techniques like pre-shows and queues that introduce ideas as “wayfinding,” or “how the audience is led through and in and out of experiences” (qtd. in Dager). Creative director Chris Lange finds that a well-designed queue can be “almost like an attraction in its own right” (qtd. in Ralph, “Voletarium”). Themed shops and restaurants can have the same effect. The shops in Universal’s Wizarding World of Harry Potter are attractions in themselves, and Polles Keuken pancake restaurant at Efteling has kinetic and auditory effects while guests eat and a storyline that connects with the Symbolica: Palace of Fantasy ride. Unlike in other kinds of stories, the visitor’s real-time movement through space plays a role in the ways that storyworlds are designed.

*Concentricity*, a “method of conveying story non-linearly” or including narrative elements that have a more circular rather than linear organization for visitors, is one of the “story techniques [that] have evolved unique to the theme park” (Younger 92). This is often accomplished with themed lands or sublands with particularly communication schemes that assist with the theme park goal of the “creation of a richly layered physical environment” (Alfieri). Rohde describes concentricity in detail:

In the layout of common circulation space, such as the public areas of any theme park, linear storytelling doesn’t read. If the space is designed to allow free, self-directed flow, then the designer cannot know what linear sequence each person may follow. Since we can’t control the guest’s point of view or force a purely linear sequence of events, as in a

film, we create concentric layers of space with a sequence of idea and impacts. This is at the heart of narrative placemaking. The place itself, in every detail, must reiterate the core ideas that drive the story. The guest freely passes through the layers at all kinds of tangents but always passes through some sequence of narrative logic and emotion.

(“From Myth”)

In practice, this means that places like Harambe Village at Disney’s Animal Kingdom echo the stories of nearby attractions, reinforcing the narrative. As Rohde puts it, the “point of the story, the value of preserving wilderness, was embedded in the space, not just the plot” (Rohde, “From Myth”). Disney’s Animal Kingdom “articulated a holism” in the park that is more prevalent here than other parks, according to Karen Jones and John Wills (140). A creative panel on the making of Pandora – The World of *Avatar* mentioned the layering of story in the space (“The Making of”). A similar principle to concentricity called the “sliced onion technique” is described by creative consultant Nate Naversen: “An onion is built with layers upon layers, and this is how themed spaces are created as well...Each added layer serves to enhance the space” (“The Sliced”). The layers he lists are the show building, foliage, signage, special finishes (texture and paint), show lighting, show audio, set pieces, props, and dressing (fabrics). The metaphor of the onion is also useful because there is uniformity and cohesion needed for the full effect.

The most immersive of spaces particularly demonstrate this with the use of the pavement as a reinforcement of setting or even as a narrative device (fig. 8). New Fantasyland at Magic Kingdom, for instance, has seagull tracks in the queue for *Under the Sea – Journey of the Little Mermaid* and horse tracks in the *Beauty and the Beast* village. The ground near the *Tangled* restrooms features horseshoe prints that say “Maximus,” indicating that the character from the movie has inhabited that space. Wright finds “themed paving” with relevant textures to be a key

aspect of the realism at Disney’s Animal Kingdom, while the austere pavement with nods to science at Epcot “adds another layer to the Park’s message” (*Disney’s Animal 95; Epcot 63*). However, it can equally paint fantasy, as Pandora – The World of *Avatar* has animal tracks as well as phosphorescent paint to signal the bioluminescence of the landscape.



Figure 8: Themed paving at Magic Kingdom and Disney’s Animal Kingdom (Photos: Author)

In a theme park, the plot of an attraction will support a story, but so will the architecture and props in areas, continuously rendering narrative space.

### **Theming, Symbolism, and Architectural Techniques**

Adding themes and motifs to the park creates examples of symbolic architecture. These are quite often narratives or themes reduced to their basic forms, but Hench said these forms are not “poverty-stricken”; instead, they “purify the style” to make it an old, symbolic form that is organized by “harmony” and a “single theme” (qtd. in Haas 18). Hench is known for calling Disneyland the architecture of “reassurance” rather than “escapism,” which has spawned both critical and affirmative responses (16). It is an art form generally meant to “reassure over agitate” (Pickett, “Story... Writing”). Either way, it is evident that designers “tend to put guests into an environment in which story is imparted through the design of spaces and elements within those spaces” (Wright, *Disney California 49*). As show producer Tim Delaney says, “Most of the time

the story has to be told by the place itself” (qtd. in *The Imagineering Way* 72). The “complete experience” of the theme park is about having a “collection of compelling attractions,” so the storytelling expressions must carry through the space (Alcorn 168). This supports the notion of a *storyworld*, and Rohde is explicit about space as a primary narrative technique: “We build storyworlds, not necessarily story plots” (“Legends: Adapting”). Though adding a plot is optional in themed design, designing a storyworld is usually a necessity.

Architecture is both a storytelling medium as well as the content in some cases. Sklar noted that “As designers and storytellers, we make use of nonverbal ways to communicate: color, shape, form, texture” (*One* 44). This concept connects to implicit storytelling and environmental storytelling, which will be detailed in this chapter. “The architecture in theme parks serves to tell stories,” according to Anton Salvador Clavé (179). He elaborates: “The theme must refer to a story, an argument, which the visitor will assimilate during his visit in a progressive progress of identification. The physical, landscape and aesthetic characteristics of the surroundings provide the forms” (Clavé 32). Concept designer Don Carson confirms this: “One of the trade secrets behind the design of entertaining themed environments is that the story element is infused into the physical space a guest walks or rides through” (“Environmental”). The spaces are imbued with story so that both their form and function are narrative.

Queue design is also a “storytelling opportunity” as it helps to “orient [visitors] toward the story” while in line (*Walt...Magic More Real* 103). It is an opportunity to “advance the storytelling and...set the stage for the main event ride” making it a form of prologue (Levine). The function of the Star Tours queue is captured by Lauren Rabinovitz: queues “extend the narrative to the social spaces of the building beyond the movie theater” (“From” 56). Alcorn says, “A lot of the success of Spider-Man and Harry Potter are due to the queue line being

further developed to tell part of the story before boarding” (personal interview). Another example of this would be the queue for Kali River Rapids, which “underwent a design process every bit as detailed as that for an attraction” (Wright, *Disney’s Animal* 102). This includes the presence of over 5,000 props (102). Props throughout spaces, queues, and attractions can also help with narrative consistency. The museum queue of Expedition Everest: Legend of the Forbidden Mountain is used as a case study for a “queue design class” at a design college; it has likewise been used by professors like Hover to discuss storytelling environments (Levine). Creative director Henry Corrado affirms that “Guest flow in the attraction is perfect for establishing and developing the narrative elements: the queue and preshow offer unique opportunities to set the scene, introduce characters and unfold the plot.” Carson believes that the physical space “does much of the work of conveying the story” and elaborates: “every texture you use, every sound you play, every turn in the road should reinforce the concept” (“Environmental”). Carson continues about the importance of texture: “Texture maps are our canvas sets and how we choose to use them will make or destroy the story we are trying to convey.” Whether it is texture or color or queue design, each element contributes to the experience. Younger details a unique theme park technique called *peppering*, where clues about a narrative are strewn throughout a space, allowing visitors to construct the narrative and permitting an expansion of the “story-world narrative” (94). These “breadcrumbs” or “trail[s] of symbols” as Carson calls them, may be within the queue or in the attraction. Space is clearly used as a storytelling device when this technique is employed. When layering is employed, it allows for different levels of engagement based on guest inclination.

Designers and scholars mention particular cases when narrative techniques are employed through space. Main Street is the “transition” between the real world and the lands within,

illustrating its role in narrative composition (Neuman 41). Sklar said that with Main Street, U.S.A., “a story would be told by architectural facades and interior designs” (qtd. in Marling 15). Robert Neuman finds that Main Street has an “archetypal and shared” character, and its color, details, and signage are symbolic of an ideal community (41, 51). Richard Francaviglia argues that Frontierland has an icon with a “deep narrative storyline” (82). Space Mountain “tells its story architecturally” (Hench 14). Likewise, Disneyland’s Indiana Jones Adventure is telling a story through “a carefully orchestrated sequence of interior and exterior spaces” (Marling 113). There, “architecture is the attraction” and “The building is both the story and the means of telling it” (114). The latter statement makes sense, as it is a sacred temple where the action takes place. At Busch Gardens Williamsburg, a park with lands representing European countries, the architecture has a “significant role in telling a story” (Lukas, *Theme* 138). Art director Alan Gilmore mentions that in Universal’s Wizarding World of Harry Potter, “The sets needed to be beautiful from every angle,” so dimensionality remains an essential part of what Lukas terms a *design story* “produced through forms of spatial design” (qtd. in Stamp; *Immersive* 53). Disney executive Bob Chapek explains, “Our parks are a physical manifestation of these stories, these mythologies, and these characters” (qtd. in Leonard and Palmeri). Its physicality then, and its architectural components, are what people might think of first when discussing the parks.

Over the years, many have accepted theme park architecture as symbolic. Executive Michael Eisner mentions that architecture is used for “myth and metaphor” (qtd. in Dunlop 15). Beth Dunlop denotes the World Showcase as filled with “symbols designed to evoke a sense of place” (58). The façade of “it’s a small world” appears abstract, but the shapes recall national landmarks; the movement and colors likewise invoke childhood. Alexander calls themed buildings “archetypes.” The symbolic architecture of the castle wienies in particular have been

observed. Hench explained that “In telling a story architecturally, there is great power in beauty” (17). The castles’ color, beauty, and medieval character appeals to people (M. West, “Animator” 33). Even now, the beauty of the castles puts them among of the most photographed objects on earth. Mark West calls the castles the “most influential” buildings for children (32). Cinderella Castle at Magic Kingdom specifically is the “most impressive example of children’s architecture” (32). These structures serve no purpose, he affirms; they are merely for storytelling and symbolism. West describes the castle as not just symbolic but “narrative architecture” (31). It serves to tell the park’s story, the land story, the brand story, and the visitor’s own story. Hench called the Disney castle “Everyman’s home,” illustrating that its symbolism extends to the entire culture, particularly the non-elite (qtd. in Haas 18). Margaret King agrees when she says the castles are a “testament to the universal symbolic language in which they are couched” (“The Theme” 10). Another castle, Hogwarts Castle at Universal, uses “classic film tricks like forced perspective” to make it look “700 feet tall,” allowing it to loom over these lands and refer back to the films and books it was based on (Thierry Coup qtd. in Hill, “Universal”).

Additionally, there are multiple parks that have “mountain” type structures, with the Disney castle parks known as having a “mountain range.” The first of the mountain range was Matterhorn Bobsleds at Disneyland, which was the first tubular steel roller coaster (though a themed one that still set out to tell a story). Later attractions like Space Mountain would tell a more futuristic story, though Disneyland Paris’s first incarnation “embellished Space Mountain’s narrative element even further” with a Jules Verne plot (Surrell, *The Disney* 57). Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, at four Disney parks, would advance the roller coaster story idea: “The idea that Big Thunder Mountain Railroad would be a *story* that happened to be told via a roller coaster was a quantum leap forward in the art of Imagineering and theme park storytelling” (64).

Show producer Jeff Burke mentions that a symbol, gold in the West, generated the “story and mythology” for Frontierland in Disneyland Paris (qtd. in Littaye and Ghez 79). In that case, a symbol became the impetus for architecture, which in turn became another symbol. *Setting* is still an essential elements of all of the mountains, as they need to fit “physically and thematically” in spaces (Surrell, *The Disney* 66). Splash Mountain remains the most narrative of the mountains, as it is based on an existing film and cultural property. Unlike the movie *Song of the South*, which tells three distinct br’er stories, the ride is “a composite of all the stories, with its own distinct beginning, middle, and end” with the stories told “primarily through music” (85).

Few things are so obviously symbolic in human structures as ones that replicate sublime natural structures. As show writer Jason Surrell confirms, “They’ve long possessed symbolic value both throughout human culture and within the story arts. Mountains represent adversity, exploration, and discovery. They’ve also come to stand for change and mark significant rites of passage” (8). Walt Disney found the Matterhorn a feat of design: “The Matterhorn proved to be just as compelling a setting for a theme park story as have so many other peaks, both literally and figuratively, in life and in art” (33). An artificial, often concrete mountain that appears looming and even “organic” is representative of the work of art and engineering (88). Now these mountains include a working volcano in Mt. Prometheus at Tokyo DisneySea; Expedition Everest: Legend of the Forbidden Mountain, with the “most detailed story ever created for a Disney roller coaster”; and the floating mountains of Pandora – The World of *Avatar*, one of the most difficult theme park engineering projects to date (113).

There are intimate areas that are symbolic in similar ways, as Hover and Vugts explain: Over the years, the process of re-experiencing has come to relate to the Fairytale Forest itself: one was there as a child, one returns as a parent and later as a grandparent with the



grandchildren. The physical, organically grown context of the Fairytale Forest as a ‘story world’ gives an extra dimension to this social experience. (273)

The physical world in this case is symbolic of being immersed in the innocence of childhood. West talks about the “literary playground” of Tom Sawyer Island, the attraction that Walt Disney was most involved in designing (“Tom” 102). In this space, children participate in “imaginative play” and project themselves into stories similar to the dramatic play of kiddie parks only more immersive (106).

Berger associates synecdochic symbolism with “brain scripts” that we are already programmed to comprehend. Christian Mikunda defines these as scripts in the mind that assist with “interpretation of a story” or “acquired story patterns which are triggered by certain signals” that allow people to “construct a meaningful story from seemingly random information” (qtd. in Berger 30). Berger gives an example of perceiving an area of the Magic Kingdom with animal footprints, tent structures, and music which immediately bring to mind the circus brain script even without seeing the Storybook Circus banner: “Because you are familiar with the elements of the ‘circus’ brain script, you have easily connected the dots, combining all these random signals to ‘decode’ a construct a meaningful story in your mind” (qtd. in J. Young, “Every”). Perhaps the easiest way to do this is through the creation of a setting layered with motifs, something even many amusement parks have taken to doing. Whether mountains or intimate lands, the brain jumps right to patterns and symbols.

Straddling the line of architecture and landscaping are surfaces including rockwork. Rockwork can be used to tell stories and create places. An example of this is found in the immense basalt cliffs of Phantasieland’s area called Klugheim; the area functions as terrain, character in space, theming, and part of the backstory (fig. 9). This “entire range of mountains”

was meant to be setting and “provide the perfect frame around the themed world” (Buhl, “One”). The work is symbolic, with some of the formations meant to “remind us of the ruthlessness of the weather” and others meant to “recreate the structures of basalt rock with all of its shadows and natural patterns” (Buhl, “One”).



Figure 9: Taron roller coaster going through Klugeheim at Phantasialand (Photo: Author)

Similarly, Hensch mentioned the aged surfaces at Disney’s Animal Kingdom: “its story can be found in the color and the condition of the surfaces” (121). Some of this can be subtle, as in the ruined temple exhibits or in the frieze in Maharajah Jungle Trek, which depicts the tragic relationship of man and nature. The Tree of Life, that park’s wienie, is an oil platform encased by a sculpture of hundreds of animals (fig. 10). Designers call it a “potent symbol of the interconnectedness of all living things” and a “three-dimensional love poem to the planet” (Malmberg 62, 183). It is a metaphor in “the mythologies of many cultures around the world” and an “emblem of symbiosis” (Wright, *Disney’s Animal* 4). This one structure, then, is telling

multiple stories through architecture and surfaces. It was augmented by the Tree of Life Awakenings projection shows, which convey even more obvious visual stories.

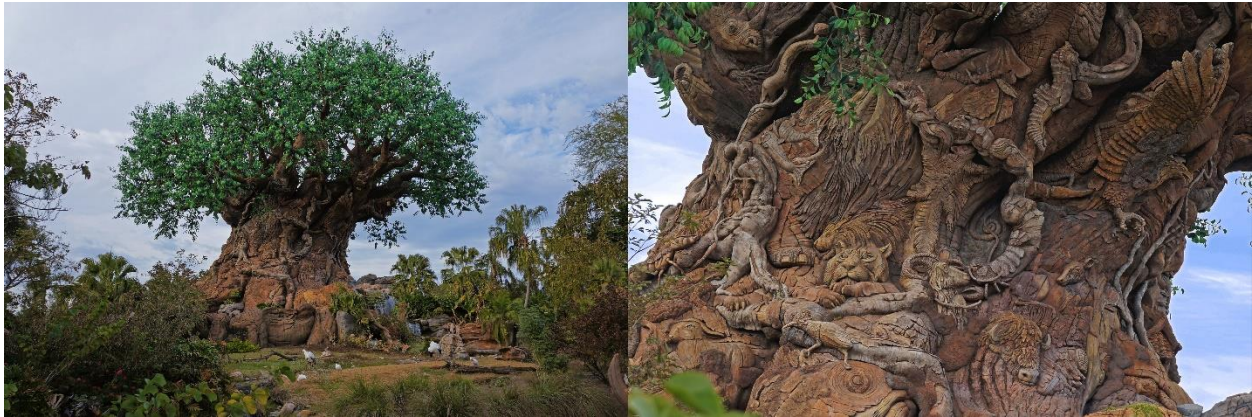


Figure 10: The Tree of Life at Disney's Animal Kingdom (Photos: Author)

### Landscaping

Landscaping, a basic element of both public and private space, has been elevated in theme parks. Creative director Jeff Kurtti mentions Disney landscaping legend Bill Evans and how he created “storytelling environments” (62). Bill Evans said his job was “making landscape tell a story” (qtd. in Dunlop 28). WDI author Melody Malmberg sees the prevalence of “story through landscaping” in certain parks (qtd. in Kurtti 65). Landscape designer Michelle Sullivan refers to herself as a “storytelling landscape architect” (qtd. in *The Imagineering Workout* 64). Landscape designer Paul Comstock notes that “Landscape *is* the set; it *is* the show” (qtd. in Malmberg 80). It is, drawing on the words of Hench, the “landscaping of reassurance” (Mannheim 85). Theme parks create “story landscapes” and landscapers “consider story as a means for seeing your external living world in a new way” (*The Imagineering Workout* 64). Landscape architect Jeff Morosky mentions the profession, already about combining “artistic design and physical sciences” to create sustainable spaces, but adds that in working at Disney theme parks there is something extra: “it is focused on the creation of immersive environments for our guests and a natural extension of Disney storytelling within the outdoor environment”

(qtd. in Bogaert, “Landscape”). The landscape features he uses must “support the storylines” or create a “sense of place”; those features can include berms, design walls and plants, tree canopies, and shrubs used in specific ways (qtd. in Bogaert, “Landscape”). Multiple theme parks include topiaries, for instance, with the planets often representing specific characters or scenes. While climate and other things are a factor, story is still “the foundation of making all design choices” (qtd. in Bogaert, “Landscape”).

Landscaping is connected to creating a pleasant environment and has a “primary function” of “placemaking” (Wright, *Disney’s Animal* 70). SeaWorld, for instance, is known for “the ponds, the flowing rivers, waterfalls, and rockwork” (O’Brien 45). Busch Gardens Williamsburg is frequently considered one of the world’s most beautiful parks in industry awards because of its commitment to landscaping. Efteling actually began as a nature park (recalling the early history of amusementscapes) and natural beauty remains a staple of the place where “around 90% of Efteling is covered with trees” (qtd. in Ralph, “Efteling”). Executive Coen Bertens avers, “We are more nature with attractions than a theme park with a little bit of landscaping” (qtd. in Ralph, “Efteling”). Several older fairy tale boat rides (examples of this model still exist at Europa-Park, Heide Park, Liseberg, et al.) are built around green, meandering, well-landscaped spaces creating the green world that is the stage for the magic of faery.

There are quite a few examples of storytelling through landscape. Hong Kong Disneyland is described as “storytelling through horticulture” (Kurtti 64). Derham Groves talks about the importance of feng shui construction and landscaping at Hong Kong Disneyland (142). Disney took to the approach easily, he reveals, because both Disney design principles and feng shui are cultural symbols and storytelling methods (148). Even Epcot landscaping tells a story according to Wright, as the east side of Future World (about science and technology) is maintained with

“chiseled edges and angular forms” while the west side (about nature and imagination) is softer, curved, and naturalistic (*Epcot* 62). Universal professionals Collins and Collins explain that “The landscaping of the theme park was critical to creating the illusions intended to convey the storyline of the attraction” (32). For instance, at Universal Japan, a banyan tree was used as a “symbol required to set the stage for guests entering the queue lines” (32). Alcorn notes that at theme parks, “The landscaping, facades, paving, even the trash receptacles all contribute to the theming” (Alcorn, *Theme* 29). Nonetheless, this goes even further at some theme parks.

Landscaping can also be a *character* in the story as in Pandora – The World of *Avatar*, where real and artificial plants collide to create a new landscape. More than 250 “trees, shrubs, and epiphytes” were planted for the land including large trees meant to resemble a “mature forest” according to landscape architect Russell Larsen (qtd. in “Pandora”). The *setting* in this case “drives” the storyline (“The Making of”). Because the characters from the *Avatar* film are not included in the world, the land itself becomes the most prominent character and the one most likely to draw visitors. The land lives and breathes; like a character, it acts and contributes to the events found in the land’s story. Environmental literary criticism can be deployed to comprehend the importance of landscape as a character in this space. Both Flight of Passage and Na’vi River Journey emphasize exploring the landscape of Pandora through virtual means, and in the land outside, visitors interact with plants, including one that erupts when touched.

The Oasis, the front entrance of Disney’s Animal Kingdom, is an entire land associated with just flora and fauna; it acts as a “buffer zone” between the stark parking lot and the natural features (Wright, *Disney’s Animal* 24). There are no symbolically human structures, only greenery and animal exhibits that live within it, which highlights the importance of nature messages to the park. This is distinct from other theme park entrances and contributes to the

park's overall theme of engagement with nature. Wright notices there are "naturalistic storylines" in this park, a contrast with the "theatrical approach" of the castle parks (17). This is due to the fact that Disney's Animal Kingdom uses setting as an essential element: "here the landscape is the entire set rather than a complementary element. It creates every bit of the setting in which we tell this story" (70). The symbol of the firefly is presented in Rivers of Light, in the Tree of Life Awakenings, and on trees throughout the park; this is considered a signal of the "transition" between day and night for the park or the nighttime natural world "waking up" ("The Making of"). In Rivers of Light, the water itself is a character according to show director Mark Renfrow, and the natural tree line is a storytelling device ("The Making of"). Keeping with nature as the show, the animal floats are examples of painting with light, and the dancers are the lotus blossom floats; thus the theme, the story, the performance techniques, and the actual space it is presented in are tied to the idea of natural landscape.

Finally, though it is a more expository experience, Epcot's Living with the Land boat ride has a narrative specifically about the landscape features including a working greenhouse as well as dioramas about natural features. Landscaping can contribute to environment, as it has been traditionally associated with, but it can also help tell a story, illustrate a theme, or be a character or even main character in a story.

### *Implicit Storytelling, Tableaux and Dioramas, Walkthroughs*

Some of the earliest theme park installations are implicit expressions of storytelling through static or animated dioramas or walkthroughs. Dioramas and tableaux have been used in theme parks around the world, especially in fairy tale areas like the Sprookjesbos (Fairytale Forest) at Efteling or Märchenwald at Europa-Park (which they refer to as Grimm's Enchanted Forest in English, rather than "fairy tale world"). These large fairy tale areas have multiple

possible paths and even attraction types within (dioramas, architectural features, shows). Some fairy tale spaces tell a linear story like the Sleeping Beauty Castle Walkthrough at Disneyland, which has a diorama representing each scene of the story or Tokyo Disneyland's Cinderella Fairy Tale Hall, which has dioramas in different art styles. A couple include a tactile element, like Cinderella Castle at Europa-Park, which has visitors walk through the space to get into the story that is portrayed through generally static figures. Others are simply single scenes from a story either static or animated with physical or projected media. This is a more implicit form of storytelling in many cases, though some of these installations employ written or oral storybooks to discuss a tale or at least the part of the tale before the depicted scene.



Figure 11: Doktor Allwissend (Doctor Know-All) attraction from Europa-Park's Märchenwald (Photo: Author)

These attractions are symbolic, a form of *synecdoche*, as they often substitute just a single scene to symbolize an entire story. This form of storytelling is based on the visitor's preexisting knowledge and cultural contexts. For instance, my lack of familiarity with one fairy tale in Efteling made me unable to take the single shorthand scene and connect it to a larger story or

idea; all I could do was guess since the storybook display only explained the introduction. Conversely, the animated diorama of “The Little Match Girl” allowed me to immediately summon my experience reading the tale, comprehending the tale, and watching the Disney animated short film of it despite the attraction narration being entirely in Dutch. Generally, theme park attractions like this rely on knowledge of a short story, but occasionally longer works like *The Odyssey* are shown (as in Terra Mítica’s water ride El Rescate de Ulises, The Rescue of Ulysses, with symbolic figures portraying an epic). Dioramas are not always a main attraction, as occasionally they are used to establish settings or represent potential characters in a storyworld; this is the case in parks like Knott’s Berry Farm, Europa-Park, and Disneyland Paris.

There have been walkthrough concepts in theme parks since the beginning. Many kiddie parks (i.e. Children’s Fairyland, Enchanted Forest, Great Escape, Idlewild, Story Land) have miniature fairy tale villages and tableaux that young people can walk through to experience traditional stories and imaginative play. Guests can explore stories in some of Disney’s castles and other places (Swiss Family Treehouse in a few of the parks, Fortress Explorations at Tokyo DisneySea, and both Aladdin’s Enchanted Passage and The Mysteries of the Nautilus at Disneyland Paris), while Europa-Park lets visitors observe goblin laborers in the Magic World of Diamonds walkthrough. The Main Street arcades at Disneyland Paris establish place and pay tribute to the arcades of Paris. Architectural symbols and walkthroughs are early ways that theme parks adapted story using architectural technologies, and though sometimes “visual design was more important than technology” in these installations, many still enthrall visitors (Hover 8).

Naversen considers certain walkthroughs successful: Swiss Family Treehouse, Sleeping Beauty Castle Walkthrough, Tom Sawyer Island, the queues of Indiana Jones Adventure and the former Dueling Dragons, and haunted houses (“Why”). Techniques used in these include telling



a story and providing a reason for the experience being in walkthrough form. For instance, Swiss Family Treehouse makes sense because the tree was already a “central component of the story,” so it is most accurately depicted with an architectural vehicle (Wright, *Magic* 42). Despite this form still being built today, there have been discussions of the walkthrough format being boring or unpopular. Alexander notes, “The first thing you learn at Disney is walk-throughs don’t work. People don’t like to walk-throughs. They want to sit down” (qtd. in Gennawey, *Universal* 54). Similarly, Sotto explains that walkthroughs have less capacity and that it is more difficult to “tell a story in scenes” if there are groups of people going through (qtd. in Naversen, “Why”). Though there is great “intimacy” in these attractions, the pacing and the sightlines can occasionally be off (Sotto qtd. in Naversen, “Why”). Even so, the walkthrough is particularly well suited to the theme park’s focus on space. More elaborate walkthroughs that culminate in shows exist as well including Spookslot (Haunted Castle), Poseidon’s Fury, and Templo del Fuego. These experiences increase the excitement level with large show sets and narratives, though they are also less intimate. Spookslot is an animatronic show that has an implicit, impressionistic design with no dialogue. It presents a spooky castle exterior and queue before the audience stands behind glass to watch a sequence of events (story) narrated with a few mechanisms: space, lighting, sound, and animatronic movements synchronized with Camille Saint-Saëns’ “Danse Macabre.” Similar to the original tone poem, Death plays a solo violin as the undead perform a dance before the sun rises. Poseidon’s Fury and Templo del Fuego are combinations of shows and walkthroughs, with a participant narrator that drives the plots. Both have exploration themes, focus on motion, and include special effects that represent a power that controls the elements.

Even some roller coasters involve aspects of implicit storytelling like metaphors. Esparza notes that Volcano and Flight of Fear (formerly based on *The Outer Limits*), two roller coasters

at Kings Dominion, expressed the metaphors of being shot out of a volcano and being abducted by aliens respectively. Dollywood's FireChaser Express was designed around the "unsung heroes of the Smoky Mountains," firefighters (Anderson). However, Osterman admits that "you're not gonna generally tell a lot of story" in a standard roller coaster, though the addition of onboard audio and other elements allows designers to "tell more story." Thrill rides like Space Mountain, through the use of sensory elements and "controlled motion through spaces," can still be "charged with narrative meaning" (Lainsbury 166). Even standard "flat rides," generally rides that use repetitive motions for the purpose of thrill, have come to be more related to symbolism. A few of the drop tower rides are connected with symbols (or even stories like Dr. Doom's Fear Fall). The "madhouse" variety of thrill ride (which gives the illusion of flipping upside down) is consistently given narrative treatments with plots, themes, and music (e.g. Villa Volta, The Haunting, Hotel Embrujado/Haunted Hotel, Houdini – The Great Escape, Cassandra's Curse, Hex – The Legend of the Towers, Merlin's Magic Castle, Feng Ju Palace, Magic House, and Le Défi de César/Caesar's Challenge). Janet Murray found possibility even in Aladdin's Magic Carpets, a spinner ride akin to Dumbo: "The Aladdin model suggests the possibility of a new kind of movie-ride, an adventure experience that is driven by the guest's curiosity and the beauty of the explorable world rather than by rushes of adrenaline" (*Hamlet* 50). Even the feather given to riders of Dumbo is a symbol for what allows the elephant Dumbo to fly, indicating that the guest is going through a similar experience.

Implicit storytelling can also facilitate the expression of culture. Mieke Bal refers to the "cultural embeddedness of narrative" (220). Hover and Vugts found that Efteling evokes fairy tales; Vugts mentions that Efteling is particularly European. Multiple sources as noted explained that Disney parks are symbolic of American values. Terence Young agrees that "designers

rejected explicit language and extracted symbols from the visitors' cultural backgrounds to generate interest and promote responses" (2). Lukas says something similar: "Theming reflects the values of the culture that has created it and it creates values among its workers and patrons" ("How" 195). The meanings of parks are "culturally and historically specific, vary between parks, and are generally the elements giving coherence – a theme – to the whole" (T. Young 5). Some rides and shows are specifically about cultural tales whether they be historical or cultural legends like in Chinese heritage parks (e.g. Songcheng's Song Dynasty Town). A dark ride is being built at Legandia in Poland called Bazyliaszek based on legends and "historic Polish folklore," so the practice continues ("Alterface"). In this ride, according to creative director Simeon von Telling, "Trees and plants come to life and take all kinds of forms and shapes, aligning the scenery with the story and enhancing the ride experience" (qtd. in "Alterface"). This is implicit narrative that will express culture.

Stephen Fjellman finds that narratives are often used in service of presenting history and culture at Disney parks; he argues that they tell small stories in attractions and larger stories in collections of attractions or parks. Tuch talked me through the many things that Carsland evokes. While it does attempt to replicate the storyworld of the animated feature *Cars*, it also expressed California car culture, the "great American road odyssey," Route 66, the 1960s, the "iconic image" of cars seen in film and television, and even memories of Tuch's family and dealings with car shops. The space evokes personal memories and cultural narratives, all embedded into one space. As Tuch asserts, "It's got the story world, it's got the evocative story, it evokes an atmosphere." All of these things contribute to internal messages, though he admits that a grandfather's perceptions will be unlike a child, who may only see the movie landscape.

Some of the most basic representations of stories are implicit; they are the epitome of shorthand, especially when they include only a single or a few scenes that represent multiple events within a story. While more complex and explicit forms of storytelling emerge in theme parks, implicit forms like tableaux, dioramas, and walkthroughs continue to exist and provide a storytelling form most frequently found in visitor attractions like museums and theme parks.

### *Cinema Influence, Dark Rides and Films*

Within scholarship, one of the most common links is between theme parks and film, especially when considering Disneyland. Rabinovitz calls Disneyland the “fusion of movies and amusement parks” (*Electric* 21). Early Disneyland used “cinematic architecture,” and themed settings can be considered permanent sets (30). Some have argued that the park itself was designed to resemble a movie theatre, with the main entrance a “lobby” with attraction posters, Main Street as the “first scene,” and the rest of the lands the primary events (Handke and Hunt 7). Hench elaborated: “Main Street is like Scene One, and then the castle is designed to pull you down Main Street toward what is next, just like a motion picture unfolding” (qtd. in Goldberger). Graphic designer Sean Adams observes this design perspective:

The park’s guests are not spectators in the environment. They are actors on a stage. The designers created the experience of entering the park to simulate the beginning of a motion picture theater experience. The guest passes through a dark tunnel below the railroad tracks in the same way that theater lights dim as a film starts.

Even later parks like Magic Kingdom had filmic construction, for instance the lake as a liminal space (buffer zone between reality and fantasy) and transit patterns to or in the park that acted as theatre and were “highly cinematic” (Wright, *Magic* 19).

According to multiple creators and scholars, the content of the parks was related to cinema. As Christopher Finch notes, “Visiting Disneyland would be like spending a day inside a cluster of Hollywood films” (437-8). Miodrag Mitrašinić calls Disneyland a “complex movie set” (242). Agreeing with this, Christian Moran notes, “The physical layout of Disneyland was very unique; it was like a movie set that one could walk on and be completely immersed” (Moran 80). It was not just that it was movie content then but that the space itself was a movie. Todd James Pierce calls Disneyland a “cinematic amusement park” (117). This makes sense as filmmakers created the park, so they already “thought cinematically” (Pickett, “Story... Writing”). “Disneyland wasn’t so much an amusement park but a series of elaborate movie sets,” according to Pierce (136). The land themes themselves were “cinematic reproductions” (135). Pierce comments, “In Disneyland, Walt created a cinematic environment in which people visited themed lands arranged like Hollywood sets” (207). Show producer Danny Handke and art curator Vanessa Hunt concur: “As a master storyteller, Walt created his vision of Disneyland like a dimensional motion picture” (7). Disneyland was about story, about cinema, and about space.

The film background of the designers was a good fit for “realizing Walt’s vision of a storybook atmosphere” (Thomas, *Building* 194). Cher Krause Knight mentions that Disneyland was theatrical but had a “filmic” structure and content (10). Bryman explains how Disney designers used “cinematic techniques” to “enhance...narrative elements” (*Disney* 85). He goes as far as to state that “the theme park is the extension of the cinema” (85). Younger also found in his research that “lots of film techniques overlapped into theme park design” (qtd. in T. Schneider). For instance, Hench stressed the importance of “close, medium, and long shots”: “long views establish an idea, medium views continue to support the idea, and close-ups provide elements that reinforce the story” (Wright, *Disneyland* 28). Just this description is evidence that

the designers sometimes see the space as a film set albeit in three dimensions with a continuously moving group of visitors. Likewise, Wright notes that a theme park is a space that utilizes environmental stories, “designed in much the same way a film set might be” (*Disney California* 49). Disneyland was made to “flow, as did a movie, from scene to scene” or a “living movie that its guests would experience by moving through it” (Thomas, *Walt* 252; Kinni 90). The difference is that in the actual space, as opposed to within the rides, the visitor functions as the camera (it is not a directed experience though there may be guidelines and rituals), making the visitor a “key collaborator in creating these ‘stories’” (Wright, *Disney California* 49).

In the planning phases of Disneyland, Walt and the animators reviewed their films “looking for ways to adapt story elements into two- or three-dimensional amusement rides” (Pierce 76). He would do this by adapting filmic stories into the dark ride genre. Pierce refers to them as “cinematic rides for children” (77). Bruce Bushman was integral to this process and “began to refine ride concepts, such as Peter Pan and Mr. Toad attractions, attempting to stage each as though it were a movie, every room a new scene, creating drama in addition to beautiful scenery” (Pierce 79). Disneyland, in addition to being a “movie-inspired amusement park,” had “live-action set design and real-world architecture” (111, 108). Disneyland’s buildings resembled film sets and had “narrative flow,” as did rides (Finch 438).

This applies not just to Disneyland, the park that was “informed by filmmakers” (Allen). “Every Disney park is a movie park” according to Berger because they are made with theatrical techniques (Berger 113). The connection between Disneyland and film extends to the techniques used, the content of the attractions, and even the language used. Tuch, for instance, notices that the process of creating an attraction is “writing a film through three-dimensional space.” Most contemporary parks have this influence, and Gilmore observes that the process of developing the

Wizards World of Harry Potter at Universal “was almost like another movie” (qtd. in Stamp). Osterman mentions that the Potter worlds were “very consciously trying to be more like a movie set, like you’re really in the scene.” Gilmore continues: “We had no preconceived notions of what a theme park should be, so we approached it as taking the film sets and making them real. We wanted to create a story and logic for everything” (Gilmore qtd. in Stamp). Gilmore and Stuart Craig worked on the films and the land; Craig designed sets for both “at the same time,” which provided “cohesion” (qtd. in Porges, “How”). Like with Disneyland, creators associated with the films worked on the park land. Disney and Universal know that visitors want the visual familiarity of the films, so the similarities were intentional in both cases.

Themes give a sense of continuity, which exists within lands but also within the carefully controlled environments of the dark ride. According to Christopher Finch, “A movie transforms an audience from point A to point B by means of a carefully structured sequence of visual devices...the camera is a moving vehicle which carries the audience through the narrative” (451). The ride has the function of the camera. Margaret King and J.G. O’Boyle concur: “In the theme park, rides are mechanisms designed to position the visitor's point of view, much as a camera is aligned, moving riders past a series of meticulously focused vignettes to advance the narrative” (“The Theme” 6). Disney’s development of the Omnimover system (used on Haunted Mansion and other attractions) with linked vehicles that are programmed to focus on the particular elements and scenes the designers direct creates an even more controlled but still cinematic experience, as the gaze remains that of the designer. Disneyland replicates film not only because guests could view “Disney storytelling experiences” but because the attractions can be conceived of as scenes, “as each attraction represented key frames in the extremes of an action” with Hench comparing attractions with movie scenes in terms of “defined sets, unfolding

narratives, clusters of actors, and eudaimonic arrivals” (Chytry 266, 272). Florian Freitag’s article entitled “Movies, Rides, and Immersion” traces the many ways in which theme parks are related to film with “cinematic shorthand,” ride pacing, ride adaptations of films, and movie ride types (126). The connections between these two mediums have gotten the “most critical consideration,” as is evident from multiple articles existing on the subject (125).

Finch refers to the “cinematic character” of the Magic Kingdom (455). Architectural narratives are considered cinematic; at the entrance of the theme park, “a movie controls how an audience experiences the story” (Pierce 37). Pierce says it was “total control of the environment to create the illusion that one could enter the realm of television and movies” (136). Wolf offers when discussing all imaginary worlds: “How an audience first enters into an imaginary world, and the sequence in which the various works making it up are experienced, can greatly shape the audience’s experience of the world” (264). Whether it is the sequence of narrative found in walking through space or being conveyed by ride vehicles, there is a sense of directed experience.

### **Dark Rides**

According to Wright, Walt Disney specifically wanted to “bring the realms of his films to life in three dimensions” (*Disneyland* 18). J.P. Telotte agrees that the Disney parks are “cinematized” and that dark rides in particular have a “filmic character” (“Theme” 171, 173). Dark rides can be conceptualized as three-dimensional versions of movies. Allen calls dark rides “great examples of little short movies that get executed on sets that you’re a cast member in.” Dark rides, to Pierce, are “rides that conveyed guests through the scenery and sets of famous Disney films” (129). Wright explains, “The act of designing a ‘dark ride’ ... is very similar to that of developing an animated short film. Many of the same techniques are brought to bear, and we



go through many of the same steps in the process” (*Disneyland* 102). They commonly have the emotional content of films as well, with Josef Chytrý likening the attractions to the “feeling of watching a film” and dubbing the parks purposefully “emotional environments” (266, 259). For instance, the Claude Coats backgrounds of dark rides at Disneyland “matched the emotional mood of the corresponding film” (Pierce 129). Like in films, there were plots, characters, visuals, directional cues, and musical scores. There were also techniques like “forced perspective, mirrors, show lighting and multi-plane scenic” (Phil Bloom qtd. in Nick). The whole point of a ride, according to Carson, is to “tell a story through the experience of traveling through a real, or imagined physical space” (“Environmental”). This is not dissimilar to books or films, but it adds the quality of motion as an essential element.

The reducible unit of the dark ride is the *show scene*, and this is not unlike theatre or film scenes, though there are less of them: “A show scene is a set design translated for use in a theme park attraction. A theme park attraction is usually broken up into a series of show scenes. Each one of these scenes is meant to tell a single story” (MSS, “An Introduction”). Show scenes, the “modular unit of storytelling” in theme parks, can be seen as *tableaux* (mostly static, establishes a story before and after though does not change, “communicates everything you need to know all at once”) or as *dynamic events* (active, with the event actually occurring in time) (Pickett, “Story...Interactive”). They can also be created through physical or virtual effects.

Elements like show scenes, sets, and directional cues would continue in other major theme parks, especially Universal Studios, another park chain built by an older film company. Disney and Universal both use the “language of the cinema,” though I would say that much of it was stage terminology first (Clavé 16). Like Disney, Universal uses film IPs as content and techniques from the cinematic realm to accomplish storytelling. Their most popular and

groundbreaking rides like *The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man* or *Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey* are particularly cinematic, becoming the multi-sensory extension of cinema. As Andrew Nelson states, “this is not a cinema of attractions; this is a cinema *from* attractions.”

In addition, while some dark rides are fully practical effects, others are hybrid or even primarily screen-based. *Harry Potter and the Escape from Gringotts*, for instance, has large 3D film screens that wrap around the visitor. Cinematics are apparent in other dark rides as well including those as early as the Studio Tour at Universal (with its movie-like scenes that reference movies) to more recent installations. The newer concept of the “immersive tunnel” has elements of film and simulator, with models like *The Curse of Blackstorm Bay* combining this with a dark ride. *Don: The Chase*, an immersive tunnel attraction at Bollywood Parks, is meant to be about immersion and storytelling (two elements that are now more connected, according to media production director Michael Carroll) (“*Don*”). Even the entrance area of *Chimelong Ocean Kingdom* has physical cave-like features and fish figures, but visitors walk underneath a dynamic “media canopy” that is digital, giving the impression of strolling under the sea.

The techniques of motion pictures would carry on to other theme parks, so the cinematic character of theme parks may be found even in theme parks that have no connection to movie producers. Animator Rolly Crump, for instance, explains the foreshadowing in the mural in Knott’s *Bear-y Tales*: “[Mural artist Suzie McLean and I] used the same formula that Disney used on the dark rides at Disneyland. The idea being that the mural is kind of a story of what’s going to happen to you once you got on this ride” (qtd. in Merritt, “A Whimsical”). *Nights in White Satin* at the defunct Hard Rock Park, for example, was essentially a ride-through music video; the soundtrack combined with psychedelic imagery and effects.

Dark rides, though they are moving through space, have some of the most engaging methods of storytelling and are frequently employed for the purpose. The dark ride is an “effective mechanism for storytelling,” especially if linear (Alcorn, *Theme* 38). There are far more dark rides that tell stories than do not, though they certainly vary in approach. The design company Jora Vision offers, “We are storytellers and Dark Rides are the ultimate way to do so, incorporating not only scenic décor, but also sound, lighting, visual effects, animatronics, music and the ride system” (“Jora”). They continue that effective dark ride development is based on a balance of elements (the “ingredients” listed in the last quote), “implementing a clear story,” and syncing all of the senses (“Jora”). While many call dark rides cinematic, Jora Vision says they are also a “theatrical experience,” again illustrating the mutual aspects of those mediums. Phantom Manor at Disneyland Paris is particularly cinematic and the music is operatic, which increases its similarity to a film with a soundtrack. As Andrew Lainsbury describes, “They designed the ride to function as a living narrative, with characters and a scary plot that would unfold in a linear progression” (61). Though not based on a film, he says, the ride is “purely cinematic” (61). The ride has an extensive backstory, but unlike other Haunted Mansions, there is no narrator, so it is nearly devoid of explicit storytelling.

The dark ride vehicle can be both the medium and the message, possessing multiple functions; the “hunny pot” in the Pooh rides around the world conveys visitors and contributes to the story (the visitor is in a hunny pot), represents the narrative (hunny pots stand for Pooh), and expresses the theme (whimsy). Agreeing with these multiple layers of function, Lukas states that the dark ride is a “self-contained themed world and a narrative delivery device” (Lukas, *Theme* 77). As referenced in Chapter 2, Hench detailed that Peter Pan’s Flight intentionally utilized these diverse functions with the attraction as a representation of the film, a sensory story in itself,

and a symbolic story about flying because of the use of the flying ship vehicle. Likewise, Disney's Pirates of the Caribbean, according to ride manufacturers Ed Morgan and Karl Bacon, is successful because its ride vehicle is a boat, perfect for a pirate "boat story" that guests will want to be immersed in (qtd. in Reynolds 143). The boat is part of the "allure of the ride"; it is likewise an attraction that functions on many levels: individual carnival practice, "family ride," and "communal experience" (143). It is eminently theatrical, and Pickett refers to Pirates of the Caribbean as having the "form of a ride-through show," one that was successful enough to lead to a movie franchise (personal interview).

More recent rides may connect the ride vehicle to the story, as creative executive Joe Lanzisero says the trackless ride vehicles of Hong Kong Disneyland's Mystic Manor (termed the Mystic Magneto Electric Carriages) "actually reinforce our story" (qtd. in Hill, "For Imagineer"). This makes sense because the free-moving vehicles are an "invention" of the host character in the attraction and the magic filling the room would need to have seemingly random movement of vehicles, especially in the chaotic showdown with the Monkey King. Lanzisero mentions the use of ride vehicles in general:

In our attractions, ride vehicles usually take on two roles. One, they're invisible, like on Haunted Mansion, with the Doom Buggies. They're really not part of the story. It's just a conveyance device that moves you through the house. In other attractions, Indiana Jones being a good example, or here [Mystic Manor], the ride vehicle is really part of the storytelling. (qtd. in Niles, "The Imagineers")

In attractions with symbolic ride vehicles, it may be explicitly mentioned in the ride (as it is in Mystic Manor's queue signage), or the visitor may have to infer why that kind of vehicle was chosen (as in Pirates of the Caribbean). Either way, Wright finds vehicles in rides like Indiana

Jones Adventure and Dinosaur to be “another character in the story” because of their motion capabilities that allow new ways to deliver information (*Disneyland* 38, *Disney’s Animal* 123). Transformers: The Ride takes this further by having the ride vehicle actually meant to be the character Evac, thus an essential part of the narrative.

### **Explicit, Implicit, and Interpretive Storytelling**

Dark ride storytelling can be *explicit*, with rides like The Cat in the Hat at Islands of Adventure or The Many Adventures of Winnie the Pooh at Magic Kingdom, which include both oral and written narration as well as a scene-by-scene expression of the storybook. Monster Mansion’s theme tune, character dialogue, and a few signs express the storyline of the attraction. Kingdom of the Dinosaurs at Knott’s Berry Farm found Professor I.F. Wells worriedly talking guests through a time machine experience during each time transition, though the show scenes themselves were driven by auditory storytelling and lighting effects. The predecessor to this ride, Knott’s Bear-y Tales, included signs throughout that let the riders know what they were looking at or where they were in addition to a queue theme song that gave a room-by-room summary of the action. Both the Cadabra ride at Cadbury World and Busch Gardens Williamsburg’s The Curse of DarKastle have used early narration that helps the rider grasp the rest of the storyline. One of the most explicit narratives would be Universal’s hybrid train/dark ride High in the Sky Seuss Trolley Train Ride, which features storybook panels that tell the tale of the Sneetches in the queue (fig. 12) and then a fully-narrated train journey with four possible storylines.



Figure 12: Narrative panels in the queue for Islands of Adventure's High in the Sky Seuss Trolley Train Ride (Photo: Author)

Dark rides may also contain *implicit* storytelling, or telling the story with non-textual visuals, which can assist in parks with multiple languages. In his conversation with me, Tuch examined the Star Tours queue in the way that Sherlock Holmes might, using the processes of observation of evidence and deduction. If the gist of the story is attainable through that method, it is likely implicit in design. “By the time you’ve done that,” according to Tuch, “you’ve assembled a story world.” Designer Tony Baxter mentions how one has to be “more visual in telling stories than in literary storytelling” when working abroad (qtd. in Padva). He mentions the design of Adventureland at Disneyland Paris (shown in fig. 13):

The pirate ship is anchored right out in front of the Pirates of the Caribbean, so people that don’t speak the language can look at it visually and say, “That must be where the pirates are, because there’s a pirate ship and so forth.” So, we were consciously trying to use visual cues to tell our stories so we wouldn’t exclude anybody that might be a visitor from enjoying the park to the full. (qtd. in Padva)



Figure 13: Pirate ship and beach outside of Pirates of the Caribbean at Disneyland Paris (Photo: Author)

Similarly, the Swiss Family Treehouse has multiple rooms that tell stories with minimal text.

In the case of Mystic Manor, Schirmer notes that it is more difficult to “create a show with little to no dialogue,” but it makes sense at a park with people who speak many languages visiting (qtd. in Alton, “Mystic”). As he says, “Once guests board the ride, the story is primarily told through the visuals of the show sets, figures, special effects and music” (qtd. in Alton, “Mystic”). Once the riders are on board, there are only a few lines of dialogue at the beginning and end; everything in the middle is implicit. Schirmer details how the story is conveyed to people in areas before the ride begins:

The queue line and pre-show did everything it could to prepare the guests prior to boarding the ride vehicle. We used extensive artwork to depict the history and the relationship of Lord Henry Mystic and his companion, Albert the monkey. This art also depicted the exotic ports of call that they visited, all of which was foreshadowing what the guest would see and experience during their ride through Lord Henry’s museum. We

also decided to introduce Albert as an Audio-Animatronics figure in the pre-show, as we wanted guests to meet and identify with him as soon as possible. (qtd. in Alton, “Mystic”) The queue is mostly implicit, the pre-show is explicit, and much of the ride is implicit but with a few lines of dialogue, revealing that a combination of approaches can be effective in “Disney dark ride storytelling” (Schirmer qtd. in Alton, “Mystic”).

The contemporary version of the Haunted Mansion at Disneyland and Magic Kingdom is an example of implicit storytelling. In 2006, the famous “attic” scene was updated to tell a clearer story. The attic is dusty and filled with old wedding artifacts. The rider can view Victorian-style wedding portraits where five consecutive husbands’ faces disappear, symbolizing death, and at the end of the scene, it is obvious that it is specifically representative of beheading. The male names and dates on the frames or on surrounding wedding banners are Ambrose, 1869; Frank, 1872; The Marquis, 1874; Reginald, 1875; and George, 1877. While this is “text” and an example of “peppering,” it is implicit because it takes an understanding of the surrounding environment to gather what is going on. Another look at the portraits reveals that the bride, named Constance, gains a string of pearls for each new husband, signifying wealth acquisition. Surrell says, “The portrait and wedding gifts tell the story of the way Constance improved her station through each of her five marriages” (*Haunted* 83). At the end of the scene, Constance materializes in a ghostly blue hue and presents a gruesome image of smiling, cackling, and wielding a hatchet. Now, Constance talks about her beliefs on marriage explicitly: “here comes the bride,” “we’ll live *happily* ever after,” “till *death* do us part,” “I do...I *did*,” “you may now kiss the bride,” “as long as we *both* shall live,” “for better or for *worse*,” and “in sickness and in *wealth*.” Nonetheless, the visitor had to recognize the implicit storytelling before getting to Constance to make sense of the narrative. The designers also leave some room for interpretation,



as riders wonder how it is Constance died and why she appears to be so happy still despite her obvious fate. Using the implicit storytelling and clues presented, the rider can speculate that she dies on her wedding day (since she is still in the dress) and possibly by the person meant to be her next husband, as she has at least six strings of pearls on in her spectral state. Either way, the implicit leaves possibilities for interpretation, though not as many as purely interpretive rides.

There are dark rides that are neither explicit nor implicit; they are *interpretive*, where the designer did not intend for a particular narrative to be found. This is true in Efteling's Droomvlucht (Dreamflight), which has suspended ride vehicles that traverse multiple fantasy landscapes (from castle landscapes to meadows with animals and fairies to outer space with colorful planets) (fig. 14). It has five show scenes: The Castle Realm, The Wondrous Forest, The Fairy Garden, Heavenly Strongholds, and Squelch Forest. This ride "translated the fairy tale's basic storyline into a composition of successive scenes. Furthermore, Droomvlucht conforms to fairy tales in terms of the wondrous, the supernatural and the magical aspects" (Hover 8).



Figure 14: The Fairy Garden area of Dreamflight (Photo: Author)

The music for the ride is dreamy and the experience rather surreal, so some have speculated that it has no story. Certainly, “The attraction Droomvlucht did not have an explicit story” (8). Nonetheless, the visitor goes through a series of events and worlds, and there are obvious settings and characters in addition to the clear theme of dreaming. Instead, it is up to the individual rider to construct the story from the material given. A subset of guests, according to Younger, “care about experience and creating their own story within a realised world” (personal interview). Vugts explores the interpretive idea when talking about attractions like Dreamflight and areas of Pirates of the Caribbean:

This is to speak a universal language without saying anything. You don’t have to know every character of the story but you understand it. And the most important thing is you can actually tell your own, think about your own story. I think that’s what people want. They want to be a situation where they can actually invent, create, and experience their

own story. So what we do is build characters where you can actually invent your own story.

Vugts finds that parks have changed storytelling to be more implicit since “people want to invent and create and have their own experiences.” Similarly, design coordinator Kirsten Kischuk finds that a “fleshed-out and detailed story” is not always conducive to certain emotions (she cites fear and intrigue) unlike an interpretive attraction (personal interview). There are times when story is “left up to the viewer to fully interpret.” Tuch argues that if no backstory is provided, guests do this automatically. “If you don’t put it there,” he says, “then the audience makes it up for you.”

Several designers avow the principle of allowing the guest to create their own narratives while on attractions, one that could change each time based on the whims of the imagination. Younger refers to this aspect of design as *including*, or adding in “references to things to encourage the guest to create meaning” (92). While too much of this can mean visitors “lost in a world they don’t understand,” using enough of it allows designers and guests to co-create the ride experience (93). Also, a few attractions are narrative and present visual art (in addition to obvious forms of art in parks like paintings, tapestries, mosaics, or sculptures). This is evident in “it’s a small world” at five Disney parks (fig. 15) or The Flying Trunk at Tivoli Gardens. Both tell implicit stories but highlight a stylized art design and the nature of childhood.



Figure 15: “it’s a small world” exterior and interior, Hong Kong Disneyland (Photos: Author)

This meshes well with Kevin Lynch’s suggestion that the ideal is a design that “endows each space with ‘poetic and symbolic’ potential,” allowing the visitor to determine use and meaning (qtd. in Jenkins, “Game” 129). Hover supports the notion of allowing visitors “individual interpretation of the implicit narratives,” something that will only increase their connection to the story and the park it is housed in (6). Baxter agrees that the best attractions are about “filling in your own narrative” instead of “generic narration,” which the visitor will “only want to hear once” (qtd. in Niles, “Theme”). Kischuk firmly advocates interpretive stories:

A movie or play with such disjointed and unclear storylines would not have the same popular appeal, but theme park “stories” can afford to be disjointed, subtle, jarring or unbelievable and still be enjoyed. Part of this may be because of how brief the rides are and how quickly guests move through environments. Part of it may be because there is so much sensory stimulus that the mind is less concerned with how neatly packaged the story is. Perhaps we enjoy the fact that the spaces and details give room for the imagination to find its own personal meaning and emotional resonance in what is being presented. (personal interview)

Thus, though there may be some risk in them, interpretive stories allow for continuous reinvention and imagination.

Technology is frequently used to provide cinematic, high-technology experiences for familiar stories in dark rides. Tokyo DisneySea has several of these rides including Journey to the Center of the Earth, 20,000 Leagues under the Sea, and Sindbad's Storybook Voyage, all based on literary material but using technology, theatrics, and music to create compelling experiences. Alcorn argues that lighting and scenery can create a "sense of place and emotion," which is evident in many rides (55). Some highly immersive rides are based on film properties including E.T. Adventure, which creates a detailed alien world that the movie does not. Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey employs advanced technology in its queue, ride vehicle, three-dimensional sets, and film screens while using narrative about the visitor entering the filmic world of the *Harry Potter* series. Under the Sea – Journey of the Little Mermaid achieves a similar effect with its building façade, queue, music, ride vehicles (shaped like sea shells), and ride all tying into Disney's film adaptation of the Hans Christian Andersen story. Even some of the earlier dark rides are now being refreshed with contemporary technology elements including Alice in Wonderland and Peter Pan at Disneyland.

Disney's Splash Mountain is another instance where, as Anastasia Salter notes, "every aspect of the ride contributes to the atmosphere" (27). She observes that, "As riders move through the space, they read short messages grounding them in the world of Brer Rabbit so that they will be prepared for the conflict that the space holds" (27). Salter continues that while riders cannot go off track, they "can gather information about the environment and therefore gain a better sense of the story, even as they proceed through its narrative arc" (27). Steven Johnson examines Splash Mountain's particular artistry:

With this man-made (literally) framework around our experience, the undertones of storytelling from the queue area, and the varying degrees of realism vs. fantasy we experience in the ride itself, the pattern of metafiction and experiencing someone else experience a story becomes a clearer picture. Splash Mountain is no mere log flume, but a testament to the art and power of storytelling.

The success of Splash Mountain indicates that a thrill ride can be a storytelling experience.

One of the benefits of a dark ride as defined by Wright is that it “allows for greater isolation of show elements and light control” (12). They are more akin to the cinema’s camera control. The Omnimover system was created by Disney and used on rides like Adventure Thru Inner Space (now closed), Haunted Mansion, the Little Mermaid dark rides, Spaceship Earth, World of Motion, Journey into Imagination, Horizons, If You Had Wings (which became Delta Dreamflight and then Buzz Lightyear’s Space Ranger Spin), and The Living Seas (now The Seas with Nemo and Friends). With the exception of Buzz Lightyear, which allows for a range of motion, the idea of these constantly moving, interlinking ride vehicles is that the designer directs the motion of the ride to look at particular scenes. The early example of the Omnimover, Haunted Mansion, had the directional benefit according to Robert Niles:

The Omnimover ride system allowed ride designers, for the first time, to change the direction that riders were facing as they moved through the ride. No longer did you simply face the ride vehicle in front of you. Vehicles could swivel to redirect attention to animation elements located on either side of passengers, giving designers more opportunities to shape an immersive narrative experience. (qtd. in Hinson)

Lainsbury comments on the same phenomenon: “The doom buggies that transported the guests into the story – visually and physically – were designed to function like movie cameras by

twisting, turning, and directing the gaze of passengers from scene to scene” (61). The design of the vehicle, then, was meant to facilitate narrative. Correspondingly, in *The Little Mermaid* dark rides, the Omnimover system helps simulate the “actual sensation of going under the water” and “submersion” (show producer Lisa Girolami qtd. in Glover, “Under”). It starts on shore, the vehicle rotates and descends backwards (with bubbles projected on the vehicle in front of the rider, illustrating that a ride vehicle can be a canvas) through the under the sea scenes, and then it travels upwards when traveling back to “dry land.”

The trackless dark ride system has also been used to direct guests in interesting ways including having groups of vehicles “dance” together as in Pooh’s *Hunny Hunt* or *Symbolica: Palace of Fantasy*. This ride system marked the first time that “designers were no longer forced to use a linear path” (creative executive Craig Hanna qtd. in Hinson). Lanzisero summarizes how they use this ride system on *Mystic Manor*:

It has the ability to start and stop, turn 360 degrees, go fast, go slow. It really becomes our camera in that we can tell people what we want them to look at. A lot of this is what Walt was really trying to do with the original *Haunted Mansion*, and that was to create a large-scale magic show. We have some of the most amazing special effects in this show, and the reason why we can pull them off -- most of them have a set-up, they play out and we move on to the next one -- is because we have the ability now with this ride vehicle to time out the whole experience to allow each scene to play through before moving on, unlike rides like *Pirates* or the *Haunted Mansion*, which have to be continuous -- it's just a cycle of things that go and go and go, and hopefully you catch the right moment. Here we are guaranteed always to get you at the right moment where we want to see the particular thing. (qtd. in Niles, “The Imagineers”)

Trackless dark rides are becoming more popular despite their cost, and this freedom of directionality is one of the reasons for this.

A roller coaster/dark ride combined with the direction technique is found in Mack's Inverted Power Coaster used on Arthur – The Ride at Europa-Park and Dragon Gliders at Motiongate Dubai. This system allows for more thrilling elements but still directs rider attention to physical or virtual show scenes. Technical advisor Matthew Priddy notes its advantages: “We can start, stop, speed up and slow down the ride vehicles so we can focus the guests’ view where we want. This is storytelling through the use of technology at its very best” (qtd. in “How”). Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for Sunken Treasure has vehicles that can direct the rider towards a scene or go backwards, often to allow a sense of scale. The rides based on submarine journeys over the years (Submarine Voyage and Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage at Disneyland, 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea at Magic Kingdom, and 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea at Tokyo DisneySea) function similarly, as portholes restrict the riders’ view, making framed shots of each show scene. As Kischuk explains, “This experimental condition highlights why dark rides, out of all possible rides, are well-suited to interactivity: dark rides are a well-controlled environment where everything is isolated and designed, and all distractions are carefully screened out” (*A Prototype* 56). With these ride systems, the ride vehicle becomes the camera, directing the riders in how to view the story in space. Going even further, creative executive Craig Hanna says of Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey, “The things that ride system could do with guests created the viewpoint that you are the camera in an astonishingly cinematic ride experience” (qtd. in Hinson). In this way, the guests themselves become the camera, reinforcing the position of the actual visitor as the medium.



## Movies

The common denominator between movies and rides is the “storytelling situation,” but dark rides are still quite different from films (Kurtti 52). They are often multi-sensory experiences using three-dimensional sets that visitors are conveyed through. Visitors may traverse the story as an audience to the story or as a participant in it, but it is nonetheless a more active role than in most film or theatre productions. In addition to the cinematic techniques in dark rides, though, theme parks have had actual movies within them from the beginning. These can include anything from promotional films, film shorts, or longer-running original concepts. Telling stories through the medium of film (now digital) has been a frequent choice, as film’s virtuality has a versatility that allows for the kinds of fantasy or impossible concepts so often seen at theme parks. Motion theatres will be mentioned later, but many standard-seating films or in-the-round movies have been presented over the years in either 2D or 3D. Certain theme parks like Epcot and Futuroscope have many film attractions running at one time. Many of the Circle-Vision films have had a travelogue approach, but *The Timekeeper/Le Visionarium* attractions “mark[ed] the first attempts to use the system to deliver a narrative storyline,” in that case about time travel and meeting personages like Jules Verne and H.G. Wells (Wright, *Magic* 124).

Cinema can hold its own storyline and represent that of the park. This is the case with Dollywood’s *Heartsong*, which, as Melissa Jane Hardie notes “metaphorizes the virtual space of Dollywood” as it is a “simulation of the country way of life” (23-24). It is described as a place where “fantasy is collapsed with documentary,” connecting it with a genre of film (25). Lukas talks about the authenticity of the park’s themes and says they represent “family, memory, God, the heart and the rustic” (*Theme* 93). While other areas of the park are a depiction of Dolly Parton’s life (there is a museum and a replica of her childhood home), the *Heartsong* film makes

the connections explicit. Thus, film can play a symbolic role in the park, with *One Man's Dream* a similar biographical feature about Walt Disney.

Motion theatres are a common form of film that involve elements of simulation. One example of this kind of theatre show is *Kaka's Great Adventure* at Chimelong Ocean Kingdom. Like other movies of this kind, it includes 3D imaging and special effects. A giant theatre placed at the front of the park, this attraction is meant to be the first one visitors experience. Show director Rick Rothschild elaborates:

It serves as the central storytelling piece for Ocean Kingdom. It was designed not only as a great piece of entertainment, but to inform the overall guest experience of the park, to have the park's organizational thematic environment make sense. It provides backstory and enhances the personalities of many of the characters found within the park, from the penguins to the whale sharks and numerous other characters. (qtd. in Lam)

In this way, the attraction is a part of orienting the guest, placemaking, and establishing a narrative fabric over the whole park. An executive confirms, "It was important for us to create a new story that belongs only to us," demonstrating that parks do not only ask for attractions out of a catalog; they want to establish branding and narrative identity (Paul Yuen qtd. in Lam).

There are many hybrid attractions that possess both physical and virtual elements. The virtual elements are most often film screens, whether in a low-key attraction like Gran Fiesta Tour at Epcot or a high-action ride like Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey. Things that are considered high technology are still based on the moving image common to film. Newer interactive dark rides, for instance, may have riders interfacing with/shooting at movie screens, and virtual reality experiences tend to resemble movies. As Osterman explains, "Filmicly-driven stories and attractions allow for a lot of storytelling and in some respects are easier to do than

physical ones ‘cause it’s film.” It is thus easier to use hybrid attractions in some ways and less difficult or costly to incorporate storytelling techniques.

Finally, there is an entire genre of theme park related to films specifically. Disney, Universal, and Warner Bros. parks (and formerly Paramount, who used to own a chain of parks now held by Cedar Fair) have entire libraries of films to draw attractions from and even specific parks dedicated to film themes (Disney Hollywood Studios, Walt Disney Studios, Universal Studios, Parque Warner Madrid, Warner Bros. Movie World, etc.). Other parks thrive on concepts of or content of films (i.e. Bollywood Parks, Motiongate Dubai, Movie Animation Park Studios, Movie Park Germany, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox World, or the short-lived Wanda Wuhan Movie Park). Like storytelling, film or film influence is pervasive at theme parks.

### **Color**

Color is in all visual arts and not always derived from film techniques, as is the case in the fairy tale expressions at Efteling, which rely on literary interpretations from artist Anton Pieck. Designer Tony Baxter mentions, “Like at Disneyland, if you go in there and are familiar with Anton Pieck's work, everything in there is reflected thematically” (qtd. in Niles, “Theme”). It is moreover reflected in the color palette. Creative director Bill Butler describes this: “De Efteling has a unique house art style reminiscent of its original and emeritus art director, the famed illustrator Anton Pieck. This style looks very much like the gorgeous European-inspired backgrounds of Disney’s classic animated films Snow White and Pinocchio, a saturated watercolor look” (“Efteling’s”). However, since the color theories at Disneyland got their start in Disney films, they will be discussed in the film area.

It is with animated film that Disney especially began to “use color as a language” (Lee and Madej 51). Artist Mary Blair’s work is associated with color in both her concept art and

designs for film and her most notable attraction, “it’s a small world.” Hench was particularly fond of color theory and was named the “color guru”; he was a likewise a proponent of Walt’s insistence on “visual literacy” and the elimination of contradictions (Gennawey, “Reassurance”). He has a lot of commentary on the use of color, but these are some of the statements related to color as a storytelling tool:

- “Color assists Imagineers in telling stories: it helps identify the character of place and time in which a story happens, to set the story’s mood and emotional tone, and to reinforce the story’s meaning” (Hench 105).
- Color “supports story structure” (112).
- “Color is one of the greatest assets to a storyteller” (116).
- “Color helps to give the illusion of reality” (118).

It is evident that color connects to mood, atmosphere, theme, and storytelling. An Imagineering book agrees that “Color is used to signal mood and telegraph a story” (*Walt...Magic More Real* 96). Comstock associates color with his craft, landscaping, and mentions how landscaping in Frontierland Disneyland Paris involved forced perspective but likewise color variation with “subtle and more faded colors in the background, and more vibrant colors in the foreground,” something Younger calls “multilevelling” (qtd. in Littaye and Ghez 85; Younger 174). This is a reminder that while techniques can be broken out to analyze and differentiate them, they combine to form the total show.

Particular lands are associated with color. The Fairytale Forest still echoes Pieck’s palette. Mickey’s Toontown, a cartoon-inspired land at Disneyland and Tokyo Disneyland, tells a story with “shape and color alone” (Marling 132). Seuss Landing at Islands of Adventure uses only colors in the Seuss palette. Based on concept art, the upcoming Nintendo Land from Universal will rely on the colors of the video game properties (e.g. the *Super Mario* franchise’s bright primary colors) to create a familiar space. Conversely, Gotham City at Six Flags over Georgia appears bleak and worn. The Wizarding World of Harry Potter or the realistic areas of

Disney's Animal Kingdom are given more muted and natural tones. Pandora – The World of *Avatar* has a very different look to it during the day, with its subdued hues, earth tones, and natural light, and at night, where the “bioluminescence,” created with artificial light, glows in brighter and more alien, cool colors like blue and purple.

### *Theatre Influence, Shows and Parades*

Though cinema is a clear influence on theme parks, theatre shows are common to theme parks, with a couple of theme parks being comprised primarily of shows. Scholars and creative professionals alike have made the connection between theme parks and theater not just symbolically but literally. As noted, Disney and Universal both use theater language in daily communications, and many companies do when they refer to the “roles” of employees. Wright refers to *Pirates of the Caribbean* as the model of the “themed show,” indicating that though widely dubbed “attractions,” the experiences within theme parks are still theatre (*Disneyland* 60). Alcorn believes theatre shows to be “the best environment for telling a story” (personal interview). Rafferty posits that his experience has led to an awareness of theme parks as theatre: “It took many years to solidify my thoughts about the perfect formula for creating a successful new attraction or whole park, and it all boils down to thoughtful, well-executed theater brought to life upon the foundation of our tried-and-true design principles (and a few new ones). In a word: showmanship” (qtd. in Sklar, *One* 206-207). Even more simply, Pickett avows, “theme parks, I contend, are theater” (“Story... Writing”). It is no surprise that Hench's influential book on design was subtitled the “art of the show.”

Rohde considers the theme park a theatrical form as noted in the introduction; he mentions the principles of “theatrical design” including the onstage and backstage and says that “A performance is framed in such a way that that the audience can tell what is and what is not

performance” (“Detail”). In this conception, the audience may be aware that it is a theatre performance. Rohde expands on this notion: “Narrative space is theatrical space. What matters are not the functional realities of the buildings and landscape, but their use as language to communicate ideas. Theatrical space exists only in the viewer’s imagination and is shaped only by story” (Rohde, “From Myth”). Like Joseph Pine and James Gilmore and others posit, theme parks “stage” experiences and the space itself is a theatre.

### **Oral Storytelling**

Though it is older than theatre, oral storytelling most naturally fits in this section. Oral storytellers are staples of fairy tale-driven theme parks like Disneyland and Efteling. The shows in Disneyland’s Royal Theatre feature interactive storytelling and Renaissance-like actors, stagehands, props including puppets, and humor with only minimal technology. Epcot’s Holidays around the World festival includes daily storytellers narrating oral tales and sometimes musical or dance tales from various world cultures. Walk-around characters, walk-around entertainment (“streetmosphere”), or area-themed performers are common in many parks including Old West characters at Knott’s Berry Farm, turn-of-the-century performers on Disney’s Main Street U.S.A., or craftspeople at Dollywood and Silver Dollar City (fig. 16).



Figure 16: Rob, a glass artist at Dollywood (Photo: Author)

These groups have daily, often unscripted interactions with visitors. Major theme parks usually have employees who dress and speak in ways that evoke the theme; as Hensch and art director Rhonda Counts explain, the employees and even the designers in some cases are “living in the story environment” (Hensch 29; *The Imagineering Workout* 80). Oral storytelling, traditional puppet show technologies, and the aforementioned “magic” keys that turn on recorded stories are used at Children’s Fairyland. Puppet shows are a cultural expression at Hong Kong Disneyland too. Oral storytelling is particularly important at Efteling as Hover attests to. Employees there have become the narrators of an entire tradition of tales.

### Shows

Like with film, the theme park is not only ideologically connected to theatre; theme parks have had stage and other shows in their line ups since the beginning. Most major theme parks have shows of some sort (stage shows, outdoor shows, stunt shows, water shows, fireworks shows, or nighttime spectacles). While some shows are original concepts, others are adaptations of existing media, especially film: “A theme park’s live stage version of a film will almost always regurgitate the plot of the original” (R. Schneider 207). Theme parks like

Dollywood and SeaWorld are known for their live shows, and Puy du Fou is a theme park that is almost completely comprised of shows. An executive explains their perspective: “Puy du Fou seems to be the only park that deals with dramas to entertain people. We move them with some stories inspired by history. History is often sad, but Puy du Fou draws from it the greatness of human beings. From the young children to the grandparents, everybody can share the same emotion in every show we present” (Nicolas de Villiers qtd. in Kleiman, “Uniquely”). Puy du Fou has been vocal in the past about shows being an acceptable foundation for a park, with rides not needed at all. Additionally, Puy du Fou’s spectacle Cinéscénie (fig. 17), the impetus of their entire park, represents theatre on an unprecedented scale: thousands of actors and volunteers, a massive stage area, epic length for a theme park show at two hours, water effects, and fireworks.



Figure 17: Puy du Fou's Cinéscénie (Photo: Pierre Andre Leclerq, Wikimedia Commons)

Their work inspired Kynren – An Epic Tale of England, an open air spectacular in Durham, England that recounts various moments in their history with volunteers, effects, and props.

Shows have a varying level of technology and traditional narrative usage. There are conventional shows and musicals like *Beauty and the Beast – Live on Stage* or *Forest of*



Enchantment that tell a linear story and use basic theatre technology (costuming, sound, lighting, and stage mechanics). The popular Candlelight Processional is one of the only overtly religious offerings within Disney where a narrator and choir relate the story of Jesus Christ. The Holy Land Experience has explicit shows including the Wilderness Tabernacle, walking tours, and a set of once-per-day shows focused on particular events in the life of Jesus Christ. Efteling's Raveleijn is a traditional outdoor show, but a robotic dragon with a musical score increases emotion during the conflict; the show has very little dialogue, relying on music and symbols to convey the plot. Puy du Fou's shows generally employ traditional technologies and large groups of actors in open air settings. Even the indoor show Mousquetaire de Richelieu is epic, with lighting, water, horses, sword fighting, and dancing in an elaborate venue.

Some shows employ more obvious technology. In Mickey and the Magical Map, live performers interact with a "magical map," really an LED screen. The Mickey Mouse character (live) speaks with the wizard Yen Sid and a character called Spot, who are digitized. Projection screens and mapping play major roles in Out of Shadowland, Mickey et Le Magicien, Mickey and the Wondrous Book, and Frozen Live at the Hyperion, becoming the backdrops and storyworlds (providing visual depth) of the characters on stage and employing visual effects throughout. Mystery Lodge tells a Native American story in a less linear fashion but using effects that look holographic (through the interaction of live actors, projections, and Pepper's Ghost reflections). Finding Nemo – The Musical is a Broadway-style production with linear storytelling (using the story from the film but adding musical tracks) where the performers use advanced puppetry and stage technology (wire flying). Traditional narrative elements with either limited or high technology recall the origins of theme parks and illustrate the enduring nature of storytelling in human culture.

Gennawey mentions that Universal began a new kind of show, the “outdoor thematic show” with the opening of the Studio Tour (*Universal* 29). Unlike the typical spectacle style show, these were ride-through shows where visitors could be within movie sets. In the high-tech Battle of Galactica segment, for instance, “visitors got to really ride the movies,” which was their slogan of the time (47). The scene included animatronics, laser and sound effects, and live actors in addition to the spaceship-themed building the tram rode through. Universal also created the role-playing show, like the Make Believe Screen Tests, which changed the guest role (36). The Star Trek Adventure show allowed for guests to play many of the roles and was the “next step in the evolution of the audience participation show” (96). It was likewise connected to merchandising, as video tapes of the episode shot were available for purchase (as they were at the Recording Studio, where guests could record music videos).

Just like with dark rides, theme park shows can be explicit (Katonga: Musical Tales from the Jungle), implicit (Voyage of the Little Mermaid), or interpretive (Mystic Rhythms). Design director Taylor Jeffs remarks on Finding Nemo: The Musical, which “tells a linear story” and Festival of the Lion King in the same park, which is “more abstract and circus-like.” There are some shows that have clear storylines, for instance The Adventures of Conan: A Sword and Sorcery Spectacular, which was the first of its kind in the sword and sorcery genre (Gennawey, *Universal* 56). Conversely, creative executive Norm Kahn clarifies of the popular WaterWorld show that “Rather than tell a story, the script is formulated around the most repeatable stunts and gags from the movie” (qtd. in Gennawey, *Universal* 159). It is a return to the older versions of shows or dark rides focused around gags and stunts instead of plot and character. This kind of show would not fit as well with Rohde’s philosophy where a detail “only exists to serve narrative purposes” (qtd. in Martens, “Meet”). He continues: “In theater, there are principles, principles of

design, and one of those principles is if something is on stage, it is on stage for a reason” (qtd. in Martens, “Meet”). Like rides or theme parks, shows also employ the design styles Younger mentions, with Conan being a traditional show and WaterWorld being a postmodern one.

### **Lighting**

Since lighting is a basic part of stagecraft, the technique will be mentioned here despite its being employed all over the parks. An article on *Themed Attraction* instructs on the importance of both architectural and show/theatrical lighting in theme parks (MSS, “Themed...One”). It refers to three common kinds of theatrical lighting: gobo (go-between lights that project patterns), black lighting (ultraviolet lights common in dark rides that react with fluorescent paint), and fiber optic lighting (versatile though expensive) (MSS, “Themed...One”). Many dark rides are known for their use of ultraviolet light, while others are standard incandescent lights. Snow White’s Scary Adventures is a “mix of both black light and regular white light paint that can be shown under theatrical lighting as well as UV lighting to reveal different nuances of the art as the Guest moves through and the lighting changes” (Wright, *Disneyland* 86). Show director Christopher Merritt describes how Knott’s Bear-y Tales included a unique at the time mix of ultraviolet and incandescent, sometimes using both within the same show scene (“A Whimsical”). Fiber optics over the years have done a good job with the effect of looking like “magic” or stars and can be made any color.

Lighting designer Tracy Eck describes lighting as a kind of bridge or transition, the “glue that pulls the different elements of an attraction together and makes it all coherent” (qtd. in Bogaert, “Lighting”). The process starts with story, with both light (front light and back light in various colors) and shadow helping to tell it. She mentions that “shadow management and shadow design is as important as lighting itself,” as it contributes to depth, scale, and dimension

(qtd. in Bogaert, “Lighting”). She finds that a lot of “themed lighting” is used (a candle or beautiful light fixture, for instance) but that sometimes the real light source is concealed, as themed lighting is not efficient. The use of neon lights in Disneyland Paris’ Discoveryland is considered a “visual metaphor” for the “energy of new ideas and imagination” according to Delaney, so lighting is also symbolic (qtd. in Littaye and Ghez 272). Wright agrees that every “fixture” tells a story; lighting can thus add to motif, theme, or narrative (Wright, *Magic* 73). This fact was highlighted once when I rode the Haunted Mansion and the wrong lighting was used in the attic; at that point, the character effects and the story were diminished.

### **Parades**

Parades are an old form of theatre. They are most popular at the Disney “castle parks,” though others have them as well. Parades are generally thematic rather than narrative (e.g. Flights of Fantasy, SpectroMagic), but most present symbolic floats, some with scenes playing out in the way of implicit narrative. A float from the Dreaming Up! parade, for instance, symbolizes the “Be Our Guest” scene from *Beauty and the Beast*, and a float in the Universal Spectacle Night Parade presents the scene of many stories within *Harry Potter*, the Hogwarts Express. Fantillusion followed the typical dramatic pattern with three clear segments (The Enchanted Fairy Garden as exposition, The Evil Villains as conflict and climax, and The Happy Ending as denouement). This parade was meant to “challenge the entire idea of a parade” with its narrativity, but they still had to “condense the story” into three acts (Silvester 74). The Festival of Fantasy parade reenacts *Sleeping Beauty’s* battle (fig. 18) between Prince Phillip and Maleficent in dragon form again and again on the parade route, creating a walking tableau vivant.



Figure 18: Prince Phillip battling Maleficent in the Festival of Fantasy parade, Magic Kingdom (Photo: Author)

Other parades, like Main Street Electrical Parade or Six Flags Glow in the Park, are simply montages. A parade like Tapestry of Nations was quite abstract so needed an early narration to explain the figures. Productions like the Parade of Dreams used “show stops” to recreate scenes from a film; the Everland Moonlight Parade uses them for a dance number. A few parades (e.g. Lion King Celebration, Mulan Parade, Hercules Victory Parade, Aladdin’s Royal Caravan) reenact the whole film by showcasing scenes symbolic of parts of the movie. There is no one way to go about parade design, but they are stereotypically associated more with spectacle and less with storytelling. This is interesting because at theme parks there is audience participation during parades (often more than at any other time in the parks), recalling traditional storytelling, and the majority of parades can still be related to story in content if not in form. They epitomize the movement, human interaction, and spatial orientation present in the theme parks and the medium’s unique storytelling capabilities.

It is not always evident that there is storytelling within parades, as very few of them employ explicit storytelling and narration. However, show director Randy Wojcik states that even the Paint the Night parade (a nighttime LED light parade) is meant to tell “familiar stories that we all grew up with” but in a different way (qtd. in Woloski and Woloski). As is the case in some of the water shows (World of Color) and projection shows (Celebrate the Magic), and other parades (Main Street Electrical Parade Dreamlights), this parade is done in a “modular fashion, so we can always introduce new elements and franchises” (Wojcik qtd. in Woloski and Woloski). This involves removing a particular segment and adding in a new one, for instance Celebrate the Magic’s having a mode for each season. The modular system is an interesting narrative technique, as it shifts each time, making for a more flexible art form.

Parades are immediately a combination of forms: visual design, dancing, and music. Music producer Don Dorsey sees the parade route as a “movie multiplex,” where each segment is showing the same show but at a different time, so it needs to be coordinated (qtd. in Sasha, “The Sound”). He argues that audiences now expect “vivid experiences both visually and sonically,” so even parade sound needs to be “immersive” (qtd. in Sasha, “The Sound”). Parades are multi-modal experiences that engage the visitor in the moment. They differ from most attractions in their close human connection and from their staged theatre counterparts by being generally very intimate experiences.

### **Costuming**

One important technique or technology is costuming, something that plays a major role in shows and parades. In the Festival of Fantasy parade, for instance, costumes can represent characters (Mickey Mouse, Belle, etc.), themes (fantasy, whimsy), and motifs (sea, Scottish, circus, et al.) and are a dominant part of the spectacle. The Jubilation! parade had costumes that

symbolized particular lands or rides. Costuming can be used to tell stories or symbolize stories, and they can be filled with details. The costumes for Rivers of Light (fig. 19) “represent Earth & Fire and Air & Water” by the use of colors, textures, fabrics, beads, and even the technologies to create them, as they were both “ancient” and “digital” (Fickley-Baker, “Behind”).



Figure 19: The fire shaman Aditya from Rivers of Life at Disney's Animal Kingdom (Photo: Author)

Some costumes are symbolic to the extreme, with Wright pointing out that the costumes in the Impressions de France attraction were modeled after an Edouard Manet painting (*Epcot* 111). Costumes are an essential part of dressing animatronics, with “it’s a small world” being a

prominent example. Butler describes the level of detail present in the costumes for Symbolica: Palace of Fantasy:

Each costume had multiple layers of very specific fabrics of unique weights and finishes, coupled with details like sewn-in sparkling jewels, feathers, hand-painted mock embroidery, furs, custom buttons and clasps, buckles, bells, tassels, and more. In the theatrical show lighting of the attraction, many details would be lost in shadows or blocked by props, but for the brief moment that the light catches and reflects from a carefully-placed crystal on Almar's flowing cloak, the detail sparkles into life.

(“Efteling’s)

Costuming plays a prominent role in the presentation of story in many shows and parades, once again positioning theme parks as an elaborate theatre production.

Beyond entertainment costuming, “costumes” are what are worn by all cast members at Disney and team members at Universal. Some theme parks and most amusement parks have a park-wide uniform that is worn (some which render employees visible, others that reflect a park identity); several parks have ride-specific or land-specific costumes (i.e. Indiana Jones Adventure at Disneyland, which reflect the Jones character or Camp Snoopy ranger outfits at Knott's Berry Farm). When costumes are specific to an attraction, it visually places the employee within the storyworld. The ride operators of Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey are dressed like Hogwarts students from different houses, making them a part of the story itself (where students are welcoming visitors to Hogwarts). Costuming is part of theatre, and the vast scale of costuming operations at some theme parks again speaks to the medium as large-scale theatre.



### *Auditory and Musical Storytelling*

While audio is generally a facet of other components of the theme park experience (i.e. the aforementioned architectural installations, movies, and shows), its significance is enough to warrant an entire section. Music, soundscapes, and audio effects are present in the majority of theme parks, illustrating more ways theme parks resemble theatre and film, which likewise have these techniques. Theme parks use a variety of non-original music including film soundtracks, new arrangements of film soundtracks, and commercial music to lend to the ambiance of a particular land. Theme parks also frequently create custom soundtracks for rides, shows, and lands. Interestingly, some of the same composers from the film industry score theme park rides and shows and audio director Jesse Allen observes the similarity in production: “The scale of the music and sound production that we invest in every project is really outstanding. This is how sound is created for major motion pictures” (qtd. in Salmeron). However, unlike the more “controlled environment” of film, according to sound director Rick Morris, theme parks need “immersive” sound but must cope with “ambient sounds” and “equipment” (qtd. in Salmeron). There are firms like IMAscore and other contracted composers who work with parks. Some companies employ in-house composers to create theme music.

Music has been a powerful force in theme parks since the beginning. Walt Disney could not imagine a “pictorial story” without music (Kurtti 106). The “dimensional and environmental storytelling of Disneyland relied on the evocative qualities of music” according to Kurtti (107). Creative executive Darren Ulmer considers the three main types of music in parks to be: background/area music (used to “set the mood and communicate transition,” often subconscious and “places you in a moment of time and place”), attraction music (about “bringing the story of a specific ride to life,” sometimes in a supporting role or used to “drive the entire experience”),

and show music (music which “acts as a key driver in the story,” more in the foreground than the other two) (qtd. in Sasha, “The Sound”).

Background music helps with “transporting park visitors to other times, other places, and other worlds” (Kurtti 107). It “makes you feel as though you’re in a different world,” agrees composer Joe Alfuso (qtd. in Stein 140). Music especially assists with setting and motifs, so one hears ragtime on Main Street, Western film scores in Ghost Town or Frontierland, Indian sitar music in Asia, or rock music on Marvel Superhero Island. Music in Liberty Square for instance is “period-specific” in sound and instrumentation (Wright, *Magic* 67). Background music might change based on season, as many parks have a Christmas loop and some parks have special event music. A couple of parks have day and night loops including the Aquasphere music at Tokyo DisneySea or Main Street, U.S.A. at Disneyland Paris which has a “softer, more welcoming” soundtrack in the morning and a “more lively” one in the evening according to audio producer Don Lewis (qtd. in Littaye and Ghez 42).

Music is used commonly within theme park attractions, offering an emotional thrust, a complement to the storytelling, or acting as explicit storytelling (in fireworks shows and spectacles or stage musicals, the music is frequently telling the story). In several attractions, in fact, the music presents the story. It “supports the action” regardless of whether it is “comedic” or “dramatic” (Alfuso qtd. in Stein 137). Schirmer comments on Mystic Manor’s score written by Danny Elfman: “For the first time in our attractions, the musical score was treated just like composing for a feature film. Instead of looping tracks there are musical arcs that follow the story, setting the emotion for each scene...Danny's music not only became the perfect complement to the story, at times it became the story” (qtd. in Rath). Since this ride is about a music box coming alive and animating objects, the main theme tune is symbolic of the magic

inhabiting the space and later explicit (“magic’s in the air today”). The lyrics warn: “running away from an ancient curse and hiding will only make it worse,” letting the rider know why the experience is happening, something the monkey protagonist Albert does not grasp. Sindbad’s Storybook Voyage presents a mini-musical, so the music and lyrics convey the message of the ride as well as the atmosphere of each room. These are examples of explicit storytelling within music, but music can be implicit like Western music in Ghost Town or interpretive like the soundtrack of Dreamflight.

Nonetheless, musicals and theme songs with lyrics are not the only option or even a majority of what is heard in parks. As composer and music producer Jon Baker notes,

As our world gets smaller, we have to tell stories that aren’t driven completely by language. Guests come from all over the world and attractions are being built more and more in non-English speaking countries, so the onus is shifting to non-language components of storytelling. Music and sound design help tell the story and make the emotional connection. If you take away the dialogue or narration, the guests still need to understand the story. (qtd. in Sasha, “The Sound”)

An example of this is in Journey to the Center of the Earth, which has neither dialogue (other than a warning) nor lyrics; the music and sound effects must carry the story along with the visual effects to match. Jesse Allen confirms that “The music is what’s going to draw you in, and guides you through the narrative of an attraction. It’s the tone-setter” (qtd. in Salmeron).

Designer Tom Morris reveals how designers changed a fundamental aspect of the Storybookland Canal Boats when they made Le Pays de Contes de Fées (The Land of Fairy Tales) at Disneyland Paris. The earlier attraction includes a live narrator, but in this one they did not want to do that because of multiple languages present. “Since we couldn’t use a narrator,” Morris

explains, “we allowed the music to play that role, which had an impact on the scenes chosen for the attraction” (qtd. in Littaye and Ghez 219). Thus music helped lead design and actually functions as a narrator. Like other parts of the theme park, music is a “symbolic art,” and this is particularly evident in attractions where language has been removed (Merkelbach).

Audio is now considered an essential facet of the theme park experience. Others agree that audio is “integral to the overall experience” of the theme park and a “powerful” tool (Alcorn 133; Berger 120). Music helps to “create a unique atmosphere,” even if the recognition is not conscious (Willebrand qtd. in Christine). Both music and soundtracks provide “acoustic theming” that assist with immersion and even emotion (Willebrand qtd. in Christine). In the Haunted Mansion, the arrangement of the theme tune changes throughout, which “helps set the scene and manipulate the listener’s feelings each time it is heard” (Surrell, *Haunted* 33). The music changes as each scene progresses, and instruments are visually highlighted in each room, making Haunted Mansion like a concert in some ways with music as a symbol and motif. According to composer John Rust, “Music is a direct link to our emotions – I can control the kind of emotion I want you to feel by the kind of music I play. We go to the effort of theming every part of a theme park. We need to theme the music, too. What we do is create immersive experiences. Music is a tremendous part of that” (qtd. in Spitz). In the multi-sensory paradigm of immersion, an auditory component is essential. This is especially the case on dark rides, but walkthrough attractions are likewise augmented with music, especially fairy tale areas or Halloween-themed mazes like The Mystery of Hocus Pocus Hall.

Interestingly, the positioning of music is pure theatre because in real life, spaces do not have soundtracks. Listening to music is generally an individualized, not externally designed, choice. Rust continues: “The music is as important as everything you will see at the park. The

right music will tap into your senses; the wrong music could break the illusion” (qtd. in Spitz). One Imagineering book concurs with music as a powerful concept as it “plays in the background of every land to set the mood and enhance attractions” and “conveys emotion both subtly and overtly and can get points across in a visceral way” (*Walt...Magic More Real* 112). It is a powerful tool because the “atmosphere” changes with music, and it is a medium where parks “don’t need words” to convey information (Merkelbach). The music is an essential part of placemaking and storytelling, “not just background music,” as it is used to “put someone in a scene or in an environment” (Merkelbach). With a strong musical score, the guest is “immediately...in that world” (Merkelbach). Like with visual information in the theme park, guests have auditory brain scripts activated by particular soundtracks or music genres.

Specific parks opened with examples of original music. Delaney describes Chris Tolley’s original soundtrack for Discoveryland at Disneyland Paris: “the tempo was dictated by the rhythm of the *Orbitron*. Some of the musical themes are quite Victorian, whereas others are very classical or more whimsical” (qtd. in Littaye and Ghez 272). When appropriate, original soundtracks can be recycled or used in new applications; for instance, Tolley’s Discoveryland music is used in Port Discovery, a similarly themed land at Tokyo DisneySea. Composer Russell Brower talks about the creation of a soundscape for Disney’s Animal Kingdom using “created, nonelectronic, and organic sounds,” which lends to a feeling of “otherworldliness” (qtd. in Malmberg 117). He says of a theme park soundtrack that “It supports the theme park experience as a film score does a movie” (117). Islands of Adventure likewise opened with original music. Multiple composers worked on tracks for the park and wanted to bring the story of each island through the music. Woodbury points out that Universal has many film-based sections, thus they have “ready-made soundtracks,” but in the case of Islands of Adventure, they wanted to craft

mostly new songs (or new arrangements as in the case of the *Jurassic Park* land) (qtd. in Spitz). The area music and ride themes for the Klugheim part of Phantasialand or for the Ireland part of Europa-Park are recent additions to original land music. New music is also a regular feature when considering shows, with some parks creating original shows annually.

Composing for theme parks often begins with understanding the storyline. Composer Hendrik Schwarzer explains that “As a composer for a theme park you always live in different worlds and stories” (qtd. in Alastair). When he writes a soundtrack, he immediately begins with story: “I try to understand the story which should be told” (qtd. in Alastair). Composer Rene Merkelbach agrees: “I try to write to the background story. I try to stick to the background story. I try to tell the story in music.” It is especially important to express the tone and theme of the story if it is a roller coaster like *Joris en de Draak* (George and the Dragon) where many guests “don’t get the story” or “don’t get all the details.” In these cases, the music is one of the conduits to the narrative. In a ride like *De Vliegende Hollander* (The Flying Dutchman), Merkelbach says, guests are “guided through it (the attraction) through music.” Now, when reflecting on this ride, “you cannot imagine the attraction without the music. It’s a completely different experience” (Merkelbach). Schwarzer observes that composing for musicals takes longer than rides; the composer will “try to tell a story within the underscores and the songs” and “you have more time to develop the themes” (qtd. in Alastair). Merkelbach agrees that writing for musicals is “more effort” and it requires main themes and multiple songs (including an underscore and leitmotifs). The creative process itself assists with linking music to the story according to Xaver Willebrand, a composer, who says “Every soundtrack is closely linked to the story of its creation and the people involved” (qtd. in Christine). This reflects the fact that even within the attraction development process, there are multiple creative cycles taking places.

The presence of a musical soundtrack can also enhance the narrative qualities of traditionally non-narrative attractions like roller coasters. Schwarzer's soundtrack for the Wodan roller coaster at Europa-Park is epic and eminently classical with Norse inspirations, illustrating that music (and the elaborate queue the music plays in) can in fact elevate what would otherwise be an amusement park ride. A number of roller coasters have soundtracks used in promotional material, in the queue, or on board (i.e. Blue Fire Megacoaster, Dwervelwind, Fluch von Novgorod, Helix, Karnan, Krake, Mystic Timbers, Mystery Mine, and Wicker Man). Efteling's Baron 1898 has theme music, but more pronounced are the operatic interruptions of the White Women, who threaten riders in the queue and before they climb the lift on the way to the "mine shaft." This ride would be a good example of when the queue "orchestrates all of the requisite opening stages of narrative development," stages that "anticipate and demand completion" through the rollercoaster experience (DeAngelis 125). Mako, a SeaWorld Orlando roller coaster meant to symbolize the shark, is tied to storytelling music according to composer Rich McKee: "I wanted the symphony to kind of tell the story of what the shark is" (qtd. in Bevil). There are seven movements in the score that represent different aspects of the shark, a "complete cinematic story" (qtd. in Bevil). McKee clarifies: "if you were to hear them together, they would tell a complete musical phrase or musical story" (qtd. in Bevil). Wordless music here is no longer abstraction; it is a musical tone poem with a theme park work rather than literary piece as the inspiration. Similarly, thrill rides can be augmented with musical scores with the aforementioned madhouse variety, top spins like Talocan, and even a children's flat ride, the Dancing Dingie.

Pandora – The World of *Avatar* proves additionally that the *lack* of music can be equally powerful. Unlike the majority of theme park spaces, there are areas where the Pandora soundscape has no music. Guests hit a "wall of jungle sound that is all very specific to the World

of *Avatar*,” something that “mirrors” the areas of the park with live animals (Rohde qtd. in “Pandora”). The areas closest to the “natural” features include wildlife sounds, and the fauna gets louder at night; the areas closest to the restaurant and store provide the musical evidence of human activity. Rohde describes the “sonic environment” of this land:

Pandora relies a lot on this sense of a natural environment that changes from day to night... As the sun begins to go down and the shadows get longer, the first thing that happens is the entire sonic environment begins to change. If you've ever been in a natural place as the sun goes down, it becomes cacophonously noisy because all the animals are assembling into their night spot, where they're going to go. We have an entire sonic environment that we've built here that is unlike anything we've ever done. It changes literally from the moment the sun comes up to the end of the day past midnight. It is not repetitive, it is an evolutionary art that mimics the kinds of sounds you would hear, were it to be real. (qtd. in Porges, “Everything”)

There is also a set of drums in the center of the land that act as part of the setting, a soundscape, an interactive element, and a show space. Rohde sees the “central drum circle” as a kind of symbolic architecture. The drums are “not exactly musical instruments. They are living membranes on a living plant that is sitting in the center of this land. So when you play these drums, you communicate to the entire land. The entire land is a single integrated data bank just like in the movie, so the sounds that you create echo out and are responded to by the environment” (qtd. in Porges, “Everything”). This becomes a convergence of space, music, and the presence of people, making it an eminently appropriate theme park expression.

Music also helps visitors associate memories with particular attractions; songs become “free souvenirs” meant for “eliciting an emotional response” (Baxter qtd. in Niles, “Bob”; Alfuso



qtd. in Stein 140). Sklar mentioned the importance of music to the Epcot pavilions: “almost every pavilion had a song that you could associate with. It became a key part of our storytelling – you could just take that song and play it and you knew what that show was about and you knew what that story was” (qtd. in Niles, “Bob”). This is connected to memory and meaning. Ulmer agrees that music adds “meaning” to the experience and is part of the “core DNA of Disney,” and one could certainly say other companies as well (qtd. in Sasha “The Sound”). Merkelbach similarly reflects on the “Efteling DNA” and the “heritage of Efteling music,” which connects to a “nostalgic feeling” or a “peaceful environment.” They are also known for their “famous themes” and “earworms” (Merkelbach). These songs particularly resonate now as “we’re a society that lives with soundtracks” (Alfuso qtd. in Stein 140).

Within these parks, some of this music is sold or distributed (in soundtracks, official albums, or retrospectives), so the songs in the park can be heard at home, not in their context, but as a tangible memory of the parks. Music producer Dan Stamper explains: “It’s important that songs are simple enough to be catchy, yet rich enough to last for generations and transcend any trends. And these songs can exist beyond their respective productions and have a life of their own, becoming relevant to other life situations” (qtd. in Sasha, “The Sound”). Wright concurs that the “importance of a great song” in an attraction to the theme park experience “can never be overstated” (*Disneyland* 72). Several parks have clear musical identities with a few even commissioning symphonic works to represent them (e.g. Original Soundtrack of Europa-Park or Walt Disney World Suite of Dreams). Entire fan cultures have evolved around the music of certain parks (i.e. Disney, Efteling, SeaWorld, Europa-Park, Alton Towers, Phantasialand, Everland) with buying, recording, trading, categorizing, remixing, and conversing on music, so the importance of music in the construction of a theme park space or fandom cannot be

emphasized enough. Especially because, as Lukas explains, tangibles removed from the park (merchandise, music, photographs) become part of the guest's "lifespace," which extends the reach of the physical space (and its power) into the home (*Immersive* 242).

### *Audio-Animatronics as Narrative Devices*

One of the signature features of theme parks is the use of the robots with sound and motion called Audio-Animatronics (if at Disney) or animatronic figures (if anywhere else). Created by Walt Disney's group in the early 1960s, these figures have become storytelling mechanisms as well as characters within stories. As creative executive Stefan Hellwig notes, "Walt Disney himself has a huge history and legacy around animated figures" (qtd. in Gaudiosi, "For"). There was an uncanny quality to the original Abraham Lincoln figure (an "illusion of man") in Disney's Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln at the 1964 World's Fair, but now all of the United States' presidents are gathered in one room in the Magic Kingdom's Hall of Presidents (Kurtti 50). These figures, though criticized by postmodernists like Umberto Eco and put in comedy bits, are still a way to tell a story that is generally synonymous with the theme park medium (with the exception of Chuck E. Cheese's, itself inspired by Disney's animatronic shows like the Country Bear Jamboree). Butler finds, "Guests have come to expect figures in themed experiences both inside and out of theme park gates, leading designers to look to animatronics as a unique method of engaging visitors" ("Versatility"). Creative executive John Wood goes even further: "Animatronics are constantly evolving. They really are becoming more of an art form" (qtd. in Palicki, "Justice"). Drawn from early concepts of automata or static figures, animatronics are now advanced and engaging "humans." They require hours of programming through computers that give the figures commands, illustrating that they are still very much machines.

Animatronic shows exist in theme parks and have for decades. Technology would be related to these shows as well, with *Battle of Galactica* (1979) as the first theme park show “controlled by a computer” (Gennawey, *Universal* 47). It was also the first animatronic installation outside of Disney. Pickett mentions a notable example of animatronic entertainment, Epcot’s *American Adventure*: “As far as I think, the most successful animatronic-based attraction, that grips your emotions, is the *American Adventure*” (personal interview). *American Adventure* is as “complicated as any Broadway production,” with some of the most upkeep of any show because of its multiple technologies (thirty-five animatronics, scene changing mechanism, projection screens), moving sets, and “one of the most ambitious [productions] Disney has ever created” (Sklar 83; Lloyd Bridges qtd. in Sklar 82). Rothschild concurs that it is “the most complicated ‘play’ we have ever created in our parks – and the first ever with so many Audio-Animatronic ‘actors’ onstage” (qtd. in Sklar 84). *American Adventure* is a combination of “big images” and characters like Benjamin Franklin and Mark Twain; they speak to the audience and “have a living presence” (Hench qtd. in Haas 19). They experimented with having multiple narrators instead of only one. Rothschild explains, “We actually let the 20th Century begin to tell its own story, to allow the narrative [to] come from a variety of different voices that are each speaking to their point in history. You can’t sometimes summarize in one, sometimes you have to let the many take the storytelling” (qtd. in Niles, “Bob”). Over the years a number of Disney’s Audio-Animatronic shows have closed (*Mickey Mouse Revue*, *America Sings*, *Meet the World*, Disneyland’s versions of *Carousel of Progress* and *Country Bear Jamboree*), perhaps because of changing technologies or levels of audience interest. Nevertheless, large-scale shows like *American Adventure* and *Hall of Presidents* remain as do animatronic exhibits like *Dinosaurs Alive!* at multiple Cedar Fair amusement parks.

Wright points out that the “art form” of Audio-Animatronics (on the Dinosaur ride) is “the only way you can see these creatures in all their massive, snarling glory” (*Disney’s Animal* 122). Sometimes animatronics are made the attention draws in queues (e.g. Buzz Lightyear in the Buzz Lightyear dark rides, Mr. Potato Head in Toy Story Midway Mania rides, R2-D2 and C-3PO and others on Star Tours, aliens in Men in Black: Alien Attack, the goblins of Harry Potter and the Escape from Gringotts, and the shaman in Skull Island: Reign of Kong). It has likewise become common now to have animatronics (often larger-than-life ones) as showstoppers and key characters in attractions. Examples of this practice are below:

- Friends: Almar and Pardoes (Symbolica: Palace of Fantasy), Buckbeak (Flight of the Hippogriff), Genie (Sindbad’s Storybook Voyage, fig. 20), Hiccup and Toothless (Dragon Gliders), Kong (Skull Island: Reign of Kong), Marshmallow (Frozen Ever After), Rocket Raccoon (*Guardians of the Galaxy – Mission: Breakout!*), the Seven Dwarfs (Seven Dwarfs Mine Train), Shaman of Songs (Na’vi River Journey), Shrek and Fiona (Shrek’s Merry Ferry Tale Journey)
- Foes: Acromantula and Dragon and Dementors (Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey), Baron Gustave Hooghmoed (Baron 1898), Carnotaurus (Dinosaur), Davy Jones (Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for Sunken Treasure), Dragon (La Tanière du Dragon), Hopper (It’s Tough to be a Bug), Imhotep (Revenge of the Mummy), Jaws (Studio Tour), Joker (Justice League: Battle for Metropolis), Lava Monster (Journey to the Center of the Earth), Q’araq (Roaring Rapids), Stitch (Stitch’s Great Escape!), Tyrannosaurus Rex (*Jurassic Park*-based attractions), Ursula (*The Little Mermaid*-based attractions), Were-Rabbit (Wallace & Gromit’s Thrill-O-Matic), Wicked Witch and Alien (former Great Movie Ride), Yeti (Expedition Everest: Legend of the Forbidden Mountain and Matterhorn Bobsleds)

Animatronics have been used to portray lead and background characters, and indeed entire rides are made up of a robotic cast of characters: Arthur – The Ride, Cat in the Hat, E.T. Adventure, Fata Morgana, Frozen Ever After, Haunted Mansion, “it’s a small world,” Men in Black Alien Attack, Monster Mansion, Monsters, Inc. Ride & Go Seek, Pirates of the Caribbean, Radiator Springs Racers, Splash Mountain, Sindbad’s Storybook Voyage, Timber Mountain Log Ride, and others.



Figure 20: Genie from Sindbad's Storybook Voyage at Tokyo DisneySea (Photo: Author)

Crawford says that “Storytelling requires characters with depth” (140). Storyteller Carolyn Handler Miller offers, “In character-centric media like novels and movies, not only do the characters in the stories experience strong feelings, but so do the readers and viewers of these stories” (108). This can be true in theme parks when viewing shows or experiencing ride-through stories. Newton Lee and Krystina Madej say, “To make a story compelling and believable the characters had to be empathetic—the people in the audience had to identify with them” (156). It is interesting then that whole narratives are presented with robots. These “masterpieces of electronics” perform in an “eternal scenario”; importantly, “these are not humans and we know they're not,” yet we see them as “perfect imitation” (Eco 46). Eco argues, “You realize they are robots, but you remain dumbfounded by their verisimilitude” (45). Masahiro Mori posits that “in climbing toward the goal of making robots appear human, our affinity for them increases until we come to a valley...the uncanny valley.” Drawing on Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny, where humans have a feeling of repulsion from the human-like object (a corpse, for instance),

Mori mentions robots having similarity to humans (or lack thereof) in both appearance and movement, but there remains a distance or disconnect.

Yet despite these stances, animatronics are now being utilized even more than before, with some appearing truly lifelike and others purposefully fantastical or animated. Animatronics engineer Garner Holt details the difficulty of constructing a portrait of a real person with “lifelike realism” and still maintain “performance realism.” Some, as in the case of *Symbolica: Palace of Fantasy*’s cast, have an “80% realistic face with 20% caricature” (Butler, “Efteling’s”). Some rides presume the audience will identify with or follow the animatronic character. In *Pirates of the Caribbean*, Jack Sparrow’s presence altered the narrative, with the audience expected to root for the rogue to steal the treasure. Indiana Jones is the hero trying to help the visitors in the two *Indiana Jones*-based rides. In *Symbolica: Palace of Fantasy*, Pardoes helps the visitor have more fun on the journey and Figment plays a similar role in *Journey into Imagination with Figment*. In *Mystic Manor*, the riders follow Albert through his adventure. Not all of these characters are human (making it easier to accept the fantasy), but it still illustrates that the animatronic has become a fully-fledged character, not merely an uncanny robot. Matthew Panzarino details the technique of adding autonomous robots that guests can interact with like the Vyloo (bird-type creatures) in the queue for *Guardians of the Galaxy – Mission: Breakout!* The future of robots is, according to Panzarino, connected to “emotional context, autonomy and interactivity.”

### *Graphic Design*

From attraction posters and signs to maps and postcards, graphic design plays a role in assisting wayfinding and in delivering stories to visitors. After all, “every graphic artifact expresses a point of view, implicitly or explicitly,” whether about enforcing power or ideology or the usual case of the theme park, participating in a narrative (Drucker and McVarish xxvi). There

are times when graphics are not “really there for storytelling,” but at other times, they lend to or even tell the story (Kischuk, personal interview). Visual communications in parks may begin before the visitor gets there through marketing, though that is not the focus of this dissertation (a marketing pitch delivering a destination’s story is relevant, but it is not done within the park). Visual communication is enhanced through graphics with the parks, often with maps and attraction signs, as “signs are an integral part of the stories we tell in our parks” (*Walt... Magic Real* 100). Wright concurs when talking about land signs: “Our land marquees are more than just directional devices that help people find their way around the Park. They are the first opportunity we have to begin to tell the story of the land, through visual styling and design communication” (*Disney’s Animal* 60). He details their particular effects: “we create graphic elements that assist us with our placemaking through their design and tell our backstory through their content” (*Disneyland* 47). Like attractions, signs have many purposes and expressions.

One of the more popular forms of graphic design communication over the years has been Disney’s attraction posters. The posters are at the front of many parks, serving as early marketing for the experiences within the park. They are also clearly “symbolic,” representing both the attraction the poster represents, the “unique emotions” it might generate, and the storyline it is tied to (Baxter qtd. in Handke and Hunt 4-5). As Baxter notes, “a great poster sells its story from a distance and needs to be glimpsed just briefly to work its magic” (5). He refers to the posters as “artistic expression”; interestingly, the process of poster art involves a creative professional interpreting an attraction in one image and then the visitors doing the same thing (5). It is a multimedia process, as one form of visual art is translating another form of visual art (a kind of riff on *ekphrasis*). Baxter finds the images to be like songs in that they are remembered even after the experience. Handke and Hunt offer that the posters help with storytelling and brevity:

“Successful posters tell the story quickly, directly, and clearly.” Delaney agrees that the posters tell the “story of the attraction” but only in “one image” (qtd. in Handke and Hunt 7). Signs are occasionally used on construction walls to promote and simultaneously inform about new stories when attractions are being built or closed for refurbishment (e.g. bright travel posters selling the idea of Pandora or aged signs warning of the goings on in Phantom Manor).

Delaney believes, “Like a lot of things at Disneyland, attraction posters are storytelling without saying words” (7). Attraction posters may employ explicit storytelling, implicit storytelling, or interpretive storytelling. Some examples are below:

- Explicit: Snow White’s Scary Adventures (“Venture into the Dark Forest, meet Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs but watch out for the Wicked Witch!”) or Pirates of the Caribbean (“Sail with the wildest crew that ever sacked the Spanish Main”)
- Implicit: Pooh’s Hunny Hunt (no words, but the image is Winnie the Pooh flying away on a blustery day, the bees that will likely attack, and his friends swirling around in a hunny pot) or Star Tours: The Adventure Continues (no words, but the image depicts multiple possible planets and a speeder flying away from enemy fire)
- Interpretive: Journey to the Center of the Earth (no words, only two explorers peering into an elaborate cavern) or Le Visionarium (no words, but an interesting array of colors, a clock, and two robots)

Whether explicit, implicit, or interpretive, posters give visitors information about attractions and express values. For instance, the Main Street posters were “distinctly American” and “richer in story” so they could be used as décor according to Sotto (qtd. in Handke and Hunt 17). They may reflect stories and themes by using particular colors, textures, and symbols. This includes Adventureland posters that are lush and green, Tomorrowland posters that are “stylized and abstract” or science fiction themes, and Frontierland posters made to “look like they were printed in town during that era” or using a “color palette to capture the romance of the West” according to graphic designer Leticia Lelevier (Handke and Hunt 91; qtd. in Handke and Hunt 53, 64).

Graphics can play a major role in the story, and graphic designers may be involved in the story development process. As Kischuk explains, “In many cases, graphic designers come in



towards the later parts of the process but help to develop the finer details of the story” (personal interview). Graphic design can contribute to the story within a detailed space. In Mystic Manor, a poster shows the rider that they will be in Lord Mystic’s new invention, the Magneto Electric Carriage, termed a “wonder of the modern age” (fig. 21).



Figure 21: Poster before riding Mystic Manor at Hong Kong Disneyland (Photo: Author)

Graphics in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter contribute to immersion by adding depth and layers. Graphic designers Miraphora Mina and Eduardo Lima explain the influence mix in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter: “Harry Potter’s world includes Gothic, Victorian, Soviet elements, ‘70’s and ‘80’s influences” (qtd. in Dunne). This combination of graphic models generates a distinct new thing that establishes the storyworld. Typography is important in setting a mood; it “helps to unify the experience and create distinct points of view for the guest” (S.

Adams). Graphics can help develop a park story, as happened with Tokyo DisneySea’s attraction posters. Graphic designer Will Eyerman explains how the work at Tokyo DisneySea created a philosophy of poster art:

We try to get as good an image as we can and then try to present it well. We still pay attention to color and the general values, but we’re getting more specific with the attraction stories than ever before. We’re experimenting with new techniques and new ways to tell the story for us, so it isn’t always the same texture. (qtd. in Handke and Hunt 121)

The posters were designed to fit together thematically; they would “reflect an overall statement, but be individual to each attraction” (Handke and Hunt 121). Thus, even single posters are conceived of as stories and as tools to connect with larger stories.

Interestingly, the *lack* of signage or graphics may also be a storytelling decision, especially as signage at theme parks has become a subconscious expectation. Producer Jon Landau explains that there are intentionally no signs in the outside areas of Pandora – The World of *Avatar* because designers wanted to “let you explore and discover on your own” (qtd. in Padilla). The only real sign is at the entrance of the land, and it resembles a National Park trail map or marker, signifying that the space is an alien version of a park. Because exploration of a new planet is the core of the storyline, it is the lack of rather than the presence of graphics that assists the storyline. When one gets into the queue for Na’vi River Journey, the National Park motif is augmented with informative plaques, including one which explicitly informs the guest that the entire canopy above is a “woven map” symbolic of the rainforest (fig. 22).

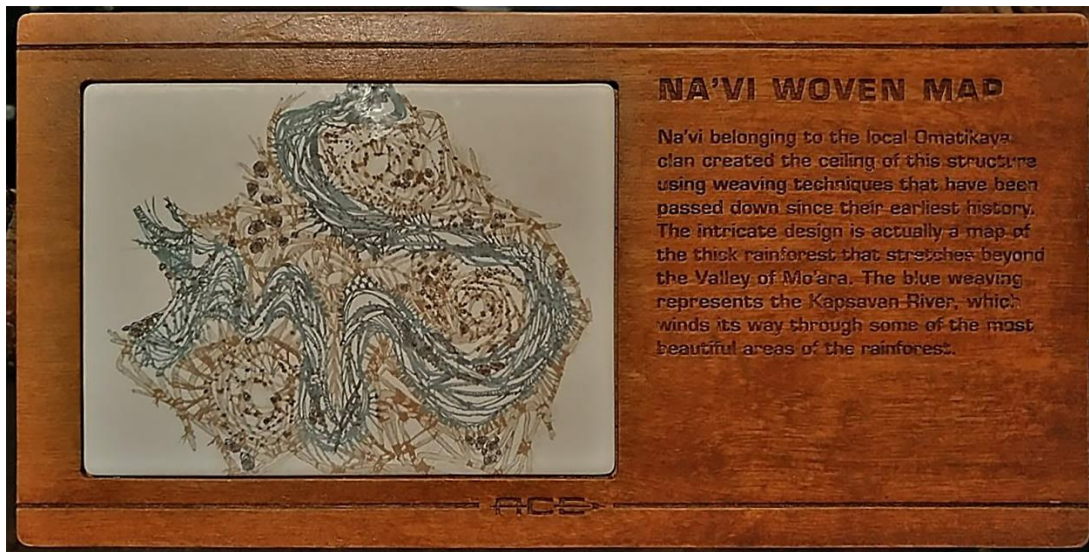


Figure 22: Sign in the queue of Na'vi River Journey (Photo: Author)

Graphic arts can be taken away in the form of merchandise. Postcards, according to Rabinovitz, “commodified the parks and made them transportable” (*Electric* 97). Bryman notes that in theme parks, there is a “narrativizing of consumption,” and these kinds of tangible items, tied to memorable stories, do just that (*Disney* 126). He mentions the connection between this notion and items being “purchased for their symbolic rather than for their practical utility” (126). Baxter refers to the business reasons for these items: they “extend the experience” of a park visit, “generate repeat visits,” serve as “triggers for the emotions experienced” within parks, and make a guest an “emissary” to introduce the parks to others, making graphic ephemera an earlier form of “social media” (qtd. in Handke and Hunt 4). Many theme park souvenirs would fall into this category. It should be pointed out that theme parks are sometimes rife with *paratexts*, or material outside of the storytelling experience that is “in some way connected to it” (Abbott 239). This might be books, comic books, posters, souvenirs, or others things like the “story papers” available at Tokyo Disney Resort for foreign language speakers.

## Modern Narrative Techniques and Technologies

This section is grouped into seven separate techniques and technologies that were developed in theme parks as they matured. Most of these continue to be used, though a few have fallen out of favor with the immersion paradigm.

### *Edutainment*

While theme parks are generally associated with the fantastic, there have been exhibits, shows, and rides over the years that have brought in museum-like elements in the way of expository, educational content. One would generally think of non-story narrative in educational presentations, but there have also been attractions that use storytelling to present informational material. Younger refers to what he calls “presentational parks” (like Epcot or Futuroscope) as “documentary in three dimensions” (qtd. in T. Schneider). While these are not as common, they are not always less narrative because of educational content.

Epcot is one of the more successful parks that employs edutainment though it too is evolving. The pavilions are meant to both instruct and tell stories, or “entertain while they inform” (Wright, *Epcot* 56). Wright references Spaceship Earth, which highlights the past in a linear sequence to project ideas for viewers to then extrapolate about the future. In Spaceship Earth’s case, it illustrates the advances in communications throughout history through Audio-Animatronic scenes. He argues that this technique is useful “to take a topic that might have the potential to be rather abstract and make it familiar” (*Epcot* 35). Another Epcot ride, Ellen’s Energy Adventure, used humor and the story of a game show and dream sequence to assuage the “dry and heavy” topic with the “least amount of explication” (35). Living with the Land is wholly educational but still tells a story about agricultural techniques around the world and

within the on-site greenhouse. In the same pavilion, *The Lion King* characters talked about habitat destruction in the *Circle of Life* film, whose tagline was “an environmental fable.”

Some subject matters, however, may prove difficult for a theme park treatment. Wright discusses Epcot’s former Wonders of Life pavilion and their “struggle” to find storytelling techniques to fit the topics of the body, health, and the origin of life (44). They had a simulator, *Body Wars*, where the visitor travel through the body; the film, *The Making of Me*, which used comedy with animated, anthropomorphized sperm and eggs; and *Cranium Command*, a humorous show about controlling a teenager’s body (a seeming precursor to the film *Inside Out*). The pavilion lasted less than twenty years, illustrating that the presentational style does not always appeal when paired with particular topics. Conversely, the museum-like exhibits in the World Showcase, the “greatest concentration of gallery spaces” in a theme park, have remained (106). Wright insists it is “imperative” that even the exhibits and galleries tell stories: “Our curatorial focus is definitely on finding a story around which to build an exhibit” (107). Some amusement parks like Six Flags Magic Mountain or Knoebel’s have had museums that detail the history of the park, though they do not tend to be as narrative as the spaces in Europa-Park or Dollywood. In these cases, the theme design focus on narrative generally overrides the museal one, stereotyped as historicity or authenticity of artifacts and either busy or sterile displays.

Though Disney’s Animal Kingdom is not a presentational park, it does have a land, Rafiki’s Planet Watch, which is considered behind the scenes, expository, or presentational (even “academic”) (Wright, *Disney’s Animal* 84). This goes along with executive Michael Eisner’s assertion that “nature is perhaps the greatest storyteller of all,” though the park and the stories are of course manmade (qtd. in Goldberg 165). Wright distinguishes the park from traditional zoos because it features stories about human-animal interaction thus allowing it to reach “levels of

intellectual stimulation that are beyond the reach of zoos that merely present animals to view and offer accompanying information to round out the experience” (20). It is storytelling that allows for a deeper connection, as humans respond better to stories than exposition.

Storytelling is enacted in various ways in these spaces. Wright notes that the Gorilla Falls Exploration Trail tells stories with diverse methods: through explicit but inanimate means (chalkboards, signage, field notes) and through explicit animate means (employees posing as researchers and answering questions) (74). Kilimanjaro Safaris at the same park had a blatant message about poaching in addition to a storyline about stopping elephant poachers, but this has been “toned down” over the years (Eades, “A Former”). A video in the queue still depicts poaching and the tram driver still mentions the danger of poaching, but the character-based story is gone. Edutainment attractions, whether narrative or expository, still tend to be explicit in their presentations. The film and show *It’s Tough to be a Bug* uses IP to inform visitors about the importance of insects. One of the few exceptions to this is raft ride *Kali River Rapids* at the same park, which has an implicit message about illegal logging, with part of the otherwise green setting marred with smoking logs and chainsaws. Another would be *Volcans Sacrés* (Sacred Volcanoes) at *Vulcania* (an educational theme park), a dark ride that details different cultural relationships with volcanoes through effects, animatronics, wraparound movie screens, and even an implicit storyline of a lava rock ride vehicle floating through time down a lava stream.

Finally, there is a particular kind of hybrid attraction that combines fictional characters with real aquarium or wildlife exhibits, which helps visitors connect to more abstract concepts or global populations. Some examples of this type are *The Seas with Nemo and Friends* and *Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin*, though in both of these, the real animals are showcased at the end. *Deep Sea Odyssey* and the *LEGO Deep Sea Adventure* are more balanced examples, with

typical theme park show elements being combined with aquarium scenes. In all of these, key characters (*Finding Nemo* characters, Puck the Penguin, Pao-Pao the fish, LEGO characters) are used to help visitors relate to the storylines. SeaWorld's Turtle Trek is close to this kind of attraction, as it includes an outdoor exhibit to see real turtles, but the indoor 3D dome theatre tells a real-life hero's journey about the crossing of sea turtles; the wraparound theatre makes it more immersive, as does the soundtrack. In what might be a sign of the future, National Geographic Experience: Ocean Odyssey, is an edutainment experience that presents marine life with multiple theme design staples (projections, animation, interactive exhibits, and "transformative storytelling") but without any actual animals in the space (Storey, "Orlando").

### *Explicit Artificiality*

Though the paradigm would move to immersion, some theme parks, especially those already about constructed activities like filmmaking, have opted for explicit artificiality. Carl Laemmle's early 1910s studio tour was meant for the "public to pull back the curtain and witness the creative process" (Gennawey, *Universal* 1). The later Universal Studios park was "innovative in allowing visitors to get unprecedented access to the creation of film and television" (Jeffs). Universal's theme parks and the entire studio park genre embraced explicit artificiality. As Sam Gennawey explains, "While the Disney parks strove to eliminate any visual contradictions that would disrupt the story they were trying to tell through environmental design, Universal seemed to celebrate the chaos that is inherent on a movie backlot" (*Universal* 109). Instead of the idea of guests visiting another realm, they are going to an artificial space like a movie set in which they may actively portray a role. Nonetheless, Pickett observes that even Universal Hollywood's Studio Tour, which began by allowing guests to witness sets that were genuinely used in moviemaking, eventually added attractions like Rockslide that were created specifically for the

ride (“Story...Interactive”). Purpose-built tram tour attractions like Battle of Galactica or Flash Flood (fig. 23) were used in movies, making the Studio Tour a dynamic space fluctuating between filmmaking and live performance for guests, highlighting the theme park’s relationship with artificiality, film, and reiteration. The ride is still one of the longest at a theme park and continues to alter its show, but the transitions between spaces highlight its explicit artificiality.



Figure 23: Flash Flood on the Studio Tour at Universal Studios Hollywood (Photo: Rob Young, Wikimedia Commons)

Explicitly artificial places fall within the category of postmodern parks, which offer “non-immersive” attractions and contemporary design (Younger 154). The behind-the-scenes movement might have started with Universal, but other places have employed it including the recent Bollywood Parks. Disney’s Hollywood Studios had a Studio Backlot Tour that included walking through a prop warehouse, a live produced show with guests in it, and a tram through Catastrophe Canyon, a large set that continually erupted and then repaired itself, showing guests how it works. Universal had Earthquake: The Big One, Disaster!, Backdraft, and Twister...Ride



It Out, which all demonstrated the power of special effects. Disney and Universal have both had shows that involve guests becoming part of a movie shoot including Indiana Jones Stunt Spectacular (where guests are movie extras) or the older Star Trek Adventure (where guests starred in an episode). Instead of theme park shows that involve watching a spectacle or immersion with a guest *there* in the world, these shows are on a “hot set” and generally involve a “cut” with explicit discussion of filmmaking. Even the removal of rolling stages at Disney’s Hollywood Studios is performed as part of the live “show” and connected to a movie studio visit.

Interestingly, at the Warner Bros Studio Tour – The Making of Harry Potter, they overtly emphasize an “authenticity” found in replicating film sets rather than being a theme park. Creative director Chris Durmick observes the “behind-the-scenes” aspect of the Forbidden Forest area (the most immersive section of the experience with effects and animatronics) and posits that the attraction’s “thesis” is its filmmaking authenticity or being “closely tied to the production process” (qtd. in Findlay). He mentions them “unmasking the production effects that created the magic” and finds the immersion is in the film world not the actual world of *Harry Potter*, but this is not much different from what the tour or set facets of studio parks do, perhaps pointing to the explicitly artificial attractions as a subversion of the theme park model (qtd. in Findlay).

Movie parks or shows are not the only option for explicit artificiality. While some shows at SeaWorld are spectacle, others have involved stopping and discussing animal behaviors with the audience. The Pets Ahoy or Pets Rule shows at SeaWorld have little scenarios with humans and rescued pets “acting” in a scene. However, these shows often mention learning behaviors and always mention where the animals were obtained from and the value of rescued animals, which immediately allows the guest to understand “this is not real.” This is the opposite message of the layers of immersion in the more recent paradigm (or even the message of the educational

areas of Disney's Animal Kingdom that remind it definitely "is real") though behind-the-scenes shows still exist. In fact, SeaWorld's shift to more educational content meant a theatrical dolphin show, Blue Horizons (with an implicit storyline, stagecraft, and an emotional soundtrack), being replaced by Dolphin Days, a narrated show which emphasizes behaviors mimicking the wild.

The opening address of Walt Disney Studios in Paris explicitly linked storytelling and filmmaking: "Here we celebrate the art and the artistry of storytellers from Europe and around the world" (Michael Eisner qtd. in Silvester 222). Explicitly artificial experiences do still use storytelling techniques, though the story tends to be the same: "you the guest are watching a show being produced live" or "you the guest are a part of that show." While most theme parks want visitors to feel like they have an active role in the large, theoretical show of the theme park, these are about specific shows or films. These attractions tend to be the ultimate role-playing experience, and those who do not volunteer still recognize that the show is being produced in the moment. Also, unlike other genres of attractions, nearly all explicitly artificial experiences are narrated, likely because there is less of an idea of an unfolding or world.

### *Simulators*

One of the trends that concept developer Ross Osterman observes is the rise of the simulator. Star Tours at Disneyland, the first motion simulator (1987), would go on to trigger a multitude of copies. The attraction, which essentially straps a guest in a contraption and shakes them around in front of a small movie screen, has a claustrophobic sense that might render it more realistic; getting in a vehicle/enclosed space that travels somewhere is very familiar. This attraction recalls the aforementioned Hale's Tours and Scenes of the World. That attraction added to the "historical precedent of the motion simulator" with its inclusion of stationary seating, moving images, rocking, and wind effects (Manovich, *The Language* 249). Pine and

Gilmore consider Star Tours one of the first escapist experiences, where guests were “completely immersed in them as actively involved participants” (49-50). Brenda Laurel calls Star Tours a “sensory-rich amusement park installation” that employs interactivity, virtual reality, and sensory immersion (“The Six” 566). Murray notes: “The ‘movie ride’ is engineered for strong visceral effects. It combines the surprises of the fun house with the terrors of the roller coaster” (*Hamlet* 49). Though now simulators are common, the early simulator must have seemed a different kind of attraction from the norm. Rabinovitz asserts that these rides made people accustomed to “sensory-overloaded, hyper-real spectacle” and “new technologies” (“From” 42, 44).

The first version of Star Tours had a storyline of the inexperienced pilot Rex taking visitors into the action of the *Star Wars* film. The newer version, Star Tours – The Adventure Continues (2011), is more technologically advanced with randomized scenes in addition to a storyline that involves helping a rebel spy (an audience member) flee the Empire and escape to rebel bases on far off worlds. Osterman agrees about the importance of Star Tours and finds that Back to the Future, a later simulator, was part of the “next generation of rides” (executive Terry Winnick qtd. in Gennawey, *Universal* 129). Like the Disney simulators, this too involved a storyline related to a chase and escape. Osterman also finds The Simpsons Ride notable for its inclusion of humor. Once these rides got popular (in installations including motion bases, motion theatres, and flight simulators), they were added at theme parks in the majority of chains.

Flight simulators or “flying theatres” like the IMAX-based Soarin’ have become especially popular in the last fifteen years. Theme parks have installed successors to Soarin’ including Futuroscope’s The Extraordinary Voyage, with a Jules Verne storyline; Europa-Park’s Voletarium, called a “symbiosis of a ride and a movie,”; defunct Wanda Wuhan Movie Park’s Hubei in the Air about Chinese mythology; and FlyVenture at Lotte World, which has two

choices for themes, Korea or Chaos (creative executive Michael Mack qtd. in Gilling, “A New”). Non-theme park visitor attractions have also installed digital flight simulators like FlyOver America, FlyOver Canada, FlyOver Iceland, This is Holland, or The Flyer – San Francisco. Rothschild explains the difference between older simulators like Star Tours and newer ones like Soarin’ or FlyOver Canada:

With rides like *Star Tours*, the idea is that you’re in a vehicle. You view the world through a window while moving through an environment. In contrast, *FlyOver Canada* gives you the opportunity to look around the world you are flying across, without the intermediary of a vehicle. The experience is much more like that of a bird flying forward and moving around as it flies – or like being Peter Pan – which was in fact much of the inspiration for me. Guests can move their head to view the world around them much like a bird while the sensation of surrounding motion is created by our camera, attached by a gyro mount to the helicopter. (qtd. in Kleiman, “Rick”)

This description connects the ideas of simulators and cinema but interestingly, Rothschild references Peter Pan’s Flight, still one of the most influential theme park rides. It also makes sense as one of the most popular theme park tropes is flying, and Peter Pan was the original flyer that inspired the next generations of designers (Niles, “Theme Park Fans”).

Some of the flight simulators, including Soarin’ (Over California) and its sequel, Soarin’ (Around the World), tend to have an experiential or environmental kind of storyline with no plot (Christian Martin calls them generally “contemplative”) (qtd. in Gilling, “A New”). FlyOver Canada includes a long pre-show that is considered “chapter one of a two-chapter guest experience” (Rothschild qtd. in Kleiman, “Rick”). Others, like Voletarium, do have a plot (in this

case about an adventure society trying to solve a mystery about the first manned flight), but the experience is still a simple one of the guest flying over landmarks. Rothschild explains:

I view these kind of spaces as experiences, rather than films in a traditional sense. Films traditionally can be used to tell lengthy dialogue or narrative intensive stories. The experiences I spend much of my time developing are way less dialog/narrative intensive “stories.” So, with the understanding of that central difference, it is my hope that with the use of the variety of technologies, the guest can reach a point in their experience when they lose all sense of disbelief and become fully “immersed” in the experience. (qtd. in Palicki, “FlyOver”)

Simulators have been associated with the concept of immersion even before that notion was the industry paradigm. These attractions were not merely about the sight of being in another place but the “sensation of immersion in it” and the “experience of being in that place” (Rabinovitz, “From” 51). It also helps to redefine what storytelling is within theme park rides, focusing on the guest’s experience through space rather than an external character with a plot. It often removes the observable story, leaving only the experiential one.

Rothschild found that most flight simulators use live-action film as opposed to computer-generated imagery (CGI) for their media (though the recent Soarin’ and Voletarium are certainly “sweetened” with CGI). A notable exception to this would be Flight of Passage, the most advanced and newest form of simulator. This ride had to use solely 3D CGI as it attempts to visualize the landscape of an alien planet. It has crisp video and the flight experience is still similar to earlier installations because the primary novelty is the flying ability. Show producer Mark Eades finds it intriguing that unlike other simulators, it “simulates stopping and landing” (“A Former”). This simulator has an explicit plot of visitors to Pandora being allowed to connect

with avatars riding ikran (the dragon-like “banshees” from the *Avatar* film) through a technology called a “link chamber.” The apparatus passengers ride actually “breathes” during flight, and there are water and smell effects. This links humans researching these species with the Na’vi coming of age ceremony of “iknimaya” or bonding with an ikran for the first time. It was thus more explicitly planned as storytelling and with a clearer purpose to the flying. Rohde explains of the ride that “emotionally, it is not simply a tour of an amazing planet. It is clearly a coming-of-age journey, a challenge, and a revelation that is beautiful” (qtd. in Porges, “Everything”). The rider goes through exciting and peaceful places, encounters a dangerous leonopteryx (a large dragon-like creature), rests in a cathedral-like bioluminescent space, and lands to watch a sunset. One can guess based on past trends that Flight of Passage’s ride system will be duplicated many times, so the flight simulator appears to have a future as a storytelling technology.

### *Interactive Dark Rides*

One of the trends in theme park attractions is adding varying levels of interactivity. Interactivity can make a “more profound or immersive themed space,” though occasionally the artificiality of the interface or the inauthenticity of the movements might break the illusion (Lukas, *Immersive* 229). Creative producer Eric Merz finds that interactivity “allows people to have very personalized, human moments where they feel like they have some agency in their experience” (qtd. in Terwiesch and Siggelkow). The human element is key, as Kischuk reveals that “interactivity is most engaging when it resembles a social/relational interaction,” but many interactive attractions are not there yet (*A Prototype* 28). Currently, Disney mentions this in a patent for face tracking in various lighting: “It is believed that improvements in conventional face tracking systems are needed to better support interaction between participants and interactive devices within an entertainment environment” (qtd. in Storey, “Disney”).

Nonetheless, there are many levels of interaction within a ride space; interaction “not only occurs between the human and device, but also between the device and the ride environment, and between the human and the people around them” (Kischuk, *A Prototype* 29). Crawford finds that interactivity is based on speed, depth, and choice; something should have quick interactions, interactions with meaning, and multiple options. Designers working on theme park interactivity are trying to get closer to these positive characteristics with various levels of interaction within a park (queues, rides, shows, and quests).

Acting as kind of a bridge between traditional dark rides, contemporary dark rides, and video games, are interactive dark rides. According to Anja D’Hondt, these rides were inspired by “the traditional shooting gallery”; Wright likewise refers to the Buzz Lightyear ride as a “shooting-gallery-on-a-track” (*Magic* 120). The shooting gallery inspired Sally Corporation to create The Great Pistolero Roundup (1997), the “first actual interactive dark ride that [Sally Corporation] designed and built” (Wood qtd. in “Sally”). The popular Ghost Blasters model and others with similar theme packages were built; haunted theming is popular in “participatory visual attractions” (Samuelson and Yegoiants 68). Sometimes attractions have objects that can be pushed but are not actually interactive (Mission Space). There are interactive dark rides that involve non-game reaction including 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea (where the rider controls spotlights in the dark, “underwater” landscape), Roger Rabbit’s Car Toon Spin (where the rider spins the vehicle like the “tea cups” flat ride), Buzz Lightyear’s Space Ranger Spin (where the rider controls the vehicle to angle it for better shooting), Monsters, Inc. Ride & Go Seek (where the riders use flashlights to find monsters), or Symbolica: Palace of Fantasy (where effects can be chosen and scenery interacted with). The most common interactions relate to using an implement and shooting targets though the device can vary from laser guns (Toy Story Midway

Mania, Voyage to the Iron Reef, etc.) to turkey callers (Gobbler Getaway) to pastry cream bags (Maus au Chocolat). Some of these experiences use 3D and many virtual elements, while others have stuck to all or mostly practical sets.

Because of the weapon element, a majority of these experiences have a *conflict* plot where the rider is needed to assist with shooting stuff and eventually battle a villain. Even the tongue-in-cheek Maus au Chocolat features the conflict narrative, though the mice, rather than the humans win (unlike the majority, where the rider defeats the villain). There are a few exceptions including Gobbler Getaway (Holiday World), where the rider must round up turkeys for a farmer during Thanksgiving, but the moment of crisis is averted when everyone decides on pizza for dinner. This ride features a *meneur de jeu*, a narrator that sits apart from the story, in the way of a friendly grandma in the queue.

Other more cinematic rides like Men In Black: Alien Attack exist; it is also both a “participatory ride” and “like a video game” (Gennawey, *Universal* 208). The ride most like a video game might be Terra Mítica’s Labyrinth of the Minotaur. It is a target shooting dark ride with elaborate sets that puts the riders through the gauntlet of Greek mythology. However, as Wood explains, “At two points in the ride the scores are tabulated and the riders are allowed to continue only if they have received a sufficient score” (qtd. in Naversen, “Dark”). This is a rare ride that puts player achievement ahead of experience. There seems to be some debate about the level of “video gameness” on these attractions as executive Benoit Cornet reminds, “It is not a video game but an immersive experience with a storyline.” Nonetheless, multiple screen-based interactive dark rides could be classified as the “video game on wheels” he condemns.

More recently, Justice League: Battle for Metropolis at multiple Six Flags Parks is a continuation of cinematic rides like The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man but according to



Hill, it is “unique to the industry due to the interactive elements mixed with motion and media” (qtd. in J. Young, “An Interview”). Wood explains the process of getting to this ride:

We saw the trend when Toy Story Mania came out and interactive dark rides shifted definitively towards video media. It was at this point that we took the decision to make a paradigm shift into a mixed-media interactive attraction. There were other similar attractions, of course. Spiderman was always inspirational to anyone in the dark ride business. We felt, at this point, we could take everything we had learned and combine all the factors that worked very effectively in our standard dark ride attraction, with an upgraded interactive video technique, 3D, and a motion-based simulator dark ride vehicle. (qtd. in “Sally”)

Hill explains other elements that this version has including open doors so “you can enjoy the highly dimensional environments and feel like you are a part of them” (qtd. in J. Young, “An Interview”). He calls the experience both a “fully realized interactive game” and a “dramatic adventure” (qtd. in J. Young, “An Interview”). As with other interactive dark rides, the plot surrounds the visitor needing to help the superheroes defeat the villains.

Interestingly, Hill finds that “gamers” and “non-gamers” focus on different things. For non-gamers, it is about the fun of shooting and getting “satisfying haptic feedback” (qtd. in Niles, “Bringing”). When designing for gamers, they “focus on the depth of the game by unlocking puzzles and layering targets so players are always finding new ways to score” (qtd. in Niles, “Bringing”). Like other theme park experiences, then, interactive dark rides can have multiple layers in the same space. These rides are still about story combined with gaming, however: “If you don’t have a back story, it’s difficult to have lasting appeal. Every one of our rides has a story, and yet in some, the story plays truer than the game. The game is an integral

component” (Wood qtd. in “Sally”). Wood lists the overall features needed for these kinds of dark rides as marketability, capacity, and repeatability (qtd. in “Sally”).

A recent trend includes using reactive mechanisms that are not guns, like the interactive wrenches on Benno’s Great Race or the “rustic” magic wands on the Smurfs’ Ride at Comics Station Antwerp. In terms of future concepts, D’Hondt sees the future of interactive dark rides as using more “natural interactions,” or motions in more natural contexts like the hand gesture system on Lego Ninjago The Ride (where hand motions, rather than artificial attachments, trigger moves like fireballs). Shooting galleries also influenced Alterface to create Desperados, an “interactive theater” or “collective amusement ride” where teams shoot at characters, something that appears on Plants vs. Zombies Garden Warfare: 3Z Arena (D’Hondt). D’Hondt suspects that dark rides and roller coasters will be blended more often, as in the case of Arthur: The Ride or Dragon Gliders. Interactivity has also entered other themed entertainment, as interactivity and gamification have cropped up in waterparks with something called “slideboarding” which combines a water slide and a virtual video game (Eades, “Disneyland”).

Often because of the rise of interactivity, theme parks have tried some radical approaches that reflect contemporary narrative experimentation concepts like branching fiction (though these attractions are not all interactive). A few rides, including Pooh’s Hunny Hunt or Mystic Manor, have a mild version of this, as the ride system chooses which paths the rider will take, with a few possibilities of different areas and programs. The new version of Star Tours has many possible ride combinations, as the computer randomly selects which areas, scenes, and characters from the Star Wars franchise the rider will experience. A similar scheme is on Tokyo DisneySea’s Nemo & Friends SeaRider. Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for Sunken Treasure has “a surprise ending that plays at random intervals” where the guests and Jack Sparrow keep the treasure

instead of having it dissolved by Davy Jones (creative executive Luc Mayrand qtd. in Palicki, “Pirates”). Randomness may seem “incompatible with the logical structure of narrative,” but it does not destroy the structure of theme park rides with their already “spatial narrative” organization (Ryan, “Beyond” 597-98). Symbolica: Palace of Fantasy allows riders to visit one of three rooms (based on heroes, music, or treasure), an example of a “forking path narrative,” though the choice is made before the ride begins (Abbott 168). Former Epcot attraction Horizons went further than this, allowing riders to choose one of three futuristic endings during the ride (colonizing space, desert, or ocean).

Epcot’s Spaceship Earth is perhaps the best example of an interactive branching concept. The first part of the attraction is a traditional dark ride that guides riders through the history of human communication (from cave paintings to personal computers). However, the final section allows riders to choose their ideal future living situations based on multiple options (interests, priorities, desired location) displayed on a touchscreen. Once the choices are made, a short video is played containing characters (with the riders’ faces superimposed on the animated bodies) enjoying the future they created and highlighting the specific technologies that will help accomplish these visions. Certainly alternative endings or a “choose your own adventure” scenario in a theme park ride is a representation of nontraditional narrative, allowing for both “interactivity” and “exploration” (Ryan, “Beyond” 597). As Jenkins asserts, “we seek to play and participate,” and some park attractions fulfill that desire (qtd. in Lukas, *Immersive* 246). Kischuk hopes that future expressions of interaction will concentrate more on real engagement and less on simply scoring so that they may “deepen narrative immersion into a fantasy-based world” (*A Prototype* 5). Interactive quests, discussed in a later section, may fulfill some of that desire, but they are generally walkthroughs and not rides.

### *Fireworks and Spectaculars*

One of the most popular draws at destination theme parks especially is the nighttime entertainment including fireworks, water shows, projection shows, and shows that are actually named “spectaculars,” which often combine multiple elements. From the 1990s on, these attractions have become popular across the globe, though Disney’s offerings remain the most well-known. All of them would fall into the category of spectacle, with connotations of pageantry, visual displays, and the perception of distance. The great majority of these productions involve storytelling in some way.

Fireworks have been at Disney since the 1950s, though they have become far more advanced now with shells synchronized to the soundtrack. Show director Christophe Leclercq refers to fireworks shows as “choreography in the sky”; they are a combination of “story, lighting effects and fireworks” (qtd. in Bogaert, “Enchanted”). He describes the process of organizing fireworks for Disneyland Paris as constructing a storyboard, presenting it to a pyrotechnics company, and testing and adjusting ideas including music and firework types. He explains that “The colors needs to match the story that you are trying to tell,” demonstrating that even exploding shells can express story and present a mode of theatre (qtd. in Bogaert, “Enchanted”). Similarly, entertainment director Steve Davison says that even with fireworks shows, the consideration is “what makes a good story”; the difference is that “these stories are told in massive ways” (qtd. in Woloski and Woloski). When talking about the Disneyland Forever fireworks, he states, “We wanted the show to explode with color and light all around our guests ... to completely envelope them in the story and make them feel a part of it” (qtd. in Glover, “Diamond”). This meant fireworks, projections, and effects surrounding visitors on Main Street, making it a more multi-sensory experience.

Fireworks are recognized for the excitement of explosions and spectacle, but over the years, the shows have brought in elements of intimacy and moments of drama and emotion. This sometimes happens because they are combined with other elements including water (like in the castle shows at Disneyland Paris) or projected images. A good example of the latter is Happily Ever After at Magic Kingdom, which includes multiple acts, dramatic music, and purpose-made projection mapped art to correspond with the music. It has the flight of Tinkerbell (a live actor on a guide wire above the crowd), as many Disney fireworks shows do, which is highly symbolic. It has a storyline that exemplifies the Disney hero's journey (dreams, adventure, love, adversity, achievement), with the notion that the viewer will go through a similar thing. The lyrics represent this journey: "The battles, the stories, the losses, and all the glories. We're changed by the way we live every day." This show has a brief moment after the villain sequence when the music stops and rain extinguishes the crackling embers of the castle. Few shows have a moment of silent contemplation like this, but it demonstrates that fireworks shows are becoming more complex in their narrative approach. It validates the visual and filmic nature of the medium, as this kind of "dramatic pause" would be harder to replicate in a written text.

Water shows like Fantasmic!, Illuminations, and World of Color are popular attractions that tend to showcase scenes from Disney movies. Some of the most thoughtful theme park shows (i.e. Aquanura, BraviSEAmo!, The Forge of the Stars, Lady O, Lake of Illusions, The Legend of Mythica, Organs of Fire, Rivers of Light, Symbio!) are water installations. While several are abstract, World of Color: Hurry Home brings in *personification* with the character of Little Lantern, who needs to journey home for the Lunar New Year, a narrative approach that leads to personal connection, Chinese cultural tones, beauty, and intimacy despite spectacle. One of most profound water shows is Epcot's Illuminations: Reflections of Earth, a show designed

for the millennium mark but so popular it has lasted nearly twenty years. Nichols says of this show that, “For me, this has been the best synthesis of theatre, music, fireworks, fountains, pyro, lights and lasers for an enormous audience of over 25,000 guests” (qtd. in Emerson, “Mark”). It has a story beginning with the chaos of Earth’s formation and leading to the development of mankind. Dorsey calls the show the “history of History in 12.5 minutes” and Nichols says it “speaks to the innate part of all of us that wishes to be told a story” (qtd. in Emerson, “Mark”). The explicit narration at the beginning positions it as a purposeful storytelling installation:

We’re gathered here tonight, around the fire — as people of all lands have gathered for thousands and thousands of years before us — to share the light and to share a story. An amazing story as old as time itself but still being written. And though each of us has our own individual stories to tell, a true adventure emerges when we bring them all together as one. We hope you enjoy our story tonight: Reflections of Earth.

This narration pays tribute to the art of oral storytelling but then presents a story using visual and auditory means with only a short song at the end that involves language.

While *Illuminations: Reflections of Earth* is one of the biggest spectacle shows with its large space and audience, *Rivers of Light* is supposed to be more intimate. The smaller amphitheatre and its “intricate details” were “designed as a key part of the show’s storytelling” (Fickley-Baker, “All”). Though shows are associated with movement, parade floats are generally locked into a particular pose and a few water shows (*Rivers of Light*, *The Legend of Mythica*, *Fantasmic!*) have both performers and floats. As production designer Michael Curry notes of the floats in *Rivers of Light*, “I get one pose, and so it has to show you everything” (qtd. in “*Rivers of Light* Lanterns”). Curry mentions the theme and the technology attempting to convey it: “We’re trying to actually render a rustic primitivism but using the world’s highest technological

means to get to that place” (qtd. in “Rivers of Light Lanterns”). Nonetheless, like other spectacles, there is an underlying message, as the introductory narrator explains, “We are united in this special place to celebrate the magnificence and wonder of all living creatures, for in life we are all one.” The narration at the finale continues the theme:

Within each of us is a light. A light that shines in all living things. Here where fire and water bridge the earth and sky, our light rises on the wind to join the stars. As we journey on this great earth, may we remember the light we share. May we celebrate our bond with the natural world and the wonders that flow on rivers of light.

The imagery during this frame is of animals becoming constellations and walking across the aurora borealis. Storytelling technology can thus be used for many kinds of stories, including, ironically, one about bonds with nature and the beautiful natural features of the world.

Many shows on this list qualify as nighttime “spectaculars,” which means they employ multiple media and techniques to tell a story at night. Lotte World’s Let’s Dream! is a nighttime spectacular with GPS-programmed floating lanterns and fireworks combined with a light parade. The show blends “old and new” in many ways including the music mix (classical and electronic dance) and technologies (shadow puppets and a hologram fairy). According to Jeffs, there are “six different dream worlds represented in the parade”: the deep (ocean) (fig. 24), adventure, underland (ogres and such), the dark, bright tomorrow, and the dream master (qtd. in J. Young, “Super”). The pre-show entertainment includes storytellers on bikes who tell stories to the audience; as Jeffs explains, “all six stories are interconnected, so to truly understand the parade’s backstory, guests will have to watch the preshow from all six different zones” (qtd. in J. Young, “Super”). The project is so large and integrated that Jeffs refers to it not as a traditional parade

but as a “21<sup>st</sup> Century transformative theatrical experience” (qtd. in Kleiman, “Goddard”). Its use of GPS lantern choreography is likely a preview of future shows with drone technology.

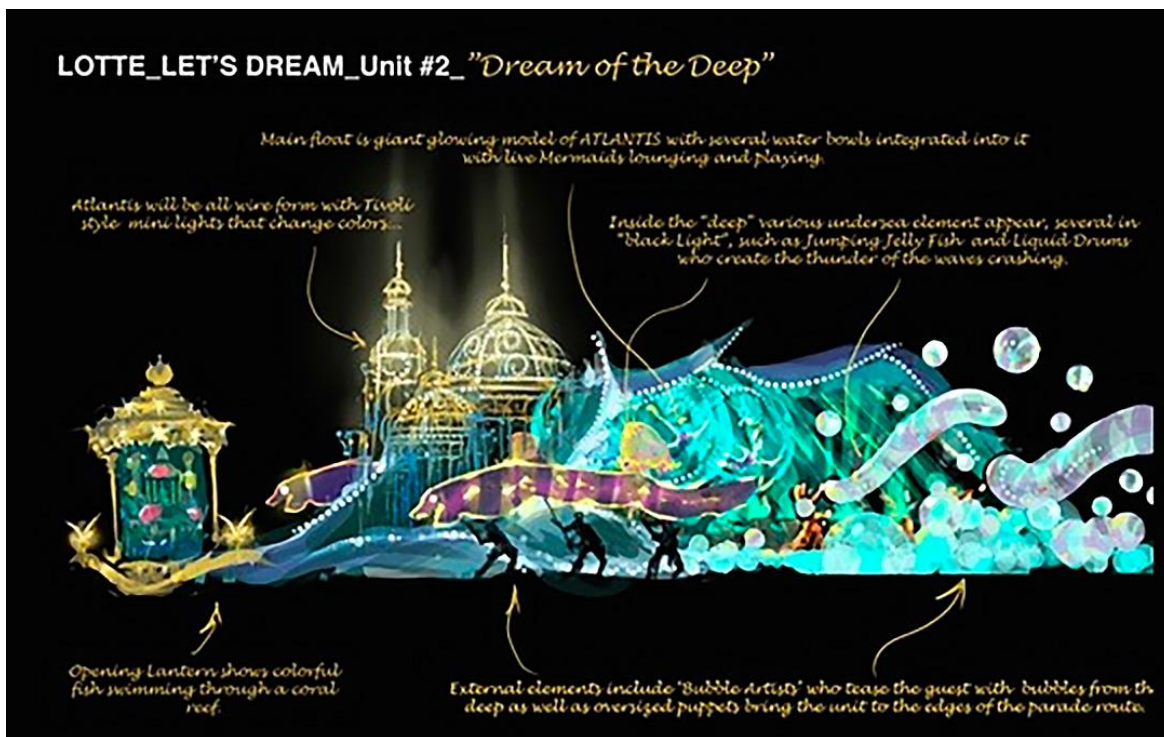


Figure 24: Concept art for Let's Dream underwater unit (Photo: ©Goddard Group, used with permission)

Projection shows, while a contemporary technique, draw on the tradition of nighttime spectaculars. According to Ulmer, projection mapping installations started as a “gimmick,” but now they have become “an accepted part of our palette” (qtd. in Pedicini, “Disney”). Walt Disney World alone has had two dozen implementations of projection mapping:

- Walkthrough: Enchanted Tales with Belle;
- Rides: Haunted Mansion, Seven Dwarfs Mine Train, Under the Sea – Journey of the Little Mermaid, Test Track, Frozen Ever After, Na’vi River Journey, Expedition Everest exterior;
- Queues: Buzz Lightyear’s Space Ranger Spin, Peter Pan’s Flight, Toy Story Midway Mania, Star Tours – The Adventure Continues;
- Post-show: Project Tomorrow;
- Restaurant: Be Our Guest Restaurant;
- Nighttime shows: Magic Memories and You, Celebrate the Magic, Once Upon a Time, Happily Ever After, Hocus Pocus Villain Spelltacular, Star Wars: A



Galactic Spectacular, Disney Movie Magic, Jingle Bell Jingle BAM!, Sunset Seasons Greetings, Rivers of Light, and Tree of Life Awakenings.

Other attractions use projections to paint on a physical surface like the Voyage to the Crystal Grotto finale though it has most often been employed as a new way to create nighttime shows.

Rothschild talks about mapping as a tool to “place images within larger environments and context” (qtd. in Palicki, “FlyOver”). The connection to film is also seen, as the projection show genre “turns landmarks into movie screens” (Pedicini, “Disney World’s”). It adds to the idea of spectacle, especially when projected on objects familiar to visitors during the day. The Glamorous Sky over Hengquin projects on their whale sculpture, some projection shows at Europa-Park are on familiar buildings, We Love Mickey! is projected on the buildings of Main Street, a show at Kennedy Space Center is mapped on a rocket, Tree of Like Awakenings are painted on the park icon Tree of Life (fig. 25), and both Disney and Universal utilize the castles as a canvas. During winter, the story of the Villa Volta attraction at Efteling is projected on the front of the attraction’s building and ghosts are projected to add to the queue of Spookslot. Projection technology will continue to be used, according to show director J. Michael Roddy, “if it’s right for the story” (qtd. in Pedicini, “Disney World’s”).



Figure 25: “Gift Giver” from Tree of Life Awakenings at Disney’s Animal Kingdom (Photos: Author)

Projection shows have sprung up in any number of venues and contexts now, perhaps highlighting that effective theme park usage can influence other areas in society.

Whether fireworks shows, spectaculars, or projection shows, these productions share the characteristic of being “communal” (*Walt...Magic More Real* 140). While character meet and greet experiences are individualized and rides tend to be in small groups, these spectaculars are often shared with thousands of people at once. Disney castle park shows are particularly centralized, as they tend to be hub-centric designs. They are considered the culmination of a theme park day. Because of this, these shows sometimes have the loftiest themes and stories.

### *Montage*

Occurring in multiple attraction genres is the fairly unique theme park approach of the montage, which is presented as a composite or amalgam story that combines and links previous familiar but unrelated stories. Rides, show, parades, and in-park films have all displayed this technique. James Monaco defines *montage* as “a process in which a number of short shots are woven together in order to communicate a great deal of information in a short period of time” as well as “a dialectical process that creates a third meaning out of the original two meanings of the

adjacent shots” (183). Monaco contrasts montage with *mise-en-scène*, which is the standard film term for the arrangement of a scene or film frame (characters, scenery, and visual storytelling elements). Brian Richardson finds that the conventional techniques of a unified plot and coherent sequences have been broken by modern forms that are “replacing causal connections with thematic or metaphorical ties” (145). By its very nature, the theme park often favors thematic and metaphorical content over linear plots and related events.

Montage is not only combination; it represents a separate meaning for the current context, not only the meanings of the original shots. In theme park shows, montages function as a kind of symbolic shorthand, representing themes with allusions to entire stories. Christian Metz found that in montage, “narrative elements...can exist within shots as well as between them” (Monaco 186). “Narrative discourse is infinitely malleable,” as many things can be changed including the presentation of order, point of view, and more or less description; however, in montage productions, the events themselves are condensed or represented by a frame or two and then combined to create a new thing (Abbott 17). There are many ways to order shots: time, characters, locations, symbolic, or point of view (Bal 8). Luís Morante discusses both “narrative montage,” which links image together to tell a story and “expressive montage,” which puts images together to create a new idea. Theme parks tend to use expressive montage and not narrative montage. The “stories” created out of the linked images tend to be thematic (adversity, friendship, love, achievement, adventure), but this might vary based on the attraction. Though all media is edited, montage is dependent on editing. Morante finds the purposes of editing to be “relating a story in a clear and ordered way,” to “create meaning,” and to “excite and emotionally move the audience.” Theme park attractions do this, but the montages focus on gathering together a series of memorable and meaningful media to facilitate a greater message.

One of Disney's most popular shows, Fantasmic!, showcases Mickey Mouse in a dream that turns into a nightmare but then becomes right again, all by going through a montage of dozens of Disney story scenes. The show combines live performers, narrative, music, technology (such as a fire-breathing dragon, water screens, and pyrotechnics), and emotional triggers related to nostalgia for childhood films. World of Color, primarily a water show, uses movie clips from a multitude of films to convey particular themes derived from emotions and elements. World of Color: Celebrate is the only version of the show that is narrated (by Neil Patrick Harris) and explicitly chronological, recounting the life and accomplished dreams of company founder Walt Disney. Nonetheless, the show is a medley of film clips and songs, with a few quotes from Walt Disney thrown in (some of the only examples of written language in any of the shows). Disney's 3D movie attraction, Mickey's PhilharMagic, involves a scenario with Donald Duck exploring recreated movie scenes; the attraction uses expanding screens and smell effects to enhance immersion. It also employs a *framing narrative* of Donald stealing Mickey's sorcerer hat, which explains the subsequent medley of Disney films. Disney's The Great Movie Ride and Universal's Cinematic Spectacular employed montages of great films. The castle projection shows do this as well, as do many Disney fireworks shows, but it can be the visitor who goes through the stories. In some shows, guests' experiences and "your most beautiful memories from your childhood" can be the actual story the media is telling, a loyalty-building tool (Hover and Vugts 272). The Magic, The Memories, and You! show at Disney's U.S. parks is a clear example, as it used pictures of visitors taken throughout the day. Disney California Adventure's LuminAria used a similar ploy of using holiday cards within the show that were created by children visiting that day.

Montages are common in holiday shows, which are themselves frequent offerings at theme parks. Davison distinguishes between the normally Disney film music-laden World of Color show and a holiday version called World of Color – Season of Light: “If we’re doing a water show on ‘Moana,’ you know what that is. It’s a Disney product. Holidays are not. Holiday is you. Holiday is very different – it’s different religions, it’s different music, it’s completely inside of you” (qtd. in Martens, “With”). Disney characters are still the stars of that show, but the music is traditional and popular holiday songs. The show, like the majority of holiday works, are a medley of songs, film images, and symbols. The show is “thematic” with “plenty of symbolism,” especially at the end (the finale segment is all light, water, and a few symbols like doves with no more character scenes): “The single fountain represents you...It’s very subtle. It’s very interpretive. But it always comes back to that single fountain. To put a single message out there – peace on Earth, peace in our lives, peace together – was an important thing to say” (Davison qtd. in Martens, “With”). Todd Martens jokes that the show’s purposefully symbolic design goes against “those who may think a theme park show doesn’t classify as art” (“With”).

Theme park parades are celebrations of films or stories and montages as well, with one of the most effective being the Magic Kingdom’s Festival of Fantasy Parade. The parade’s units (Disney princesses, a grouping of other Disney characters, and scenes from the movies *Tangled*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Peter Pan*, *Brave*, and *Sleeping Beauty*) all evoke the concept of fantasy and use the Fantasyland section as its overarching theme. Tokyo DisneySea’s show The Legend of Mythica presented a different kind of amalgam – that of cultural symbols. The spectacle combined water and float technologies with live dancers and united animals (frog, ram, turtle, sea serpent, griffin), Disney characters, and mythical creatures (dragon, hydra, phoenix, unicorn). The show had original elements and a basically linear story, but it did so by using myths and

legends that would be familiar to most audiences. These symbolic composite stories stir multiple memories and immerse visitors in relatable themes. These are not necessarily conventional stories, but they are examples of “translating events in the stories into which we can visit” (Jenkins qtd. in Lukas, *Immersive* 246). Excerpts from familiar material provide that connection.

Montage stories often have the quality of *intertextuality*, or the condition of a text being “composed of preexisting texts” (Abbott 236). Abbott distinguishes this from *allusion*, the reference to another text outside or *imitation*, the copying of influential elements. The intertextuality of the montage story is often more theoretical, as texts are (not purposely) amalgams of “words and forms that are already available to use” (236). This would explain the presence of the monomyth or archetypes in multiple narratives. These shows have this type of intertextuality despite their often thematic rather than linear structures. They also have a more practical association with this concept in that they are literally comprised of a set of texts like film clips or songs. It is closer to “remix culture” (or borrowing, “cut and paste,” and riff) where pieces are taken from multiple locations to create a new expression (Lessig 24, 105). In this case, the new work is composed using the IPs of the sponsoring enterprise. Nelson, in fact, argues for “non-narrative attractions” as *transtextuality*, an umbrella term that includes all relationships between texts (concepts like intertextuality and paratextuality are in this), as viewers are already aware of the moves and allusions within attractions, so they may be left out of the narrative. Jay David Bolter likewise talked about the tension between text as a story or as a “structure of allusions” (185). In the case of theme park montages, the “story” part sometimes loosely overlays the structure of allusions or does not exist at all.

## *Environmental Storytelling*

Though immersion is the buzzword of now, there have been immersive spaces and stories told with the environment for many years. I will distinguish this and the later section on immersion by time; this section will encompass earlier versions of immersive experiences and the later section will address contemporary approaches. Hensch wrote that Disneyland turned “space” into “story place” (69). In his view, “Every aspect of the physical environment is a potential opportunity for storytelling” (49). Rogers says something similar: “If theme means story and a park is a place, then a theme park is, at its heart, a story place” (qtd. in Niles, “An Insider’s”). Theodore Kinni observes that there are stories everywhere and that “setting plays a primary role in the delivery of each of those stories” (101). Groves observes Hong Kong Disneyland: “The rides, the landscape, even the food at Hong Kong Disneyland are all meant to tell stories” (148). Some of the earliest techniques utilize symbolic architecture, but the usage of space to tell particular stories continued to evolve. At amusement parks, it was usually only the inside of the building that told a story. In immersive worlds (the newer model to be discussed later), entire lands may tell a cohesive story. However, in this middle period, sublands or areas contributed to the telling of a particular story. Carson and Jenkins refer to environmental storytelling, or narrativizing space. Designers “search for a story, or a part of a story, that can be told experientially and in three dimensions” (*Walt...Magic More Real* 26).

This is a practice that has been going on for decades. Allen, for example, found that Disneyland’s Mine Train through Nature’s Wonderland (1956) is still memorable because of its “great storytelling” about the town of Rainbow Ridge. Though it was “low tech,” its environment was filled with “geysers and mud, mud pots and stuff that you’d find in Southwest deserts” (Allen). This lent to storytelling through the creation of places and features, a precursor to the

immersive environments valued by later design styles. Similarly, the Enchanted Tiki Room (1963), the original animatronic bird show, “employed the animated elements in a fully immersive environment that broke the fourth wall of the stage or screen, surrounding people in music and animation” (Niles qtd. in Hinson). Younger’s category of traditional-design theme parks, with Disneyland as its popularizer, includes themed attractions and some immersion but generally more implicit storytelling or experiential storytelling. The “new traditional” style, of which immersion is more indicative of, has more explicit or at least more defined stories.

One of the best examples of environmental storytelling is the Pirates of the Caribbean (1973) area at Magic Kingdom. The area surrounding the ride continues the Spanish architecture from the story content. Appropriate music plays, and now the music from the motion pictures has been added. Newer experiences like A Pirate’s Adventure (interactive quest) and Captain Jack Sparrow’s Pirate Tutorial (interactive stage show) extend the theme. The queue of the attraction assists with the storyline through music, lighting, and props. Sklar stated that Pirates of the Caribbean is “Disney’s quintessential, signature attraction,” the “most valuable single property ever created in the theme park business,” and a “new standard” in the industry (qtd. in Surrell, *Pirates* 52; Sklar, *Dream* 11). Creative executive Tom Fitzgerald calls it a “milestone in immersive Disney storytelling” and a “crown jewel” of the parks (qtd. in Surrell, *Pirates* 4). Surrell finds it to be a “seamless melding of storytelling and technology” (9). Part of the acclaim is because of its eventually leading to a film franchise, but the other aspect is how guests have experienced the ride over the decades. The ride is famous for its inclusion of particular scenes told through themed design or as Kurtti calls it, the “touchstone of dimensional environmental experience” (52). Otte offers, “Pirates of the Caribbean is a model for older storytelling; it was all about design to put people in a world and allow them to experience a world. There was less



plot other than ‘here you are in a place’.” It was, according to Surrell, “loosely related tableaux” rather than a linear story (*Pirates* 29). Younger says the original *Pirates* provides a “*series of experiences*” but not much plot, whereas the later incarnations add more explicit information (150). Tuch likewise states it is “not a dramatic engine,” but it has continuity and scenes, so “you could call it a story” though it is often considered plotless. Actor Ron Schneider asserts that Disney attractions “don’t so much communicate a linear tale as create a mood, or generate a feeling in the guest” (49). However, Kurtti argues that “mood, sensation and creating an enhanced reality” are aspects of storytelling translated through “theming and form” (56).

Plot is not the only element of storytelling, especially not in themed design, but structure is generally present. Eades says, “While rides do not have to be linear stories, the best ones offer some kind of structure” (“A Former”). The distinction is explained well by Miller: “Structure should not be confused with plot. Plot consists of the basic beats of a story, the ‘what happens next.’ Structure is the framework of the story. It connects the basic pieces of the narrative and ensures that the work flows in a satisfying way” (114). Interestingly, in 2006, *Pirates of the Caribbean* added Jack Sparrow to the ride, bringing in the character from the films, adding more explicit narrative and plot, and in fact changing the theme of the ride (instead of the finale of lawbreakers being punished, Jack has all the treasure). Though created long before immersion was a common term, the area represents environmental storytelling at its most effective, as the story is expressed in many ways before the ride even begins.

Other companies had environmental storytelling as well. E.T. Adventure is a great example, with the ride space telling the story of E.T.’s home world through sculpture, animatronics, and lighting. Deep Earth Exploration from the defunct MGM Grand Adventures had scenes and lighting that created the world. A later example of environmental storytelling

could be Islands of Adventure. The designers chose to “juxtapose multiple architectural, technological and aesthetic modes in one space” (Lukas, *Theme* 91). Creative executive Phil Hetteema offers, “The park was designed as a series of detailed environments that could stand alone but together created something truly special” (qtd. in Gennawey, *Universal* 185). Seuss Landing was a “very unique visual world” and “one of the jewels of the park” with its color palette and architecture based on curved lines (187). The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man, considered a “defining moment in theme park attractions,” is an example of environmental storytelling with action and sensory effects (Gennawey, *Universal* 203).

Even a recent attraction, Europa-Park’s Voletarium, is described by Lange in these terms: “We’ve taken an approach of environmental storytelling: The story is conveyed through sets, special effects, and audio – completely through the physical environment” (qtd. in Kleiman, “Uniquely”). He refers to the experience as immersive, which helps draw the distinction between the two concepts. Immersion can come from screen-based technologies or virtual reality, whereas environmental storytelling relies on the physical environment to tell stories.

Merchandise shops have been used in environmental storytelling. The shop after the Pirates ride is related to the theme and has lots of props, making it an extension of the attraction space. Magic Kingdom’s represents three levels of storytelling depending on the guests visiting there. Guests may enter this store as shoppers if they are just walking around the area and go in. Riders of Pirates of the Caribbean exit the ride through this shop, so it represents the final act of the attraction story. Players of A Pirate’s Adventure will discover the last layer, which includes hidden effects and explicit narrative that can be triggered during gameplay. The Christmas shop at Magic Kingdom too was given a backstory and a “unifying theme” (73). Artist Pat Burke notes the kinds of details and thematic elements used in stores designed for Disneyland Paris;

because “all the props had to be above merchandizing,” he built a second level to display storytelling elements related to mining (qtd. in Littaye). Even in stores, “The characters and stories we choose drive the visual design and lend it depth” (Wright, *Magic* 73).

Finally, a way that parks utilize environmental storytelling is smell effects. These have occasionally been employed to create a more multi-sensory experience. This includes cookies on Disneyland’s Main Street, pine trees on the Log Ride at Knott’s Berry Farm, berries on Knott’s Bear-y Tales, fire on Spaceship Earth, skunk smell on Journey into Imagination, roses on Dreamflight, and various smells on Soarin’ and Flight of Passage. An article on *Themed Attraction* talks about senses being employed on attractions; while smell is less utilized, the aromas can “contribute” to themed attractions (MSS, “Themed...One”). As Wright states when discussing Soarin, “The effect of immersion is heightened by the inclusion of additional sensory inputs such as the smell of a pine forest and the feel of the wind blowing on your face” (*Epcot* 66). Even before the immersion model was being frequently discussed, then, smell effects contributed to the notion of environmental storytelling. On a related note, designers have experimented with temperature as a means of environmental storytelling. In the flume ride Valhalla, water, fire, and even snow are utilized. Rides like Test Track, Revenge of the Mummy, Escape from Pompeii, and The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man have all used heat effects, Antarctica: Empire of the Penguin uses cold, and The Curse of DarKastle used both.

### **Contemporary and Future Narrative Techniques and Technologies**

This section is grouped into seven separate techniques that were developed in theme parks during contemporary times and continue to be used.

## *Explicit Storytelling*

Allen describes a number of “story vectors,” or mechanisms used to tell stories in parks. He includes architecture, sound/music, ride systems, and a “cogent backstory.” A “front story,” including an explicit one, is an obvious strategy. While theme parks are often known for more implicit forms of storytelling, many attractions over the years, especially shows, have explicitly told stories through verbal or written narration. One way explicit storytelling works is through “infodumping,” or holding guests in a particular area for “direct communication of story” (Younger 94). This is particularly common in preshows, the scenes that go before a ride (usually falling after the queue). Younger denotes that guests can only handle so much telling over showing, perhaps revealing that theme parks still privilege the visual over linguistic dimension. Kischuk has noticed that storytelling has become more formulaic because of this emphasis on explicit storytelling, though in general storytelling has a “formulaic nature” (Murray, *Hamlet* 187). While some older rides were thematic rather than plot-based, the industry emphasis on story has led to attractions that “must have a beginning, middle and end, and must almost universally make sense to any demographic” (Kischuk, personal interview). Otte mentions how earlier rides were more about environmental storytelling, but this changed: “Culturally how people tell stories has changed. There is more IP, more plot, a strong narrative.” This can sometimes be a challenge as an explicit story is more likely to be locked in language constraints than an implicit story, but the form itself is widely recognizable.

Hover finds that fairy tale attractions tend to be “more explicit,” with written or oral explanations generally accompanying architectural narrative (personal interview). As she observes, “Every newly added fairy tale is less well known so would need some explanation (explicit) for the scenes (implicit) to come across” (personal interview). Other attractions may be

explicit as well, as 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea at Tokyo DisneySea is a fully narrated linear story. The steamboats at Disney (Mark Twain, Liberty Belle) contain explicit narration by a characterization of Mark Twain. Beth Dunlop refers to Splash Mountain as “literal storytelling” (53). In that ride, the songs narrate the story. Rohde calls Expedition Everest a “fictional story told in a realistic style,” and a museum-like queue with lots of text narrates the experience (“From Myth”). According to Hover, the genre of theme park attraction matters when choosing whether to tell a story explicitly or implicitly: “People do appreciate an attraction which is fully implicit (such as Dreamflight), but when visiting a show, they expect a story being told also explicitly” (personal interview). Shows tend to include explicit storytelling either through a narrator, character dialogue, or song lyrics.

The classic notions of storytelling are referenced by multiple sources. An Imagineering book elaborates: “Taking a cue from techniques used by novelists, Imagineers used classic storytelling structure to create Expedition Everest in Disney’s Animal Kingdom”; these include foreshadowing, tension, subplot, climax, and denouement (*Walt...Magic More Real* 134). The importance of a “real story” or “core narrative” and the “structure of a story” was mentioned by Allen, who argues that it cannot be “bullet points” but “actual characters, place, setting, plot, voice and...the things that make up the story.” His complete list was character, setting, conflict, voice, emotion, and plot, the latter to have a “systematic way of getting the audience from scene one to scene two to scene three.”

Explicit storytelling tends to be connected to traditional narrative structures and arcs. The most “rudimentary” of structures, or the “three act structure” is simply the idea of a beginning, middle, and end (Pickett, “Story...Writing”; Younger 109). However, most models contain more points than just three. Some ways to express common dramatic structure are below:

- Gustav Freytag’s pyramid (or triangle) representing the “dramatic arc” of traditional drama (between axes of complication and time): exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement
- Brenda Laurel’s modified Freytag for contemporary drama: exposition, inciting incident, rising action, crisis, climax, falling action, denouement
- Moniek Hover’s “universal storyline” (between axes of tension and time): opening scene, “motoric moment,” “turning points” of crises and tension, climax, and denouement
- Darryl Pickett’s “five-point” structure: “statis/character goal,” inciting incident, conflict, rising action, and denouement/resolution

Many shows and rides exemplify dramatic structure. Splash Mountain could be the symbolic representation of Freytag’s Pyramid, with the clear dramatic structure of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement. Since storytelling is also “pattern formation” and humans value “pattern recognition,” it is not surprising that story patterns like these show up again and again in various mediums (Allen). As Alcorn argues, “There are many new technologies that are used to present stories, but the fundamental structure of a story is the same as it was thousands of years ago” (personal interview). Hetteema elaborates:

As technology causes cultural shifts, the formats that we use for telling stories (such as pacing, length, visual complexity) evolve and respond to the way audiences absorb experiences. While the format may evolve and the tools we use continue to evolve both through specific technologies, and the immersive worlds we’re thereby able to create, the basic aspects of storytelling and communication remain the same. (qtd. in Palicki, “Phil”)

As articulated earlier, the techniques and technology change more than the patterns of stories.

Nonetheless, not all attractions will follow traditional structural patterns. As noted earlier, some trace the hero’s journey, which while sometimes relayed as a three-part path (from the ordinary world and call to adventure to the special world and then back again) is more often represented as a circle. Fan analyst Foxx Nolte mentions the “circularity” of Disneyland’s Pirates of the Caribbean (“Fire”). While dark rides (with the exception of trackless) are a circuit

physically because of technology, she asserts that the ride “tells a narrative that *is* a circle” because of its spatial elements, the role of the load/unload platform, and the ride entry scene (“Fire”). Non-linear or branching narratives in park installations were referenced earlier. Also applicable to theme park stories is the notion that stories have a “fractal” structure. Rohde explains, “It has a kind of self-similarity to it. It returns again and again to its own structure, looks back to its own arc and it tries to re-express that again in different layers of structure” (qtd. in Jacques). Fjellman offers a comparable point: “With its themes within themes within themes, Walt Disney World represents the replication of similar patterns at different scales that is characteristic of fractals” (403). This could relate to techniques like concentricity within the space, but it also relevant that the narrative itself is self-reflective and mimicked throughout lands, parks, and park chains. Vast narratives will be discussed later in this chapter, but this is a kind of vast narrative that reflects the design philosophies of the creators and expresses the character of worldwide storytelling.

To some, explicit storytelling in a dark ride can be a danger because “If the dark ride is just a story ride, it has diminishing returns over a period of time because guests already know the ending” (Wood qtd. in “Sally”). Wood argues instead for interactive rides, which are repeatable because they are different experiences every time and there is an element of competition. In addition, Lukas finds more “indirect means” of narrative to “increase the immersive and thematic potentials of spaces” (4). However, explicit storytelling, dramatic structure, and literary models are all common. Rohde jokes that designing for theme parks is a “classic, frankly, high school comp lit course” where one has to locate the themes of the work: “extract the themes from the subject and work to the themes” (qtd. in Martens, “Meet”). Wright agrees that the design process of Disney’s Animal Kingdom was “an unusually literary one” (*Disney’s Animal* 41). Even

knowing the limitations, explicit storytelling can be useful for bringing guests into the story. In *Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for Sunken Treasure*, for instance, characters talk directly to the guest according to creative executive Luc Mayrand; “We know that guests don’t get on an attraction to listen to the words, but if you get the right words in the right place then you are helping to explain the story” (qtd. in Palicki, “Pirates”). Mayrand continues, “So there is more dialogue than other iterations, but I think a lot of it is functional. We wanted to set up the story and make it clear” (qtd. in Palicki, “Pirates”). Making a story clear is a key reason why this traditional method of storytelling continues to be used.

### **Metanarrative**

There are additionally quite a few instances of theme parks employing *metanarrative*, or a narrative that references the act of narrative. In doing so, metanarratives draw attention to their constructed nature. As noted in the section on nighttime spectacles, some shows reference stories and their own *narrativity*. Likewise, Mickey’s Friendship Faire characters (Mickey and Minnie Mouse, other animated film stars) refer to a “tapestry of tales” and reflect on their own created existence when they say “we are heroes of stories as yet to be told.” In the lyrics to the Happily Ever After fireworks theme song, it mentions that the “story comes alive, when we look inside.” The Hong Kong Disneyland words to “Happily Ever After” are similarly metanarrative and focused on literary stories: “Ready to begin, your story waits to be told” and “The story comes alive when we turn the page, a new world in every chapter.” The incarnation in Mickey and the Wondrous Book says, “You’re part of the story...find your happily ever after,” positioning the guest as a fairy tale character, a rather common trope for Disney advertising. The lyrics to the Disneyland Forever show included the line “Step into the magic. Watch the stories come to life,” implying that the theme park itself is a story and the show is about to demonstrate



that through its music and visuals. The Magic Kingdom Welcome Show likewise urged guests to “step inside our storybook,” a similar lyric to the Disney Magic on Parade theme.

Enchanted Tales with Belle is a completely metanarrative attraction, as it involves (generally young) guests actively taking on a role to recreate the story of *Beauty and the Beast*. Once Upon a Time, a projection show at two of the Disney parks, is narrated by *Beauty and the Beast*'s Mrs. Potts. Like a few of the other fireworks shows there is a *meneur de jeu*, or a narrator who is outside the story who “connects the threads of the story,” though in the case of Once Upon a Time, Mrs. Potts is explaining the stories to her son Chip, an excuse for explicit storytelling (Abbott 81). The lyrics have similar metanarrative qualities that not only refer to stories and theatre but position the guest as the writer: “Once upon a time you made your own song. No matter how it’s read or anywhere it’s said, you’ll never sing it wrong. . . . Once upon a time is up to you” and “So set the stage, turn the page. Make a wish and off you go.” Many instances of metanarrative being related to *Beauty and the Beast* makes sense, as its theme song is already self-referential (“tale as old as time”), and the Disney films employ metanarrative as a tool for relating the power of storytelling. Considering the theme park’s reliance on fairy tale conventions and content, it is no surprise that metanarrative would be a component of attractions.

### *Transmedia Storytelling and Vast Narratives*

*Transmedia storytelling* is a common subject of discussion in new media studies, and it has touched the theme park industry as well. It is where there is a “spreading of narrative across multiple media platforms” in increasingly widespread “transmedia ecosystems” (Ryan, “Narration”; Alfieri). It is a “multilayered approach to storytelling” that allows for a “more complex, more sophisticated, more rewarding mode of narrative to emerge” even “within the constraints of commercial entertainment” (Jenkins, “Transmedia”). Jenkins clarifies transmedia

as “a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience” (“The Revenge”). The “different components are used to expand the core material” and are “closely integrated” (Miller 151). Jenkins talks about two kinds of transmedia storytelling: *redundant* or *adaptation* transmedia, where the story is repeated in the new medium; and *synergistic* or *extension* transmedia, where the new medium tells a new story in that universe or is part of a unified story dispersed across mediums. The first is more like the “book report” notion in theme park adaptation, though the characteristics of the new medium would still make the experience different (*The Little Mermaid* film is more detailed and longer than the Little Mermaid dark ride, which is more spatial and associated with motion). For the synergistic variety, Jenkins argues that “Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story” and that “each medium does what it does best” (“The Revenge”; “Transmedia”). Miller agrees: “Each platform should contribute something to the overall story. Don’t just paste new components onto an already existing property without considering how they will enhance the narrative” (162). In theme park transmedia stories, this contribution could be related to the physical realization of a storyworld or a synergistic storyline. *Men In Black Alien Attack* adds a framing narrative about a World’s Fair-type pavilion that masks the MIB training facility, with new aliens for guests to target. The *E.T. Adventure* allows the rider to visit E.T.’s home planet, expanding upon the universe of the *E.T.* film rather than recreating it.

There is a set of transmedia storytelling concepts noted by Jenkins that have already been applied to theme parks. *Spreadability* refers to the “circulation of media content” across channels and social networking (“The Revenge”). Theme park fans cannot spread the permanent structures of theme park attractions, but they do spread the audio tracks, fan art, and public

discourse about attractions. In *drillability*, the audience can drill down into the storyworld, finding depth and layers. This is possible on some theme park attractions including those that have deep backstories. Jenkins makes a distinction between *continuity* and *multiplicity*, with the former being about maintaining a consistent storyworld and the latter about allowing for alternate worlds and tellings. Theme parks are generally always about continuity, though a few examples of an alternate world exist including the Sorcerers of the Magic Kingdom interactive quest, where multiple worlds are brought together into the visitor's world. Jenkins explains *immersion*, which will be dealt with in detail in a later section, and *extractability*: "In immersion, then, the consumer enters into the world of the story, while in extractability, the fan takes aspects of the story away with them as resources they deploy in the spaces of their everyday life" ("The Revenge"). No doubt theme parks are operating on an immersion model, and theme parks have examples of extractability in souvenirs, soundtracks, and personal photographs. *Worldbuilding* consists of "constructed interconnecting worlds which link together stories scattered across publications"; they "represent ways in for consumers to engage more directly with the worlds represented in the narratives" (Jenkins, "Revenge of"). The Disney/Marvel comic book series *Disney Kingdoms* is a good example of extending a world and allowing more storytelling depth to engage in. The titles in this series thus far are *Figment* and *Figment 2*, based on Journey into Imagination; *Big Thunder Mountain Railroad* and *The Haunted Mansion*, based on the rides of the same name; *Enchanted Tiki Room*, based on the show of the same name; and *Seekers of the Weird*, based on the unbuilt attraction Museum of the Weird. *Seriality* "disperses the story across multiple installments," something present in this comic book series but generally not in theme park attractions ("Revenge of"). In *subjectivity*, the perspectives of secondary characters are developed or things like mock media are generated. Pandora – The World of Avatar had a mock

media website generated from the Pandora Conservation Initiative and there is a phone application that includes speaking with a fictional member of this group. Finally, Jenkins mentions *performance*, where all parties are enacting stories and looking for ways to engage with these stories, something that is inherent in the theme park model.

There is debate about transmedia as opposed to “crossmedia.” According to Colin Harvey, several of the park narratives would just be crossmedia, as they simply repeat stories. Some would still class this as transmedia if on multiple platforms, albeit redundant transmedia or adaptation, though it should be repeated that with adaptation, the different affordances of a new medium still add something different to the story. Also, using existing stories as “framing devices” for new experiences, as in the Harry Potter rides, can “contribute a sense of authenticity to new stories,” making them more easily sensed as being part of the storyworld (Godwin). Either way, Harvey similarly defines transmedia as the “conveying of connected stories using a variety of media platforms” (278). He privileges synergistic or extension transmedia, where it is “one story” that is spread across media (281). This seems to focus on the plot and characters, whereas the theme park might preference the storyworld. Nonetheless, he has a taxonomy of transmedia storytelling with *directed*, where the IP holder has control; *devolved*, where over time there is more flexibility; *detached*, where it is inspired by but not authorized; *directed with user participation*, where it is still directed but allows some user participation; and *emergent user-generated*, where fans direct the transmedia. Because of the age of Disney and Universal especially, all of these might be present with their IPs. However, most theme parks follow the *directed* model and some have *directed with user participation* with days set aside for cosplay or the character creation allowed in productions like Ghost Town Alive!. Finally, Harvey says that mono-medium stories are smaller stories that lead to “distinct but related stories that add up to

the wider storyworld” (280-1). In more than just a theoretical way, the theme park itself is a storyworld and its own IP. The stories within, while they may exist independently, blend in with the fabric of the park, creating its own form of transmedia storytelling.

There are obvious examples of transmedia storytelling in parks. The Pirates of the Caribbean ride spawned a blockbuster franchise of synergistic transmedia films, which reciprocally led to the inclusion of the Jack Sparrow character in the ride. *Harry Potter*, *Cars*, and *Avatar* (and soon *Star Wars*) are successful franchises that inspired the creation of entire lands that include both redundant and synergistic transmedia experiences. The augmented reality experience *The Optimist* was created for the *Tomorrowland* movie, which was itself partly based on the theme park land Tomorrowland. There was a museum associated with the movie in Disneyland’s Tomorrowland and a film preview with a motion base at Epcot. Even Disneyland, with its synergistic marketing, was an example of transmedia storytelling. Wright believes that there is reciprocal influence with these transmedia experiences: “The ability to inhabit real versions of these places during a visit to Disneyland adds to the experience of viewing the films, just as knowledge of the films adds richness and depth to a day at the Park” (*Disneyland* 18). In the case of the original Disneyland, the *Disneyland* television show included clips of both related television shows and films that would appear in the park. Universal used “transmedia production and merchandising” as early as the 1960s with the marketing of their horror characters (Ndalianis 62). Now, synergy and “contributing to a larger narrative economy” are basic strategies in business, with theme parks, television shows, films, and merchandise all driving one another’s success and all carrying some element of the story (Jenkins, “Game” 124).

A good example of transmedia storytelling is found at Efteling theme park. The most iconic area of that park is the Sprookjesbos, the Fairytale Forest, which has been continually

developed since the 1950s. In 2006, the *Sprookjesboom* (Fairytale Tree) animated television series launched, providing an “innovative” way for the park to express fairy tale characters and to extend their reach into the home (Hover and Vugts 274). It includes a virtualized version of the Fairytale Forest complete with Cinderella, the Big Bad Wolf, and Little Red Riding Hood telling new fairy tales. This moved to a website and merchandise line and live entertainment in the park; with these latter shows, “The stories and songs have been aligned with those of the animation series” to make it recognizable to children (274). In 2010, the park added the physical *Sprookjesboom*, the talking tree of the animated series, to the theme park forest (fig. 26).



Figure 26: The Fairytale Tree at Efteling (Photo: Author)

As Hover and Vugts explain, “The Fairytale Forest saw its virtual translation into the animation series, film and website as a *physical context* or ‘story world’ of the Fairytale Tree stories” (274). Transmedia is already present in the cultural giants known as fairy tales as “knowledge of fairy tales is fed by different media in different ways” (Hover 5). The Fairytale Tree thus meets

multiple aspects of Jenkins' principles of transmedia: "The transmedia storytelling at the Fairytale Tree aims at strengthening *meaningful re-experience* mainly through *recognition* of fairy tale characters and fairy tale like stories" (Hover and Vugts 3). Transmedia storytelling can begin with oral tales, literary tales, films, television shows, or theme parks themselves, but it is no doubt a key concept in understanding theme park narrative.

Theme parks can offer not only synergistic storytelling but a synergistic medium. James Cameron, director of the *Avatar* movie, explains that it was the Disney design team, headed by Rohde, that "offered this whole narrative around this land where you can come, you can visit, and the war is over, the conflict between the humans the Na'vi is in the past and you can just soak it in" (qtd. in Pallotta). The design team helped develop the story of the land though they were working with the original IP creators. Interestingly, some of the creations for the theme park inspired ideas that may be in future films, illustrating the reciprocal process of design ("The Making of"). The *Guardians of the Galaxy* ride at Epcot, for instance, is expected to reference Epcot itself, not only the characters from the films. Like with the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, the idea of projects like Pandora or the *Star Wars* land is to recreate a world in space and then extend the storyline to include the visitor, making them transmedia storytelling in the theme park medium. Lukas notes that the *Star Wars* land will "result in more complex forms of theme park storytelling, expanding narratives across media," thus continuing the transmedia storytelling tradition of theme parks as well as their "convergence of media properties" (personal interview). As noted, *Star Tours – The Adventure Continues* lands at Batuu, the future theme world based on *Star Wars*. The planet will additionally receive its "first canonical appearance" in the *Thrawn: Aliances* novel by Timothy Zahn, which will include a mission with Darth Vader (Silliman).

This will lend to a richer backstory of the land, as major characters will have visited in the lore; it will also continue the process of various mediums “weaving into each other” (Silliman).

### **Vast Narratives**

Theme parks are often considered self-contained worlds, but some employ or extend vast narratives. Pat Harrigan and Noah Wardrip-Fruin note that “vastness” is a “cross-media phenomenon” seen in the continuance of fictions within many spheres (1). This concept has resemblance to transmedia storytelling, but transmedia does not imply the largeness of the narrative, while vastness does. In other words, a story could be distributed across multiple channels, but it may still be small. While the short experiences at theme parks might seem to belie the presence of vast narratives, theme parks, in their use of transmedia storytelling, participate in well-known vast narratives including *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter*. They make unique contributions to these narratives in their sensory, spatial, and role-playing features of the medium but also in occasional new plot lines that add to the whole instead of merely repeating it. These fall into some of the categories Harrigan and Wardrip-Fruin give for the extent of the narrative, the “world and character continuity,” and its being a cross-media narrative with multiple canonical authorships (2). “Narrative consistency and thematic coherence” is generally a necessity even in the spatial realms of these narratives (4).

The Wizarding World of Harry Potter is a part of the vast narrative of *Harry Potter*, which includes books, films, video games, and online content on the *Pottermore* platform. The narrative becomes immense if considering the enormous quantity of fan fiction. The theme park space extends the vast narrative by allowing readers to experience Harry’s journeys firsthand and to take on the witch or wizard role if they desire. As Coup affirms, “It’s almost like we’ve added a few new pages” to the series (“Legends: Adapting”). *Star Wars* is an even older vast narrative,



so large it had an entire extended universe that was disqualified from the canon. The new land intends to be an extension of the canon narrative. This is especially evident from the title of the land, *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge*. This sounds like earlier film titles, indicating that the land is another episode in the vast narrative. For this land, creative executive Scott Trowbridge states, "We decided not to build a place you knew from the movies. We wanted to create a brand-new planet, a remote frontier outpost somewhere on the edge of wild space that is rife with opportunities to for you to discover your *Star Wars* story" (qtd. in Leonard and Palmeri). "We will extend the universe with a story starring you," Trowbridge posits ("Legends: Adapting"). This is not new, however, as *Star Tours* dates from the 1980s; as Trowbridge confirms, "We've been a place where fans have been able to come and live part of that *Star Wars* story" (qtd. in "Where"). In the new land, there will be interactive attractions including the Millennium Falcon ride, where the results of the scoring will determine how the visitor is treated within the land. Trowbridge says it is a "living place" where all of the employees will be related to the universe instead of standard employee roles (qtd. in Bishop, "Disney's Star Wars-Themed"). He also says it will be a "place of history": "This is a place that has been here a long time and has layers and layers of design and layers and layers of story" (qtd. in Martens, "Your"). This is especially indicative of a vast narrative, as Trowbridge is talking about a brand new land in this way, but it exists on top of the layers of history and story already in that narrative universe.

Finally, the theme park itself can be seen as a vast narrative and often self-referential. Stephen Fjellman notes, "The stories themselves have content, and [Walt Disney World] as a whole tells cinematic metastories in which each attraction becomes a scene in a larger production" (258). *Star Tours – The Adventure Continues* has a storyline where the ship lands on Batuu, the planet that will be used in *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge*. *Mystic Manor* presents an

original story, but it also references multiple previous attractions. The Society of Explorers and Adventurers (discussed in the next section) group transcends attractions, parks, and nations. Pirates of the Caribbean and Haunted Mansion spawned films, comic books, and video games, making them good examples of “how a park can become its own IP” (Niles, “Theme”).

### *Original Narratives*

It may be true that it is “very hard to tell a new story with a complex plot in a theme park attraction,” but that does not mean it is not done (Hetteema qtd. in Palicki, “Phil”). Though theme parks are commonly seen as appropriators and adapters, they do create new narratives including some that become part of culture. Some designers, like creative executive Ryan Harmon, find original stories more exciting to create than existing ones: “There’s something exciting about creating something new that’s not inhibited by existing IP rules. We have no limitations. Our designers can have creative freedom on a project” (qtd. in Eades, “Ex”). Jeffs had a similar feeling when working on the Let’s Dream! production: “One really exciting thing for our creative team was the freedom we were given to create something totally original, and not be saddled with any established IPs, outside of a few existing Lotte World characters” (qtd. in J. Young, “Super”). However, original stories might be less likely to immediately connect with visitors, according to creative executive Paul Osterhout: “IPs have the advantage that they offer a known story, known characters, so you have an audience that has expectations before they get there. When you invent your own IP, you’ve got to create it yourself.” Because of the lack of story familiarity especially, these expressions utilize many techniques and technologies to facilitate stories in an engaging way.

There are older examples of original stories including Haunted Mansion and Pirates of the Caribbean at Disney that “draw upon a broadly shared genre tradition” (Jenkins, “Game”

123). Pickett calls Haunted Mansion and Pirates of the Caribbean “new stories” and “perceived as being Disney stories,” though they are really “versions of...[familiar] genres” (personal interview). Though they might be criticized as “generic” stories, Pickett calls them “original” stories nonetheless. The first incarnation of the Journey into Imagination ride was based on the “ambiguous subject” of imagination, different from other themes because “imagination is ethereal, coming from the realm of the mind where everybody sees things and approaches things differently” (Baxter qtd. in Korkis, “Tony”). This ride spawned the popular character Figment, himself an embodiment of imagination or symbol of the creative process. Baxter explains that “part of the reason the story works so well is that like much of the best fiction, it works on different levels,” in this case, literal, metaphorical, and psychological (qtd. in Korkis, “Tony”).

Hong Kong Disneyland’s Mystic Manor presents a new story about a jolly Victorian explorer, Lord Henry Mystic, who wants to share the artifacts he collected with the visitors (fig. 27). His mischievous pet monkey Albert opens up a Balinese music box, which releases a magic that animates the house’s objects to dangerous and hilarious effect. Mystic Manor, according to Schirmer, is about “50% evolution and 50% inspiration,” drawing on older attractions (Haunted Mansion, Enchanted Tiki Room, The Adventurer’s Club) and adding a “brand new story with original characters” (qtd. in Rath). Lanzisero denotes the process:

We were now going to get to do what the original Imagineers did with Walt. Which wasn’t build a ride or show around some pre-existing Pixar or Disney intellectual property. But — rather — create something out of whole cloth like The Haunted Mansion or Pirates of the Caribbean or It’s a Small World. Build a brand-new theme park experience around a place that people had never been before featuring characters that they’d never met. (qtd. in Hill, “For Imagineer”)



Figure 27: The first show scene of Mystic Manor at Hong Kong Disneyland (Photo: Author)

Johnson says that a mixture of old and new is precisely what the company Atkins Global goes for: “one third of what we deliver should be familiar, one third should be an evolution of those things, and one third should be revolution, introducing something totally different” (qtd. in Cramer 62). In Mystic Manor, all three are present with familiar elements (props recalling earlier attractions, the S.E.A. theme), evolved aspects of the Haunted Mansion (using a trackless system instead of an Omnimover but still directing attention, the premise, music, architecture, and particular scene gags), and new additions (the storyline, characters, and projection technology). An executive finds Mystic Manor to be a combination of the “theatrical,” the immersive, “traditional storytelling,” and “innovative technology and special effects” (Bill Ernest qtd. in Silvester 285-86). This is likely the hallmark of the contemporary dark ride.

Original rides certainly exist outside of Disney as well. Dark rides like Calico Mine Ride, Burg Falkenstein, Geister Rikscha, Dreamflight, Gobbler Getaway, or Voyage to the Iron Reef can be seen as original even if they are drawn from Westerns, Medieval, Asian lore, fantasy traditions, country life, or steampunk, showing that use of genre is still the basis of many original

works. Similarly, Knott's Bear-y Tales was an original dark ride concept that relied on whimsy; guests watched animatronic animals in various settings including a jam factory, a "Gypsy Camp," a creepy cave, woods scenes, and a country fair. Crump explains that it was its employment of fantasy that made it successful: "It was like looking at a children's book" (qtd. in Merritt, "A Whimsical"). Six Flags over Georgia has a unique ride entitled Monster Mansion that has a quirky cast of characters set in Southern surroundings (fig. 28).



Figure 28: Concept art for new characters at Monster Mansion (Photo: ©Goddard Group, used with permission)

In this story, humans are invited to a monster picnic which goes awry when the boat strays into a marsh with more dangerous monsters. Its soundtrack and monsters have connected with visitors

for decades, and its renovation (updating the name from Monster Plantation, upgrading the technologies, and adding a small museum in the store) illustrates that parks can maintain nostalgia yet stay current.

There are notable contemporary instances of original attractions. One of these is the previously mentioned transmedia Fairytale Tree in Efteling's Fairytale Forest, originally created to “‘refresh’ the cultural heritage of fairy tales” by making the stories more contemporary and appealing to today's youth (Hover 11). This is a talking tree that recites stories; he is both a new character and a park attraction (literally a piece of technology that tells tales). This attraction has a related in-park musical puppet show and an external television show and online game in the same way their unique show Raveleijn has. Hover describes how Efteling has “‘interpreted and re-interpreted, created, designed, and distributed (via various media) fairy tales in different ways,” illustrating the power of the theme park to influence culture (2). In this case, embracing fairy tales was an intentional response to “‘industrialisation and urbanisation” (6). Fairy tales provide “‘a ‘counterpoint’ in the form of nature, romance, and ‘safe’ entertainment and fantasy,” which connects to Dutch cultural heritage, regional identity, and children's imagination (6). A key aspect of this is that while fairy tales impacted the park and visitors, the new attraction is operating the other way around by influencing visitors and the art of fairy tale creation.

The multi-park narrative of the Society of Explorers and Adventurers (S.E.A.), a group of explorers “‘dedicated to the gathering of newfound knowledge,” exemplifies original narrative. It also “‘ties together the stories of different Disney attractions from around the world” (Kubersky, “The Story”). Initial clues of this organization were found in the Fortress Explorations walkthrough attraction and Magellan's restaurant at Tokyo DisneySea, though it is derived from an older storyworld, Disney's defunct interactive nightclub Adventurer's Club. Fortress

Explorations (and the interactive quest Leonardo’s Challenge) provide a guide to the interactive exhibits, each of which ties to the S.E.A. organization’s tenets of adventure, romance, discovery, and innovation. There are other links to the story by way of particular members on attractions worldwide as expressed in Table 1 (alphabetical order by last name):

Table 1: List of Society of Explorers and Adventures Characters

Character	Location	Details
Dr. J. L. Baterista	Pictured in Mystic Manor queue	None
Professor R. Blauerhimmel	Pictured in Mystic Manor queue	None
Barnabas T. Bullion	Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, Magic Kingdom	Mine proprietor, rather a villain in the <i>Big Thunder Mountain Railroad</i> comic series
Jason Chandler	Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, Magic Kingdom	Inventor of mining technology, hero, explorer (mentioned in the <i>Big Thunder Mountain Railroad</i> comic series, founder of the unbuilt land Discovery Bay); connected to Museum of the Weird director Madame Zarkov, an Adventurer’s Club character
Dr. Albert Falls	Jungle Navigation Co., Ltd. Skipper Canteen, Jungle Cruise, Magic Kingdom	Founder of the Jungle Navigation Company, meeting room for S.E.A.
Harrison Hightower III	Tower of Terror, Tokyo DisneySea	Greedy and disrespectful explorer who is punished for defacing an idol, called the “Pillaging Prince” by Pamela Perkins from Adventurers Club
Jock Lindsey	Jock Lindsey’s Hangar Bar, Disney Springs	Pilot from <i>Indiana Jones</i> , bar an S.E.A. meeting room
Lord Henry Mystic	Mystic Manor, Explorer’s Club, Hong Kong Disneyland	Kindly explorer who hosts his home as a museum for all to enjoy, pet monkey Albert; his “grandnephews share stories from their adventures” with him in a small show (Silvester 286)
Mary Oceaneer	Miss Adventure Falls, Typhoon Lagoon; Oceaneers Lab, Disney Cruise Line	Explorer, diver, and treasure hunter, pet parrots Salty and Duncan
Merriweather Adam Pleasure	Adventurers Club, Pleasure Island (defunct)	Library made into S.E.A. meeting room

Characters are retroactively added to the storyline, and fans have guessed other connections. Little nods like S.E.A. fezes or stickers or names on suitcases appear in random places. This vast narrative includes explicit stories, like Tower of Terror or Mystic Manor; implicit, like Jock Lindsey's (information can be inferred); and interpretive, like Fortress Explorations.

The premise of the S.E.A. creates synergy between parks and a subtle narrative only discernible to those who travel to multiple properties. A similar but more explicit backstory was used for the opening of Europa-Park's Voletarium, with the explorers club called the Adventure Club of Europe. Its members, artifacts, and expeditions are thoroughly detailed in a transmedia website in addition to a related mobile game called *Voletarium – Sky Explorers*. This content was created as a tool to “add a second layer of storytelling at Europa-Park” and will be applied to a future resort (Gilling, “A New”).

Bryan Bishop suggests that with the success of the theme park medium for storytelling and its usage of film properties, theme parks “can be used to launch new story ideas and characters” more often (“Theme”). Original stories integrate into the park and into the lives of visitors. The first two theme park rides I remember from childhood are “it's a small world” and Knott's Bear-y Tales. In the Netherlands, children are growing up with the Sprookjesboom. In the case of Pirates of the Caribbean, a theme park story has a global reach. Like other forms of media, theme parks have narratives that can influence other narratives and society as a whole.

### *Interactive Quests*

One of the more recent expressions of storytelling within theme parks is the interactive quest. Interactive quests are generally explicit narrative experiences with a linear quest and a prominent role in the story for the visitor. This can be using “story hooks,” where guests are “given roles in the narrative” (Younger 92; Rohde, “From Myth”). These are “roles for the guest



to adopt, places for the guests to go, and activities for the guests to engage in”; Younger’s example is the talking skull in Disneyland’s Pirates of the Caribbean leading guests to search for treasure (94). This attribute follows the advice of Miller: “Give members of the audience some way to participate in the narrative in a meaningful way. They want to have some impact on the story” (162). Many ways exist to emphasize the guest’s role in a storyworld or even in a story, something that theme parks can do particularly well with their expressions in physical space.

Interactive quests are essentially physical forms of virtual quest games. In interactive games, according to Kjetil Sandvik, “the story has to be performed by you instead of narrated or shown to you” (149). Salter posits the same condition about video games: “However, adventure games cannot simply narrate a story: they somehow have to involve the user in the experience and make him or her part of the narrative development” (39). Kischuk elaborates:

The feeling the guest can have of being a protagonist within the environment is not just perpetuated by giving the guest a means to control their experience and a central role in the narrative, but by empowering the guest with the ability to act and influence the characters, environment, and story around them. Now, rather than being a passive spectator, the guest is starting to be able to embark on exciting adventures that happens *to* them, rather than just *around* them. (*A Prototype* 16)

These attractions are more likely than interactive dark rides to meet Crawford’s definition of interactivity: “A cyclic process between two or more active agents in which each agent alternatively listens, thinks, and speaks” (29). Miller, too, finds interaction to be an “active relation between two entities” (54). They each recognize that a computer can be one of the agents in this kind of conversation, so interactive quests have the potential for being perceived as high-level interaction instead of just button-mashing reaction.

The concept of large quests within theme parks is now more common. Universal's Wizarding World of Harry Potter sells wands that interact with the details of the surrounding scenery so that visitors can role play as wizards and witches. Disney has created many of these kinds of quests. The Disney Cruise Line has the Midship Detective Agency, a "classic adventure game" about "discovery and exploration" (Ackley qtd. in Brigante). Leonardo's Challenge at Tokyo DisneySea is a quest overlaid on the already participatory Fortress Explorations that allows the visitor to follow clues and become a member of the aforementioned S.E.A. Disney California Adventure has interactive exhibits in Sorcerer's Workshop as well as interactive drawing instruction in Animation Academy. Both Disneyland and Magic Kingdom had a version of PinQuest, a scavenger hunt that led to gaining collector pins. At Disney's Animal Kingdom, the Wilderness Explorers (using the concept from the movie *Up*) program allows visitors, especially children, to gain badges by learning about wildlife throughout the park. Disney's Animal Kingdom had a temporary quest called Lion Guard Adventure based around the release of the *Lion Guard* television show. Epcot's interactive quest, Phineas and Ferb: Agent P's World Showcase Adventure (formerly a *Kim Possible* quest) allows players to solve puzzles and activate scenery by using a cell phone. They have more rudimentary quests based on particular special events including Masters Scavenger Hunt (Figment character searching for art for the Festival of the Arts), Epcot Eggstravaganza (Easter egg hunt), Spike's Pollen Nation Exploration (for Epcot's Flower & Garden Festival), and Remy's Ratatouille Hide & Squeak (for the International Food & Wine Festival). Epcot has a long history with interactive experiences with displays in ImageWorks and Innoventions.

Magic Kingdom, perhaps because it is the most visited theme park and needs additional attractions to cope with constant peak demand, has been the most apt to add quests. Many of the

Magic Kingdom's queues now have interactive elements, where line waiting is less tedious because of the participatory, themed elements. There are also more formal quests. A Pirate's Adventure: Treasure of the Seven Seas (2013) includes taking part in pirate quests for treasure by using maps and interacting with surroundings. It is concentrated on physical effects and uses Adventureland as its canvas. Once players are done with a quest, they can receive another map with other storylines for a total of five rounds (fig. 29).

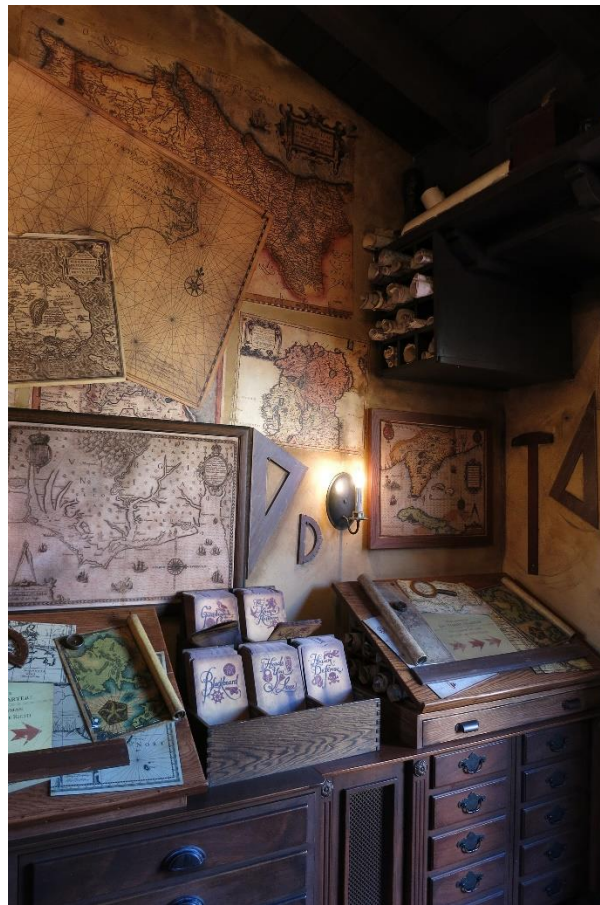


Figure 29: "Enlistment Quarters" for A Pirate's Adventure at Magic Kingdom (Photo: Author)

Sorcerers of the Magic Kingdom (2012) takes this model even further with networked portals in five lands (screens that come alive once activated to project dialogue and images) with Merlin enlisting the guest to defeat multiple villains working for Hades that want to take over the theme park. Visitors are likely to recognize most or all of the Disney villains and heroes/heroines

depicted in the animated scenes; they must “follow a trail of symbols” to achieve the title of Master Sorcerer (Carson, “Environmental”). In addition to the keys that open the portals, there are over seventy cards with Disney characters on them used to cast spells at the villains based on the characters’ powers. The game can be played on three levels, and on harder levels, the player must learn which combinations of cards are effective against specific villains. This experience is in most sections of the park, so it is a quest in addition to being interactive, role-playing, and a fan/collector experience. It has video game elements including a varying level of difficulty (easy for casual players and difficult for “hardcore gamers”) or not explaining all of the rules: “Part of the game is intuiting what the rules are, which spells work against which villain” (Ackley qtd. in Brigante). This scheme provides a reason to return for dedicated fans and provides a respite for potentially frustrated guests who do not want to queue for long periods.

Game designer Jonathan Ackley notes that Disney still builds physical experiences, but Sorcerers of the Magic Kingdom adds a layer of interactivity. Ackley notes the guest’s role in the story in this kind of experience versus more traditional attractions:

When Walt came up with his idea for Disneyland, his idea was that he would allow our guests to enter the world of his movies and clearly that was a good idea – very popular. But mostly, you sort of travel through the world of the movies and so what we’re doing with what we call these “immersive experiences” is we’re making the guests the main character in the Disney story. So it’s classic Disney storytelling but we’re sort of changing the role of the guest to be the main character instead of somebody passing through the world. (qtd. in Brigante)

The game combines elements of card games and online role-playing games with placemaking and the Magic Kingdom’s “tremendous, essentially, sets for the movie stories” (Ackley qtd. in

Brigante). Players interact with each other, employees, and buildings within this quest. In an earlier article, “Creative Choices and Fan Practices in the Transformation of Theme Park Space,” I detail this game and how it and the fan practices surrounding it have changed the landscape of theme parks like the Magic Kingdom to be more participatory. The game also solidifies the notion of “narrative architecture,” as the architecture is literally narrative in this quest.

Interactive quests are occasionally seen at waterparks like at Yas Waterworld, which has Pearl Master Quest (2013), an interactive quest (with events triggered by a wristband) that follows the park’s backstory. The quest is in English or Arabic, making it one of the few bilingual quest narratives. There are “over 60 elements of the Quest” around the park, and participants can join a “tribe” and play for an hour or a whole day (technical director Kevin Johnson qtd. in Cramer). Julie Cramer describes the tasks available as “search for lost treasure, encounter magical creatures, discharge hidden water cannons and solve ancient puzzles.” There is a training video, a booklet with information, and an implement (a wristband in this case) that keeps track of progress.

MagiQuest (2005) uses technology to power an interactive role-playing game based on spell-casting magic wands. Though most of the standalone locations have closed, it is now at a majority of the Great Wolf Lodge family resorts. It is rather elaborate as the game is linked nationally so that players can save progress from previous visits. Magic wands store information and activate effects throughout the game space; wand toppers can be purchased that have special powers. All of the MagiQuest games take place in the kingdom of Vellara. In the first chapter, Guardians of the Realm Portals, the player acquires runes and goes on adventures (depending on location: saving the pixie queen Serena, helping bear god Ursa Major, defeating the goblin King Bandyshanks, battling the fire dragon Charlock, battling the ice dragon Winterra, or battling the

Silver Dragon). The second chronicle, Journey to Save the Light (or called ShadowQuest), asks the player to help the fairy Lumina and the runemaster yeti Ivan to battle Malaki the Shadow Lord. This one is about gathering runes, but more of them are used in the final battle and other traditional video game quest motifs are used (e.g. obtaining objects during certain times of day). The third chronicle, Rise of the Totem Masters, requires the “magi” to go back in time to save the present from Shadow Lord Kurzak; assisting in this are Pokemon-like totem creatures Beraxus, Lickety Spit, Mongowl, and Wendingo. The gameplay is associated with battling with totems and relics and has a toys-to-life component of purchasing physical figures. Different iterations of the game (upgraded versions of the same quests, with the new sites using computer-generated imagery instead of actors) are present throughout the MagiQuest locations. There are a few other associated quests also done by Creative Kingdoms (who developed MagiQuest) including SplashQuest (includes Pearl Master), another Great Wolf game called CompassQuest, DinoQuest at Discovery Science Center, and Cosmic Quest at Kennedy Space Center.

All of these live-action role-playing experiences make heavy use of explicit narrative. Not only do they employ either actors or computer-generated imagery to explain the story and announce the next steps, the MagiQuest locations give out a “Book of Wisdom” to help players track their progress (physically, though a few locations now have a phone application). Many of the games involve riddles with the Crystal Shield quest being solely about the answering of riddles. Totem Masters includes lots of text-based narrative displayed on screens (fig. 30). The fantasy-focused quests involve *metalepsis* or “frame breaking,” where characters enter our world from another (Abbott 171). Just like in theme parks, the space is important, as it is a physical representation of a computer role-playing game. When I played at the standalone location in Pigeon Forge, there were set pieces akin to theme parks. The Great Wolf locations, of which I

have played at a few, are generally props and screens placed in hotel hallways, though the Garden Grove location has an animatronic version of the dragon Charlock (fig. 30).

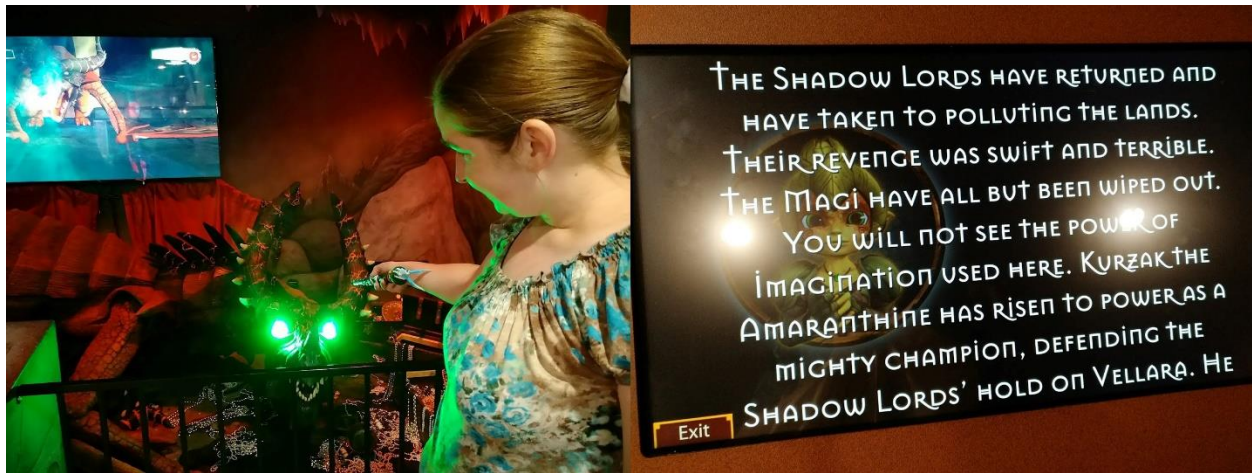


Figure 30: Charlock animatronic from Guardians of the Realm Portals, explicit narrative from Rise of the Totem Masters (Photos: Author)

The narrative is the same, but the interaction with space is different. While they are less immersive, the Great Wolf locations are more communal, with sometimes dozens of people running the halls and helping each other with difficult quests or battles. MagiQuests are location-based entertainment and often in resort hotels, but the design process is similar. Composer Taylor Michael Ryan talks about the storyline development of the games and explains in detail the process for writing music for MagiQuest. He utilized music that is both Western and non-Western, tribal and dystopic (for the third chronicle), and employed a technique called “horizontal resequencing” which allows for “branching paths” and a “somewhat random” replay of the themes. This makes a more repeatable experience as it is “adding something new every time you play a specific level” (T. Ryan).

Though more theoretical than literal, fandom acts as another form of interactive quest. Fandom has become more participatory of late, but designers also use enough breadcrumbs to make the park quest something that transcends the in-park experience. Todd Martens mentions

the many little details that make the parks and that fans try to engage with and connect the dots. He believes this makes the park a “more active experience.” As he says, “We are not simply spectators, we’re players, exploring a world that has been crafted by master designers while concocting our own set of stories” (“This”).

### *Live Role-Playing, Interactive Theatre, and Improv Storytelling*

Though part of the theatre genre for many years, interactive theatre productions like live role-playing and improv storytelling have made their way into theme parks as well. The most basic live theatre would probably be character meet and greets, which “provided a personal, spontaneous experience with the guest” (R. Schneider 99). These generally non-narrative events have taken on new life as interactive theatre in dinner shows and clubs like the former Adventurer’s Club. “Improvisational storytelling,” according to Schneider, can be powerful (109). Improv in themed shows is “about the guests’ experience” (282). There is a similarity between this and oral storytelling. Linda Degh explains that “The interruptions and calls from the audience are a part of the act of storytelling” (227). This kind of storytelling in particular accepts these kinds of interruptions and adaptations of the script. However, the theme park norm is not the improv format: “A themed show is not improvised because it does not stand alone. It is a scripted experience that contributes to the story being told in the setting. It should give a guest a personal experience of the time, place and genre we’ve carefully created around them” (R. Schneider 282). Even some shows that seem improvised draw from a list of scripted possibilities. Similarly, Walt Disney World has begun to add customized storylines to some attractions by placing guests’ actual names within active screen posters including at “it’s a small world,” Rock ‘n’ Roller Coaster, and Expedition Everest: Legend of the Forbidden Mountain.



A contemporary trend has been interactive virtual theatre shows with “living characters” like Stitch Encounter, Monster’s Inc. Laugh Floor, Turtle Talk with Crush, Donkey Live, and Do You Speak Beluga? (Takahashi; Wright). In these experiences, a virtual character is on a screen with a live actor behind the scenes responding to audience questions or discussion. Creative director Asa Kalama offers:

Guests didn’t just sit back and spectate. They go to actively participate. So we decided to take that same paradigm and apply it to everything. What if we decided to let our guests participate in ‘living stories.’ We have all of these amazing experiences, parks built with great play sets. Why not use them to tell our own emergent story experiences. (qtd. in Takahashi)

Disney conceives of large versions of experiences like this where “The guests get to live their own story, with a narrative overlay on the experience that can last a whole day,” similar to experiences at Knott’s Berry Farm and what is expected in *Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge* (Kalama qtd. in Takahashi). Kalama remembers that in tests for these kinds of experiences, too much back story got in the way; he argues that guests are already “creating their own backstories” (qtd. in Takahashi). Pickett discussed a test of the Mickey Mouse meet and greet character using a live actor responding to guests (it became particular recorded responses, but the test was live). It was an “interactive narrative experience” and “the highest level of interactivity that has yet ever happened” (personal interview). The biggest value Pickett finds that he got out of this was “how important the emotional quality of park experiences are” (personal interview). Similarly, Merz finds the interaction with a goblin bank teller at Wizarding World of Harry Potter to be a “very personalized” moment, one that allows guests to feel a “part of the story,” something bound to have emotional resonance (qtd. in Terwiesch and Siggelkow).

There are multiple role-playing schemes available for children at Disney parks in particular. Many children already come in costumes and princess dresses to spend a day at the park. The Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique outfits primarily little girls and decks them out in princess dresses, though there is little storytelling involved. A Pirate's League is better at this, as it tells children they will take a pirate oath once they are dressed the part. The best example of this genre is the Jedi Academy show, as it involves children role-playing but includes a clear narrative of training to defeat villains such as Darth Vader, Darth Maul, and Kylo Ren.

In 2014, Disney did an interactive storytelling proof of concept with Adventure Trading Company, where guests collected ancient relics and stories, and the popular amongst fans Legends of Frontierland, where guests could create characters and choose whether they wanted to be a resident of Frontierland or nearby Rainbow Ridge, towns locked in a battle. The experience encouraged guests to buy land, earn money/"bits" by running errands for townsfolk, and to tell their own stories about the experience in social media. Though both of these only lasted a short time, they illustrated another potential theme park storytelling technique, one that would be expanded at Knott's Berry Farm.

One of the most elaborate experiences in this area is Ghost Town Alive! at Knott's Berry Farm, which began in 2016. The tagline is "live new adventures in the old West," illustrating the importance of place (the guest is experiencing a story in a setting with a history). This is a large-scale interactive theatre and improv storytelling experience that takes place in the Ghost Town section of the park, exemplifying how critical themed spaces can be for facilitating storytelling. The normal Western soundtrack is replaced with typical town noises during the event. At Ghost Town Alive!, Calico acts as a "real town" with small events throughout the day changed based on guest participation. For instance, a vote for sheriff determines how the story will unfold that

day, with a couple of options (when I was there, it was between the sheriff of years and a criminal recently out of jail who had stolen the deed of the town). There are varying levels of participation possible. The most distant would be an observer who simply watches a small event or two (a posse walk, the bank robbery, a showdown, the wedding, the end-of-day hoedown, etc.). The middle level might be what I did, where I spent hours watching the story unfold, participated in some of the daily events (sworn in as a Calico citizen, voted for sheriff, walked through with a posse), and engaged with the quest of The Raven, who hides clues about the day's storyline in symbols on buildings that unlock clues within books (a low-tech interactive quest). Talking to the townspeople, who gossip about the ruthless Mayfield family or mention daily events like the wedding, yields information about the story. Sheriff Bryce Wheeler, up for reelection, invited me to play cards with him while he watched over a prisoner. This kind of in-time invitation to participate can result in guests feeling more invested in the story's outcome.

The final level of engagement is the most participatory, as it includes acting as a town message distributor or package deliverer (Pony Express) for hours or even creating a new character, inserting oneself into the storyline, or wearing a costume. Creative director Ken Parks, one of the designers of the experience, mentions that annual passholders return multiple times: "They want to experience all of the variations, see for themselves all of the twists and turns that this immersive tale can take" (qtd. in Hill, "Knott's). All of these levels occur simultaneously, so guests can enjoy different levels without awkwardness. One of the most interesting facets of the show is the newspaper called the *Calico Gazette*, which is printed three to four times a day following the storyline of that day's show (fig. 31). An actress playing a news reporter gathers statements from guests, so sometimes their comments or names appear in the paper. While the storyline itself is fixed, linear, and concludes every day (accounting for single-day guests), it is

also branching because guests can modify the outcomes in at least some ways. It is possible to not experience the narrative arc and opt instead for observation of just a scene or two, which would mean that theoretically a guest could miss the key narrative features of the experience.



Figure 31: The *Calico Gazette*, Ike Mayfield locked up at Knott's Berry Farm's Ghost Town Alive! (Photos: Author)

Yas Waterworld has a private ticketed event of this kind of elaborate interactive show called Legends of Arabia: The Quest of the Pearl Tribes. This live-action role-playing experience involves all of the guests (who openly chose to do the experience) and transforms the park into a different space, being at night when the park is closed to regular guests. In this story, participants are separated into tribes and dressed accordingly. They are given roles from legends and get swords. The park calls it “interactive drama” and emphasizes the ability to collaborate, sing and dance with a group, and become a character rather than watch a show (“Legends of”). As their

website says, “This is not a story we tell you. It is 500 stories we create together, each one unique and intertwined with the others” (“Legends of”).

The *Star Wars*-based hotel at Walt Disney World is expected to be a large-scale live-action role-playing experience as well as “next-level immersion” with cosplay and customized storylines (Sampson). Executive Bob Chapek describes it:

From the second you arrive, you will become a part of a *Star Wars* story. You’ll immediately become a citizen of the galaxy and experience all that entails, including dressing up in the proper attire. Once you leave Earth, you will discover a starship alive with characters, stories, and adventures that unfold all around you. It is 100-percent immersive, and the story will touch every single minute of your day, and it will culminate in a unique journey for every person who visits. (qtd. in Jasper)

According to Chapek, each visitor will be given a “multi-day adventure,” so it is an individualized experience, one that is likely to come with a very high price tag (qtd. in Jasper).

### *Virtual and Augmented Reality*

Hybrid or mixed reality attractions have been around for decades. As mentioned before, some rides already blend physical/practical effects with virtual elements like screens, projections without screens, holograms, or other effects. Media and screens are added in attractions to “help immerse our audiences in our stories” though some fans think this is the opposite (*Walt ...Magic More Real* 142). Pickett, for instance, mentions a particular hybrid attraction. While the queue, practical effects, and animatronics are “atmospheric” and impressive, the “media portion” is less so. In the end, he feels he is “still watching a movie” (personal interview). Nevertheless, Hill finds that “a balanced mix of practical and virtual elements” is best, and he describes elements on Justice League: Battle for Metropolis that are better with physical effects (the animatronic

Joker being very close to you) or virtual (chase scenes on screens) (qtd. in Niles, “Bringing”). Hill continues: “You want [riders] to be surprised by the wide variety of ways you are delivering the story to them” (qtd. in Niles, “Bringing”). Ride designer Phil Bloom argues that 3D projections with physical sets is a technique to “perceptively expand space” (qtd. in Nick). Martens considers mixed reality as the “new path for theme park rides” based on the success of rides like Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey (“Wizarding”). Woodbury comments on that popular ride: “We spent a lot of time thinking about how we merge the real world and the virtual worlds. How do we do that in a seamless way?” (qtd. in Martens, “Wizarding”). He elaborates that flying with the *Harry Potter* characters was best done virtually (using film screens) whereas creatures like the Dementors were best done in physical form. There are likewise multiple routes to the same kind of effect, as Jack Sparrow is turned from physical to a ghost/bones form using advanced projection technology at Shanghai Disneyland, whereas Captain Barbossa at Disneyland Paris has the same transition but with simpler lighting techniques (switching between blacklight and regular white light).

There has always been a bit of virtual in the theme park, but contemporary theme parks have seen an inclusion of formalized virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) systems. Interactive quests like Sorcerers of the Magic Kingdom can be considered augmented reality, as they are draping a different story on top of an existing storyworld. Sandvik explains this: “Augmentation of places may happen in the form of the *palimpsest*, that is the over-laying of an actual place with some kind of fictional universe creating a sort of *mixed reality* in which the place has a status as an actual location in the physical world and as a story space” (149). One of the best examples of this is the aforementioned MagiQuest games that reside at Great Wolf Lodges. The game is played in hallways and lobbies that bear the mark of any hotel (rooms,

room numbers, employees, elevators, lobby space, restaurants), but the fantasy world of Vellara overlays these mundane features.

Though not as involved as the interactive quests, *Battle for Cedar Point* (2016) and *Battle for Kings Dominion* (2017) are phone applications with various AR features; these are deemed “extended experiences.” The games include AR mini games (walking up to a ride sign and fighting creatures), AR videos, points for riding attractions, and a park-wide battle against other players for the domination of the park. Designers created character representations of favorite rides based on their inferred personalities. Players choose the ride they want to support and play a game to gain pieces of the map. Playing this was interesting because while I stayed in the park longer, I was far more attached to my phone. Nonetheless, Holovis explains that it tries to leverage these “emerging disruptive technologies” (“Holovis”). Concept development executive Amy Steele comments, “Extended Experiences are the future of entertainment. Every element is connected together allowing guests to discover hidden narratives and gamify what are traditionally passive moments” (qtd. in “Kings”). She finds that players continue to interact with the application when they leave the park as well as share on social media.

This is another example of experiences leaving the “berm” of theme parks, which, while likely startling to those who consider parks immersive and escapist, is probably increasing their reach in the “real world.” Holovis confirms that the “post ride experience” will become a more important aspect of an attraction as they demonstrated with their demo of the *Ride & Realm* system which adds augmented reality, games, and customization to attractions (“*Don*”). The key to the success of these experiences will be gamification of existing attractions and “creating a connective storytelling process” (“*Don*”). Creative director Peter Cliff indicates the connection between storytelling, augmented reality, and role-playing in *Ride & Realm*:

Ride and Realm is more than just gamification and non-linearity; this is letting people determine their own destiny while being at the heart of a multidimensional, compelling narrative. We see this concept expanding so that all park wide media, both on and off rides, react differently for every individual, depending on where they are in their game and evolving storyline. This is a true revolution in theme park wide personalisation.

(“*Don*”)

Between this kind of experience, other interactive quests, personalized messages on rides, and the growing connecting between social media and the theme park space, it is evident that the concepts of contemporary life will influence the theme park.

The recent trend has been to add VR to roller coasters at multiple amusement and theme parks. When I attended a Themed Entertainment Association panel on “The Art and Science of Imagination,” the creative professionals there expressed doubt related to the narrative development of the VR medium, though other professionals I spoke with said there are possibilities. Murray’s words on virtual reality do present the potential power of the form: “We would enter the story, and the plot would change according to our actions while still sustaining its power to surprise and delight us” (*Hamlet* 63). There have been a few storytelling VR installations on roller coasters including at Europa-Park (Pegasus Coastality, related to characters from their 4D show Happy Family and Alpenexpress Coastality, with a story related to park characters and their 4D show The Castle of Balthasar Castle), Universal Studios Japan (Space Fantasy – The Ride, which has received multiple VR overlays including one connected to the *Final Fantasy* IP), Legoland (The Great LEGO Race VR Coaster), and SeaWorld Orlando (Kraken Unleashed, an adventure that led up to an encounter with the kraken). VR coasters will likely continue to explore narrative possibilities so that riders find meaning in what may



otherwise be a purely technical experience. For instance, a VR Coaster I rode had no pretense of a storyline, so it was putting on a headset and being thrust into an unexplained conflict in an undefined setting. Though not on a roller coaster, Knott's Berry Farm's VR Showdown in Ghost Town is a full-motion VR experience, the first permanent one at a theme park. Though it is essentially a shooting game, it employs a storyline that draws on the park's history and the attraction previously in the same space, Kingdom of the Dinosaurs. Battle for Eire at Busch Gardens Williamsburg combines a motion theatre with VR, though a traditional film is an option as well. It is heavily based in lore, with a plot that allows visitors to assist the fairy Addie in saving Ireland from the villain Balor.

Despite these recent attempts, VR is occasionally regarded as antithetical to good story. Creative executive Michael Mack talks about the future of VR: "The next stage is how to get the story and sound on the ride to interact with other riders beyond shooting something in that world" (qtd. in Eades, "Disneyland"). Mona Lalwani goes as far as to say "Storytelling in virtual reality has yet to take shape. While the simulated world of gaming has proved the visual capabilities of the medium, few have taken a crack at the art of building a compelling narrative." While special effects designer Robert Stromberg says "The mediums will change, but the storytelling will stay the same," others would argue that the basic principles of narrative are not always used in VR or even AR installations, though some are experiential or environmental in the way that video games can be (qtd. in Lalwani). Stromberg admits the format (a combination of "live performance" and "cinematic storytelling") is close but has not yet achieved a "dramatic storytelling event" (qtd. in Lalwani). Pickett, for instance, finds that even immersive VR technologies are difficult because he is "still aware that [he's] looking at pixels" (personal interview). The eventuality is finding ways to "create true emotions when someone is viewing a

story,” as that seems to be a disconnect in current implementations (Stromberg qtd. in Lalwani). The key is clear storytelling and moving beyond “parlor tricks,” Stromberg asserts, as it is about establishing whether the viewer is a character in the story or an observer (qtd. in Lalwani). He notes that unlike with traditional film, virtual reality experiences have different editing methods (e.g. extended shots awkward, short ones jarring, a need for smooth transitions). VR has the added negatives of possible motion sickness and unhygienic practices. Designers will continue to find ways around these drawbacks, or the emerging format will become a short-lived trend.

Considered a “virtual theme park,” DisneyQuest (1998-2017) was a proving ground for virtual reality attractions and the “combined thrill of a ride and the exceptional graphics of a video-computer game” (Lee and Madej 152). Some of its rides (e.g. Virtual Jungle Cruise, Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for Buccaneer Gold, Cyberspace Mountain) were riffs on physical Disney rides. Newton Lee and Chrystina Madej describe it as a place to enjoy a “three-dimensional fantasy world” and a “richly textured and detailed world” (152-53). However, it can be argued that DisneyQuest was a glorified arcade and not perceived as a theme park, whose physical environments include physical, not only virtual, texture. It remains to be seen how fully virtual spaces like The VOID in Utah, which bills itself as “hyper-reality” rather than virtual reality, will fare (“What Is The VOID”). The website notes that they want “hundreds” of centers in the country, so it is a scalable and portable concept. Its “real-time interactive environments” are likened to a Holodeck (“What Is The VOID”). It is hard to know whether theme parks adding immersive VR attractions will stave off competition from purely VR spaces.

At least one answer to that question may be found in The VOID’s Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire, a hyperreality experience that includes locations in the shopping districts at Walt Disney World and Disneyland, or the “first location-based Star Wars story” (Gaudiosi, “Star”).

Like *Ghostbusters: Dimension*, an earlier example of this type of installation, it combines virtual reality with ambulatory quest, senses, and role-playing. Experience designer Ian Bowie explains what he finds different about the virtual reality medium:

You'll read a book where it talks about how a character feels something going through their hair, but you play a game or you watch a movie, you're not feeling it. But now [you'll] know what it's like to ride a skiff across the surface of Mustafar. That's a sensory memory on top of a story memory on top of an experiential memory. There's lots of things in play there that hopefully make this feel all the more real. (qtd. in Prudom)

Experiencing this attraction confirmed the direction that VR is going and the truth of their claim of “hyperreality,” which focuses on the multi-sensory capabilities of the platform. While on the skiff Bowie mentioned, there is movement, heat, and a burning smell. It was enough to convince me to be cautious of the edges as we flew over the lava. The tetherless experience meant being able to walk from room to room in groups of four, making it more social than most VR, which tends to be “individual and isolated” (Cliff Plumer qtd. in Gaudiosi, “Star”). The point of the experience according to creative executive Vicki Dobbs Beck is “stepping inside the stories,” but she admits that there are still a lot of “game-like elements” (qtd. in Gaudiosi, “Star”). They learned, for instance, that the “pacing is different than in traditional linear entertainment”; in fact, its frantic nature was closer to a video game (Beck qtd. in Gaudiosi, “Star”). While the presence of the headgear or the video game-like look and actions (e.g. avatar customization, effect lags, first-person shooter actions) do not yet equal the immersive world that can be touched and seen without equipment, it showcases the potential of the genre, especially in storytelling.

It is about the sensory experience, but the attraction is equally focused on storytelling. An executive mentions that the acts within *Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire* (watching a pre-show

video, putting on the heavy gear) are related to the “storytelling process” and “storytelling experience” (Plumer qtd. in Prudom). Unlike some VR implementations, *Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire* has tight, linear storytelling, a “three-act structure,” and a clear mission given to guests (rebels stealing equipment from the Empire) though it is a “fixed” narrative in a prescribed order (Gaudiosi, “Star”; Bishop, “With Star”). It has a 360° view, but it is not an open world with its room-by-room scheme. It is obvious role playing, and I noticed that the employee referred to the experience space as “on stage,” referencing the association with theatre or perhaps its presence on Disney property. Either way, emotional connection to the franchise may be activated by the presence of familiar characters (Darth Vader, Cassian Andor, and K-2SO).

There is lots of *conflict* through fighting Stormtroopers, lava creatures, and Darth Vader (complete with haptic feedback when hit). There is also a surprisingly dark resolution, as while users retrieve the item they are meant to steal, it is only after Vader brutally kills your rebel ally center stage. As creative development executive Diana Williams confirms, this kind of conflict would be part of the answer to the question “what does it mean to step into a *Star Wars* story,” as *Star Wars* is a “universe that is ultimately defined by what *kind* of stories it tells” (qtd. in Prudom; Bishop, “With Star”). Williams mentions VR as its own emerging platform:

We truly are treating it as its own platform. Games has its own platform, books their own platform, films, television, everything, and this is the next wave of what we're going to be trying to do to expand out the *Star Wars* universe. With xLAB, we are focused on figuring out and really pushing out what people's ideas are of story and how you experience story on this platform, because it's just as different as every other platform. (qtd. in Prudom)

Whether this “new storytelling platform” will be viewed as a compliment to theme parks (Star Wars: Secrets of the Empire at Disney locations) or as competition (perhaps some of The VOID’s other locations) remains to be seen (Gaudiosi, “Star”).

### *Immersive Worlds and Total Immersion*

Robert Niles states that what visitors often “crave” are “rich, immersive physically and emotionally engaging story-telling environments” (“An Insider’s”). Frank Rose says something similar: “We know this much: people want to be immersed. They want to get involved in a story, to carve a role for themselves, to make it their own” (8). Creative director Joshua Updike, who refers to immersion as an industry “buzzword,” says that because current generations have grown up with more immersive entertainment like video games, “guests are expecting more” (qtd. in Eades, “Ex”). He continues: “They want to be able to walk in, walk around and physically taste, like Butterbeer at Universal, or even touch the worlds they see on film, television and video games” (Updike qtd. in Eades, “Ex”). It seems that the theme park industry has caught up with this desire. Woodbury mentions that one of the most difficult things to do as a designer is “to get the story and the visceral experience and the immersive experience to all line up” (qtd. in Niles, “Interview”). When this does happen, it brings the theme park to the next level. The ultimate goal for some theme park spaces now is the *immersive worlds* model, with some reaching the level of *total immersion* that was predicted by Murray, who saw entertainment going towards the ideal of the Holodeck of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* fame that fully engrossed visitors with simulations. As she describes it, this is “utopian technology applied to the age-old art of storytelling” (*Hamlet* 15). This section will be one of the longest, as it traces the attributes of immersion as well as posits total immersion as one of the goals of the industry (whether this is through virtual reality or intricate physical spaces, the goal of immersion tends to be the same).

Younger explains immersion in the theme park context: “In its themed design definition, immersion describes whether the designer intends for the guest to suspend their disbelief and pretend to actually be amongst the fictional world” (86). This could be applied to earlier implementations of immersion as well; now, the expectation is an immersion beyond that. Sotto defines immersion as “a persistent world that continually reinforces through details that seamlessly keep us believing.” The word “persistent” here is significant. Going further, Lukas views “total immersion” as a state “in which the guest is taken into another world, story, or place through the use of as many senses as possible,” achieved through an “effective combination of symbols, brands, and senses in space” (*Immersive* 204). Crawford defines immersion as “sensory completeness” (26). In the theme park, it is generally a multi-media, multi-sensory experience.

Story is an essential component of an immersive world, not just scale and detail. Pierre Gander defines immersion as “to be captured by and experience a story and its world, shutting out the ‘real’ world around you,” making story a central facet in immersion (1). According to Davin Heckman, “immersive environments thrive insofar as they have a strong, distributed narrative backbone” (276). In a theme park context, Lukas explains, “Story may be considered the most relevant factor in the creation of immersion within a space. Story is what holds a space together by linking elements, creation situations, establishing moods, and involving guests” (155). Hensch deemed immersion the “pervasive illusion of reality” (38). Margaret King finds that “these multi-installations are total-immersion environments” (“The Theme” 8). Murray references immersion, noting its metaphor of being surrounded by water. She avows, “The experience of being transported to an elaborately simulated place is pleasurable in itself, regardless of the fantasy content” (*Hamlet* 98). This is compounded in a theme park, as the space cannot disappear with a command to the computer of “end program” like with Holodeck users.

There is a connection between immersion and being an agent within the story. Murray maintains that “The more realized the immersive environment, the more active we want to be within it” (126). Role-playing is a key part of immersion; “The more the guest is able to feel like they are part of the fiction, the more immersive it is” (Younger 86). Osterman finds that the space is about “putting you in the story and making you a character,” which he calls “another take on immersion.” “We make you a character” in the *Harry Potter* universe, he says. In this place, “Harry, Hermione, Ron, they talk to you, they invite you on their hero’s journey. You’re literally a character.” Hover finds that Wizarding World of Harry Potter is more immersive because it “places the visitor in a first person role in several ways, which enhances the feeling of being part of that world, and of identifying with the characters/witches/wizards,” even to the extent that it leads to adult cosplay (personal interview). A similar perspective is found in Kischuk: “the pleasures of immersion stem from our being completely absorbed within the ebb and flow of a familiar narrative schema” (*A Prototype* 21). Jenkins observes that the Wizarding World of Harry Potter “felt as if it was designed as a performance space,” especially during a special event, and fans leveraged this by wearing costumes (personal interview). In fact, he sees this as a key way that parks have changed; from rides where guests “observe” to “performance spaces, where we get to embody our fantasies in a more open-ended way” (personal interview). He sees “immersive and interactive spaces” as places where “patrons have a chance for structured experiences within unfolding narratives” (personal interview).

Significantly, Vincent Neveu determined the “crucial role” of prior knowledge of narratives when visiting theme parks, stating that “knowledge of the underlying story shapes the extent of feeling immersed into the area” (79). The visitor will participate more and thus feel further immersed if already familiar with the story. Fans walking around in robes or carrying

wands also “strongly contributed to the immersion of other visitors,” demonstrating that watching the participation of others may lead to increased immersion or possibly participation, something Neveu refers to as “social storytelling” (7). Gilmore would likely agree with this assessment: “But then of course we see the people with wands. We see people dressed in their house robes. We see people eating chocolate frogs all around, there's activity. People drinking butter beer. It's those layers that create the amazing immersion and really bring you into the place” (qtd. in Porges, “How”). Likewise, Marlee McGuire avows that believing in the imagery within a park is based on “the patron’s credence and appreciation of the narrative” (16). Tuch talks about the importance of placemaking and story to these feelings: “Putting the two together creates a double effect. There’s this kind of a meta journey through things. Being able to go through one place and then to the next places continues the feeling of residing in the story world.” The space itself may be “evoking a thousand stories,” as the designers have created a story world where guests have agency (Tuch). Murray reflects on the computer as a “participatory, immersive medium,” but surely the theme park outdoes even the computer in its material, walkable form (98).

Rose confirms that immersion is about users being “involved in a story” and “mak[ing] it their own” (8). Immersion in his text can provide an escape, so immersion becomes a quality that keeps out the real world. After looking at the spread of the immersion concept in print fiction, hypertext, 3D films, video games, augmented reality games, open worlds, online communities, social media, and other things, he settles on the theme park as the culmination of immersion in both good and bad ways. Disneyland brought stories to life and rose “above the mundane to truly extravagant levels of unreality” (290). He mentions that “Sleeping Beauty Castle at Disneyland is a narrative architecture purpose-built to provide an immersive experience” (315). Immersion



has then long been present in the parks. In the park design area, immersion is described by Carson as “draw[ing] the audience into an imagined world,” with keeping guests “immersed and entertained” as the goal of design (“Environmental”). Rothschild has a similar view: “The whole trick, if you will, with what we hopefully do in creating immersive stories and experiences is to transport the guest into the created reality we are presenting” (qtd. in Palicki, “FlyOver”). Sotro goes as far as to say that Disneyland long had virtual reality before it was a “technical platform” (“Why”). He argues, “In a meaningful way, Disneyland was one of, if not the first persistent virtual world” (“Why”). Hench said a similar thing: “Virtual reality is nothing new...we’ve been doing that for more than fifty years!” (qtd. in Wright, *Disneyland* 6). If looked at as *enhanced reality*, what Gary Dehrer calls virtual reality, than this is certainly true.

Theme parks themselves are sometimes considered self-contained worlds or, as Sherry Turkle terms them, “microworlds” that “offer the holding power of action, of imaginative identification, of losing oneself in a world outside of the habitual” (“Video” 505). Neal Gabler refers to them as “fully realized worlds” (qtd. in Leonard and Palmeri). This is an area in which theme parks diverge from film, which generally maintains a distance. Though building film sets might be a commonality, this has culminated in immersion. As creative executive Shawn McCoy offers, “When you walk in, we don’t want to think that you’re in a theme park that happens to have a ride based on a movie you love. You’re stepping into that world” (qtd. in Rodriguez). Similarly, the levels of detail between the film adaptation and the theme park adaptation are different. As Rohde comments about the *Avatar*-themed land:

The film was photorealistic, but in the film, you're looking at principal characters. The screen may be gigantic, but it is often occupied with somebody's face talking. You don't get to sit there and stare at a tree trunk for two hours. So the level of detail required to

make the film realistic is not as much as the level of detail we needed to reach here. (qtd. in Porges, “Everything”)

Rides and shows themselves can be these microworlds. Wright refers to Stitch’s Great Escape as an “immersive theatrical environment” as it demonstrates the “power of audio as a storytelling medium” and incorporates smells as part of the story (*Magic* 114). Mayrand describes Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for Sunken Treasure as “a hyperimmersive long format experience” (qtd. in Palicki, “Pirates”). In these cases, the visitor is surrounded by details and a realized storyworld and are often being asked to participate in the story, which helps with suspension of disbelief.

Perhaps the best clarification of immersion is that of Wolf, who would consider the theme parks “imaginary worlds.” Like Murray, he uses the water metaphor of being surrounded and adds to this *absorption*, where instead of only being surrounded, visitors bring the world into the mind; and *saturation*, where the details of the space occupy “the audience’s full attention and imagination” (49). Wolf defines a useful spectrum with three kinds of immersion: *physical*, wherein the “user is physically surrounded by the constructed experience,” as in a theme park attraction; *sensual*, wherein “everything the user sees and hears is part of the controlled experience,” as in virtual reality installations; and *conceptual*, wherein it “relies on the user’s imagination” to be immersed, as in “engaging books like *The Lord of the Rings*” (48). He sees these not as categories but as points on a continuum, with purely physical immersion on one side and sole conceptual on the others. The latter is the most powerful. Unlike rides that focus on technologies or going higher and faster, which are limited by the physical body, according to Vugts, attractions about imagination go further because “fantasy has no borders.” Conceptual immersion, when done correctly, is boundless.

These classifications are useful for the understanding of theme park experiences as they evolve. All theme park attractions according to Wolf's scale are physically immersive. Some, including virtual reality or environmental effects in attractions, are sensual. Since the majority of theme park attractions are visual, they may not be at the pole of conceptual immersion. Tuch says "immersion is mental" and that the place itself actively does something to the visitor's imagination. Priscilla Hobbs and the writers of *Themed Attraction* both used the imagination as a dimension or sense in theme parks. Implicit stories, including cartoonist Ian Kay's "Forensic Stories" or Younger's "Including," which reference designers setting up interpretation events for the guest with no explicit clues, can encompass conceptual immersion. These stories are static and include the "beginning, middle, and end" all at once (Kay, "Forensic"). Kay elucidates: "Forensic stories omit information, events, and motivations that any other narrative structure would milk for six seasons and a movie. Instead, forensic stories let us imagine the information, events, and motivations for ourselves. Therefore, the forensic story not only tells a story, but it also lets us tell the story, too" ("Forensic"). This can apply to tableaux and vignettes observed at parks, where a single event or symbol of an event is used to represent a series of events. It can also apply to the techniques used to create immersive worlds, as spaces tell these stories. The effect of spreading out bits of clues that lead to a narrative whole (as noted, called "peppering" by Younger and "breadcrumbs" by Carson) can bring "nuances and subtleties" even in the theme park space (Wolf 49). Kay stresses, "Forensic stories are gems, loading tiny spaces with tons of information. They make fantasy worlds feel real and lived in. We're rewarded for paying attention, provoked into asking questions and imagining answers, and immersed even further into the parks" ("Forensic"). This illustrates how storytelling techniques can tie directly to immersion and deepen the experience to one of the conceptual level. Attractions based on popular literary

properties like Jules Verne or *Harry Potter* can connect the space to the larger narrative, which recalls concepts and emotional reactions from the reading experience. Theme park attractions have also “been thematized and narrativized through through their connection with the entire history of the movies,” so visitors will link attractions to both literary and filmic origins (Linda Williams qtd. in Nelson).

The final attribute mentioned in Wolf’s notion of the conceptual dimension is *emotional immersion*, where the user is emotionally engaged in the concept (49). Though this will depend on a person’s “level of maturity and experience,” theme parks provide a frequent vehicle for this kind of immersion (51). While going to a theme park with family could stimulate emotional response, I presume that he means the storyworld provides the impetus for the engagement. Familiar characters like Harry Potter or Mickey Mouse are easy hooks for engagement, whereas unknown characters will need to deliver a compelling narrative to inspire feeling.

While he did not refer to the theme park immersive world, Gander considers two notions related to immersion as myths: first, needing to be surrounded by extra information (audio, visual, etc.) as more immersive and second, “the belief that an audience who is able to intervene – be active, participatory – in a medium will feel more immersed in the medium” (2). He implies that the more conceptual modes of immersion in storytelling are not connected to technological information and experiencing a story does not always denote agency. Gander views immersion instead as “attention” to the story, “mental construction of a story world,” and an “emotional state, as a response to elements in the story” (5). These are closer to Wolf, and it should be stated that in the theme park immersion concept, details and information are critical, but agency is not always implied. Theme park attractions do feature the visitor participating through motion and experience but not necessarily by taking a lead role in a story. The latter is certainly a common

discussion now because of interactive quests and interactive theatre, but a subset of guests strongly prefers to be immersed through passive experience rather than being active characters.

### **Immersion and Details**

Though it can be inferred from other sections that details are essential to immersion, multiple designers and scholars have remarked on the significance of detail saturation. Details “corroborate every story point, immersing guests in the story idea” according to Hench (78). Visitors “love relevant details” and are “confused” by irrelevant ones (Pickett, “Story... Writing”). To Sklar, the profession is about “creating new worlds,” but “The details are what tell the story of the environments we create” (*One* 163, 166). Wright talks about the many details of the Asia area at Disney’s Animal Kingdom or Frontierland at Disneyland and Magic Kingdom; details connect to placemaking, are “critical” to telling stories in space, can use a multitude of “motifs,” and help establish a “sense of time and place” (*Disney’s Animal* 91; *Disneyland* 46; *Magic* 53). Asia is an example of “elaborate theming” and placemaking accomplished through details (Samuelson and Yegoians 151). Rohde talks about the most essential aspect of details in Asia, its communication potential: “While the environment is visually convincing and filled with accurate details, including architectural elements and props made for us by craftspeople in the Himalayas, its real purpose is to convey messages” (“From Myth”). Production designer John Gizienski talks about the fact that looking closely, a visitor could see that the Swiss Family Robinson Treehouse at Disneyland Paris is actually made of parts of boats. He says that “Everything should be meaningful, that makes all the difference” (qtd. in Littaye and Ghez 144). This can be read in two ways: one, that each detail should have symbolic appeal and fit within a story instead of being random props and two, that details can have meaning in the overall understanding of an immersive environment.

Whether it is story or another message, details are a noticeable feature of the immersion model. Details, in addition to possibly the more prominent role of the guest, are precisely what makes an immersive space an immersive world. One Imagineering book emphasizes the importance of details: “Detail is a passive but hugely powerful tool,” “Details can tell, or reinforce, a story,” and “Detail helps plunge Guests into the story, providing a seamless environment where nothing intrudes to break the mood” (*Walt...Magic More Real* 86). Disneyland had details, as Imagineers ensured “all elements big and small enhanced the visual storytelling” (Knight 10). It is remembering the “tiny details” at Disneyland that inspired Gary Norton to create the theme park Silverwood (259). He continued the tradition by creating “little gems of perfection found throughout the park that will enrich a guest’s experience” (231). The level of detail in some of the newer immersive worlds is incredible.

Other spaces like Seuss Landing at Islands of Adventure have been associated with detail: “There was a lot of lavish attention paid to the details even down to the signage” (Hetteema qtd. in Gennaway, *Universal* 187). It was a park “based on stories and immersion into those stories” and this was accomplished through minute details that related back to those stories (Hetteema qtd. in “Phil”). Likewise, Phantasialand’s Klugheim has an emphasis on detail, from the rockwork mentioned earlier to the wood. Project manager Annette Pieck talks about the woodwork in the land reflecting cultures built around nature and braving the elements; their “robust building techniques, artistic ornaments, and mystic symbols all form the basis for the buildings in Klugheim” (Buhl, “Born”). She particularly reflects on the symbolic importance of the dragon throughout the land, including its function as a protective mark on houses. Christian Buhl describes how wood sculptor Björn Poppinga created original works in wood, lending the land a “unique essence” (“Born”). Poppinga comments, “It’s a great feeling to use classic

handicraft to contribute to the creation of a new themed world. The fact that even the wooden dragons on the roofs were crafted using traditional manual techniques is truly incredible” (qtd. in Buhl, “Born”). This includes hand scorching the wood for color and depth. Using craftsman to build aspects of themed lands illustrates the high expectations for details and even unique pieces of art; it also counters the notion of theme parks as only mass-produced, standardized ventures.

I would argue that certain new traditional theme parks like Tokyo DisneySea and Disney’s Animal Kingdom already embodied the deep immersion concept. Critic Susan Willis refers to Disney’s Animal Kingdom as one of the “most meticulously themed environments on the planet,” one that “overwhelms the visitors with sensory cues” (60). Cornelius Holtorf asserts that the details and “narrative placemaking” at Disney’s Animal Kingdom lend it a quality called “pastness,” a perception of authenticity built into objects (27). He quotes Rohde, who says, “There are details within details within details to anchor you in the fact that we are talking about the real world, not a children’s book fantasy world” (28). Cogently, Rohde refers to details as the “inner berm,” with the outer berm being the physical barrier or separation space between the visitor and the real world. The inner berm adds an additional layer of protection from the real world. He maintains: “Detail exists for only one reason, to uphold the narrative reality of the story being told” (“Detail”). Designers avoid contradictions and use “saturation” of details to help visitors “surrender” to the story (Rohde, “Detail”). Spaces like these have widened the gap between theme and amusement parks.

To achieve the layers necessary for immersive worlds, theme parks “need depth” (Rohde, “From Myth”). Younger’s descriptions of new traditional design style, now the “dominant form of theme park design” exemplify this necessity (159). This style focuses on immersion and explicit storytelling; it represents both a “maturation” of the theme park medium (with the theme

park being considered a “singular attraction type” rather than merely an amalgam) and designers’ prerogative of “story as their differentiation tool” (Younger 157, 156). Sotto operates with a related idea he terms “systems of story” (qtd. in “The Immersion”). He designs using a “holistic” approach (focusing on both macro and micro) to create immersion, which is achieved “when all visual and sensory cues align to place you in an alternate reality” (qtd. in “The Immersion”). Sotto uses the metaphor of the designer as the conductor of a symphony who needs good musicians and techniques to create an emotional experience for visitors. He explains this by using the metaphor of a book: “All of these elements play together within a system that reinforces the story. Immersion is the binding of the storybook that keeps everything intact. That fragile binding that can be broken by a single flawed detail, reminding us that it’s only a book and taking us out of the story itself” (qtd. in “The Immersion”). Whether looking at it as layers or concentricity or systems, the idea is overlapping strata of sensory and mental information encompassing a visitor.

### **Single-Property Immersion**

Immersive worlds have also come to mean single-property lands that have berms around them and contain hyperdetailed space. These include Carsland at Disney California Adventure, Arthur and the Kingdom of the Invisibles at Europa-Park, Treasure Cove at Shanghai Disneyland, and though older, Mickey’s Toontown at Disneyland and Tokyo Disneyland, or Mysterious Island at Tokyo DisneySea. Non-single IP lands exist such as Harambe and Asia at Disney’s Animal Kingdom, the Medieval City at Puy du Fou, Sunset Boulevard at Disney’s Hollywood Studios, Song Dynasty Town at Songcheng, Klugheim at Phantasialand, and the original immersive street, Main Street, U.S.A. In these spaces, “people step inside the worlds of our stories” according to creative executive Vicki Dobbs Beck (qtd. in Bishop, “Disney’s Star



Wars Land”). Most commonly discussed as the paragon of the immersive world, the Wizarding World of Harry Potter at Universal Orlando (with the Hogsmeade area now at Universal Japan and Universal Hollywood too), is considered to have raised the bar with design.

The Wizarding World of Harry Potter (2010 in Orlando) was a “game changer for Universal and the theme park industry in setting a new standard of design” as well as “business impact” (Gennawey, *Universal* 238, 241). Pickett notes that the land is an “extraordinary high watermark” with the “sense of having stepped right into the story” and the “extraordinary level of detail and opportunity for immersion” (personal interview). Coup concurs: “the project set the bar so much higher in the industry” (qtd. in “Q&A”). This was their goal, as Osterman attests: “The goal with Potter was to just raise the bar so much higher. That’s about you being totally immersed; you get rid of anything that looks like a theme park and make it look like a real magical environment. Everything supported the story and the experience.” Author J.K. Rowling had final approval so “the story took precedence over the standard operating procedures” (Gennawey, *Universal* 238). With the addition of Diagon Alley in 2014, “Universal created the first centrally themed, multipark experience” (Gennawey, *Universal* 246). Gilmore terms it a “new level of experience” (qtd. in Porges, “How”). Designers wanted it to “feel like a real town, except with the language of Harry Potter” (Gilmore qtd. in Stamp). Creative director Adam Bezark reveals a major impact on the industry: “Diagon Alley proved beyond a doubt that people will love to wander an ‘E-ticket’ space, as well as go on a ride” (qtd. in Eades, “Disneyland”). Generally, the old Disney ticketing system is referred to when trying to express the thrill and quality of a particular ride (with an A ticket being synonymous with mild and an E ticket being the most elaborate or exciting attractions). In the quote, Bezark observes that visitors are there to interact with the space itself as much as go on the rides. A panel on Pandora – The World of

*Avatar* likewise argued that “area development,” the creation of the space between the attractions, is now an attraction itself (“The Making of”). The design of the land is the attraction and not merely the vessel to deliver attractions.

They relied on many techniques to get the Wizarding World of Harry Potter to this status. Coup notes that this is indeed a “true three-dimensional world” where the “depth of storytelling is incredible” (qtd. in “Q&A”). Hover finds that it is a “true storyworld...where retail shops and restaurants are not just part of the theme park services but are part of the immersive experience” (personal interview). Gilmore describes how props, including actual props from the *Harry Potter* films, contribute to “one seamless place” (qtd. in Hill, “Universal”). Storytelling is a key component, as visitors can watch the stories of their favorite *Harry Potter* characters and then create their own place in the storyworld. Before the opening of the land, according to Roddy,

The attention to detail and immersive set design is unbelievable. It is going to be one of the best examples of an intellectual property brought to life. Like T23D, and the Simpsons attractions, the original creators have a major involvement in the creation. For Universal’s creative team, I believe it will be their finest hour. As far as the impact it will have on the industry, I personally think that it will set a new mark that will be referenced anytime an attraction is being designed based on an intellectual property. (qtd. in Emerson, “On”)

The building design in particular was a notable achievement, according to producer Paul Daurio: “These are unbuildable. There are no right angles. Nothing is square or plumb. Everything’s wonky” (qtd. in Leonard and Palmeri). The park also included “heavily themed retail shops with exclusive merchandise,” so it was bound to both make a lot of money and provide fans

opportunities for more engagement with the property (Gennawey, *Universal* 247). Gilmore relates the amount of detail here to a museum:

There are thousands of items everywhere. In the shops, in the castle. Everywhere are these amazing objects that add that layering of detail so it is actually a real place. We want to make it a museum so you can sort of find something and say “Hey, look this is the actual book” that certain character might have held or “this is the actual chair” a certain character might have sat on. (qtd. in Porges, “How”)

This illustrates that just in the way that museums have become more theme park-like, theme parks can resemble museums with authentic or recreated artifacts.

Coup calls *Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey* (fig. 32) the “the ultimate immersive experience” (qtd. in Hill, “Universal”). In a separate article on the Wizarding World, I argue that the land embodies the key immersive worlds concepts from themed design as well as some new media principles (transmedia storytelling, participatory culture, remediation, and convergence, the final two of which will be discussed in the next chapter) (“Universal”). Through the employment of effective techniques, the land became heavily talked about in popular culture and fan circles, actually helping visitors understand what it is that they want in a theme park.



Figure 32: Hogwarts Castle, exterior of *Harry Potter and the Forbidden Journey* at Universal Studios Hollywood (Photo: Breakfast221, Wikimedia Commons)

The next acclaimed immersive world is Pandora – *The World of Avatar* (2017) at Disney’s Animal Kingdom, a space that proves every square inch can be detailed and contribute to storytelling. Ashley Rodriguez notes that Pandora is “More than a mere ride, each element feeds a broader narrative designed to transport park-goers into the alien world of James Cameron’s *Avatar*.” Like Bezark mentioned with *Wizarding World of Harry Potter*, sculptor Zsolt Hormay notes that in Pandora, it is more than the space just “leading you into a ride” as “the land itself is an attraction” (“#VISIT...A National”). One reason for its effectiveness is that it is all part of an “immersive single story”; guests are “walking out of the world and into a completely contained story” (Rohde, “#VISIT...A National”). Chapek emphasizes the role of employees (“cast members” at Disney) in the creation of this elaborate storyworld as they “populate the land” and “drive the land’s story home” (“#VISIT...A National”).

Emotion is important in the land. According to Rohde, “The attractions have very deliberate emotional moments crafted into them, the way a good story does, the way a good film

does. It's not as simple as just coming to a place that looks realistic. It's a place that's been deliberately imbued with the emotions of awe, of wonder, of respect, of harmony” (qtd. in Padilla). Rohde notes that it is designed with emotion in mind: “It’s very deliberately emotionally crafted. It is a very emotional place” (qtd. in Pedicini, “Disney Plans”). Architectural features like the floating mountains are “deliberately made to evoke emotion, to make you feel awe” (qtd. in Pedicini, “Disney Plans”). Seth Porges refers to the land as “immersive theater on a grand scale” and Rohde offers that “The entire burden of performance is on the place itself” (fig. 33) (“Everything”; qtd. in Pedicini, “First”). This illustrates the convergence of architecture and theatre, with both containing emotional resonance.



Figure 33: Pandora’s floating mountains and Flight of Passage queue area (Photos: Author)

Like with Wizarding World of Harry Potter, many things help with immersion including the visual environment, ride experiences, employees, soundscape, smells, the shop, and restaurant. The queue design is “immersive and about place” according to Otte. Restaurants and stores have this expectation as well. Show writer Fangxing Pitcher notes that at a store in Shanghai Disneyland, for instance, “We created the story, and the designers made the story visible in the store” (qtd. in Feiran). Even the merchandise can help with total immersion, and the merchandise can be an extension of story. Steven Miller observes regarding Pandora that the

popular banshee toys (set up in a rookery environment) “continue the immersive tradition of storytelling” (“Connect”). Cody Hampton of Disney Merchandise explains, “We love bringing to life stories from our attractions through creative and innovative product designs” (qtd. in Miller, “Connect”). Miller refers to the store itself as an “immersive shopping experience” and a space that will “immerse guests in their in-park experience” as well as guests to “immerse themselves in Na’vi culture” (“Windtraders”). It is aestheticizing consumption, but the store explains part of the land’s story, both the good (a store occupying the former site of the exploiters at the RDA) and the bad (the Na’vi are apparently commercializing their culture). Chef Robert Adams refers to the restaurant menu as “as immersive as everything else in the land,” illustrating that food and beverage locations can serve the story as well (“#VISIT...F&B”).

To even further add to immersion and connect with social media culture, perhaps, Rohde brought his discussions outside of the park completely with Instagram posts about a Pandoran pest called the Velocivirus and water conservation. This works as a form of marketing but also backstory development, as the fan will go into the space with additional knowledge, which may also increase engagement with the space. There is likewise a mobile application (Connect to Protect) that involves chatting with a Pandoran expert, which leads to making a contribution to real-world animals. Both the internal and external social media here function as *paratexts* and contribute to worldbuilding.

Again, the role of the guest is generally at the forefront in immersive worlds. Baxter explains the connection between story and playing a role: “It’s so story-driven. In our parks, *you* create the story. The most important person is you — how you interact with it, and creating places where there is no one, set way” (qtd. in Niles, “Theme”). In these immersive spaces, then, explicit and implicit storytelling may be present, but there is a continuous interpretive element.

As Rohde says of Pandora, “This is not a revisit of a plotline of a film you already saw. This is your opportunity to go to an amazing world and have adventures of your own. The story is about you” (qtd. in Harpaz). A panel of designers backed up the position that in Pandora, the story is not about the film characters but about the individual guest experiencing the setting (“The Making of”). In Flight of Passage, it is important that the visitor is, as Hellwig says, “experiencing this story first-person” (qtd. in Gaudiosi, “For”). If any attraction is purposefully representative of the hero’s journey, it is Flight of Passage. Nonetheless, Rohde finds that all of Pandora is based on myth; even the animals are “psychological ideas turned into stories with characters” (qtd. in “Pandora”). Immersive worlds especially may be heavy on symbolic language and myth-driven images.

Not all immersive experiences are necessarily based in explicit storytelling. The slow-moving boat ride is almost purely environmental; he says the attraction is about “the immediate physical experience of each person in that space” (qtd. in Padilla). The goal of the Na’vi River Journey, according to Rohde, was “just plain beauty” (qtd. in Martens, “A Visit”). It illustrates that environmental storytelling and thematic rather than plot-based attractions still exist.

Production designer Joe Cashman explains the symbolism in the ride:

Each of the vignettes, as you move down the river, tell a different emotional tale. You start in a cave, with it being mysterious, and then the next scene is a little bit dangerous. Then the scene with the fan lizards and the animals overhead is whimsical. And then you move on to grandeur, and you keep moving down to the river to this celebratory, spiritual experience at the end. (qtd. in Bishop, “Disney’s Most”)

It is poetry rather than plot, showing that individual role-playing is not restricted to overt narrative. It is also a reminder that bi-narrative structure is not a requirement in theme parks as long as the experiential story, the guest's journey, is in place.

Na'vi River Journey is also instructive in distinguishing immersive worlds from the more directed, scene-based, filmic rides such as Omnimovers or track-based dark rides. Unlike those, a boat ride is more environmental and open world, as artist Stephan Martiniere describes, "A boat ride is meant to be a very immersive experience; while the boat is controlled by an underwater track, the audience has the freedom to look in all directions." Because of this, areas must be "dynamic and full of detail" though with some points of "visual interest" to attempt some kind of direction (Martiniere). With Na'vi River Journey, there is a balance between "lush" details and the brain's ability to "fill in the gaps" so the designer can avoid oversaturation. Martiniere also points out the "emotional buildup throughout the ride" and the "journey" of the visitor, both revealing that even in a more poetic attraction there are structures and storytelling features.

The next expected impactful immersive world is the *Star Wars*-based land, *Star Wars: Galaxy's Edge* coming to Disneyland and Disney's Hollywood Studios. Reports about the *Star Wars* land include a "reputation" system: visitors choose which factions to be in, and the person's path is tracked. The two rides are likely to have more guest involvement in the storyline than normal, which would bring the experience closer to immersive theatre. Kischuk presents more role playing as a positive direction:

Theme park rides are still, for the most part, spectator experiences in which technology is used to pique as many senses as possible. But I think that we will more and more have attractions where the guest has an effect on the experience, environment and storyline,



rather than just being considered a ‘character’ in the story but not actually having any effect on it. (personal interview)

Bishop refers to this notion in the *Star Wars* land as “Mapping interactive, narrative storytelling tracks onto a real-world location,” drawing on the principles of immersive theatre and the aforementioned palimpsest (“Watch”). Creative executive Doug Chiang calls it “a 14-acre movie set that’s real,” bringing the concept of Disneyland being a film set full circle (qtd. in Bishop, “Watch”). However, he additionally describes why it is different from film: “Film sets are meant to be temporary they only need to last maybe a week or a month or however long it takes to shoot it. Construction for the parks however are completely real. It requires a level of authenticity that is unparalleled” (qtd. in Libbey). Its three-dimensional quality means it cannot be a temporary façade. Trowbridge describes the marketplace and its availability of “fragrances and spices and clothes and toys and equipment from all across the galaxy,” cementing the ideas of immersion and detail saturation (qtd. in Wynne). As creative director Chris Beatty mentions, their goal is to “create a place that is so authentic, so real, that when our guests step inside, they are there. They are in the movie” (qtd. in Wynne). There will be a physical berm as well as the detail berm to ensure that this level of immersion is present. Trowbridge points out that they are “working hard to get the details right” but also that there will be a “depth of storytelling” to be found in the space with even the merchandise stands and fare “completely in-story.”

Film director Rian Johnson explicitly mentions its being total immersion: “You walk in there, and everything from being in the environment, to having random characters that you actually interact with...everything about it is just about total immersion” (qtd. in Bishop, “Watch”). Designer Jeffs believes this is where the industry is headed: “From the standpoint of ‘what’s next,’ we are moving towards total immersion – fully-realized story worlds where all

five senses are ‘in character’” (qtd. in Palicki, “The Goddard”). Since *Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge* is sure to become one of the most successful theme parks land in the world, it will probably continue to drive the industry towards the principles of total immersion. As Jeffs reiterates, “the future of storytelling in theme parks would be full-scale immersion – the one experience that is not available in any other mass-market entertainment medium” (personal interview).

Though immersion is the current paradigm, there are other techniques still used including explicit artificiality (e.g. the behind-the-scenes attractions at Bollywood Parks) and grand show models (e.g. productions at Puy du Fou). Jenkins still sees a tension between “spectacle and immersion” in theme parks with the spectacle part evident in shows or technologies like animatronics or immersion, which allows us to have a “more transparent relationship to the fictional world, to enter into the story” (personal interview). The difference is one of the relationship between “the guest and the depicted world” (personal interview). Even in much older attractions at Disneyland there was an “acknowledgement of our presence” by way of particular symbolic features; he mentions the cars in Mr. Toad’s Wild Ride as an example or the “feather you are given when you wait in line for the Dumbo rides” because it is a “transitional object which allows guests to become more a part of the fantasy the ride reproduces” (Jenkins, personal interview). However, as is evidenced in the varying participation with large-scale immersive theatre, not all guests prefer immersion; plenty of visitors would prefer to sit back and enjoy a spectacle. Because of stylistic differences and guest preferences, then, theme parks may never be totally immersive, but that is a dominant value of the contemporary industry.

The idea of immersion could be one way in which theme parks contributed to the advancement of storytelling. According to Osterman, because of lands like the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, “we are actually broadening our view of story.” What “guests consider a story

changes, evolves,” according to him. He cites the Internet, video games, cosplay, and augmented or virtual reality as influences on the guests’ perception of story. He finds that the immersive world was not only a “turning point” for the company and for the industry because it was a “whole different way of looking at storytelling.” Osterman continues, “I think what Potter proved, both phases, is that the placemaking can *be* the story”; “it *is* the story.” Instead of setting or a storyworld being perceived as a background, inhabiting the world is a different way to conceive the idea of story. Osterman concludes, “It’s so compelling, so that’s a whole level of storytelling.” Storytelling is no longer only a layering of a plot on top of a world in this conception. The world itself has become the mechanism for storytelling or even the story itself.

In a similar way, Pandora: The World of *Avatar* advanced the facilitation of IPs and illustrated a continuum of guest involvement. Earlier immersive worlds like Mysterious Island were about visiting a different world. The single-property immersive worlds were about watching characters from favorite stories and occasionally having a role in someone else’s story. In Pandora, as indicated, the story is about the individual visitor, allowing for a narrative customization not always seen in immersive worlds.

Immersive spaces are generally still called “land” or “world,” but one wonders if eventually these tags that hint at constructedness will be dropped (i.e. “Hogsmeade” instead of “The Wizarding World of Harry Potter – Hogsmeade” or “Pandora” instead of “Pandora – The World of *Avatar*”). *Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge* still maintains the IP title instead of being called Batuu, the name of the planet it is meant to depict. In the future, perhaps these worlds will be immersive to the point that the name of the property will be so obvious in construction that explicit mention of it will not be necessary. There is also the possibility of an entire theme park functioning as an immersive world. Guests and the press are already referring to immersive

worlds like the Wizarding World and Pandora as separate entities like a “*Harry Potter* theme park” and an “*Avatar* theme park.” This demonstrates that the public already considers these cutting edge areas in theme parks as distinctly different from their predecessors. This is despite the fact that newer immersive lands often have only a few major and minor attractions and may not even be the largest or most fully featured land in the parks they reside in.

### **Other Themed Entertainment Types**

Though this project is primarily about theme parks, there are other areas for themed entertainment including casinos, cruise ships, dinner shows, escape rooms, haunted houses, interactive theatre, and waterparks. This section will focus on a few of these forms, as theme parks inspire these forms of entertainment, and in turn, they influence theme parks (a couple of theme parks now have escape games and interactive theatre, for instance). Industry executive Andreas Andersen explains the “blurred lines” between these medium genres:

We are all becoming hybrids. We all borrow from each other and we offer varied experiences to our guests, all in the name of remaining relevant to our guests.

Museums use theming and storytelling with interactive animatronics. Theme parks add large scale aquariums or safari experiences. Zoos add family rides such as trains and carousels to broaden the appeal and lengthen the stay of the visit.

Spatial storytelling is used in these entertainment types as well, so they relate to theme parks in some important ways.

Halloween events are seasonal entertainment and generally consist of theme park installations (the most popular being Halloween Horror Nights at Universal and Halloween Haunt at Cedar Fair, Fright Nights at Europa-Park), organization and attraction installations (like Dark Harbor at the Queen Mary ship attraction), and independent and private events (like the

traditional A Petrified Forest in Florida or the more advanced Into the Black in California, which includes a story-driven pre-show that establishes context). Most of the Halloween attractions are called “mazes” or “haunted houses.” Some are like theme park attractions, where each house has a particular setting and theme. Others, like The Haunted Graveyard at Lake Compounce, are quite long and go through multiple settings within one experience. Conventionally, mazes have focused primarily on gore and disturbing imagery with no particular storyline. These showcase genre traditions based on settings with scary elements (i.e. forest, sanitarium, fantasy, aliens, corn field, bayou, nightclub, circus, slaughterhouse, the West). Increasingly, however, Halloween events are looking to integrate more storytelling into their haunted houses. Several are based on literary stories (*Alice in Wonderland*, Edgar Allan Poe works), particular historical events (like the Knott’s Berry Farm’s “Terror of London” maze about Jack the Ripper), or even theme park experiences (like Haunted Mansion, or the Knott’s Berry Farm maze “Dark Ride”). The houses that focus on well-known stories often take a satirical approach to add the element of comedy to an otherwise strictly horror-based norm. The most recent addition to Halloween events has been the use of IPs, often centered around classic or contemporary horror movies (like *Nightmare on Elm Street* or *The Grudge*). Parks are leveraging guests’ prior engagement with these narratives, which aids in telling more in-depth stories.

Having been to around a dozen “scary” Halloween events over the years, I can say it is evident that there is no consensus in terms of the presence of storytelling. Haunt mazes tend to operate within the horror genre and utilize either genre traditions or IP whether they are at low-budget installations (which often rely on simple gags and props) or high-technology, high-production value installations like Halloween Horror Nights (which uses the film tradition to create walkthrough movie sets with *The Shining* maze a good example of incorporating

technology to reproduce a filmic nature). The techniques discussed in theme park design tend to be replicated in haunted attractions (i.e. characters, music, theatre and film influence, and occasionally newer concepts like 3D, interactivity, and virtual reality). At Knott's Berry Farm, visitors can pay an additional fee to obtain a "skeleton key" which unlocks exclusive areas of haunted houses where additional plot elements are presented. While not all have clear plots, there has been "greater focus on storytelling and attention to detail" with some more recent annual haunts (MacDonald, "Knott's). The great majority of these events rely on setting and visual storytelling even when not including plot or character.

Escape games are an emerging form of entertainment that has really taken off in the last few years with hundreds of implementations worldwide. This kind of location-based entertainment involves being "locked" in a small room or set of rooms with puzzles to solve to get out of the room before time (generally an hour) expires. This form could be considered as akin to video games in that they can be separated into gameplay, storytelling, and environment. It is possible to have escape games without storytelling and still be immersive. Nonetheless, many venues have elected to add storytelling components to increase engagement. The best example of this I personally experienced is the Budapest Express escape room at Escapology. The room has traditional escape game elements like puzzles to solve, things to unlock, an hour time limit, and rooms with a train motif and props. It adds a strong plot element with the visitor needing to solve a 1931 murder on a train during a snowstorm, recalling Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (and a prop in the space is one of her books) though with a different cast of characters and solution. Clues are hidden in the space and clear motives are established for each character; not solving the mystery/escaping means hypothetical "death" for the visitor. The room is filled with theme design principles including sound effects, music, projected snow in a window, and

spatial orientation (locations of clues are important to solve the puzzle), but the storyline is what elevates the experience. Conversely, another room I visited had a plot, but the props and clues within the room were essentially décor with little connection to the overarching story (solving puzzles was the entirety of the mission).

Chris from Escape Authority, an escape games fan group, insists that “story matters,” even in an interactive game experience. He suggests establishing a clear backstory and worldbuilding for the room, so the player knows where they are. Next, he urges a clear role for the player: “to be immersed into a story world, we must hold a clearly defined, active role within it.” Finally, the urgency of the time limit needs to be explained via the narrative. Chris explains that it is easier to achieve high-level story than high-quality scenic details. Unlike many other forms of themed entertainment, escape games are generally not repeatable experiences. A storyline, however, may make them more memorable. Josh Young, a creative director of escape rooms, concurs with the necessity of story:

Yes, I absolutely agree that storytelling is crucial in escape rooms. I have played an escape room that had no central story, just a series of puzzles that came out of boxes. While the puzzles were interesting, there was no connective tissue that tied the experience together. I personally try and drive story-driven content at my escape room away from the actual “escape” being the final goal. Instead, I focus on objectives to accomplish and not a code to exit the room. For example, if the goal is to get information, why does that final goal give us a five digit code to exit the room? In the story (unless the room was going to explode or we were trapped)... it makes no sense. (personal interview)

Young also comments on the marketing and terminology surrounding escape games:

But the term “escape” gets taken too literally in this industry. On the flip side, when it comes to customers understanding just what an escape room is, the term has become common place. So if you name your venue an “adventure room,” you have an even harder hill to climb explaining just what that is. As it is now, escape rooms have to explain what they are (even after people have booked a reservation) every single day to about 70% of most paying customers. In my opinion, what drives the sales is story driven content. Maybe they aren't exactly sure what an escape room is or what to do, but they do like pirates or aliens or a spy themed game. That is what draws people in. (personal interview)

Escape games face the same kind of identity crisis that video games have. Is it a story or a game? Young's comments illustrate that tying in stories can make the design better, and Chris finds that the players' experience is likewise augmented. Since this is an emerging form of entertainment, it will be interesting to see where it goes from here.

According to Jeffs, there has been a “rise of immersive theatre offerings.” Seth Porges refers to some of the interactive, immersive theatre shows including *Then She Fell* and the most famous, *Sleep No More*, an experience mentioned by multiple theme park designers. Storytelling is essential in these kinds of experiences as is the element of visitors role-playing within stories. Artistic director Zach Morris states, “We wanted to build experience where the audience could build their own narrative” (qtd. in Porges, “Theater”). Porges compares these theatrical productions to a *Zelda* video game or *Choose Your Own Adventure* novel and Morris explains:

It's a little bit like the game *Myst*. We actually did a lot of thinking about game design, about the difference between a branching narrative and an object-oriented design, and



figuring out the way that we could create a theatrical convention where, whenever a user was engaging with something, it would further their narrative. (qtd. in Porges, “Theater”) Though this is certainly a more experimental art form than the mainstream theme park, these are starting to collide, as theme parks are installing similar things like Ghost Town Alive! or the eventual *Star Wars* hotel. Similarly, Meow Wolf, an immersive art facility with narrative components, has some rooms that strongly resemble theme park areas.

Disney has been using techniques of “place-making” outside the berm for decades including cruise lines and hotels (*Walt...Magic More Real* 160). Even The Disney Store has had instances of motifs and figures, which has now connected to the theme parks, with the store doing live broadcasts of the “famous parades” from Disneyland and Walt Disney World and digitized fireworks (La Monica). The levels of storytelling on Disney’s cruise ships has increased over the years, as they have gone through multiple shows based on films, immersive elements like virtual portholes, and interactive quests like the Midship Detective Agency. There has likewise been a progression in the lodging circuit from no thematic identity (the impression of “modern” or “contemporary”) to motif (this hotel is “Victorian” or “Polynesian”) to immersive spaces with backstories. The recent refurbishment of Wilderness Lodge Resort at Walt Disney World, for instance, added decorative elements that connected to an overall story of the hotel’s mining history, which was laid on top of clear thematic identity (National Park-style lodge, pine tree setting, and a working but manmade geyser).

One of the key aspects of theme hotels now is guests becoming a part of the storyworld of that hotel, for example the Castle Hotel at Legoland Windsor or the hotels at Europa-Park (fig. 34), Phantasialand, Puy du Fou, and Walt Disney World.



Figure 34: Leonardo da Vinci-inspired room at Hotel Colosseo, Europa-Park (Photo: Author)

Hotels that pair with casinos in Las Vegas are known for motifs and occasional storytelling, with Caesar's Palace having a show called Fall of Atlantis that could be placed within a theme park (and, in fact, there have been multiple theme parks or themed attractions within the Las Vegas entertainment district including Adventuredome, Star Trek: The Experience, and the former MGM Grand Adventures Theme Park). Originally, hotels like Treasure Island and Excalibur had elaborate live shows (some including animatronics, effects, and storylines) meant to draw in business from passersby on The Strip. An interesting example of hotel storytelling, the Klaus K hotel in Finland, used "narrative techniques and dramaturgy" to create contemporary lodgings inspired by the "Finnish folklore" of the *Kalevala*, down to splitting the hotel into dark and light to replicate the "strong contrasts" of the stories (Mossberg 205). It is common now to see traditional hotels with pay-extra theme rooms. The *Star Wars* hotel is expected to be, as mentioned earlier, the most immersive hotel yet created, which Dennis Spiegel says will be a turning point: "It's the first step in the evolution of what we're going to see as themed hotels, not only in theme parks but in the hotel industry in general" (qtd. in Sampson).

The first waterpark, River Country, had a setting and theme but little story. The first full-fledged waterpark, Wet 'n' Wild, did not have most of these features in the beginning. George Millay, the creator of Wet 'n' Wild and SeaWorld, had a role of “innovation more than one of invention” but like Walt Disney “created a new genre of park” by pioneering both “the sea life park and the water park” (O’Brien 194, 205, 297). Though he “nearly always stayed away from intricate themeing and storytelling,” Wet 'n' Wild would have the first water slide with a storyline in Black Hole (1990) (O’Brien 316, 210). Tim O’Brien argues that, “It works and became the first major themed waterpark ride in the world” (210). Since then, waterparks are known for employing motifs and occasionally themes; several parks, like Disney’s Typhoon Lagoon and Blizzard Beach or Universal’s Volcano Bay, have backstories. Yas Waterworld in Abu Dhabi went for a storytelling approach. Johnson observes that the narrative about pearl diving (a regional, historical story) and particular characters (like Dana, a young girl who restores a pearl to her village) “runs through every element of the park” (qtd. in Cramer). In this park, they chose to add the “PearlMaster” story to each attraction, so visitors need to go to each to grasp the whole tale. Since children stay in one area, however, the “water fortress” space has “the whole story and all the characters in one place” (Johnson qtd. in Cramer). Johnson notes that even in this waterpark, “the story drives the design”; he also emphasizes details, experience, and immersion (qtd. in Cramer). He believes that waterparks will trend towards having “culturally relevant attractions,” and like theme parks, “much more meaning” (qtd. in Cramer). Europa-Park’s resort addition includes the Rulantica waterpark with a Norse seafaring backstory and exploration theme, a restaurant related to the Adventure Club of Europe, and Krønåsår, lodging they dub a “museum-hotel” with themed rooms and a connection to the adventuring storyline.

Sometimes making a new themed entertainment concept does not work out as in the case of Six Flags Power Plant (1985-1989), an “urban entertainment center” (put inside a historical building) in Baltimore filled with details, motifs, themes, and storytelling (J. Young, “Six”). It was specifically billed as “not an amusement park.” However, Gary Goddard, one of the key designers on the project, explains that the stipulation against adding any rides doomed the project, as it “could not find an audience” (qtd. in J. Young, “Six”). While it did include walk-throughs, Goddard agrees with the “mantra” of “walk-through’s don’t work” because while inventive uses of space, they may not interest the audience. It likewise included a Magic Lantern Theater (an animatronic and film show) and new characters like Mr. Electro, Proto, and Professor Phineas T. Flagg. None of this would save the space, though, as it lasted only four years. Though there are many fascinating high concepts, in other words, the space still needs to meet the desires and expectations of the target audience, something even harder to do if the themed entertainment form is not as familiar to the visitor. Michigan’s Auto World, another indoor theme complex, met a similar fate though lasted a few more years. What has proven more successful is the hybrid concept of adding amusement and theme park attractions into shopping complexes like Mall of America or West Edmonton Mall.

### **The Use of Themed Entertainment Design in Museums and Heritage Sites**

Decades ago, perhaps it would have made less sense to consider museums or heritage sites in the same breathe as theme parks, though they may all be classified as “visitor attractions.” The contemporary museum, however, has other aspects in common with theme parks including their engagement techniques. Museums have been included right alongside theme parks in the TEA/AECOM *Global Attractions Attendance Report* since 2012. Museums, heritage sites, non-profits, and even city exhibits are increasingly designed by themed

entertainment industry professionals. Deborah Philips finds that museums and libraries have used the “marketing techniques and attractions for the theme park in order to compete for funding” (105). Industry researcher Harrison “Buzz” Price goes as far as to say that non-profits apply “Disney showmanship” (175). Creative director Charlie Otte said museums not only “engage in storytelling” more now but use design principles to create exhibits. Industry researcher Gene Jeffers finds other industries “turning to the techniques and approaches developed in theme parks of linking story/narrative with entertainment or educational experiences” (qtd. in Ford). This quote indicates that it is precisely the uses of storytelling that differentiate theme parks. Since themed entertainment has become a paradigm, museums and heritage sites employ similar or the same techniques to have a chance at engaging the generally distracted visitor who has many options for leisure. Museums now have “thematic environments,” high technology, and a move from passive observation to interactivity to the point where “the gap between museums and entertainment venues seem to be narrowing,” even in art and history museums, which had stayed more traditional in approach (Sasha “Museum”). In older museums that are adding these kinds of features, there may be jarring transitions between new and old exhibitions. Nonetheless, as Tuch finds, “Story is important for museums because they’re interpretive environments.” Both storytelling and museums are a form of interpreting the world.

Storytelling has been an essential aspect of redefining the museum space and heritage sites. It is used by designers in these areas and inherently used by visitors. Athinodoros Chronis finds that within heritage sites “People use stories in order to interpret and transmit their experience” (“Tourists” 446). He asserts that tourism itself is “about storytelling” and that sites use storytelling to transform places into attractions (“Between” 1799). There are two key entities in tourism, the staging agent and the visitor. Pine and Gilmore’s notion of the experience

economy is useful here, as organizations have all had to take on the role of creators of theatre to stage experiences rather than just provide services. Museums are likewise associated with “staged authenticity”; even if the artifact or space is not authentic, it should maintain the appearance of reality (MacCannell 99). The organization often uses “commercial techniques” to appeal to visitors (Chronis, “Between” 1799). Those who curate places use *narrative positioning* (stories in marketing), *narrative image* (the projection of the destination through storytelling), and importantly, *narrative staging* (where the space’s “core organizing principle is narrative structure”) to develop experiences (Chronis, “Tourists” 455). They may employ dramatic structure as well with “central plots, coherences, and acting protagonists” (Chronis, “Between” 1799). Chronis says that the real job in marketing a place is selling its “place narrative,” in other words, the constructed story of the place rather than the place itself (1799).

Chronis observes tourist stories, which are imaginary and often emotional narratives. While he recognizes that the storyteller at the site constructs the story, a visitor “contributes to the making of the story” and his or her “imagination functions as a creative agent” (“Tourists” 450). He details the process of this: visitors come to the place with “narrative familiarity”; they are exposed to artifacts, which leads to “narrative enrichment”; they elaborate on what they see with “narrative imagining”; and they organize and interpret what they have experienced with “narrative closure” (453). This process will likely yield different results for each person based on level of narrative familiarity and cultural baggage. Chronis uses the heritage site of Gettysburg to denote that even competing ideologies (in this case, the North and the South cultural regions within the United States) can be supported by the narratives of place (“Between”). While the site may present a particular storytelling scheme, visitors bring cultural variants. Otte mentions a similar issue in the design process for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and Library.

While the creative organization (BRC Imagination Arts) attempted historical accuracy and the most contemporary understandings of the historical figure, reactions might still be mixed for those with preexisting narratives about the American Civil War. Like with theme parks, visitors co-construct narratives. While that aspect of storytelling is not the subject of this dissertation, it is clear that places are defined by stories, whether from the designer or the visitor.

When looking at the museum segment in particular, Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett distinguishes between two ways to display artifacts. The first technique of display is *in context*, which features particular objects that are arranged together based on some kind of taxonomy or relationship determined by curators. The second display scheme is *in situ*, which features set ups like “dioramas, period rooms, and other mimetic re-creations of settings” (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 3). These two differ because of their approaches to the “performativity of objects” (3). *In context* displays allow the “drama of the artifact” to be front and center; “objects are the actors” (3). This mode is more about knowledge dissemination and “exposition,” though a larger historical story can be discerned (3). Conversely, *in situ* displays are “immersive and environmental” and “thematize” instead of offering exposition (3). Some are fully realized virtual worlds in the ways that theme parks have been described as. She considers *in situ* expressions to be *metonymy*, as the particular scene or display substitutes for the whole. This method “enhances the aura of its ‘realness’” as well as privileges the role of culture within environments (19). The “most mimetic” of *in situ* displays, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett observes, are those that include live people representing the culture being showcased (20). What Keith Hollinshead deems “museum towns” or “townscapes” are emblematic of *in situ* design (270).

Kirschenblatt-Gimblett uses Plimoth Plantation as an example of an *in situ* approach. For this research project, I visited two such *in situ* townscapes, Colonial Williamsburg and

Jamestown. Colonial Williamsburg, a museum constructed of multiple edifices on a few streets is billed as the “world’s largest living history museum” and is, with the unfortunate exception of occasional resident cars driving through, quite immersive. Places like these “blur the difference between museum and theme park” (Hochbruck and Schlehe 13). Christina Kerz believes the use of the themed environment “influences the notion of authenticity” despite it being essentially a constructed narrative from the 20<sup>th</sup> century Colonial Revival period (196, 198). Many of the buildings include live people who are either acting in character, interpreting the scene in front of the visitor, or partaking in the actual trades of the time. Actors wear period clothing and use period phrases. It is a strange mix because there is obvious research that goes into each scene, but it is still a contemporary interpretation. Knight refers to criticism that Williamsburg is “history themed, edited, and marketed” (96). Kerz calls it an atmosphere of “performed pastness and secretly sanitized history” (199). Actors rather than historians populate the houses. While slavery is referred to quite a lot, slaves are not being openly abused. Animals are present but treated more humanely, and people are not as crude or malodorous as they really would have been. These are just small things perhaps, but it is a reminder that this is a theatre space and an imaginary reconstruction rather than the “real place.”

There is little denying that the *in situ* approach is effective. While Kerz argues that it means visitors get only some history with their entertainment, it will be more likely to draw those visitors into an interest in history. This is also because the place encourages “active participation from the guests” (Kerz 199). This includes costume rental at the visitor’s center so that children and adults can engage in cosplay. Everyone is encouraged to interact with the people they meet at each site; in fact, a tutorial for this behavior is given in the Welcome to Williamsburg show, the first entertainment visitors are likely to view. Kerz finds that the process



of “atmospheric immersion” is accomplished through five levels and techniques: *gripping*, or bringing the visitor into the setting to spark an interest; *immersing*, or creating a detailed world that does not seem staged (both detailed setting and the presence of many *in media res* narratives where visitors enter in the middle of the action help with this); *unfolding*, where visitors are asked to become participants in “shaping the narrative of Colonial Williamsburg”; *connecting*, when, similar to the Chronis model, visitors connect the new experiences to their lives and “existing archives of emotions and knowledge”; and *fulfilling*, where the new frameworks they have been a part of “become embedded into the visitor’s everyday life” (202-3).

Kerz states that it is important to remember that “the designers of the setting and the stories play an important and powerful role in that process” (204). The designers of this space did take cues from themed entertainment not only in the living history model but in certain interactive aspects. There is even an escape game (Escape the King) in one of the historic buildings, which presents the visitor with a task that takes place in a perceived historic location, adding to the authenticity despite its being a wholly contrived themed entertainment genre. An interesting aspect of this place is that more than at a theme park, it operates with improvisational theatre. When I spoke with Colonial Williamsburg storyteller Donna Wolf, she agreed that it is about 80% improv and 20% scripted, though this varies based on role. Wolf argues that her purpose is to “bring the guest into [her] world” and in general to “create a world,” not dissimilar from a theme park designer or other storytellers. Wolf has numerous roles including live (usually Gaelic) storytelling, acting as particular historical characters, and working as a “trade character,” or a person acting as part of a trade, in this case carpentry, instead of actually apprenticing to the trade. I was able to witness Wolf playing the 18<sup>th</sup> century employee Anne Crosby as she worked in the carpenter yard and interacted with visitors.



Figure 35: Donna Wolf as Anne Crosby, Carpenter Yard of Colonial Williamsburg (Photo: Author)

While talking to a child, she explained what people did historically in the third person but with me, she spoke completely in the first person about her daily life; she later said that a facility with tenses was necessary for this work. She emphasizes the amount of research that went into each role from the interpreters who describe scenes to the “Nation Builders” who play prominent figures (e.g. Thomas Jefferson or James Madison). While these performances are more scripted, they are equally about story.

With the exception of atmospheric immersion perhaps, no technique is more prominent in Colonial Williamsburg than storytelling. The opening show referred to the site’s motto of “sharing America’s enduring story.” Their *Making History* blog creates fake stories about the inhabitants of the town including one on Wolf’s character Sadie Gibbs who puts on Punch and Judy puppet shows that apparently involve “inflammatory rhetoric” (B. Sullivan). Wolf feels that

every role there is about storytelling. Some of this is explicit, with shows that discuss American values of the time like *A Matter of Opinion*, where in the version I viewed, Jefferson and Madison argue with George Mason about supporting free exercise of religion (and responding to guest questions, even regarding current events, in character). Others are implicit, with peppering of clues, for instance in the printing shop where newspapers indicate a colony on the verge of revolution. Environmental storytelling is omnipresent as are “tourists as story-builders” (in the words of Chronis). Kerz mentions that some decried Williamsburg as Disneyesque (in the negative context of commercialization and staged rather than “authentic” experiences), and Wolf admits that she has heard it referred to as “Colonial Disney.” She agrees that it is a theatre piece (in fact, her degree is in acting) and that slavery is not always touched upon with the force it could be. Nonetheless, she finds that even the more “fluffy stuff” she engages in (like the “Cry Witch” interactive show where visitors decide if the defendant is a witch) can still bring in historical knowledge or spark interest in it. Wolf argues that Colonial Williamsburg “cannot survive without [storytelling]. We relate to the abstract in story form, so the place wouldn’t work without storytelling.” Like with Kerz’s thoughts on metonymy, Wolf argues that the “snapshot of life tells a big story,” with visitors understanding more of the entire period through these vignettes. Significantly, Wolf emphasizes the personal background of the storyteller and says performances and relationships change because of this, so perhaps no storytelling is neutral. Either way, Colonial Williamsburg, part museum and part theme park, thrives on using a variety of storytelling techniques to engage guests.

Jamestown and Yorktown provide similarly useful ways to observe *in situ* or *in context* approaches. Jamestown has two sites: Historic Jamestowne, where the actual colony existed and consisting of ruins, and Jamestown Settlement, which includes working outdoor areas, live

actors, and indoor exhibits with theme elements. Similarly, Yorktown Battlefield is the actual site of the battle, whereas the American Revolution Museum includes multi-sensory exhibits, interactive narratives, and live actors. All of the sites are well presented, but in both cases, it can be said that the actual places are the more authentic (both run by the National Park Service), while the immersive attractions are more engaging (both run by the Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation, whose website is perhaps tellingly titled “History Is Fun”). As Kirschenblatt-Gimblett posits, “Tourists travel to actual destinations to experience virtual places,” a statement even more apt for heritage sites than theme parks (9). With the exception of an in-the-round cinema with a rather idealistic film about Jamestown history, Historic Jamestowne did not have much storytelling, though there were some expository interpretative signs. Jamestown Settlement’s outdoor portion, on the other hand, has live actors and people working at trades who tell individual stories. This act is eminently interpretive, as one tradesman at Jamestown casually noted to visitors that members of the remaining Powhatan people helped actors reconcile the inaccuracies in their portrayals even down to appropriate dress. The museum portion uses storytelling techniques throughout including an example where visitors walk inside a ship to listen to a film about the perils of sea voyages, an immersive English street where visitors look at a few artifacts, a couple of environmental storytelling spaces (buildings to walk inside of and experience), and a film vignette where an English colonist (Peter), an African (Masun), and a Native American (Ponnoiske) talk side by side about their experiences in 1620.

A similar juxtaposition exists at Yorktown. While the Yorktown Battlefield had a few interpretive signs and a small museum that featured *in context* artifacts and a couple of hands on exhibits, the land itself is supposed to be the actor, calling for active imaginations to construct historical experience. The American Revolution Museum, on the other hand, offers many more

*in situ* experiences that construct a vision for the visitor. While there were some *in context* artifact displays, there were multiple displays within themed areas, dioramas, films behind windows to be more immersive, a few projection stories, and live actors in an outdoor atmosphere. There were several films counting *Saratoga: The First Great Victory*, which is staged in a tent; *Liberty Fever*, which tells the history of the American Revolution through the personal stories of a small group of regular people; and *Siege at Yorktown*, which uses multi-sensory effects (lighting and fog, scents, noises, and vibrations) to recreate the battle. The American Revolution Museum employs other storytelling technologies such as stations where one can listen to songs or narratives from soldiers on either the English or Colony sides; the interactive art of the Liberty Tree, where guests can write their own views on liberty that then become a part of the art through dynamically changing screens; an interactive graphic novel that connects ideas of the present with that of the past; and the most addictive of the exhibits, Personal Stories of the Revolution (fig. 36), a human-sized touch screen exhibit where visitors can listen to the motivations and stories of various Revolutionary contemporaries (including every character in *Liberty Fever*) and then examine the artifacts associated with those individuals or that type of individual.



Figure 36: Personal Stories of the Revolution at the American Revolution Museum (Photo: Author)

A personality quiz can be taken before the interaction, ensuring that visitors will recognize themselves in at least one of the people living during the time. A list of the people and associated artifacts for this exhibit are in Table 2.

Table 2: Personal Stories of the Revolution at the American Revolution Museum

<b>Name</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Artifacts</b>
Benjamin Whitecuff	Loyalist Spy	Clinton painting, Gibraltar painting, map, saddle maker's tool
Billy Flora	Battle Hero	Great Bridge map, Lord Dunmore Portrait, round hat, hunting shirt
David Fanning	Loyalist Colonel	Haw River Valley map, memoir
Esther de Berdt Reed	Founder of Ladies of Philadelphia	Portrait, Esther's Call to Action, shirt, Sarah F. Bache portrait
Francisco de Miranda	Venezuelan Revolutionary	Spanish coin, King Charles portrait, Siege of Pensacola event, Fort George map
George Hewes	Boston Revolutionary	Tea in bottle, The Bloody Massacre event, Hewes portrait, tricorn hat, shoes
James Lafayette	Patriot Spy	Portrait, Lafayette at Yorktown painting, petition, manumission, handbill
Jemima Condict	Young Diary Writer	Toothkey, political cartoon, loom
Joseph Plum Martin	Patriot Soldier	Ice creepers, sappers' tool, diary
Martha Washington	First Lady	Portrait, A View of Mount Vernon painting, letter, tea bowl
Mary Perth	Freed Slave	Virginia map, prayer meeting, Book of Negroes, Birchtown Muster
Mercy Otis Warren	Patriot Writer	Portrait of Mrs. James Warren, card table, The Adulatur, Washington letter
Molly Brant	Mohawk Loyalist	Johnson portrait, Delft plates, table, glass bottle
Myer Myers	Jewish Silversmith	Bread basket, Torah ornaments, prayer book, minute book
Peter Harris	Catawba Patriot Soldier	Stono Ferry painting
Richard Randolph	Patriot Youth	Miniature painting, letter, inkwell, dominoes
Sarah Osborne	Patriot Woman	Photograph, pension application, cannonball
Shadrack Furman	Loyalist Farmer	Plantation hoes, cockle rake, violin
Trip	Patriot Dog	Button, dog collar, Washington letter, painting of lady and dog
William Augustus Bowles	Loyalist and Indian Ally	Portrait

This list illustrates the diversity of voices (genders, ethnicities, alliances) available in the exhibit but also its obviously constructed nature. Of all of the stories, these stories were curated; of all of the artifacts, these items were selected.

The examples from Virginia's Historic Triangle (Jamestown, Williamsburg, Yorktown) demonstrate that there is a correlation between *in situ* design and not just engagement and immersion but storytelling techniques. It is not only that region, however, as the Beatrix Potter experiences in the Lake District of England had a similar contrast. Numerous visitors go to the Beatrix Potter areas including a large number of Japanese and Chinese tourists. There is a Beatrix Potter Gallery that showcases her art and an interesting exhibit of her botany paintings at the Armitage Museum and Library; these are *in context* displays. There is Hill Top, her actual house run by the National Trust. Perhaps the most enjoyable part of this site was taking similar walks through the countryside that must have inspired *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and other stories. Even so, the most popular visitor attraction is the World of Beatrix Potter (1991), which is filled with life-size tableaux of many of her stories (fig. 37), a musical with puppets, a media exhibit about the author (Virtual World of Beatrix Potter), a tea shop, a gift shop, and a small garden.





Figure 37: Static scene from The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck from The World of Beatrix Potter (Photo: Author)

While the least “authentic,” as it had few actual artifacts, it was the most whimsical, with many examples of the symbolic and implicit storytelling characteristic of theme parks. It is the only entity here that is commercial, illustrating why non-profits utilize similar methods to compete.

Some organizations add even more obvious theme park installations in their educational spaces. One particular museum, Jorvik Viking Centre in York, England, uses multiple methods to tell the history of Viking-era York: standard *in context* displays of artifacts, a glass floor over an actual excavation site, and a narrated dark ride that recreates the 10<sup>th</sup> century city complete with animatronics, sound effects, and a nauseatingly rancid smell. Museum director Sarah Maltby specifically calls the place an “immersive experience,” “interactive,” and “informative” (qtd. in Whyman 57-8). She comments that the smell is “a very important part of what we represent” and that the sounds (especially of animatronics speaking ancient Norse) are “as authentic as possible,” showcasing the value of immersion (57). There was formerly a preshow

that told a story of a time warp from the present to the past. I first went on this attraction more than a dozen years ago when studying abroad in York, and it struck me at the time as something quite different for museums; however, it actually opened back in 1984, with a re-launch in 2017 following a major flood (adding newer animatronics and projection effects). Museum designer John Sunderland wondered why museum attractions could not be more like movies and thought museums should be immersive. He remembers that Jorvik did approach Disney to do a project like this but settled on Sunderland's group already in Yorkshire (Sunderland 96).

Instead of the standard approaches to archaeology or museum exhibiting, Sunderland designed the Time Car idea, which would be about "transporting people and telling them a story, creating a sense of adventure and anticipation" (161). As he explains, "This level of reconstructive display was new to the museum world, as was the idea of immersing people in it. What we were doing was so unlike a traditional museum that Jorvik's staff was confused at first as to what was real and what was *simulated reality*" (227). Sunderland mentions that to do *in situ* work successfully, it is "essential to carry the illusion convincingly" (227). He believes that the ride was "unique and *very* special," but he also worried that the experience would not be as compelling as the "other violent Viking reality" (228). Likewise, he admits that archaeologists did not know all the specifications for things because history is still mysterious in many cases but asserts that admitting what we do not know is an essential step in "Heritage Interpretation" (209).

The result of the Jorvik dark ride was positive, with high praise and visitation. Sunderland calls himself a storyteller first and believes the attraction was important to interpretation in Britain because it "told a story to people, it de-institutionalized a subject that had very academically presented before, archaeology" (qtd. in Kennedy). Gordon Rankmore of the British Museum concurs that the ride at Jorvik was significant because of its popularizing a

dry subject. He refers to the techniques used in that installation: “Sunderland was one of the first to take artefacts and tableaux out of glass cases, to present them in a realistic setting. He recreated the story and then presented the artefacts later” (qtd. in Kennedy). Nonetheless, like with Williamsburg, the space has had criticism such as the accusations of being a “pop-up-book view of history,” “a new form of theater,” or a “popularization of the past” (Jensen). Lukas calls Jorvik both unique and “perhaps controversial,” though it can further “self-education” (*Theme* 15, 167). Gregory Jensen seems to agree with the British Broadcasting Corporation that Jorvik and its successors (The Oxford Story and Canterbury Pilgrims Way) are “a new art form.” It might have inspired the recent ride Viking Ride – Ragnfrid’s Saga at Vikingaliv in Sweden. This is a dark ride at a Viking museum where a particular Viking woman narrates her and her husband’s life; like Jorvik, both designers and curators worked to create the experience. According to museum executive Elin Karlsson, they are focusing on creating a museum where “facts and stories come together in an exciting way” (qtd. in Gilling, “Dark”). It is interesting that the implication of this quote is that these two are not inherently paired. As Yiannis Gabriel reminds, one must be constantly aware of story’s “juxtaposition to fact” (5).

It would be interesting to determine the line between these Viking rides and a Disney dark ride, as Epcot’s Spaceship Earth (1982 with multiple updates since) has similar elements including a narrated recounting of history, lighting, animatronics, and even fire smells, though Jorvik sits atop an actual archaeological site and Disney has the motive of profit. The key distinction, according to storyteller Kiran Sirah might be the “purpose” of the exhibit or as entertainment design writer Sasha notes, a museum’s “underlying mission to educate and inform the public” (“Museum”). Sirah says that museums are not about entertainment but about “understanding the human experience,” though I would argue storytelling is that at its essence.

Theme parks have historical and educational shows as well, but museums “have a duty to educate and rally behind messages with deeper social, scientific or historical meaning” (Sasha, “Museum”). Thus, the same techniques can be used to create engaging exhibits with various purposes, indicating the power and versatility of themed entertainment.

Other examples exist in the City of York, England. Barley Hall, also run by Jorvik Viking Centre, is a medieval house that uses costumes and role-playing to tell the story of the time, an act that straddles the line between theatre and theme park. The medieval guildhall of the Merchant Adventurer’s Hall is a place-based experience but includes the gamification strategy of a video game that allows role-playing as a merchant. Other place-based attractions include the Undercroft section of York Minster, where visitors can walk on top of or next to and read stories about the Roman era of York. York Minster also hosts the York Mystery Plays, which are large productions of the medieval theatre genre.

The most environmental storytelling in York might be Kirkgate: The Victorian Street at the Castle Museum; this exhibit has sets that can be walked within and its original version in 1938 predates all theme parks. The updated version (2012) of the street resembles theme design, as the street goes from day to night with lighting and sound effects as well as costumed characters (fig. 38). There is a Magic Lantern show that introduces seven characters from Victorian York, and children can walk around with their information cards to role-play. The York Castle Prison exhibit has the real 18<sup>th</sup> century cells that visitors can walk inside of, but in each cell is a projected character talking about his or her story (fig. 38). Another Castle Museum environmental exhibit is 1914: When the World Changed Forever (2014), which recreates scenes and sounds from WWI including the trenches. Like with the Victorian Street, there are five characters (real people) that the visitor can follow around and discover clues about their lives.



Figure 38: York Castle Museum costumed character on Victorian Street, projected character in prison exhibit (Photos: Author)

Storytelling methods are also utilized in Dutch non-profit spaces. One place visited by Walt Disney, Madurodam (1952), a charity and attraction comprised of miniature buildings, is already about “experiencing the great Dutch stories” (Caroline Riemsdag qtd. in “Madurodam”). Miniature buildings and cities are symbolic architecture here, representing not just particular places but the Dutch way of life. In 2015, they installed a show called Hof van Nederland (Court of the Netherlands). The unique, small-space set up comprises sitting around a table and watching a projection story all around the visitor about gaining Dutch independence; it features lighting, sound, and tactile effects. Multi-sensory attractions are, as Madurodam’s Caroline Riemsdag calls them, “a different way of storytelling,” a way that will engage families for “fun education” (qtd. in “Madurodam”). This attraction was a partnership between the non-profit and the themed design company Jora Vision. Project development director Robin van der Want

emphasizes that the attraction had to have a balance between information and entertainment, but mentions too that storytelling will become an important way of operating for Madurodam in the future. He comments on Hof van Nederland's story and technology: "In our opinion a visitor experience is always about the story. Theming creates the right atmosphere, and technology supports as a medium to communicate the story. You should hardly 'see' or 'understand' the technology being used. That is why we made sure that none of the technology is directly visible" (qtd. in "Madurodam"). The 2017 installation Nieuw Amsterdam (New Amsterdam) includes storytelling (learning about, sailing to, and defending 17<sup>th</sup> century New York, with a brief look at the end of what the city has become) and technologies (immersive space with props, projections, film, lighting effects, an animatronic, and interactive cannons that allow children to shoot the English ships on the screen). These experiences are completely immersive and very different from most of the rest of Madurodam, which is about towering over clearly constructed cities.

Also in the Netherlands, Het Spoorwegmuseum, the national railway museum (themed attractions 2005), utilizes elements derived from themed entertainment to engage visitors. This contains a themed luggage room with boxes of miniatures and projected stories inside, an audio-enhanced walking tour where rail pioneer John Middlemiss speaks to the visitor in headphones as visitors walk through an immersive streetscape (De Grote Ontdekking, The Great Discovery), an interactive and elaborately themed train simulator ride (De Vuurproef, or The Fire Test), and a dark ride through scenes of giant trains (Stalen Monsters, or Steel Monsters). The museum includes standard rail museum fare including train stock, and the most emotional moment was certainly when I asked what train car I had walked into and my husband told me it was from Auschwitz. However, the themed design exhibits are effective in interesting visitors in what may be considered a dry subject to those who are not train aficionados or children. In fact, Elizabeth

Alton uses the example of Het Spoorwegmuseum, the Mind Museum in the Philippines, and the Titanic Belfast exhibit as part of the “new wave” of museums that use “storytelling, immersion, cohesive theming, and technology to elevate the museum visitor experience” (“What”).

In the United States, there are other expressions of storytelling technologies that borrow from themed entertainment including a film Otte mentioned in his interview, *The Star of Destiny* (2002) at the Bullock Texas State History Museum. This production is filled with multi-sensory effects (even the touch effect common to 3D theme park movies, in this case to simulate rattlesnakes), projections, layers of screens, and three-dimensional sets. Lynn Denton, former museum director, explains that this installation (from BRC Imagination Arts, a themed entertainment company) was done “to be responsive to not only the changing needs of the museum but the changing needs of the audience” (qtd. in “Star of”). Another show is *Beyond All Boundaries* (2009) at the World War II Museum in New Orleans, which features large-format film, effects, and moving set pieces (J. Young, “Beyond”). This space uses these technologies “all in the service of telling this massive story in a compelling way” (Hetteema qtd. in “Phil”). Even art museums are adding more interactive stories, effects, and augmented reality experiences, illustrating that the museum space is evolving alongside the theme park paradigm.

It is worth noting that perhaps because of its proximity to the Orlando attractions, Kennedy Space Center also added a ride, the Shuttle Launch Experience (2005), a simulator that helps visitors imagine what it was like in the shuttle. Daniel LeBlanc, an executive with site operator Delaware North, mentions that the installation of this ride was part of a “thematic development plan” meant to help “tell the NASA story” (qtd. in Pearlman). The center already had IMAX movies and exhibits like the Apollo 11 moon landing which included dramatic narration, lighting, and music, but this multi-sensory installation made them closer to the theme

park model, as does their use of the aforementioned interactive game Cosmic Quest. The latter was installed, according to executive Therrin Protze, to be an “absolute immersion experience” and “transformational” for their space (qtd. in Dean).

Really, there are dozens of exhibits that could make a list of installations using the principles and techniques of themed design. Not all agree with this methodology, however. Sirah worries about the movement of museums and other non-profits away from *in context* display. He does not want to see a “conveyor belt” where visitors simply learn the designer’s perspective; he desires visitors to have their “own relationship with the object.” This is similar to theme park designers who strongly prefer implicit storytelling to explicit, as they want to inspire the visitor’s imagination in the experience. With curation, though, it seems impossible to remove interpretation about which artifacts matter and how they should be linked or even labeled. Rachel Marie Gilbert finds that *in context* displays “rely on critical distance and analysis of the object to connect the thing to the culture”; the “object is separated from the viewer” (27). Some visitors, especially in this age of continuous technology and distraction as well as the sway of storytelling in daily lives, will not respond to distance like this. Rogers, who worked on the aforementioned Lincoln and Texas projects, declares the limitation of the *in context* approach: “Artifacts have great power, but only if you know their story before you see them. If you know the story of an artifact, its presence can move you deeply. If you don’t know its story, it’s just stuff. At BRC, we are telling stories and creating experiences that release the power of the artifact in a way that will change behavior” (qtd. in Lukas, *Immersive* 216). Nonetheless, the lessening of the imagination in the museum space is a relevant concern that will likely continue to be raised.



## **The General Character of Theme Park Narrative**

This section will summarize the general characteristics of theme park narratives based on this chapter's findings. While "any attraction format can be used in a narrative environment," certain types are more utilized than others as discussed in Chapter 2; these include the dark ride, the show, and the film (Corrado). The standards of narrative are employed in theme parks with a generally traditional approach to story structure. As Jenkins finds, there may also be an "over-reliance on certain sets of conventions" (like the "something goes wrong" trope) that can make a park repetitive (personal interview). Nonetheless, this makes sense because "You want to make it easy for the visitor to accept the role being constructed for them throughout the experience" so roles like "the tourist" crop up again and again (Jenkins, personal interview). Some of the storytelling content is thus repetitive, but it represents popular themes that guests connect with or at least those that are capable of being executed in a short period of time. Theme park stories tend to be visual, spatial, and symbolic, aspects that were detailed in earlier sections. The theme park is very reliant on technology to tell stories, whether old or new technologies. From the first theme park to the most recent, there is an association between storytelling and the technologies that tell stories. Theme parks also utilize some of their medium affordances to create effective narrative. One of the most evident characteristics of the theme park narrative form is its changeability, driven by various design perspectives, market forces, and societal pressures.

After considering a number of techniques and technologies, it is apparent that theme parks are a combination of appropriated and medium-specific attributes, as indicated in Table 3:

Table 3: Snapshot of Borrowed and Medium Techniques and Technologies

Category	Details
<i>Borrowed Techniques, Mediums, and Technologies</i>	Storyboard Symbolic Representation, Narrative Shorthand Architecture, Landscape Tableaux, Dioramas Film Theatre, Shows, Parades, Live Role-Playing, Interactive Theatre, Improv Auditory Storytelling Edutainment Explicit Storytelling Simulators Montage Transmedia Storytelling, Vast Narratives Original Narratives Interactive Quests Video Games Virtual and Augmented Reality
<i>Medium Techniques and Technologies</i>	Show Writing Implicit Storytelling Concentricity Including, Interpretive Storytelling Forensic Stories, Peppering Physical Shorthand Walkthroughs Dark Rides, Interactive Dark Rides Hybrid Rides (Hybrid Genres, Hybrid Virtual/Practical) Roller Coasters, Thrill Rides Audio-Animatronics Explicit Artificiality Simulators as Narrative Device Fireworks and Spectaculars, Projection Shows Environmental Storytelling, Immersive Worlds Bi-narrative Structure, Three-dimensional Staging

As evidenced, theme parks use a number of methods to tell a variety of stories. Unlike some mediums, which may rely on the set of principles associated with that medium, theme parks borrow and create as needed to support narratives. They tell explicit, implicit, symbolic, spatial, experiential, and multi-sensory stories with techniques drawn from multiple disciplines. They employ technologies as old as oral storytelling and written text and as new as interactive digital quests and virtual reality interfaces.

According to Raymond Williams, there are two common perspectives about the cause and effect of technology and society. The first is *technological determinism*, indicating that “social change and progress” is effected when “new technologies are discovered” (293). The second perspective is “less determinist,” with other social factors contributing to societal change and new technologies as “symptoms” of that change (thus *symptomatic technology*) (293). After looking at a few dozen technologies, it is clear that the theme park could be an example of this debate. On the one hand, it seems like the theme park’s history, especially in terms of narrative expression, has been determined by the techniques and technologies available at the time. On the other hand, the theme park itself has changed leisure practices in society and caused a need for new technologies that accommodate this. Themed entertainment companies develop new technologies that make most sense in themed spaces like animatronics or projection systems. They also take the technologies of each time and employ them for their purposes including things like virtual reality or interactive interfaces, which were in turn influenced by a societal desire for interactivity. This need for interactive spaces may have been encouraged by a more networked society or by the advent of technologies that led to increased interactivity. In other words, while theme parks would be a good case study for the execution of technologies and social changes, they will probably not answer this particular “chicken or egg” question.

In terms of the causes and effects with theme park narratives, there are some contexts and forces that have led to the diversification of strategies to tell stories. The most obvious is the continuation of the above notion of technology. As technologies impact society, they tend to be found within the theme parks. Projection shows would not have been thought of even twenty years ago, but now they are viable storytelling devices. Additionally, the intensification of transmedia and convergence has led to a different product, one that represents a conflation of

media platforms and continuous cross-pollination of content channels. This has meant that IPs have become the most dominant source material in all regions.

Next, the industry has become more formalized each decade to the point that now companies exist that can be contracted with to deliver particular technologies (animatronics, fireworks, projection shows, water shows, etc.). There are annual exchanges of ideas including technology vendors at the trade shows or showcases of narrative techniques at industry conferences. Related to formalization but particularly salient to this dissertation, there has been a solidification of the discourse surrounding narrative. While stories have been present within themed spaces since even before the contemporary industry, the public dissemination of narrative perspectives has increased exponentially with the advent of the World Wide Web.

Likely because of a combination of this public dialogue, personal experiences, company brands, industry formalization, and guest responses, there has been a formation or solidification of design styles and paradigms. Companies like Disney, Efteling, SeaWorld, and Universal, for instance have brand identities that influence designs in their spaces. Individual designers prefer certain types of narrative, with an example of this being the debate I observed between those that prefer to create implicit or interpretive narratives and those that want more explicit storytelling. Though the design standpoints of Disney legends Marc Davis and Claude Coats on emphasizing environment or character represent the fact that design debate is an old tradition, designers are now spread around the world and come from numerous schools of thought. These diverse perspectives mean that attractions have continued to change and reflect these personalities.

The path of theme park narrative development resembles that of the plot of *De Sprookjes-Sprokkelaar*. When the young girl Star first visits Castle Libersteyn, she is amazed to find that there are so many doors decorated with intricate ornamentation. Before she can find the fairy tale

library, filled with books and stories, she must work up the courage to go back after her first encounter revealed a room that scared her. Her grandfather encourages her to use her senses to experience the immersive space of the castle and informs her that there are “worlds beyond.” The magic castle is a good symbol for what theme parks do. Not all of the rooms are the same in the castle, and neither are the techniques identical in themed entertainment, but they are all “magic.” Magic has long been a term associated with theme parks, especially because of their fairy tale content, but in the industry, it is human ingenuity that creates enchanted spaces. The library of tales will continue to be consulted in theme parks, and there will be many doors that visitors can traverse to experience. It may be wonder or fear generated from the magic doors, but it is also human experience. Theme parks tell stories and encourage us to experience them, making it not magic nor machine but a very human endeavor.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THEME PARK AS DISTINCT NARRATIVE MEDIUM

Narratology demonstrates that there are some “core concepts that could be translated across media and forms and that all narratives would have in common,” as many forms utilize the same moves and possess narrativity (Cobley). There are also “concepts developed to describe the specificities of particular forms,” or the aspects of a narrative that allows us to distinguish mediums and genres (Cobley). As Angela Ndalians finds with horror media, it is not merely a “simple transfer of codes and conventions from one medium to the next”; instead, “each medium adapts common generic conventions to create experiences required of their own media form” (59). This section will get at what makes theme parks different from other narrative mediums. Frank Rose argues, “If stories themselves are universal, the way we tell them changes with the technology at hand. Every new medium has given rise to a new form of narrative” (2). This project tries to pull out what might be new or changed with the introduction of theme park narrative. Literature from the Texts and Technology approach will be reviewed to find the similarities between theme parks and inspirational mediums. Discussion focuses on differences in the design and experience of the theme park medium. Next, creative professionals and a few scholars provide explicit discussion of what makes the medium distinctive, which will assist in an answer to the subject of its uniqueness. Finally, the chapter looks at the dissemination of information about theme park narratives from professionals at design schools or in the public arena, demonstrating a running artistic discourse.

### **Comparisons to Other Mediums as Explored in Texts and Technology Literature**

This section will synthesize the information on narrative mediums found in the key literature in Texts and Technology. This is not an exhaustive comparison or literature review, but it is meant to compare the theme park with other narrative mediums. It is customary to try to

understand mediums in comparison to one another, as that is often the way to know when something has transcended to become a new medium instead of merely an extension of an older one. As Jason Mittell offers,

It can be difficult to notice how a given medium tells stories on its own terms – we are so used to specific norms associated with the media of literature, film, and television that we often do not dwell on their particular attributes. A useful way to notice a medium’s unique properties is to compare it to another form. (156)

Chapter 4 exercises Mittell’s advice. He suggests that while narrative theory is a good tool for “analyzing elements of storytelling common across a wide range of media,” it is essential to “be aware of the ways that any specific medium creates particular storytelling parameters, constraining some options while enabling others” (156). Similarly, designer David Younger refers to Medium Design, which asks “What can we do in this medium better than any other medium can do?” (90). From oral tale to theme park ride, this is a question that should be asked. Stories are ported from one medium to another, and as creative executive Louis Alfieri confirms, “Bringing a franchise property alive for a real-world location means the realization of a whole new set of storytelling parameters.” While the first part of this chapter compares the theme park to other mediums, the second part will provide some of the differentiated attributes of the theme park as a medium.

Theme parks are *multimodal* texts, or “narrative forms combining a variety of semiotic channels”; in parks, this involves other media types including oral storytelling, theatre, film, simulations, and interactive video games (Ryan, “Narration”). While theme parks predate the digital, they have been influenced by it and Janet Murray considers them the ultimate immersive and narrative vehicle (*Hamlet* 106). Though all forms of media have some relation to space, none

is more pronounced than the theme park. Lev Manovich refers to Disney animators using space as a “space-medium,” but for theme parks, his statement “*space becomes a media type*” is even truer (*The Language* 256, 251). He also sees spatial narratives as an “alternate” to temporal ones, but the physicality of the theme park medium finds both spatial and temporal components ever present (xxxiv). Bryan Bishop groups theme parks with emerging mediums: “mediums like virtual reality, theme parks, and interactive theatre represent the next great frontier in storytelling” (“Disney’s Star Wars Land”). Theme parks, while distinctive, share many similarities with other mediums, a few of which will be discussed in this section.

Before differentiating other mediums, it is useful to note that like any art form, theme parks share the quality of being designed. Brenda Laurel defines art as “the external *representation* of things that happen in the head of the artist” (*Computers* 30). An oral storyteller controls the narrative, the literary writer authors the piece, filmmakers direct, and video game designers shape virtual worlds. Theme park creative professionals equally interpret culture and compose spaces. Creative executive Olaf Vugts explains this process well. Though he advocates for more interpretive and implicit storytelling techniques, he admits that the space is still constructed from the minds or imaginings of the designers. In the Efteling ride Dreamflight, though there is no plot, the guest can only interpret the storyworld the designers built. In explicit attractions, even this much interpretation is difficult. A book, Vugts observes, still allows for the conceptual immersion of designing the storyworld or characters in the mind. Once it is part of a film or the physical space, Vugts admits, “Then I bring it down to earth. I take over your fantasy and bring it into my fantasy.” This is the reality of all design. Talmadge Wright argues that unlike video games, with more user input, “the theme park still reduces the experience to one engineered by the designer” (249). The fact remains that all narrative is designed, and video



games are similarly constrained by the parameters of creators. The theme park visitor still has some navigable space to enter and all mediums invite audience interpretations. Vugts sees the positive in what he calls “story hosting.” The park or designers are hosting stories, and some see it as a responsibility to be good stewards of the story.

### *Oral and Written Narratives*

This section will concentrate on the connections to oral and written narrative. Oral storytelling represents the first kind of narrative, as Jack Zipes reminds: “It is through oral transmission that stories of different kinds form the textures of our lives” (*Irresistible* 7). Walter Ong is known for mentioning both forms, particularly how literate societies have their thoughts restructured by the medium and no longer resemble primarily oral society. He discusses the “additive” nature of oral tales, where new phrases are tagged on to previous ones through the word “and” (making them more “redundant”); with writing, “analytic, reasoned subordination” is more common (making them more “copious”) (37, 39). Additionally, Ong mentions that orality is more episodic and lacks the “epic-size or novel-size climactic linear plot” (140). Theme park scripts are pared down, so they often use neither the “ands” of orality nor the frequent subordinate clauses of literacy, not to mention the total lack of epics and novel-length works. Oral tales are also more “empathetic and participatory” rather than “objectively distanced”; theme park rides have been both at one point in time, though the character-driven attractions tend to be more empathetic (45). Ong finds oral tales to be more “situational” as opposed to “abstract,” and theme park attractions generally share that quality (49).

However, theme park works, while often oral, are certainly all products of “secondary” orality, the orality that stems from written compositions being read aloud (133). Though these oral scripts may still have a “participatory” or “communal” nature as well as the use of structural

formulas, they come from the writing process that is now “deeply interiorized” in modern culture (134, 96). Theme park stories all start with written scripts, so literate practice is engrained in the process of theme park design. Visuals are also used early in the process, something theme parks share with neither oral nor literary texts.

There are similarities between theme parks and the written tradition in addition to the many intellectual properties (IPs) that began on paper. The act of reading would not be opposed to the act of traversing a theme park narrative space, especially if that space is looked at as a text. Teresa Bridgeman states, “To read a narrative is to engage with an alternative world that has its own temporal and narrative structures” (52). These selfsame characteristics are in the theme park. She argues that time and space should not be merely viewed as backgrounds, as moving around the “narrative world” is an essential aspect of the act of reading (55). Time and space are “components of the basic conceptual framework for the construction of the narrative world” (63). The only difference here is again, the construction of space in theme parks is literal. Bridgeman calls the temporal and spatial dimension of books part of an “immersive experience,” perhaps similar to the conceptual level of immersion noted in Mark Wolf (63). As Mittell notes, however, while film (like the theme park) is “more precise with its temporal continuity,” it lacks the “ambiguity and temporal play” of literature (162). Despite this, like the book form, the theme park is “culture in concentrated form” (Vandendrope 119). The written novel itself is still “derived from the ancient art of the storyteller,” and the theme park is derived from both (39). Likewise, writing becomes frozen on paper, making it more permanent than the fluid oral tales. Nearly all theme park performances are scripted, even the oral shows, and buildings take on a permanence even more extreme than a written text, which can still be ported to digital forms.

One of the principles associated with written texts is authorship. Like with novels, in theme parks there is an “unequal relationship between author and reader” (65). Though creators more often refer to themselves as designers or storytellers, creative director Alex Wright, when stressing the necessity for field research, says,

Even if books are available for research into the places we depict, if books are all we work from, we’ll only know what other people tell us. It forces us to tell somebody else’s story...As authors, we want to tell our own stories. We want to speak from a position of authority, via our own experiences. (*Disney’s Animal* 92)

Sometimes this is creating a story from scratch, while at other times it is the “selection and combination of preexisting elements” (Manovich, *The Language* 135). H. Porter Abbot in fact uses “arranger” rather than just author to highlight that not all stories are written text; the selection and remixing of existing components is an essential task of storytelling. As design legend Marty Sklar reminded, “Organizing the sequence and flow of your ideas is not just an idea for theme park storytelling”; it is “effective in any medium” (*One* 33). Creative professionals do see themselves as the arrangers and designers of these spaces, even at the times when they do not compose the original story.

Narrative is how stories are arranged, and designers create narratives but often not the story. Within narrative discourse, Roland Barthes instructs, changing a *constituent* element (*nucleus* or *cardinal function* in his work, meaning a key action with direct effect on the narrative) or a *supplementary* element (*catalysis* in his work, meaning a more trivial descriptive aspect that separates moments in the story) has a different effect: “One cannot delete a nucleus without altering the story, but then again one cannot delete a catalysis without altering the discourse” (249). Many IP adaptations maintain all of or elements of the story; however, all of

these adaptations change the narrative discourse, add supplementary elements, or modify the *diegesis* or *storyworld* (Abbott 231). Barthes makes a division between *functional* narratives and *indicial* narratives. Functional narratives emphasize actions and causality, while indicial ones emphasize “bits of information” and saturation (249). Narrative can have functions and indices, but in this case, Barthes denotes “popular tales” as being at the extreme functional end and “psychological novels” at the indicial end (249). The narratives in theme parks are almost wholly functional, but the spaces they are situated in are indicial in three dimensions.

Scott Lukas draws a clear comparison between “traditional” written stories and the “design” stories of theme parks in the notions of plot, perspective, theme, characters, setting, and the reader (*Immersive* 53). The traditional plot and themes are manifest through the characters, whereas the design plot or theme is manifest in the journey through spaces. The perspective is created through a literary voice versus forms in space. Characters have a clear function in traditional narrative, whereas design stories can express characters in many ways, including the use of the visitor. Setting is no longer evoked through language but with material. The written story especially is an often individual experience, whereas the theme park is more communal; people interact with spaces, with people in their group, with employees, and with strangers.

There is a connection between both oral and written narratives with language, whereas theme park narratives in some cases may not contain language. Oral narratives and at least partially written narratives may be in the theme park, but some stories are created solely through film or architecture, music or pyrotechnics. Storytelling has been associated with language for its history, so the perception of new kinds of texts may be slow in coming. This does not mean that other modes do not have storytelling capabilities. Marie-Laure Ryan perhaps describes this best:

Given the overwhelming storytelling superiority of language, one may wonder why mankind ever bothered to develop other narrative media. The limited narrative power of non-verbal media does not mean, however, that they cannot make original contributions to the formation of narrative meaning. The affordances of language, pictures, movement, and music complement each other, and when they are used together in multi-modal media, each of them builds a different facet of the total imaginative experience: language narrates through its logic and its ability to model the human mind, pictures through their immersive spatiality and visuality, movement through its dynamic temporality, and music through its atmosphere-creating, tension building and emotional power. (“Narration”)

The theme park is the multi-modal medium that can encourage meaning making and emotional connection. It combines many affordances and makes contributions to the art of storytelling.

### *Theatre and Film Narratives*

This section focuses on comparisons to with theatre and film. As explored earlier, there are associations between theme parks and theatre including performance culture, spectacle, and staged productions. Christopher Finch calls Disney theme parks “total theater” (460). Actor Ron Schneider maintains that “Disneyland is theater. A greater, grander form of theater than any I’d ever seen or considered, because the audience is on the stage telling the story. No, living the story” (17). He elaborates: “Its ultimate expression exists solely with the personal experience of the audience. The result of the craft of theme is the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual changes it creates with the observer – or, more accurately, the participant. The Audience is the Medium” (251). One would normally think of the text or the stage as the medium, but in this case, it is audience-actors who convey the message through their own experience. Schneider reflects on the labor of the visitor in these theatre productions:

But the themed show asks for more from the guest than a suspension of disbelief. Any stage show or movie can be a hit if we are willing to forget that it's a simulated reality. Themed entertainment asks us to interest *ourselves* in the story. In other words, the true attraction is not "The Haunted Mansion"; it's "*Your Experience of The Haunted Mansion.*" (270)

The role-playing function is a key attribute of theme parks then, something it shares with more participatory theatre forms. Todd James Pierce agrees that in places like Disneyland, "the spectator truly steps behind the footlights and becomes part of the cast" (207). As Joseph Pine and James Gilmore assert, "any work observed directly by the customer must be recognized within the dramatic structure of the performance as an act of theatre" (162). The theme park itself is a stage, and the guest enacts a role.

This conversation represents one of the key differences in theme park narrative. In many mediums, it is essential to have external characters to observe enacting and being affected by events. Watching others go through a story, the observable story, is still a part of theme park narratives, especially in shows. Barthes references Aristotelian work where the idea of *character* is subordinate to *plot* (256). However, he recognizes that it is possible to theorize that "there is not a single narrative in the world without 'characters' or at least without 'agents'" (257). The agent may not always be a "participant" and certainly not always a "person," but there needs to be an entity doing the action. Despite this need, it is possible to imagine narratives without agents: a landscape painting can insinuate a narrative, a film could illustrate setting, etc. In the theme park, everything from architecture to sound to lighting can have a narrative function. Nonetheless, if perceiving it the way Schneider describes here, there is indeed always a character when roaming within a theme park space or going through a moving attraction: the visitor.

Bertolt Brecht draws a distinction between *dramatic theatre*, or theatre employing Aristotelian conventions, and *epic theatre*, which emphasizes observation that leads to social action. Most theme park theater productions are closer to dramatic theatre, as they have these characteristics: a plot, spectators, experiences, the spectator may share the experience (though not in the same way they might in participatory theater types), there is a plot involving character growth, it is linear, and it appeals to emotion (Brecht 37). Disney theme park shows like *Beauty and the Beast: Live on Stage* or *Out of Shadowland* follow this. Theme parks are often linked with the idea of *spectacle*, with their large-scale productions and audiences of spectators (e.g. *Cinéscénie*), so the dramatic model applies. Epic theatre has some different characteristics: it is narrative, has observers over spectators, is a microcosm of the world, has montage, and appeals to reason (37). Though these are not as common in theme parks, shows like *Hall of Presidents* and *American Adventure* are closer to this model with their didactic and montage approach.

Interestingly, Brecht emphasizes that the actor is not the only conveyor of story: “The ‘story’ is set out, brought forward and shown by the theatre as a whole, by actors, stage designers, mask-makers, costumiers, composers and choreographers. They unite their various arts for the joint operation” (202). Theme parks employ a comparable scheme in that the story is produced by a combination of arts just on a larger scale. Brecht likewise argues that story is the foundation of theatre, another similarity: “Everything hangs on the ‘story’: it is the heart of the theatrical performance” (200). He acknowledges too that “there are many conceivable ways of telling a story, some of them known and some still to be discovered” (201). This can be a contemplation of narrative technique or medium, but either way, the theme park would have been in that latter category.

As noted in Chapter 3, there are particular experiences like Ghost Town Alive! that resemble immersive theatre, which is a newer interactive form of theater that removes the spectacle of theatre. Nonetheless, most of the perceptions of theme parks center on spectacle and the dramatic theatre model. While the theatre shows themselves rarely preference guest participation (unlike, say, parades), if the theme park itself is conceived as a performance piece and a stage, then the “audience” is given opportunities to participate, if not generally in the dialogues of resistance often seen in participatory theatre. Nonetheless, the annual Halloween events represent the *carnival* aspect of the parks and the subversion of daily park culture.

As creative professionals Larry and Lorna Collins remind, “Theme parks evolved from movies, which evolved from theater” (3). Concept designer Don Carson mentions that both video games and theme parks are still theatre, employing techniques thousands of years old (“Environmental”). Thus, even the later forms of media share some influence from theatre. Nonetheless, H. Porter Abbott explains that the “major difference in effect between narration in these media and narration in print or through oral storytelling is the degree to which the presence of visual imagery absorbs attention” (79). The theme park would fit well with film in this regard as one of these later media that diverges from the first narrative forms through the prominence of visual information.

Art, according to Sergei Eisenstein, is the “process of arranging images in the feelings and mind of the spectator” (“Word” 17). In film, there are new possibilities for narrative including the montage, which is, as noted earlier, common in theme parks. He also discusses pictorial juxtapositions, “enjambment” (scenes running into each other), and telling through “direction” (different ways of sequencing) of the narrative including flashbacks and flash forwards (Eisenstein, “Word” 56; Bal 84). It is still possible to have “narrative that is logically



connected” in film, but it may not be linear logic (Eisenstein, “Word” 4). As with many pieces of literature and film, theme park rides often utilize a “connected and sequential exposition of the theme, the material, the plot, the action” (3). Like film, theme parks often lack a “narrative voice” and express narrative by visual means (Mittell 160).

As mentioned, one of the most obvious similarities between film and theme parks would be the visual orientation of both mediums, something that predominates the experience. Film is one of the most visual mediums, so it might be said to have less imaginative potential; even more than an oral or print tale, it is the designed work of another. According to designer John Hench, “for us, the eye is overwhelming” and “the eye dominated,” hence the use of visual images (qtd. in Haas 17). People often do not notice contradictions between visuals and narratives because the visuals dominate (Hench). The eye interprets what it sees based on the visual information of filmmakers or designers rather than having a narrative guide. The theme park is a medium where the “*mise-en-scene* must induce movement,” so it has some of the visual composition of film but adds the element of movement through physical rather than solely virtual space (Clavè 370).

Another way the mediums are visually similar is in their expressions of the *storyworld*. A film offers a storyworld presented on screen, and the theme park adds dimensionality. Designer and creative executive Joe Rohde describes one difference between cinema and theme parks: “In a film, 90 percent of the time you’re just looking at an actor’s face about plot, right? The detail that you’ll see in a film really only exists to underscore the direct action. It doesn’t exist in an a priori way for you to examine. But here it precisely does” (qtd. in Leonard and Palmeri). The storyworld is most important in a theme park, whereas film “is a format that allows you to explore the character-based side of the storytelling world” (Rohde, “Legends: Adapting”). It is about following others with the generally third-person experience unlike the “direct experience”

in the theme park, with the “bi-narrative” structure of observation and experience (Rohde, “Legends: Adapting”; Kay).

Additionally, unlike with a novel that contains many opportunities for details, according to Mittell, “a film’s visual and auditory representation of a storyworld generally contains all of the elements that comprise that setting” (161). However, a key difference may be in the audience’s perception of these details: “Filmmakers cannot choose to leave visual details ambiguous, though; if a film shows a scene, all elements in the storyworld must be included in the image or they will be assumed not to exist in the diegesis” (161). In the theme park, this would depend on the source material. An original story leaving something out might fall into the same trap. Most theme parks are derived from familiar stories, however, so not including scenes is a design decision. In the Under the Sea – Journey of the Little Mermaid, the villain Ursula is viewed in a small corner of one set presumably being electrocuted to death. It is referenced in the scene, but the audience members who have seen the film would recall the scene, setting, and plot particulars of the omitted information. A couple of songs are completely left out, so the audience member would recognize that this is a snapshot of the longer storyline and not its entirety. In theme parks (like with film) time, space, and budgetary constraints mean that the story is often truncated. Film-going audiences noticing omissions from book sources may be less forgiving; in general, exclusion is a much more frequent complaint with films, perhaps revealing that viewers expect a film to be closer to the source material while theme parks are about something different.

There is a connection between theme parks and animated films, as many parks used animated films within and Disney began with this specialized art form (with Universal also an early purveyor). Eisenstein found the prospect of animation remarkable as it is a “knowingly lifeless thing – a graphic drawing” that it is then animated (“Disney” 120). The animators not

only narrate a story, but they then paint the story on lifeless celluloid (later computers) and bring these multiple fragments into a whole through movement and mechanical capture. However, the problem with this medium is it may be perceived that “the story is secondary” to the animator’s vision and technique or technology itself (Zipes, “Breaking” 350). This perhaps makes animation less transparent than earlier media in the sense of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, where the medium can be seen through to view the content unlike hypermediated instances where the interface is constantly apparent, but as Abbott already noted, all stories are mediated with narrative discourse. Eisenstein states that we are constantly aware of the medium in animation, and yet we “*sense*” the characters as active, living, even “sentient” (“Disney” 122). He refers to the connection of animation and movement, as characters constantly move on screen and it is the process of motion that physically creates an animated scene. Eisenstein instructs that animation moves beyond the verbal (such as the earlier tales) or even visual (standard cinema) to something “mobile” and almost tactile, thus the term “movie” that came into popular usage (123). There are few mediums as related to motion as the theme park. As with animation, the medium is created through the very act of motion. Likewise, the film medium, unlike the literary one, provides a range of non-verbal expressions and gestures that add humanlike qualities to the characters. This is similar to the animated robotic figures common in theme parks.

Films have changed the way that people view life. Manovich agrees, confirming that we now have “cinematic ways of seeing the world, of structuring time, of narrating a story” (*The Language* xv). The medium shaped ways of perceiving the world in the way that Ong said writing did. Christian Moran talks about the influence of film: “And then the use of movie techniques, film techniques applied to three-dimensional design, has now been used time and

time again in commercial developments around the world” (80). Just like the extension of themed design to other contexts, film had an influence including within theme parks themselves.

Game designer Chris Crawford believes that “visual thinking should not dominate storytelling” (20). The theme park is a paradox, however, as it presents almost all of its stories visually yet premises these visuals on verbal myths and linear processes. Crawford also believes that “spatial thinking” dominates reasoning too much and that emotion should be the core; theme parks do provide emotional cues, especially in shows, but there is little doubt they are spatially focused. Andrew Nelson refers to the “subordination of narrative to cinema’s more visceral pleasures” including special effects and spectacle. Show director Rick Rothschild admits that a key Imagineering skill is “multidimensional visual thinking” (*The Imagineering Workout* 88). Both film and theme parks would fall into Crawford’s trap of visual and spatial storytelling limitations, another similarity to film.

A couple of scholars or journalists have said that the theme park is in fact the extension of or culmination of cinema. After the land based on *Avatar* and ride based on *Guardians of the Galaxy*, Bishop commented that “theme parks are the inevitable evolution of franchise movies” (“Theme”). Rose mentions statements by executive Bob Iger on transmedia potential: “he was beginning to put forth the idea that movies and television shows might not be just an end in themselves but the focal point in a complex web of stories that could also involve books, comics, video games, alternate reality games, and (of course) theme park attractions” (204). Henry Jenkins thinks that “park design becomes part of Disney’s larger conception of its franchises,” with particular scenes put in films already designed for rides or video games (personal interview). He continues, “Interestingly, these moments get experienced as adding stories to rides but as moving from storytelling to spectacle within films, suggesting difference between

the two media” (personal interview). Jenkins refers to the mine sequence in the *Indiana Jones* franchise and the pod racing scene from *Star Wars* as instances where “critics have said that storytelling has given way to an amusement park ride like experience” (personal interview). Director Rian Johnson admits as much when he mentions the Crait chase scene in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*: “This whole sequence is a little bit of an homage to the original Star Tours ride, when they go through the comet. I always loved that” (qtd. in B. Young). Similarly, Nelson infers the view of Linda Williams when he states, “traditional rollercoasters have become more like movies, and movies have become more like rollercoasters.” Thus the properties are developed with transmedia delivery in mind and with planned narrative divergence based on medium capability. Producer Jon Landau associates this with its transmedia capabilities when he says “It’s all about expanding the story world of Pandora. What audiences can get here [in the park] is they can explore and discover” (qtd. in Bishop, “Theme”). Director Steven Spielberg posited the idea of rides as film evolutions much earlier than this: “For me, the E.T. Adventure ride in the Universal theme parks is the next evolution of the original motion picture. In a very real sense, it’s the only sequel to the movie” (qtd. in Gennawey, *Universal* 123). Multiple parks have now used transmedia storytelling principles to create expansions of a storyworld in space, but it is thus possible to say that the theme park is in and of itself the natural progression of film.

Finally, Mittell at least would probably find a similarity in the ways that these mediums have been criticized (as would, presumably, video game scholars). Lauren Rabinovitz finds that ride films are a “marginalized means of cinematic exhibition,” so even within film, ride films are not particularly respected (“From” 58). Mittell remarks on the stance that “film and television cannot achieve the narrative depths and complexity of great literature” so they are in fact “inferior media” (162). Mittell acknowledges that they are not the same and that mediums have

limitations or disparate affordances, but we can appreciate the variety. While it is true that “new media do not necessarily produce better narratives than the old ones,” neither can it be presupposed that the old ones maintain superiority (Ryan, “Narration”). Mittell elaborates:

We cannot judge a film or television narrative using the same criteria established for print narratives. Rather we should engage these media on their own terms, keeping in mind the robust repertoire of narrative strategies and possibilities that can offer unique compelling storytelling experiences distinct from those afforded by literary fiction. (171)

Similarly, Don Bacigalupi, the founding executive of the future Lucas Museum of Narrative Art (which looks at multiple “narrative arts” or “visual arts that tell a story”) expounds on the problem: “The museum world has often ignored...some of the most compelling narrative art forms. So they tend to be relegated to the status of low art, or popular art or media art – all the binaries we set up with ‘high’ and ‘low,’ and ‘popular’ and ‘fine’” (qtd. in Desmarais). He finds that the most popular forms of visual storytelling are things like “film and illustration and comics and animation” (qtd. in Desmarais). Thus, that museum is going to focus more on the “basic human impulse” of telling stories in multiple forms rather than “capital ‘A’ Art” (qtd. in Desmarais). Not only does the theme park medium share with film the tendency to be compared with traditional narrative forms like literature, it also has occasional critical dismissal.

### *Video Game and New Media Narratives*

This section deals with video games, digital environments, and new media narratives. Video games, commonly talked about in contemporary disciplines, have some similarities with theme parks including a spatial component (exploration within storyworlds) and a debate between storytelling and function (or gameplay, in the case of games). They each “combine narration and simulation” and signify “machines for meaning making” (Montfort 172, 185).

They have also put a “friendly face” on the computer through their use of storytelling: “Storytelling provides an antidote to the cold indifference, rigid determinism and unbending logic of the computer” (Ryan, “Beyond” 585). Like digital texts, theme parks are primarily visual, and space is the dominant organization of a narrative. Both mediums share some positive social functions. As Bishop mentions, “Being immersed in a narrative also has an incredible ability to foster empathy, encouraging audiences to become far more vulnerable than perhaps they would in their daily life” (“Disney’s Star Wars Land”). James Paul Gee praises the role-playing capability of video games: “One of the things that makes video games so powerful is their ability to create whole worlds and invite players to take on various identities within them”; they also allow players to “experience the world from different perspectives” (139, 151). This is something games share with theme parks, especially in more recent interactive experiences, which were in turn inspired by video games. There is already a cross-pollination of ideas within these industries, as some articles attest to including Don Carson’s, which argues for the utilization of theme park design principles within video games (or “using lessons from the theme park industry”), and Jesse Allen’s, which argues for the application of gaming principles within theme parks (or “lessons learned from the gaming industry”).

Gee also offers the following: “[Video games] situate meaning in a multimodal space through embodied experiences to solve problems and reflect on the intricacies of the design of imagined worlds and the design of both real and imagined social relationships and identities in the modern world” (48). Some of the same stories are adapted in theme parks, and the spatial component adds a level of visceral interaction. Jerome McGann mentions that the digital lent to a shift from “passive” to “active-participatory,” a shift that is reflected in theme parks but was also influenced by them (159). Storyteller Carolyn Handler Miller argues that many theme park

attractions were “passive experiences” but that “Today’s theme parks designers, however, recognize that the new generation of park visitors enjoys interactive experiences, and thus they have begun to create new kinds of attractions” (378). Interactive dark rides and interactive quests both seem to be offshoots of the video game medium or at least the popularity of the medium.

Janet Murray’s “four essential properties of digital environments” provide a good starting point for comprehending some of the important aspects of digital forms (*Hamlet* 71). First, digital environments are procedural, executing a set of rules to complete an action. Other than referencing games within theme parks, saying theme parks are procedural would be theoretical. Yes, there are complex machines in attractions, and yes, visitors have rituals within the space including queueing or sitting down to ride, but it is not procedural in the same way. Second, they are participatory, where the user can induce a response from the environment. Video games and theme parks share participation, especially now, as attractions have become increasingly more participatory and less passive. Third, digital environments are spatial, representing space that might be explored. Naturally, theme parks are spatial, but their visuals for space are not metaphoric but physical. Finally, digital environments are encyclopedic and store a lot of information. This is another variance between the digital and theme parks as a whole, as while theme park computers store this kind of information, the spaces accessible to guests tend to filter out a lot of information and present the simplified forms that Hench discussed. Murray instructs that the first two properties (procedurality, participation) are what makes the medium interactive, while the second two (spatiality, encyclopedic content) lead to it being immersive. Again, these global properties are applicable to theme parks.

Manovich has classifications for new media including that its forms use numerical representation (algorithms, binary), modularity (a “fractal structure”), automation, variability



(multiple versions, customization, scalability, hyperlinks, updates, interactivity, etc.), and cultural transcoding (media transposed on society) (*The Language* 30). He notes that the form uses new media type objects throughout, that it is computer related, that it is a convergence of computing and media technologies, and that it is a highly visual. Theme park attractions do meet some of these conditions. Most are computerized at this point (and even earlier attractions used rudimentary logic controllers) and are products of the convergence of media and computing. Many rides display automation and the attributes of variability. Theme parks are equally a visual medium. Of course, the more abstract notion of cultural transcoding applies. The logic and characteristics of the computer influenced media and culture. Computers are known for “revolutionizing the ways in which our civilization creates, stores, and transmits knowledge,” and computer principles like networking and space and associative logic have come to affect most media (Vandendroppe 1). In the same way, the theme park spread the principles of themed entertainment throughout culture and has received reciprocal influence from society.

Like video games, theme parks are expected to change paradigms if the users do so. This might be because they are both market products or because they are both fluid mediums. Game designer Jonathan Ackley believes that when they created the interactive quest *Sorcerers of the Magic Kingdom* they were “now serving what previously had been an unserved constituency” (qtd. in Brigante). He mentions younger visitors who “want to engage” by way of interactivity and technology. In some cases, they target those who identify as video game players. One *Imagineering* book explains, “We meet gamers’ expectations of ever more immersive environments with our richly detailed 3-D worlds, visceral experiences, and latest-generation personal character encounters” (*Walt... Magic More Real* 120). The expectations of new

audiences need to be met to stay competitive. As designer Tony Baxter argues, “The audience changes...and we have to change with it” (Finch 490).

Theatre and games have been compared, and theme parks have some similarity to both. Richard Lanham calls video games “participatory theatre” (*The Economics* 17). Murray talks about the desire for “cyberdrama” as an emerging story form. Laurel mentions computers bringing about “new forms of drama” (*Computers* xi). Laurel relates this to the role of the participant, connecting all of these forms: “It’s not that the audience joins the actors on the stage; it’s that they *become* actors – and the notion of ‘passive’ observers disappears” (*Computers* 17). Digital narratives involve interaction and navigable space. Nick Montfort mentions that some video games “simulate a world and present a space of possible narratives” (183). All theme parks simulate worlds, and many offer a landscape of possible paths or individual narratives. Nonetheless, with only few exceptions (some interpretive rides and a few with branching paths), theme park stories present narratives with limited conclusions, generally presenting only the one a designer chose. Some video game forms are more restrictive than theme parks like first-person shooters, rail shooters, platform games, games with side-scrolling features, etc. Theme parks can be compared with open world games that allow free movement but in another’s creative space. However, there are simulation games with sandbox modes, certain strategy games, and full-fledged sandbox games that allow large quantities of user-created work or player-driven narrative development that do not really have an equivalent in the theme park. Worldbuilding is central in both mediums, but narrative is not inherent in sandbox games like *Minecraft* though linear narrative can be found in strategy games like the *Civilization* series. However, it does tend to be inherent in theme parks or at least in the explicit strategies of the designers.

As explained, new media in general leads to “privileging space over time” and in the case of things like video games, these are “technologies that aim to immerse the viewer completely within a virtual universe” (Manovich, *The Language* 78). While this again represents a leap in medium, computers are able to facilitate storyworlds while maintaining the story and allowing for new possibilities in the narrative. Newton Lee and Chrystina Madej detail the history of Disney “getting to digital.” They trace the process from film to theme park to interactive storytelling and virtual worlds. They recognize that storytelling itself changed as “new media were explored and new technologies were developed” (11). They argue that technology and story shape each other, and that is something true with all of the technologies here. Lee and Madej discuss linear but still more participatory storytelling: “While clicking through the story and its associated activities did not change the story itself, it did change the experience of the story by creating connections with the characters and events and making it more personal” (101). The virtual worlds with multiplayer environments, however, show interaction, role-playing, and story “at its most extensive” (157). Manovich finds that many video games return us to “ancient forms of narrative in which the plot is driven by the spatial movement of the main hero” (*The Language* 246). First-person journeys in games challenge the “narration-description opposition” (246). This is similar in theme parks, especially when the main hero is the guest. There can be depth, immersion, and role-playing with both digital and physical spaces.

*Virtuality* is an essential similarity between video games and theme parks. Both theme parks and video games are microworlds and “simulated, rule governed worlds” (Turkle, “Video” 507). Like the other mediums, video games are very evidently designed spaces and “designed experience”: “When you play a video game you enter into the world of the programmers who made it” (Laurel, *Computers* xviii; Turkle, “Video” 509). In theme parks, visitors are physically

walking around in a designed space, a dimensionalized virtual world. Despite the postmodern claims of unreality, these are physical spaces that can be traversed by foot. Imagineers say: “We are creating real places that tell stories for real people” (*Walt...Magic More Real* 115). Wright mentions the technique of “heightened reality,” which is essentially building an idealized or emotionally connective space rather than an accurate one (*Magic* 23). Though it is idealized more than real, it is close enough to be confused with real-world elements. Theme parks are, in basic form, “a story in a stage set, a simulation of the real world” (Price 53). Sherry Turkle would concur, as she says we live in a “nascent culture of simulation” (*Life* 10). While she suggests that life simulation games “carried an aesthetic of simulation into the popular culture,” the simulations lauded in theme parks are many decades earlier (167). Turkle appears to recognize this, as her “Disneyland Effect” refers to theme parks making the unreal real (238). The “Artificial Crocodile Effect” augments this to indicate that to some, the “fake seem[s] more compelling than the real” (238). Christy Dena refers to “constructing an almost total environment” with a theme park, and Miodrag Mitrašinović goes beyond this, noting that theme parks are purposefully organized as “total landscape” with “totalizing narratives,” a notion going back to postmodernists looking at the theme park as simulacrum (69; 14, 19). Compelling and complete narratives are some of the points of creating imaginary worlds (a practice done for centuries), but it is relevant that there is world creation in both theme parks and video games. Murray finds that a powerful enough narrative can be virtual in any medium: “A stirring narrative in any medium can be experienced as virtual reality because our brains are programmed to tune into stories with an intensity that can obliterate the world around us” (*Hamlet* 98).

Video games have been seen as immersive, and both games and theme parks employ environmental storytelling. For Marie-Laure Ryan, immersion is achieved through “spatiality

and visuality” (“Narration”). She also explains that “The interactive nature of digital worlds is the true foundation of their immersivity” (“Beyond” 595). Murray focuses on the computer using space. She finds that “The new digital environments are characterized by their power to represent navigable space. Linear media such as books and films can portray space, either by verbal description or image, but only digital environments can present space that we can move through” (*Hamlet* 96). Of course, if the theme park is a medium, it does not present space or symbolize navigable space, it *is* physical space. Crawford refers to the “environmental approach” in games, though he argues that games with the environmental approach do not always emphasize story (136). It is through environmental storytelling that theme parks are augmented with this spatiality and visuality. Jenkins stresses,

Environmental storytelling creates the preconditions for an immersive narrative experience in at least one of four ways: spatial stories can evoke pre-existing narrative associations; they can provide a staging ground where narrative events are enacted; they may embed narrative information within their mise-en-scene; or they provide resources for emergent narratives. (“Game” 123)

These criteria should make a few things obvious. First, the focus of the environmental storytelling approach remains space or “dimensional stories” as Rohde calls them (“From”). Part of his task is the “building of ideas into physical objects” (Rohde, “From”). Second, narrative is still a key element, though separate from the world in most conceptions. Lukas maintains that “Stories provide some of the most important foundations for any immersive world” (48). Immersion is built through stories, and stories are built through environmental storytelling. Third, a well-designed space will have both allusions to other stories and potential stories. The

environment itself in this case provides the visitor with clues to comprehending the space and the narrative, another similarity with video games.

In a theme park as well as a game, space can actually be a character. In Pandora – The World of *Avatar*, the design of the area is a character itself, and the emphasis is on walking through the space. Likewise, in one of my favorite video games, *Ókami* (2006), the space itself can be designed, manipulated, and important to the story. Moving through spaces is emphasized; player feels connected to the character while playing (through gameplay and symbolically, with the Wii version being particularly interactive). This video game is beautiful and artistic, both a work of art and a meaningful story. Like theme parks, video games are underrepresented in real discussions of art, perhaps because of their commercial factor and mass market appeal.

The space is the essential attribute of the story in environmental storytelling, bringing it closer to the concept of “imaginary worlds” that Wolf describes. Imaginary worlds in any medium are experiential, invented, complete, consistent, “transauthorial,” and immersive (269). He asserts the essential role of narrative in these worlds: “Narrative is by far the most common structure found in imaginary worlds, and the reason that most of them exist in the first place” (198). If the original Imagineers are to be believed, Walt Disney was as purposeful in constructing an imaginary world to tell stories. Wolf also notes the importance of details: “For works in which world-building occurs, there may be a wealth of details and events (or mere mentions of them) which do not advance the story but which provide background richness and verisimilitude to the imaginary world” (2). Background details are key to the environmental approach in video game design and are the essential building block of space, especially in immersive worlds. However, theme park designers might disagree that “While the telling of a story inevitably also tells us about the world in which the story takes place, storytelling and

world-building are different processes that can sometimes come into conflict” (29). Indeed, stories are built into the very fabric of space in a theme park, so this kind of separation is not possible. In addition, Wolf believes, “A world can have multiple stories set in it, and need not be dependent on any particular story for its existence” (29). This is likewise true for the theme park, which has worlds within worlds, “micronarratives” within narratives (Jenkins, “Game” 125).

Nonetheless, there is a caution in continuing to embed narratives: “Worlds are built up as more and more stories are set in them, and if a world’s consistency is to be maintained, each additional story to be added to a world must take into account all of the narrative material already present in the world” (Wolf 205). Designers have to ensure that there is narrative consistency throughout the space as well as a clear tone and thematic identity. “Theme parks have long been in the worldbuilding business,” Jenkins confirms, but effective worlds are created through immersive stories that are “richly imagined” and “emotionally compelling” (qtd. in Lukas, *Immersive* 247). Video games are closer to theme parks in the spatial realm, as Jenkins defines game designers as “narrative architects” and states, “Game designers don’t simply tell stories; they design worlds and sculpt spaces” (“Game” 121). Of course, that is the literal definition of what theme park designers do, not a theoretical analogy. The park is still an imaginary world, as are other kinds of virtual spaces, so it would seem that virtual and hybrid attractions have a conceptual place. The key is designing the *space* to harmoniously bring together seemingly disparate modes including physical and virtual elements.

Theme park designers would likely agree with Jenkins over Wolf on the separation of elements. In narratology circles, story and setting are separate. In video game research, story, gameplay, and environment are all separate elements. It would make sense to break theme park attractions into the components of story, physical ride experience, and environment. However, in

theme park design, the world is not merely a setting for the story; it is part of the story literally or figuratively. Jenkins seems to grasp that video games can have a distinct reading when he asserts, “If some games tell stories, they are unlikely to tell them in the same ways that other media tell stories” (“Game” 120). They are not necessarily inferior but are different according to creative executive Drew Hunter. Much in the same way that a movie and book are not the same, “there’s different ways of expressing things” in theme park attractions (Hunter). Jenkins argues that video game stories “respond to alternative aesthetic principles, privileging spatial exploration over plot development” and are not necessarily “badly constructed” (“Game” 124). Dimensionality remains an essential aspect of theme park design and an increasingly important one in video game design.

Because of new media, there is now an “emergence of new story structures, which create complexity by expanding the range of narrative possibility rather than pursuing a single path with a beginning, middle, and end” (Jenkins, *Convergence* 121). Similarly, theme parks tell stories in a different way and leverage the many techniques possible to tell stories including spatial and abridged narratives. Wright adds something similar about theme parks:

[The word “story”] is really just shorthand for a much more nuanced of what “story” means in our medium...It doesn’t mean the same thing that it would mean if we were writing a book, making a movie, drawing a comic strip, or even standing on a stage telling a story to an audience. None of these media are approached in exactly the same way by the creators in those fields, so why would we expect that this one wouldn’t follow its own path? (*Disney California* 49)

Despite similarities to other mediums, in other words, the process and product of theme park storytelling is still different from other narrative mediums.



Video games still employ standard story structures, however. While Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan argue that story “must have some utility other than in the form of the cut-scene,” it is one of the most popular ways to drive story in games (xii). This is essentially adding in the medium of film to video games, which brings home the similarity between video games and theme parks in this way (both drawing inspiration from film stories and actually embedding them). Wardrip-Fruin and Harrigan’s volume looks at the tensions between narratology and ludology (or focus on storytelling versus gameplay), which components are important in games and new media, and whether there can be a “story-game.” In theme parks, there is not the same kind of debate with the majority of attractions (with the notable exception of interactive dark rides), which nearly always preference story or space and not gameplay.

There are ways in which video game adaptations especially use similar narrative tools as theme parks to tell stories. For instance, some have complained that video games (but this can apply to theme park rides) use narrative abridgment (leading to mental compression), shortcuts because of commonly understood signs, “shallow metaphors,” “loose notions of narrative,” or simple copies of “literary models” (Ryan, “Beyond” 581). Ryan disagrees, noting that “narrative is not limited to written or oral storytelling. It is a mental representation that can be evoked by many media and many types of signs” (583). Anastasia Salter confirms the limitation of only considering literary forms: “Traditional measures of narrative (or the expectations we bring to the literary canon) are insufficient when considering storytelling that takes alternative forms, as the story moves away from linearity in its overarching structure” (8). This shorthand is only lacking, in other words, if compared to traditional forms. Laurel addresses “cognitive shorthand,” expressed as archetypes, which allows players to connect with the dramatic tradition (“Six” 569). It may be narrative compression, but it is one common to mediums that draws on familiar

entertainment models like theatre. Laurel's position is that many video games already follow "traditional dramatic structures" despite constraints, like theme parks do ("Star" 571). As noted earlier, information is already filled in automatically with allusions, symbols that trigger brain scripts, and an intertextuality that references culture, myth, genre, and previous content.

Interactivity is a feature shared by some aspects of new media and of theme parks. Theme parks have long possessed person-to-person interactivity, but the aforementioned interactive quests have increased levels of person-to-computer interaction as well as first-person role-playing experiences. There are some rides, however, that are essentially video games. A few of these rides, Toy Story Midway Mania at many of the Disney parks and Maus au Chocolat at Phantasialand, are popular despite their being obviously video games or Ernest Adams' contention that "interactivity is almost the opposite of narrative" (qtd. in Jenkins, "Game" 118). Writing about video games, Ryan mentions that their "narrative interface" gives users a "sense of purposeful action" ("Beyond" 587). Design coordinator Kirsten Kischuk concurs that "The interface can and should be an object that fits the story, allows the guest to take action at critical moments and lets them feel like they are part of the story, moving along with the characters on their journey" (*A Prototype* 20). Despite the theatricality and sensory engagement of theme park rides, Turkle considers many of the experiences still essentially "passive" despite their movement, sensory inputs, and encouragement of active imagination ("Video" 505). Stephen Fjellman seems to agree: "Rides are the most restrictive attractions. We are strapped into the conveyance and sent passively through a story" (258). On the other hand, creative director Charlie Otte finds that theme parks have been adding more "gamification" to their spaces to "increase interaction through games and game theory." Going even further, Michael DeAngelis

believes that in both queues and attractions, “the act of movement is what makes the narrative space meaningful” (125). Either way, the same kinds of debates are occurring in these mediums.

Interactive quests like Sorcerers of the Magic Kingdom or MagiQuest, which involve a deeper level of interaction, are better at this. To be successful at interactivity, Laurel thinks the designer “must enable the user to participate in the fantasy world as an active character” (“Star” 572). Thus, some of the most interesting uses of theme park storytelling technology are interactive and participatory. According to Salter, interactive games “use traditional narrative techniques interspersed with interactivity” (6-7). Of course, there is the added element of space and movement in the theme park, lending to the authenticity of the space. Even during my best video games experiences, I am still aware that I am on a couch or a train; the theme park’s space component adds that sensory immersion.

Finally, video games are not the only possibilities for new media, so it is worthwhile to look at more of Manovich’s notions of new media. First, he makes an important distinction between earlier storytelling mediums and new media:

After the novel and subsequently, cinema privileged narrative as the key form of cultural expression of the modern age. The computer age introduces its correlate – database.

Many new media objects do not tell stories; they don’t have a beginning or end; in fact, they don’t have any development, thematically, formally, or otherwise. Instead, they are collections of individual items, where every item has the same significance as any other.

(“Database” 39)

Manovich sees database and narrative as antithetical, as one is inherently organized (with ordered events that signify cause and effect) and the other is not. Though the database form is not the only aspect of new media, it is one that seems irreconcilable with the theme park medium,

which is heavily narrative and certainly one of the most thematic mediums. The two might share symbolism, but the associative, networked, “anti-narrative logic” of things like the World Wide Web could not be further from the analytic, discrete, narrative logic of the theme park (50). Nonetheless, theme parks may have other components of his perception of new media. Theme parks have a mix of literary and visual culture, both layers and montage, and both linear and non-linear expressions, rendering it a supremely multi-modal media form. Theme parks are very much “spatialized narrative,” where many components are visible at once (50). Jeffs reminds: “As opposed to film, theater, television, and literature, we generally do not aim to tell linear stories, but rather we aim to create immersive worlds have a strong cohesive base, where the architecture, attractions, restaurants, shops, and other elements are thematically tied together.” This illustrates a spatial, multi-sensory kind of narrative presentation.

### *Remediation and Convergence*

*Remediation* is a concept articulated by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. It is a refashioning of older media by newer media, and it is a relationship between them. Bolter and Grusin present a tension: “older electronic and print media are seeking to reaffirm their status within our culture as digital media challenge that status” (5). They posit that new media actually relies on old media for its distinctions: “the new medium remains dependent on the older one in acknowledged or unacknowledged ways” (47). While the new media are offered as “refashioned and improved,” they are nonetheless only understood in terms of the older media (14). In fact, as Bolter and Grusin clarify, “what is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media” (15). While their work tackles film and digital particularly, they recognize theme parks as remediations.

Theme parks are master remediators, expertly refashioning art (film, television, print art, sculpture), culture (public traditions, pilgrimage, everyday life), diverse spaces (gardens and natural places, world's fairs and expositions, amusement parks/county fairs/carnivals, public meeting spaces, malls, cities), and even the concept of authenticity. One of the most apparent things that theme parks remediate is storytelling as has been outlined in this project. Storytelling is, of course, old media. It originated in the oral tradition and changed in print culture and came through film to the theme park medium. Theme parks showcase storytelling that has been remediated in new and interesting ways, often through advanced technology, which some might assume would have an antagonistic relationship with traditional story. Bolter and Grusin anticipate the relationship between story and technology in theme parks when they explain, "New digital media are not external agents that come to disrupt an unsuspecting culture. They emerge from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts" (19). Indeed, storytelling is situated in similar contexts (culture, history, entertainment) to theme parks, so it is not surprising that parks exploited narrative technologies to their benefit.

Bolter and Grusin recognize theme parks as remediated spaces filled with "complementary and competing media" and "sights and sounds from various media" (169). Sam Gennaway finds that Walt Disney was an early adopter of these concepts: "One of his great skills was the ability to use technology, use story, and allow the technology to subside to the back and let the story come to the front" (qtd. in Moran ix). Walt Disney's original vision was a place that would "simultaneously refashion and be refashioned by television as well as film," an objective that continues in the industry today (Bolter and Grusin 171). Though some would disagree, Bolter and Grusin argue, "Although Disney did not invent the notion of the amusement park as a

narrative space, he certainly understood better than anyone else how to make the theme park mediate other media” (171). It is true that narrative space existed before Disneyland; however, the remediation of storytelling as a primary function of space was indeed a feature of Disneyland, one that led to an entire industry.

Even the fairy tale, Zipes states, “shaped and was shaped by the interaction of orality and print as well as other technological mediations and innovations, such as painting, photography, radio, and film” (*Irresistible* 21). Fairy tales are a common kind of content for parks, and they themselves are representative of continuous remediation. A related remediation took place in the creation of Aesop’s Village for Everland, which is comprised of a land with gift shops, a restaurant, and children’s attractions such as a garden with explicit storybooks (fig. 39). The village includes elements of his stories and a walk-around character: “Everyone knows Aesop’s stories, but no one ever talks about the man himself. So we created the character. We started by imagining the places that inspired Aesop: the desk where he wrote his stories, the balcony with the telescope so he could gaze at the stars, and his special place: the garden” (Forrec).



Figure 39: Everland's Aesop's Village (Photo: Konggaru, Wikimedia Commons)

The theme park wanted a “new attraction based on stories,” and Aesop’s are very old and well-known, but they chose to “take this group of unconnected stories and give them a home – a village where all of the characters could live as neighbors, with Aesop’s own house at the centre of it all” (Forrec). Thus, these tales were adapted and then placed into a new context with an essentially new character drawn from a historical figure. One of the shops brought in “actual historic Aesop’s manuscripts from Europe,” yet the land is something new and whimsical, looking more Old Europe than Ancient Greece (Forrec). Each of the characters from the stories is given an original look. Considering this example, there is no doubt that remediating story is a function of and a defining feature of theme parks.

It is also useful to consider Bolter and Grusin’s concepts of *immediacy* (also known as *transparency*) and *hypermediacy*. These terms refer to how pronounced a particular interface is; is the narrative more present or is the interface? In hypermediacy, the interface is everpresent.

Susan Delagrange denotes that even space itself can be hypermediated. The paths at a theme park can be obvious, with “individual navigational choices available within a multidirectional text” (126). Even a “pathway framed by options” can be a hypermediated space as we are aware of its constructedness (136, 32). In *transparent* narratives, the story is more pronounced than the interface, even invisible. In *Pirates of the Caribbean*, a programmed ride system, architecture, audio-animatronics, lightning effects, environmental effects, and sound all create the illusion of reality for a guest, but these are disguised by the humanlike qualities of the robots and the atmospheric conditions created by the combination of effects. This ride would then be deemed a largely transparent ride.

Conversely, *Toy Story Midway Mania* uses a toy-like apparatus to shoot at carnival-themed targets; the vehicle parks in front of a series of screens that show 3D, computer-animated scenes. Though 3D glasses and computer-generated imagery are common today, it is hypermediated. There is never a time on a ride like this where a guest forgets the interface, understood here as the apparatus that mediates the narrative. While *Flight of Passage* seems like an obviously hypermediate attraction with a large screen and machine-like interface, the seat “breathes” in an attempt to eliminate its technological presence. As media producer Amy Jupiter says, “All of our technological efforts are supposed to disappear, because you’re supposed to feel like you’re really flying. The link chair transforms from a piece of hardware at the beginning – it softens up and becomes your creature” (“#VISIT...Avatar Flight”). Likewise, show director Mark Renfrow notes that it is more difficult (and “counterintuitive”) to make the technology invisible in a nearly fully technology-driven show like *Rivers of Light*, but that is precisely what they attempted (“The Making of”). Transparency (or the quality of being “seamless” in Hunter’s terms) has thus become a goal in more immersive experiences.



According to Bolter and Grusin, “In the highly mediated spaces of amusement parks and theme parks, the logic of hypermediacy predominates” (169). Perhaps because of the pervasive application of technologies and the qualities of multisensory experience and spectacle, theme parks are recognized as a medium built on hypermediated space. However, they continue by clarifying that theme parks “surround visitors not only with the pure hypermediacy of electric light and sound ... There are also attempts at transparency in the narrative elements of theme parks” (170). Though there are machines and built environments that mediate, the story is often immediately recognizable. Likewise, the emotional content is transparent in both animated films and theme parks: “Disney did often aim for immediacy by evoking what the culture regarded as authentic emotional responses to the narrative” (149). It is with these emotional responses combined with the mastery of recent immersive worlds projects that the theme park is starting to move from hypermediacy to transparency. Show producer Lisa Girolami says designers learn from the technologies in each ride installation and “we don’t stop until that technology can’t be seen” (qtd. in Bishop, “Disney’s Most”). Executive Nick Franklin speaks to the progression of transparency: “I think the future of experience is the seamless blending of digital, physical, visceral, and emotional,” which recalls Mark Wolf’s levels of immersion (qtd. in Terwiesch and Siggelkow). This is the maturation of the process, according to Murray: “Eventually all successful storytelling technologies become ‘transparent’: we lose consciousness of the medium and see neither print nor film but only the power of the story itself” (*Hamlet* 26). The total immersion schemes only speed towards that eventuality.

It is additionally significant that part of the trends towards immersiveness was a response from visitors who learned to value this because of previous theme park projects. Like any text, the creator and audience respond to and remediate each other. Younger refers to “theme park

literacy,” wherein audiences get used to theme park offerings and their expectations gradually change, which leads to a need to “increase the standards,” with new audiences unaware of theme park models’ characteristics (246). For instance, Bishop details an experience where a new ride he went on was less impressive because he had just returned from Pandora – The World of *Avatar* (“Theme”). Theme park fans, especially those who actively comment on the theme park experience, are even more likely to demand advancement. Concept developer Ross Osterman perceives this phenomenon and has noticed an “evolution of guests or guest behavior or guest expectation.” When parks build innovative attractions, he explains, “guests’ expectations evolve” because the parks have “introduced something that’s even newer.” In this way, theme parks “raise the bar,” which makes them their “own worst enemy,” according to Osterman. As he clarifies, “Because we constantly evolve, we contribute to making our own experiences obsolete to some extent and there’s just no way around that.” Companies in competition do something similar according to creative executive Paul Osterhout: “It’s great for us as a creative industry, and great for the vendors. It pushes us to generate top-notch product that continues to raise the bar.” Thus, both guests’ demands and market forces remediate parks.

Convergence is a similar concept in some ways to remediation as it recognizes that “Old media are not being displaced. Rather, their functions and status are shifted by the introduction of new technologies” (Jenkins, *Convergence* 14). Jenkins defines “convergence culture” as when “multiple media systems coexist and where media content flows fluidly across them” (322). Instead of any kind of displacement occurring, convergence is “mutual remediation” (Bolter and Grusin 224). Producer and creative director Christopher Stapleton likewise calls theme parks a “media convergence.” Within a theme park, various platforms exist in one space, making it inherent convergence. Cultural narratives and technologies converge. Jenkins finds convergence

to be a “process” and not an “endpoint,” and theme parks go through a convergence process with their continual integration of new techniques and technologies to produce relevant narratives (*Convergence* 16). The planet Batuu in *Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge* is now a storyline within Star Tours. The attraction functions as a narrative bridge between the *Star Wars* universe and the forthcoming *Star Wars* immersive space. There is a history of media convergence in Disney’s theme parks. When Disneyland opened in 1955, *Sleeping Beauty’s Castle* functioned as a similar bridge, introducing visitors to Disney’s upcoming film *Sleeping Beauty*. Stories in mediums outside theme parks are being introduced or elaborated on within the parks. Stapleton connects the ideas of story, digital media, and theme parks:

The art of *story* transcends all media, but the art of *storytelling* defines the media. You can tell the same archetypal story of the hero’s journey in each media, but that story takes all new form within each media to define the artistic conventions and media heuristics. In creating major productions in all forms of the arts and entertainment, the challenge of media convergence with digital media is how thousands of years of tried and true storytelling conventions redefine themselves together with emerging capabilities of digital media.

With this statement, it is evident that theme parks are not merely convergences of technologies but also stories and storytelling principles, rendering them complex and dynamic convergences.

There are some attributes that evidently define the theme park medium as will be covered in the next section. Murray argues about new mediums like games: “A new medium of expression allows us to tell stories we could not tell before, to retell the age-old stories in new ways, to imagine ourselves as creatures of a parameterized world of multiple possibilities, to understand ourselves as authors of rule systems which drive behavior and shape our

possibilities” (“From” 8). Theme parks do precisely this and have influenced many other visitor attractions and spaces (i.e. hotels, museums, restaurants, retail) as they have become global. She asserts that “A new genre grows from a community of practice elaborating expressive conventions” (10). Certainly, this entire work is meant to help with that process by capturing some of the techniques and perceptions of this community of practice.

The theme park “medium,” like most mediums before it, represents a combination of styles, approaches, values, and traditions; it is not wholly new. Its spatial component lends sensory engagement and multiple levels of immersion unlike many other mediums, but it is an amalgam of mediums like architecture, games, film, landscape, new media technologies, oral storytelling, theatre, and “something different.” Theme parks have influenced other mediums, but they have also “brought lessons from movies and video games” into their spaces (Takahashi). While theme parks were the “laboratories for museums and other places,” these locations have in turn become the “labs for theme parks” (designer Bob Rogers qtd. in Niles, “An Insider’s”). Similar to the adventure games Salter scrutinizes, while theme parks can be “probed with the lens of remediation,” they “must also be understood as providing new models for narrative play” (6). The next section is meant to give an introductory look at what the new models might be.

### **Designers on Theme Park Medium Uniqueness**

Designers and scholars see the theme park as a distinct medium or have alluded to this fact. What precisely makes it different? This section will comment on what creative professionals have denoted as the qualities in theme parks that make them discrete. My observations are added to synthesize the responses.

During the course of interviews, I discovered that creative professionals (and scholars) see the theme park as a unique medium but for a variety of reasons (Appendix F, Table 12).

The questions asked were:

- *Do you think that theme parks tell stories in unique ways?*
- *If so, how?*

The responses can be categorized into a few areas, which will be elaborated on below.

*Dimensionality:* The most obvious difference between theme parks and other mediums is dimensionality and the presence of storytelling in space. Mieke Bal finds “spatial thinking” to be a “general human tendency,” and the theme park takes advantage of this (215). Terence Young states that the “origins, divergence, and significance of [theme parks’] spatial aspects” have yet to be fully grasped (1). Younger refers to themed entertainment as “dimensional story experience” and Rabinovitz emphasizes the medium’s “three-dimensionally contained spaces” (personal interview; “From” 45). In studies of narrative, the *storyworld* or *diegesis* (expressed with elements of *setting*) is something separate from the events and entities within a story. Storyworlds are “designed at higher levels of abstraction than stories,” so they are more flexible (Crawford 89). A story can be ported from setting to setting, for instance the adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* to *West Side Story*. A story can also exist without a setting. Though Alan Palmer argues that setting should be a “third defining feature of narrative along with story and narrative discourse,” H. Porter Abbot provides examples of stories without any setting or storyworld (qtd. in Abbott 20). Even so, because of the story’s presence in a physical location, there is always a setting in a theme park narrative. It may be minimalist, incongruous, or elaborate, but it is a setting nonetheless. Storyworld is thus a defining feature of theme parks, and presence in space is what drives it. Moniek Hover observes the evolution of fairy tales and discusses new development: “One of these lines was the design of implicit fairy-tale-like worlds, immersing visitors into a multisensory environment” (8). The fairy tale, in other words, went through an evolution from oral to literary to filmic to this new, dimensional form of narrative.

Theorists and designers use any number of terms to describe a spatial logic: dimensional stories, environmental storytelling, narrative architecture, narrative placemaking, placemaking, spatial storytelling, storyplace, storyworld, subcreation, worldbuilding, and worldmaking. These do not all mean exactly the same thing, but they do speak to the privileging of the spatial dimension in theme parks, as they are simultaneously physical and imaginary spaces. Even the usage of “area,” “land,” “park,” “theme land,” “world,” or “zone” denote space. Bal discusses the significance of space in narrative, but in most media it is a “frame” or “place of action” (136). As noted with cartoonist Ian Kay’s “Bi-Narrative Structure” definition, there are two levels of spatial narrative operation: the observable space with the characters in the attraction or location, and the experiential space the guest is traversing whether they play a role in the narrative or not. Many of the other medium concepts here reflect the element of space; when Rohde notes that parks “need depth,” it is not only in narrative but narrative space.

Though Abbott does not discuss theme parks, he does recognize painting, film, hypertext narratives, role-playing games, and other visual art forms. There is a notion of “narrative worlds” and “narrative space,” emphasizing that “representations are in space” (160). He admits that there has been a “neglect of space in the study of narrative” owing to the prominence scholars place on verbal narrative (160). Due to the insufficiency of time alone as a narrative determinant, Mikhail Bakhtin established other ways to “thicken” a narrative; one way is the *chronotope*, which recognizes that time and space form a bond (161). Abbot argues that we “crave” a narrative that is “spatial as well as temporal,” a kind of “narrative space-time” (161). This is not only a literal space-time configuration as in the theme park but an understanding that “more happens in narrative than can be graphed on axes of time and space” (165). In novels, the thickening effect might be in the inner worlds of the narrator; at a theme park, the narrative is

thickened by the presence of layers in space as well as the simultaneous narrative of the visitor. Abbott defines: “Narrative in this sense is ‘the art of making and understanding a world’” (165). According to Rose, “Every new medium that has been invented, from print to film to television, has increased the transporting power of narrative” (36). This has never been more literal than in the theme park industry, where visitors are transported physically, sensually, and conceptually all at once. “World-making,” Abbott confirms, has begun to be viewed as a “defining feature of narrative” (173). Both literal and figurative worlds are created in the theme park space.

In their responses, Steve Alcorn, Bob Allen, Moniek Hover, Drew Hunter, Taylor Jeffs, Henry Jenkins, Scott Lukas, and Larry Tuch all reference a spatial component to the uniqueness of theme park narratives, so this was the most common answer amongst the participants. Previous mentions of the spatial concept exist as well. Oral stories, literature, and film, according to Priscilla Hobbs, are only two-dimensional whereas at a place like Disneyland, “those previously flat stories are brought fully into a three-dimensional experience” (17). Tuch agrees when he channels Walt Disney’s potential speech: “I’m creating a park. And in this park, all these worlds that I have offered you will be there. And you will be able to enter these worlds.” Younger says the commonality between theme parks and their forebears (such as amusement parks) is that they are “spatial entertainment” though less narrative (qtd. in T. Schneider). According to Salvador Anton Clavé, parks “spatialize the forms and contents of the mass media culture” (159). Rohde creates “dimensional stories” and show writer Kevin Rafferty says, “Our way or working is fueled by our desire to tell a multidimensional story” (“From Myth”; *The Imagineering Workout* 12). Designers are thus explicit about the spatial component of design. Scholars like Jenkins noticed the privileging of space in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter, as

he offers that “The park is structured around places and not events” (“The Night”). The space organizes the story instead of the story organizing the space, making it a literal storyplace.

While theatre also has a component of space, theme parks are a three-dimensional art form often based on motion (traversing a park, being conveyed through a ride, etc.). As Wright states, “It envelops us in these stories in a way that a two-dimensional film really can’t. We can make our own way, choosing our own path, writing our own stories” (*Disneyland* 18). Osterman observes the *Harry Potter* narratives. The books “tell that story in more detail and with certain layers of richness that we could never even hope to replicate.” On the other hand, he continues, “When fans of Harry Potter walk in our dimensionalized realms, whether it’s Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade or Hogwarts, that’s an experience that’s totally different than the books.” The ways that theme parks tell stories as examined in the last few chapters illustrate that even the other important aspects of storytelling (participatory and role-playing stories, interactivity, implicit design) are often tied to the interface with space. Jeffs concurs: “Our ability to place people in the middle of physical stories is something that no other medium can come close to replicating” (qtd. in Palicki, “The Goddard”). Similarly, creative executive Vicki Dobbs Beck believes that it is “the absolute importance of place, and that sense of presence” that defines immersive entertainment (qtd. in Bishop, “Disney’s Star Wars Land”). She continues: “It’s place, and then it’s characters with which you engage in that place, in a way that isn’t possible in any other medium, like film or television” (qtd. in Bishop, “Disney’s Star Wars Land”). Bishop talks about “immersive entertainment” or “experiential storytelling,” which includes escape rooms, interactive theatre, and virtual reality; the difference between these and the theme park is that the latter has a “grand scale” (“Disney’s Star Wars Land”). While immersive techniques may be utilized in all of these forms, the theme park is the only all-day experience; it is likewise more



inherently narrative. It is the genre that is more likely to be repeated again and again throughout the years, forming a kind of lifelong narrative space-time.

The other relationship with space is the common technique of employing multiple, sometimes all, senses. The multi-sensory character of theme parks is apparent immediately when walking in to a park and being bombarded with sensory inputs. Unlike many mediums, the senses “come into play with greater immediacy” in the theme park, with the physical body actually being utilized as a sensual vessel (Ndalianis 72). A successful attraction too “must effectively stimulate all the senses” (MSS, “Themed...One”). Susan Willis offers that Disney’s Animal Kingdom “overwhelms the visitor with sensory cues” (60). Unless watching ride-through videos, which do not capture touch or smell, the ride experience is always related to senses. Alcorn’s favorite attractions are those that have “great storytelling that immerses the audience in the experience, like reading a great book, but with all the senses engaged” (personal interview).

Sensory cues are linked to immersion. It is through this process that theme parks become, as show writer Adam Berger finds, “where storytelling becomes three-dimensional and immersive” and the visitor becomes an “active participant in the story” (2, 3). Victoria Godwin agrees that senses are connected to its narrative capabilities: “Theme parks function as storytelling devices – material interfaces simultaneously engaging multiple senses to immerse visitors in a variety of story worlds.” Sensory engagement is a key feature of the medium, as Jeffs argues that “theme parks are the only entertainment medium in which all of the audience’s senses can be engaged.” When speaking about transmedia implications, John Caldwell asserts that companies purposefully create narratives that “can be consumed via as many different human sensory channels as possible” (qtd. in Dena 42). The sensory facets of this medium then may be planned narrative extensions expected by consumers.

Even when watching a third-person story, the visitor is receiving the many levels of immersion that Wolf posited (Chapter 3). Marlee McGuire talks about the “multisensory dynamics” in the parks and asserts that visitors experiencing them may actually be “honing the senses” (20). Instead of acting in a dystopic fiction of being “numbed and deadened,” perhaps we are, she states, “developing ways of sensing that correspond to the world around us” (20). Either way, McGuire finds that offering multi-sensory experiences is needed to stay competitive: “it is the creative, innovative, and increasingly aggressive use of the senses by the theme park industry that generates the commercial and cultural momentum of these spaces” (1). Not only do visitors want to walk around in their favorite stories, they want to find them in many sensory dimensions.

*Scale:* There are few art forms which take as much time to build or cost as much as theme park attractions. According to Sklar, it takes 5-7 years and up to a billion dollars to build a theme park, and it is a much bigger risk than movies because they are material; costs have only skyrocketed since he noted this twenty years ago (qtd. in Marling 17). The recent single-property immersive worlds like Wizarding World of Harry Potter or Pandora – The World of *Avatar* were both estimated as costing a half billion dollars. Carlsland’s attraction development and construction costs dwarfed the cost of the source material film. Single attractions at destination parks can get up to the hundreds of millions. The sites are more permanent than the ephemeral art forms they are associated with (film, theatre, etc.). Pickett indicates theme parks are an art form that is expensive to build as well as to maintain (“Story... Writing”). They are also built on a larger scale. Some attractions are just enormous pieces of industrial machinery, as in the *Jurassic Park* boat ride, which is “essentially a giant computer-driven machine for telling an immersive story” (Murray, *Hamlet* 107). Theme parks often recreate huge icons including castles and mountains, which adds to the impression of scale when walking through the spaces.

Additionally, the assembly of attractions is conducted on a large scale. Many times rides are created in places around the world, as ride designer Phil Bloom explains of *Ratatouille: The Adventure*: “fabrication took place all over the world: the ride was designed in Glendale; the movies were made in Emeryville; the vehicles were built in Michigan; the ride building was constructed in Paris; and the sets were made in Ireland, England, Holland, and Romania” (qtd. in Sasha, “Shining”). The ride was constructed by “4000 craftspeople” and “more than 40 companies from France alone” (“Wait”). The Tree of Life structure at Disney’s Animal Kingdom alone took more than two years, and Pandora: The World of *Avatar*’s floating mountains twice that. Once attractions are assembled and constructed, they will be operated by likely hundreds of people over a period of years. Many attractions, if not most in this current competitive industry, can be considered risky because of scale, effort, and expenditure.

Continual weaknesses of theme park design according to Carson are the limited time within theme park rides and the “expensive limitation of building in the physical world” (“Environmental”). Lighting designer Tracy Eck mentions how the equipment must be durable as it is used heavily and may need to last for decades (qtd. in Bogaert, “Lighting”). Robert Niles calls theme parks “a relatively new medium with few new creative works each year,” and one reason for this is the many challenges associated with construction (“Interview”). An unfortunate byproduct of this fact is that multiple designers mentioned how little of what they conceive is actually built, and many of what is built may have started with more impressive concepts that were eliminated due to budget or the restrictions of the physical world.

*Communitality*: Though other art forms like film or theatre are collaborative and audiences may be numerous, the theme park has continuous communal authorship, operation, and reception. Linda Degh notes that in oral tales there can be a notion of a “communal authorship”

of tales, where “the authorship belongs to all those who have taken part in the transmission,” be it multiple storytellers or the audience members who enhance the telling through interruptions, calls at the teller, and retellings (Cecil Sharp qtd. in Degh 50). Though Degh thought this was overstated in the realm of oral tales, there is certainly no overstating it in theme parks. Hundreds of people may create a theme park attraction and millions may experience it, making it one of the most communal art forms in the world.

Not only is there collaborative creation, but there is collaborative operation in theme parks. Depending on the theme park, there are hundreds or thousands of employees necessary to manage, operate, and maintain them. The employees tend to play a role at theme parks that they do not at amusement parks, where they are living within that storyworld as a character or at least reflecting the theme or motif of an attraction. As referenced, Hench and Lukas both stated the essential roles of employees. Having worked on dozens of attractions at Disney and Universal, I can attest to the constant awareness of the attraction as a performance space. At all attractions at these parks, I was taught the backstory and the best ways to convey the front story. Both the machines and the employees were part of theatre and narrative. Whether functioning as a prop or meant to be characters in the stories (an especially common scheme within the single-property immersive worlds), employees are a living, breathing part of the art. While their existence speaks to scale, it likewise reflects the inherently communal character of the theme park.

Additionally, theme parks are very clearly meant for a mass audience as discussed in the introduction. Jeffs concurs: “When done well, the theme park medium can be just as powerful as any other storytelling medium, and it’s also one of the few that the entire family can enjoy together.” Unlike individual endeavors and more than in multiplayer video games, in the theme park people sit next to one another; they are “‘living’ through [their] adventure together”

(Carson, “Environmental”). Franklin talks about the “social dynamic” behind theme parks: “Humans are social creatures and we get value out of the shared experience....Theme parks provide a dynamic social environment that is also enhanced by visceral experiences, tactical experiences” (qtd. in Terwiesch and Siggelkow). He mentions hearing others’ excitement on rides enhances one’s own excitement. Likewise, creative executive Phil Hetteema asserts, “The reason people go to theme parks is to connect with each other” (qtd. in Martens, “Themed”). Ken Parks, also a creative executive, argues that the purpose of Knott’s Berry Farm’s Ghost Town Alive! is specifically “connecting with other people” (qtd. in Martens, “Themed”). Social connection is thus a purpose for theme park storytelling, not just a symptom of mass visitation.

As referenced earlier, Hover and Vugts talked about Efteling being generational. Certainly the most popular theme parks tend to be generational, with groups attending together or at least with the traditions being passed on. Tuch agrees that “the visit to a theme park or themed space is very often a group experience. You want to be connected to the laughter and the surprise of the people you came with.” Though a book club can remove the solitary act of reading for a time, literature and other art forms are essentially individual. People attend music concerts, but music can be enjoyed in the home. Whether one goes to a theme park individually or with a group, however, there is no option to explore it alone. Thousands of other strangers will be experiencing the space at the same time. It is forcibly communal and thus community art on a large scale. Rose believes, “When we share stories, we strengthen our links to other people” (205). Theme parks present opportunities to share stories with one another across time and space, as generations may be exposed to the same storytelling.

*Brevity:* Theme park attractions are briefer than many media forms, though certainly there are film shorts. Show writer Darryl Pickett emphasizes brevity in his response and

compares his theme park work to other narrative forms he has created in (novels, short stories, and plays). The *chrono-logic* of narrative refers to the fact that narrative has an external time (how long it takes for an audience to consume the presentation/narrative discourse) and an internal time (the duration of the story events themselves) (Abbott 16). This is similar to theatrical productions where there is not only a time within the represented story but the “performance can be clocked” and scenes are “measured with precision” to fit with an audience’s timeframe (Richardson 148). Some break this into three possibilities with “story time” as the duration of the linear story, “discourse time” as the time represented within the constructed narrative (including flashbacks, time jumps, etc.), and “narration time,” which is the real-time duration of the storytelling (Mittell 161). The great majority of theatrical productions are longer than theme park attractions, and even most shows within theme parks tend to be shorter than their external counterparts. Because of this limitation, these stories may have different narrative constraints and a need to apply shorthand. It leads to narratives with briefer duration, which Pickett hopes will be perceived as “short little packages of wonder” (personal interview).

Show writer Kevin Rafferty says that “Brevity is key to good theme park design” (qtd. in Sklar, *One* 212). Sculptor Blaine Gibson clarifies that, “In a ride system, you only have a few seconds to say something about a figure through your art” (qtd. in Prospero xiv). While even movies “simplify stories” according to Hunter, it is even harder with the “three or four minute experience” of a dark ride, especially an interactive one that requires target shooting. Thus, the best way to do this is with a “basic direct focus storyline” without too many “plot points.” Though it is best to avoid the “lowest common denominator” when designing a dark ride, it is also the case that “if it gets too complex you tend to lose people” (Hunter). Creative director Henry Corrado finds that the challenge of creating this short experience is “Telling a powerful

story in a few minutes where the protagonists are probably unknown to an audience who is not in the mood to decode complex messages.” Carson compares the theme park and a setting-based video game, “Theme Park experiences run from 30 seconds to 15 minutes in duration and could never rival the 40 hours spent wandering the islands of *Myst*” (“Environmental”). The ability to physically touch the fantasy setting may make up for the brevity.

This is one reason why it is often preferable to use a familiar IP over a more “original” story. Show producer Mark Schirmer notes the following about the characters in Mystic Manor, one of those original stories: “The ride is only five minutes long, and we’ve got so much story to tell. These guys have to be recognizable immediately” (qtd. in Niles, “The Imagineers”). Nonetheless, it is still difficult to translate a well-known property, especially if there are preexisting expectations about the story and characters. Producer Peter Alexander refers to the difficulty of adaptation from one medium to another: “Relationship stories like E.T. that rely on 2-hour long films to create their emotional impact are not easily translated into 6- or 8-minute theme park rides, so designing a ride or show that captured the essence of the film presented quite a challenge” (qtd. in Gennawey, *Universal* 123-4). Regardless of the source material, the brevity of the medium proves a challenge thus the use of preshows, queues, or even postshows to aid with exposition. The positive is that “Narrative beauty is independent of medium,” so even a brief attraction can be aesthetic and meaningful (Murray, *Hamlet* 273).

In addition to the majority of attractions being under ten minutes (and some less than five), time plays a role because attractions are experienced in real time. Creative director Tom Morris notes the crucial element of timing:

It’s important to include the element of time right from the beginning. Every ride that we do (especially dark rides) are like little clocks with a specific tempo based on the dispatch

interval, story, length, and scale. There's always another group of guests behind you coming in, which means the scenes and dialogue we create need to be concise. (qtd. in Sasha, "Shining")

Wright specifies the difficulty of show timing in Finding Nemo Submarine Voyage, as guests view the scenes through small portholes and hear audio tracks in four zones (*Disneyland* 121). To design and production manager Björn Heerwagen, timing is in fact the most difficult aspect of design work (qtd. in Bolton). Osterman believes "pacing" to be a major change, as books and movies have a generally slower pace than theme park attractions, which accommodate the guests' comfort with "faster-paced cuts and storytelling." Designers must maintain awareness of the "beats in [the] show script" to end with a clear storytelling effort (Pickett, "Story...Writing"). The coordination of elements in both space and time makes this a unique medium.

A central aspect of theme park narrative related to brevity is its condensed character. Theme parks "simplify and edit reality" (Pickett, "Story...Writing"). Unlike with movies, this storytelling is a "shorthand" according to production designer Ann Malmlund (qtd. in *The Imagineering Way* 76). Otte also addresses this shorthand and finds that not too much language is needed for "universal, archetypal ideas and communication." It is just about "finding the truth in that story and trying to communicate that effectively" (Otte). Unlike in live shows, where more "full stories" are told, rides may shorten the experience and architectural stories may only capture single scenes (Hover, personal interview). This could be seen derogatorily as narrative abridgement, condensed, or compression, though the medium might require this because of the limitations of time and space. "Communicative inefficiency" is what Younger refers to it as and notes the need to "short-cut the delivery of exposition" (176). The concept of "efficiency" that creative director Henry Corrado remarks on plays a role in both storytelling and in the



importance of ride capacity. Louis Prospero considers, “Communication quickly through illustration and metaphor and example are all about readability” (qtd. in Dager). He emphasizes the importance of “repetition and reinforcement” to make experiences memorable, something Osterman references too (Prospero qtd. in Dager).

Park stories tend to prioritize the constituent or core elements of narratives, but the spaces themselves may reveal some of the supplementary details. Corrado indicates that most attraction stories are “single act” with a structure of “introduction/conflict/resolution”; it is rare in this medium to have “complicated plots” or “subplots.” He admits that “the result is probably simplistic compared to a novel, a short film or TV production.” Similarly, Bobby Schweizer and Celia Pearce say of rides like Pirates of the Caribbean, “The format does not lend itself well to the long-term narrative or character development that is better captured in novels, films, or even long-play games” (98). Instead, it relies on things like animatronic actors and “spatial storytelling, in which a static scene conveys a narrative arc” (98). Corrado mentions a step in the concept development process called “skimming,” which is intended to leave in “any element that clarifies the action” but to remove “anything that is not meaningful to the story or indispensable to the action.” An article on *Themed Attraction* argues that even a cliché, if used in the right way, may “help the architecture tell a better story” (MSS, “Themed...Three”). Though Pickett agrees that theme park stories may be shorter, simpler, and possess “less nuance,” they can still have meaning and even deep emotional connections (“Story...Writing”).

Shorthand is particularly evident in dark rides. Creative executive John Wood notes that the “story always plays a key role” in a dark ride, but it is “usually an abbreviated part of a bigger story” (qtd. in Naversen, “Dark”). He continues: “A dark ride usually lasts 3-6 minutes and often becomes a condensed version of a broader story” (qtd. in Naversen, “Dark”). It does

this through activating a visitor's prior knowledge of a situation by utilizing a well-known trope or gag. Design company Jora Vision likewise describes the need for streamlined storytelling:

Every element designed in the ride should follow the story and concept. Many dark rides have complicated storylines. We believe it should always be a clear reason why the visitor is invited to hop on a vehicle and experience a journey. Layers of backstory can always be incorporated into the scenes, but the main reason and main tagline of the attraction should be very clear and understandable by every target group. Many examples in the market have too complicated messages which a lot of visitors do not get. ("Jora")

Accommodating the potential audience (which might be broader than some media) and accepting the limitation of time and motion are both keys in narrative design in dark rides.

Another one of the most obvious uses of shorthand is the World Showcase pavilions at Epcot; Wright mentions that the buildings are based on an "iconic image" from each nation rather than a "complete attempt" (*Epcot* 90). The interiors are a more "theatrical treatment," but both indoor and outdoor spaces are symbolic (90). This may represent the limitation of the art, as a symbol is used to represent rich cultures, something academics have critiqued over the years. Nonetheless, Ady Milman found that guests who had familiarity with the actual countries represented in Epcot were more likely to find the spaces authentic ("Guests"). Something similar is said about Europa-Park: "In Europa Park, reference to the past is thus more about creating an ambiance of bygone times through an amalgam of originals, reconstructions and 'ancient' or 'historical' looking buildings and objects" (Schlehe and Uike-Bormann 61). European cultures are represented by architectural motifs and music (e.g. Russian-style musical themes and paint patterns) or replicas like the Globe Theatre. Either way, the spaces should be seen as theatrical interpretations by artists, not accurate representations of reality. As Wright argues, "the elements

brought into a theatrically designed space are carefully chosen to evoke moods, rather than to be simply a visual encyclopedia” or a desire to “re-create a place” (*Epcot* 113). Symbolic architecture is a great example of shorthand and an opposite in some ways of the immersive worlds concept, as these are small chunks of details that are not tied together; the visitor knows the Epcot countries are not side by side in the real world and many political details are left out. Still, even the most immersive of worlds is a shorthand for the entirety of the concept and the overall narrative represented by the spaces and attractions.

*Combinatory*: One feature of the theme park is its combination of many media types into one form; theme parks are the essence of multimedia or multi-modality. Schneider clarifies theme parks’ combinatory approach:

It is the one form of communication that has the capacity to embrace all other modes of expression – painting, sculpture, film and video, architecture, music, dance, writing, acting – all of these and the rest. It presents them in glorious, harmonious concert where each one inspires and supports the other to tell a unified story. (251)

Likewise, Margaret King found Disneyland to be “a culmination of the artforms of the past: architecture, painting, novels, films, theater” (“The Theme” 13). There is a combination of elements in a theme park including “details, including character, situation, setting, lighting, color, and other media” (Kurtti 47). Narrative, theming, and “combinations of architecture, sounds, shops, restaurants, costumes, arts and crafts, and occasionally smells” are referred to by Alan Bryman as a “cinematic experience,” but it is not like a movie theatre where the presence of an interface allows one to continuously reflect on its constructed nature (*Disney* 84, 86).

Pat Williams believes that even the early Disneyland possessed this kind of combination: “Some people called it a ‘theme park,’ but it was actually a full-immersion multi-media

experience combining motion, light, adventure, thrills, nostalgia, futurism, fact, fantasy, and audience participation” (368). Ndalians refers to the theme park space as “media hybridity,” literal intertextuality, and “intermedia tendency”: “Not only are multiple media referenced or alluded to, they’re often literally incorporated into the ride experience” (63). Fan analyst Foxx Nolte alludes to the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or the “aesthetic of the total synthesis of all works of art into a single statement,” which, while she applies this to Pirates of the Caribbean, can be said to be true of the theme park medium (“Fire”). Composer Richard Wagner saw this “collective art-work” as the “art-work of the future” as well as the “highest” and most “universal” form of art (80). He thought this amalgam of disciplines would occur on the theatrical stage and through the mode of drama; theme parks have bested this by being elaborate theatre with more modes. The immersion paradigm is thus a combinatory scheme.

Technology is responsible for what Lanham describes as “the conflation of the arts into a single theatrical whole,” as his example of this, *Star Tours*, is a combination of ride, film, music, script, and story, which are simultaneously arts and technologies (*The Electronic* 32). Christian Vandendrope refers to a similar concept of *hypermedia*, where people are “placed in front of a spectacle combining texts, sounds, colors, images, and animation or video and are solicited from various directions” (93). *Multivariate* texts are mentioned in McGann, which are “elaborate multimedia forms” that incorporate language, visuals, audio, and gestures (174, 58). Florian Freitag confirms: “Theme parks in general and theme park rides in particular can be described as multimedia installations that seek to immerse visitors into multisensory environments by combining kinetics with a variety of different art forms or media, including architecture, landscaping, painting, sculpture, music, theater, and film” (125). The medium can be considered “hybrid,” “composite,” a “meta-medium,” and one composed of “intermedial relations” (125).

Graphic designer Sean Adams believes the perception of the guest to be specifically shaped by the “interaction of multiple elements and media to create a narrative.”

The theme park is also an instance of convergence culture as discussed, with many media systems coming together at once. Theme parks, Bolter and Grusin find, are “full of sights and sounds from various media, and the attractions recall and refashion the experience of vaudeville, live theater, film, television, and recorded music” (169). Using multiple elements to create experiences is no surprise when the goal of park development is, as Carson notes, to “bring people into their created worlds and keep them immersed and entertained” (“Environmental”). This is not so easy a task with the discerning public that visits parks now, a group that is used to advanced parks and hypermediated daily life. One way is to keep attention by expressing stories with multiple forms, the combination of which may be considered a new form.

Designers purposely combine mediums, and attractions are created by a variety of entities and disciplines. Tuch mentions that themed entertainment is a “combination of everything”; he lists components including film, film grammar, music, writing, architecture, technology, special effects, aesthetics, and engineering. Vugts attests to this: “There is a development going on where entertainment (theatre, dance, attractions) are all coming together.” He mentions Las Vegas as an example of a place with a “total experience.” He reiterates, “The total entertainment industry is coming together in one concept.” Transmedia properties that incorporate films, books, theatre shows, video games, and theme parks confirm this.

As explained earlier, the combinatory effect is not just in the product but the process. The groups that create the places are highly interdisciplinary. In some cases, the disciplines hand off to one another, but in others, such as the creation of the floating mountains in Pandora – The World of *Avatar*, there is concurrent collaboration (“The Making of”). Even the inspirational

disciplines of the field are varied: “Some of our tools come directly from architecture, filmmaking, theatre, engineering, or fine art. Some have been borrowed or adapted, some were invented by us, and some are still on the virtual drawing board” (*Walt...Magic More Real* 47). Whether it comes about from the collaborative process or because the medium itself is tied to the idea of multiple forms within one, the theme park is the epitome of fusion.

*Reiterative*: On the one hand a theme park is more permanent, but a theme park is also, as Allen notes, “reiterative.” One of the most famous quotes by Walt Disney is “Disneyland will never be completed. It will continue to grow as long as there is imagination left in the world. It is something that will never be finished. Something that I can keep developing and adding to” (qtd. in Sklar, “Disneyland”). He also said that Disneyland was “something I could keep plussing with ideas...I can change the park, because it’s alive” (qtd. in MacDonald). Parks mentions that Knott’s Berry Farm has ride plussing, which involves “preserving what people already loved about these classic attractions” but also “improving them, updating them” (qtd. in Hill, “Knott’s”). Heerwagen cautions that “It’s important that guests can’t tell the difference between what’s old and new” (qtd. in Bolton). Thus the attraction itself is a fluid canvas. Looked at in this way, a theme park is performance art, not just because it has dynamic activities but an ever-changing structure. Attractions may be removed or updated, new stories can be added, narrative forms may be altered, and even whole park themes can be modified. The idea of “plussing” means that attractions within the park have some narrative mutability.

In an even bigger way, theme parks are reiterative in that whole parks can be reproduced or updated. When Walt Disney said that Disneyland would “always be growing,” this turned out to be both literal and figurative (qtd. in Goldberg 50). Disneyland inspired Magic Kingdom which inspired Tokyo Disneyland, or Universal Studios Hollywood inspired Universal Studios

Florida which inspired Universal Studios Japan. In porting whole park concepts or “cloning” rides, there is a natural reiterative effect of bringing over new technology or a crisper narrative or a more current IP, etc. It may be cultural needs or time period that may change an attraction. For instance, *Pirates of the Caribbean: Battle for Sunken Treasure* is inspired by the other *Pirates of the Caribbean* attractions but is focused on the films, which visitors in China are more familiar with. It updates the technology since it was constructed decades later.

The original *Pirates of the Caribbean* rides have been altered more subtly, but all of the changes have sparked debate in fan communities (i.e. reversing the scenes where men chased women, adding the Jack Sparrow character, and removing the bride auction). Some might maintain that it is due to the “evolving sensibilities of their audience” or contend that it is “politically correct,” but nonetheless designers or management may make changes like this to avoid the attraction becoming obsolete (Surrell, *Pirates* 99). Importantly, the designers themselves debate these issues and the “controversy” of change extends beyond guests and fans to the creators themselves, who are influenced by societal debates (99). Sklar addressed the latest change of taking out the bride auction: “The Imagineers are simply reflecting what Walt started the day Disneyland opened – making changes that create exciting new experiences for our guests. I can’t think of a single attraction that has not been enhanced and improved, some over and over again. Change is a ‘tradition’ at Disneyland that today’s Imagineers practice” (qtd. in Eades, “Disney’s *Pirates*”). Sklar referred to attraction changes as “new performances” and compares this one to a different medium: “it’s like a theater show with a new act.”

Some attractions are purposefully reiterative. Puy du Fou’s *Cinéscénie* and Universal Studios Hollywood’s *Studio Tour* have been continuously updated over decades. *Hall of Presidents* changes when new American presidents take office, and some attractions like

Spaceship Earth have been updated multiple times with new narrators and occasionally scenes. Guests return to these attractions over the years to witness the changes. Pickett observes that attractions are updated for technical issues, upgrades of technology, guest dissatisfaction, or the aforementioned plussing. Attractions like Cinéscénie or Studio Tour, however, are revisited because their nature is variation though still maintaining the core experience. The shows or parades with modular form that allow variable segments similarly reflect this reiterative nature. Whether reiterations are cultural, technological, monetary, or otherwise, they are a basic part of the business.

Based on interviews and observations, dimensionality, scale, communality, brevity, a combinatory nature, and a reiterative quality are some important ways that theme parks diverge from other art forms. They are either different characteristics from the discussed art forms (oral, written, theatre, film, video games, and other new media) or at least vary in intensity from those mediums. It is precisely in their ways that they tell stories that theme parks become a robust and intriguing medium. This is a preliminary listing that can be expanded with larger interview samples and further research, but it is enough to illustrate that the theme park medium has its own affordances that can relate to and diverge from other mediums. It is also a unique narrative delivery platform that will continue to evolve and contribute to guest experiences and their perceptions of storytelling.

### **The Theorizing and Teaching of Narrative in Themed Entertainment**

In addition to the contributions that make the theme park a differentiated medium, it is significant that they are a medium that has already started the process mentioned by Robert Ray in the introduction of utilizing theory and publicity. The industry has been extended to the point that it is not only theorized by creative professionals in multiple venues (including in



organizations like the Themed Entertainment Association (TEA) or the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions (IAAPA)), it is formally taught in universities. Creative executive Anthony Esparza concurs that a major change he has seen is the *formalization* of the industry. Now there is a “language” and schools that teach industry disciplines, whereas previous designers worked from trial and error.

First, a number of publications have been released over the years from John Hench’s newspapers interviews as early as the 1960s and his foundational *Designing Disney: Imagineering and the Art of the Show* (2003) to David Younger’s recent *Theme Park Design and the Art of Themed Entertainment* (2016). Marty Sklar “possessed an unwavering belief that theme park design is an artform worth investing in” and added to the conversation with his publications (Martens, “Getting”). Some of the books in the design or management categories are officially released by The Walt Disney Company and may not even have specific authors while others are independently published. Sources outside of books include blogs, video presentations, social media like Instagram or Twitter, and at least one scholarly article. Theoretical communication in the themed entertainment industry tends to be focused on other industry professionals or fans, with few engagements related to academia, though the work of Scott Lukas, an anthropologist and creative consultant who wrote *The Immersive Worlds Handbook* (2012), is attempting to bridge the gap between academia and industry.

With design teams, publicity is rare. As creative executive Theron Skees explains, “We try to be invisible” (qtd. in Korn). A visitor will know next to nothing about who created an attraction. Fans will know slightly more, generally only the lead designers or those who get interviewed in public press. This is an interesting element of the industry because it is the opposite practice of so many other arts; for instance, authors are on book spines, paintings are

signed, and everyone near a movie set appears in the end credits. Nonetheless, some have gone public with their design through teaching, presenting, or publishing articles on social media. Glimpses of theory are given to guests by way of coffee table books or more serious discussions.

Fans play a role in the dissemination of theory as well. Several fans discuss and interrogate theme park design principles on their blogs or websites. Others interview creative professionals, providing a media outlet that is more focused than the general media response to projects. Fans may also discuss theme park design in discussion forums, which over the years have occasionally been populated by creative professionals in discourse with fans. Some fan sites have featured articles by designers. In a few cases, a designer's work is looked at by people on social media, though this is sometimes in a business context (posting concept art or images of completed projects on professional networking sites like LinkedIn). A great example of social media engagement is Rohde's Instagram account, which features frequent discussion of travel for projects and high-level theoretical dialogue. An instance of Rohde's dissemination of design theory is the following post on detail being the "inner berm," cited in Chapter 3 (fig. 40).



Figure 40: Designer Joe Rohde's post on detail (Photo: ©Joe Rohde, Instagram)

These kind of posts, accessible to fans for free (as opposed to pay-to-attend design panels at conventions like the D23 Expo or D23 Destination D) assist with more frequent dissemination of and education in design principles.

For those working in the industry, it is important to grasp both theory and best practices. One reason Hettema went back to school, for instance, was to get a “solid background in understanding design and communicating visually” (qtd. in “Phil”). This is especially critical when some clients that employ vendors to create experiences “don’t know really the theory behind them” (Hunter). They may know what attraction is similar to what they want but not what makes that attraction appealing. Thus, it is the job of designers to research narrative and employ narrative theory so that they might work with potential clients in a systematized way.

Over the years, there have been more university programs that teach themed entertainment design. Generally, these programs cater to training industry talent, but some programs may include those who have academic bents. Walt Disney himself had no higher education and distrusted theory. He said, “I don’t want a lot of theorists...I want to have everyone in that school come out capable of going in and doing a job” (qtd. in R. West, “Cal”). Nonetheless, he was responsible for a studio culture of higher education. Animators Don Hahn and Tracey Miller-Zarneke discuss the continuous art lectures and visits from art professors to the studio during Walt Disney’s day: “The culture of learning became central to the identity of the Studio” (63). Later, California Institute for the Arts or “CalArts” would be endowed by Walt Disney, with a full half of his fortune being given to them at death. Disney noted in a memo that “I definitely feel that we cannot do the fantastic things, based on the real, unless we first know the real” (qtd. in Hahn and Miller-Zarneke 18). Alum and designer Bob Rogers explains that the school echoed the “cross-disciplinary creative synergies” expected in the industry, and well-

known creative professionals graduated from there (qtd. in R. West, “Cal”). Just recently, CalArts began a program for experience design and themed entertainment (taught by industry professionals), so the legacy continues.

There are other programs that can lead to industry careers as well. Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD) started a Master of Fine Arts in Themed Entertainment Design. They have classes in various art and design topics, collaboration, visualization, technologies, and industry practices. Industry analyst Gene Jeffers remarks on SCAD’s curriculum meeting industry needs (qtd. in Ford). Otte, who teaches in this program, mentions that storytelling is strongly emphasized in it. Florida State University also now offers programs in themed experiences where professionals teach design principles. Tuch taught at the University of California, Los Angeles, which has design and architecture classes. The University of Central Florida, which has traditionally emphasized operations, has hospitality and tourism scholars but also added a program in entertainment management, a collaboration with the visual arts school. Breda University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands has both design and management focuses, including the academic-industry partnership of the Efteling Academy, which trains students to enter industry professions through an internship and courses at the park. Presumably, these kinds of programs will expand in this consistently growing industry.

Theme park professionals (whether in design, engineering, or management) tend to be an educated bunch. Certainly most interviewees and archival sources had degrees, though they varied (English, engineering, film, management, theatre, etc.). Books and artistic paradigms can inform design decisions, as Rohde attested to earlier in this project. Nonetheless, formal education is not the only way professionals learn their trades. As noted, an apprenticeship model and mentoring exist, and internships are common. The research advocacy through travel

mentioned in Chapter 3 is another way that designers learn. Show writer Rick West also calls for continuous learning within the industry, urging companies to send creative professionals on outings or research initiatives to other theme parks to maintain currency in the field (“A Call”). Carson similarly urges those interested in becoming designers to “become a student of theme parks” through extensive research by way of visiting parks, watching videos, analyzing these attractions (experiencing them “as a detective”), reading, and studying ride models or technologies or manufacturers (“Theme”).

Younger found in the course of writing his design book that for the most part, “theme park designers are huge fans of the medium” (qtd. in T. Schneider). However, researching only other theme parks is not sufficient according to Jeffs. He finds that “The best theme park designers are those who are curious and passionate about as many topics and mediums as possible, which then informs their work in theme parks” (qtd. in Kleiman, “Goddard”). Jeffs elaborates on the opposite group:

The worst theme park designers are those that only have passion for theme parks. The key to being a successful designer is to stay curious about the world and to take in as much as possible from as many different mediums as possible. As much as possible, read books, see movies, go to the theatre, visit museums, and take in as much as possible – it will all come into play later. The future of theme parks is not being shaped by theme parks, but rather by standout art in other mediums. (personal interview)

Designer and creative executive Gary Goddard relates something similar:

Whenever we are traveling we make sure to take time to find out what other interesting projects and locations are nearby so we can experience them and learn from them. And it isn't only theme parks but also cultural events, local happenings, unique dining

experiences, and festivals. You have to always keep recharging the batteries. You have to stay curious and look to learn from the world around you. (qtd. in Kleiman, “Goddard”) Like with many arts, a multi-faceted plan of professional development is necessary to be current and innovative.

Sometimes this industry’s processes inform other businesses, another way that these principles are passed on. Allen’s company IDEAS Orlando was “born out of the design, operations, marketing and training of the themed entertainment industry. We learned everything we know from that business. We are an exporter of the themed entertainment ethos to other businesses.” Christopher Stapleton’s Simiosys, which works on everything from training simulations to educational ventures to virtual reality stories that help with communicative disorders, was also born out of experience in the themed entertainment industry. As explained in Chapter 3, themed entertainment principles have penetrated many industries, so they continue to be deliberated on even in non-industry spaces.

The industry has had a few veritable spokespeople over the years. Todd Martens calls Joe Rohde “Disney’s philosopher-king” (“Meet”). Before him, John Hench was referred to as “the Philosopher of Imagineering,” the “master teacher,” the “ranking theoretician,” and the “Renaissance Imagineer” (Gennawey, “Reassurance”; Haas; Kurtti 135). Hench wrote the first substantial book on theme park design and it has been referred to as the “Bible” and recommended to me by multiple designers including Sklar, another legend. Sklar and others wrote books that regular guests may read. Rohde is a proficient spokesperson for theme park design and teaches it in many venues including social media. Nonetheless, the public theoretical perspectives of these few may have lent to a misconception that professionals in general do not theorize their work and that it tends to be done by these notable designers. As mentioned, in

designers discuss their work in many forums (websites, fan sites, blogs, presentations, industry events, articles, interviews, through teaching, etc.). They also engage in the fluid interpretation of their art form through day to day discourse, charrettes, and apprenticeship models. Artist Pat Burke talks about the many generations of Imagineers that worked together, with the older generations guiding the new ones (qtd. in Littaye). Allen mentions that there was an “unspoken apprenticeship environment” in the theme park industry, which involved new creators finding a “mentor.” Though a regular guest may not locate all of these sources or be present for industry functions, information on design and storytelling philosophies are there for the curious fan.

One of the most interesting findings of this project was that creative professionals do not only view themselves as designers but as *storytellers*, thus publicizing and theorizing not just design but storytelling. By definition, theme park designers are already storytellers, as they design, convey, and sometimes narrate stories in their attractions. Hover and Vugts offer, “As a narrative practice, storytelling also comprises the creative process of thinking up, designing, representing and/or staging stories” (272). It was obvious from my discussions with creative professionals and from archival research that many envision themselves as storytellers. Some of them, like Allen, have “storytelling” in their job titles. Some got into the industry to tell stories. As show director J. Michael Roddy relates,

I have always loved storytelling. Every aspect of it fascinates me. I can remember being at the front of the class in kindergarten retelling stories and scenes from movies to classmates, adding my own sound effects and acting out all of the roles. That early fascination and desire to tell a story was what continued to guide me. (qtd. in Emerson, “On”)



Hunter says he is known “for my little personal stories I tell.” Burke relates how he was asked to write multiple storyline treatments because “I was a pretty good story teller I’ve been told” (qtd. in Littaye). Creative executive Luc Mayrand says: “I have always loved inventing things and reading books. I loved the combination of designing things and telling stories. To me, that was all about creating anything that could be part of telling a story – every object and place and material” (qtd. in Palicki, “Pirates”). Designers research from the perspective of storytellers in the opinion of Wright: “Looking at the world as Imagineers do, through the eyes of storytellers, we often find that the best way to learn about a group of people is by studying the stories they tell one another” (*Epcot* 84). Books and interviews that refer to design, then, often project the creative identity of “storyteller,” even if the professional is known for other disciplines.

One of the many things that Rogers suggests for a new revolution in the industry is “more emphasis on great storytelling to fire the guests’ interests and imaginations.” He goes on to say that theme parks “possess the most powerful communications storytelling tools of all time” and so it should be leveraged to deal with meaningful aspects of visitors’ lives. At least three creative professionals told me they are working on a book related in part or in whole to storytelling. The publicity and theory surrounding storytelling within the industry is not fading.

Schneider says that the “Art of Themed Entertainment is just beginning to evolve,” and it will be fascinating to see where it goes (253). Lukas believes there are “more complex forms of theme park storytelling” to come (personal interview). He continues: “Much is on the horizon in the world of theme parks, and storytelling will evolve in them not only due to the efforts of Imagineers, writers, and designers, but very often due to these technological, cultural, branded, and other shifts in our world” (personal interview). Where it seems to be going is continued formalization, publicity, and theory, with scholars like me and others trying to also facilitate the

inquiry of the art form in academia. Scholarship will continue, but either way the theme park will move people whether it is articulated or verbalized or not. Rohde perhaps puts it best in a discussion of Pandora – The World of *Avatar*:

This is an art form. Art speaks. People respond. Technology is a cognitive, intellectual thing. Art is visceral. Art is a body experience. It is universal. Remember, we make these places for everybody. That means, first and foremost, this is an emotional experience.

You could be from Papua New Guinea. You should be able to walk in here, and it is like the first morning of a new world. (qtd. in Leonard and Palmeri)

### **Theme Park as “De Sprookjessprokkelaar”**

Theme parks have refashioned the medium of storytelling to meet the needs of new audiences by employing sensory experience, interactivity, and role-playing. They narrate familiar tales but have, moreover, created new content that did not originate with cultural tales or IPs, demonstrating that the parks themselves are purposeful storyteller-creators. This becomes a cultural hallmark; not only are visitors coming to experience a theme park interpretation of a traditional cultural story, they are visiting to participate in the theme park’s created story that is now a cultural narrative. Hover calls the Efteling theme park a storyteller, and Ryan explains that “the storyteller functions as the keeper and disseminator of cultural knowledge” (“Beyond” 585). Theme parks are thus inextricably linked with culture and function as contemporary storytellers that engage many methods to connect with visitors. The mutual influence of art and culture is reflected in this process. While theme parks will, according to Ady Milman, “continue to have an impact on society and will adjust their entertainment and story telling to changing social, cultural, and political thought,” culture will continue to be refashioned by adaptations and the original storytelling parks offer (“The Global” 235). The transmedia space of Efteling’s Fairytale

Tree brand or Disney's Pirates of the Caribbean have now "become accessible 24/7," so visitors can bring elements of the park into daily life (Hover and Vugts 274). Remediation can transform a visitor's "lifespace" as noted earlier, as even when the person is home, she reconnects to the immersive world, especially through products like soundtracks, memories like photographs, and communities with affinity spaces or social media.

The gatherer and teller of tales, the Sprookjessprokkelaar character, is a remediation himself, negotiating between print, oral, theatrical, and spatial texts. He represents the process and product of medium evolution, its reciprocal nature, and the ongoing concept of transmedia storytelling. His tale also epitomizes perhaps what is inherent in story, even if the story itself becomes decontextualized. There is some essence in story and some essence in storytelling that remains present even in very different mediums. As Louis Giannetti affirms, "All narratives can be interpreted on a symbolic level. There is a principle of universality that can be inferred no matter how unique or strange a given story may be" (363). The metaphor of the gatherer works in this case, as various mediums assemble these selfsame stories while adding new ones that are medium specific. The metaphor of the teller is even more apt, as narrative principles change in each medium, but the telling is a cultural construction; it is imbued in the process of creation and compelling to the listener, who joins a kind of dynamic community during moments of storytelling. In this way, the Sprookjessprokkelaar is not only the story, the collector, or the teller, but the mythic dreams of all those who have created and all those who have listened in the narrative space of the theme park.

Vugts, the leader of the group that created the Sprookjessprokkelaar, noted the similarity between himself and the character. "I feel a little bit like that guy over there," he said, gesturing at the concept art of the Sprookjessprokkelaar. "We have to keep... *we* have to keep the story

alive. With Universal it's the same, and with Disney it's the same. And so you believe in something and you go for the Holy Grail to get that." For the Efteling designers, they have to be aware of the park's "cultural heritage" and the "soul" of the park. He is not only a "keeper of stories," a collector of important tales. Parks likewise have to create new stories: "We also have to develop new stories, create new stories, but never forget the history we came from and the cultural heritage we have" (Vugts). Like the Sprookjessprokkelaar character, theme park designers have to go through a complex process to maintain their heritage of storytelling, remediating and creating in turn.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This final chapter summarizes the dissertation and its findings as well as specifies the implications and limitations of the project. Finally, it suggests avenues for future research.

### Summary

This dissertation set out to answer two primary research questions:

1. *How has storytelling in theme parks changed over time?*
2. *What makes the theme park a unique narrative medium?*

The project answered the first question by looking at the pervasiveness of theme park attractions that tell stories over time and region. Tables were composed that list theme park attractions, the attraction type, the source material, and storytelling elements (from a list of ten selected terms: allusion, character, conflict, narrator, plot, scenes, setting, symbolism, theme, visual storytelling). Over eight hundred narrative attractions were analyzed for these factors.

The work also investigated the use of major narrative techniques and technologies in three major categories (traditional, maturing, and contemporary) to trace their use within the industry. The techniques and technologies examined were these:

- architectural and landscape stories;
- implicit storytelling, tableaux, and walkthroughs;
- cinema and dark rides;
- theatre, shows, and parades;
- auditory and musical storytelling;
- animatronics;
- graphic design;
- edutainment;
- explicit artificiality;
- simulators;
- interactive dark rides;
- fireworks and spectacles;
- montage;
- environmental storytelling;
- explicit storytelling;

- transmedia storytelling and vast narratives;
- original narratives;
- interactive quests;
- live role-playing, interactive theatre, and improv storytelling;
- virtual and augmented reality;
- immersive worlds and total immersion.

Parts of both research questions were answered by seeking the perspectives of creative professionals in interviews as well as locating their voices in archival research. The second question was assisted by the process of comparing and contrasting theme park narratives to that of other mediums.

The first thing evident in this project is that there is so much storytelling in the parks that it is not quantifiable. Themed spaces before theme parks (world's fairs, amusement parks, kiddie parks, etc.) had rudimentary storytelling. The advent of Disneyland signaled the institutionalization of storytelling in the themed space and the beginning of the contemporary industry. Since then, storytelling has blossomed in each time period and in all world regions. Storytelling is accomplished through multiple forms, modes, and narratological schemes. *Dark rides* and *stage shows* are particularly likely to involve storytelling techniques, though explicit and implicit means are both applied. *Setting*, *scenes*, and *visual* storytelling are the most common narrative devices used in park storytelling. Story expressions continue to be drawn from cultural tales and popular intellectual properties. Despite the debate mentioned in the introduction and the multiple philosophies creative professionals have about the incorporation of story, storytelling is prevalent in the most successful theme parks and is in fact a distinguishing factor of the medium.

Though narrative has remained prominent and even increased over the years, how stories are told has changed over time. Five primary factors for transformation are indicated below:

1. *Technology* has been a major contributing factor, as theme parks have continually infused technologies into the repertoire of storytelling. Some were developed early in the industry

or before it, such as dark rides, while others, such as virtual and augmented reality, are recent. In a number of cases, theme parks develop technologies that are widely used (e.g. animatronics, simulators), and in other cases, theme parks utilize or adapt outside technologies to fit theme park contexts (i.e. film, interactive quests). As new technologies arise, theme parks will try them to stay competitive.

2. The *formalization of the industry* has been a factor in evolution. This includes the fragmentation or specialization of industry trades, the teaching of techniques to the next generations through mentorship and other models, the professionalization of the industry by way of education and professional organizations, and the continuing philosophical discourse of design principles in the public and private spheres. The advent of the Internet has led to more popular media and fan sites contributing to public discourse on theme parks, with creative professionals involved in the conversation.
3. The *explicit discussion of story* in the industry, perhaps as a result of number two, has meant that storytelling has become more prevalent in parks as well as in discourse surrounding themed entertainment. In both professional and fan publications, the act of storytelling is being considered on a more regular basis. Whether arguing storytelling as an essential feature or disputing that, designers debate narrative and its place in design.
4. *Design philosophies* continue to determine the kind of storytelling used in parks. There are certainly “camps” of designers (in some cases coinciding with time period paradigms, company strategies, or favored design styles), with different designers preferring explicit storytelling, implicit or interpretive storytelling, storyworld creation, or experiential storytelling. Within some of these camps, the very definition of storytelling may vary.

5. The *convergence* of media has lent to the infusion of more new media practices like transmedia storytelling and the bleeding in of the storytelling techniques of mediums like video games or theatre. As media becomes more a part of one whole, mediums become less distinguishable from one another (at least in their presentations of story), though essential differences remain. Theme parks are part of vast narratives that employ storytelling over diverse platforms, allowing opportunities for parks to expand content and invest in favorite franchises. This convergence led to an increase in desire to walk around within these beloved stories and a need for more elaborate and connected stories.

These are some of the largest trends, but like all narrative mediums, they will continue to evolve.

Theme parks will remediate techniques, technologies, and culture while still participating in invention based on their medium-specific affordances. Terence Young claims that recognizing story allusions in early parks depended on formal education whereas now they are geared toward a mass audience. However, the contemporary theme park has always been part of mass culture and depends on synergy with other mediums. There will continue to be a reciprocal relationship between mediums, inspiring and drawing from others in turn. Theme parks have mass appeal, and one reason for this is their weaving of stories into physical space and the opportunities for the visitor to become an instant part of a *storyworld*.

Relating to the professionals who create theme park experiences, this research has further demonstrated that they theorize their work and contribute to a growing body of discourse. Many of them view themselves as *storytellers* rather than only job descriptions (“creative director,” “designer,” “show writer”) or job titles (“creative consultant,” “creative vice president,” “development officer”). They operate with story as a design principle, talk about story to one another and sometimes to guests, and occasionally teach storytelling in either professional or



academic capacities. An attempt has been made here to assemble discussions about storytelling from creative professionals, but this is only a beginning. A few have already published articles or books that mention storytelling, and others will follow. At some point, one can hope there will be a library of published works from both designers and academics on theme park narratives.

Based on comparisons with other narrative mediums and interviews with creative professionals, theme parks have discrete qualities that make them a distinct narrative medium and unique art form. The defining attributes gathered from the research are *dimensionality*, *scale*, *communality*, *brevity*, a *combinatory* aspect, and a *reiterative* nature. More so than other mediums, theme parks rely on space and sensory experience to tell stories. They are created on a larger scale than other art forms, with expensive, often permanent installations that may have taken years and hundreds of people to design and build. The theme park is a collective art form, as it is developed with collaborative processes and presented to thousands of visitors at once.

Theme park narratives are generally briefer than all but some film shorts; because of this limitation, they rely on symbolic presentation, shorthand techniques, and familiar stories. While media in general has come closer to becoming one whole, theme parks have long relied on combining media forms (oral, written, sculpture, painting, theatre, film, video game) to present stories. Unlike other art forms, which tend to reach a kind of permanence, theme parks add and subtract attractions or reinvent themselves and are still considered the same narrative container.

Theme parks are a “constantly evolving” art form and likely one of the “most known art genres” (King, “The Theme” 8-9). Salvador Anton Clavè asserts that the theme park is not just a tourist attraction; it is “a unique place for entertainment, a source of meaning and a suitable framework for the study of culture, place and technology” (xx). Margaret King finds them to be “prominent, even central, American cultural icons,” though I would argue that Europe has a

mature theme park model and Asia has a developing one (“The Theme” 6). Stories will continue to be utilized within the parks, visitors will keep going to experience these tales, and storytelling as a vehicle for meaning will be the subject of discussion amongst designers, fans, and scholars.

The theme park will continue to act as the Sprookjessprokkelaar, the Efteling park character who is the gatherer and teller of stories. Like that character, theme park stories are collaboratively produced and collectively received. They find age-old or original stories to engage an audience and encourage an emotional response. Like the mood the walk-around Sprookjessprokkelaar character elicits in the theme park, with children sitting around rapt with attention, there is a wonder to storytelling, a human desire to listen and connect. Theme parks are a communal space, one where visitors will keep experiencing tales from humanity’s library.

### **Implications of the Project**

This project posits the theme park as a distinct narrative medium and an emerging medium. It should be considered as such in literature and scholarship surrounding visual, material, and narrative arts. While storytelling is frequently covered in areas of scholarship, the theme park as a distinct medium with interesting ways to tell stories has not been touched upon by many of the areas that deal with storytelling. Though art and design schools are beginning to embrace themed entertainment as an art form, it is rarely if ever addressed in discourse around narrative theory, literature, or folklore.

In the literature surrounding Texts and Technology, there is a perceived evolution from oral to literary to digital to new media texts. Scholars like Janet Murray, Henry Jenkins, and Frank Rose recognize theme parks as interesting examples, but scholarship in the area does not focus on the theme park as a new medium or as an evolution of or remediation of previous mediums. Theme parks should be recognized as a separate medium or at very least a medium

that is an amalgam of others. Since theme parks predate what is generally considered “new media,” but they are not “old” media, scholarship can determine where the medium fits. The theme park has enough distinct affordances to qualify as a medium worthy of separate consideration, and an interdisciplinary program like Texts and Technology (related to new media studies and digital humanities, though spatial humanities would be beneficial for this work) is particularly suited for this purview.

Other areas of scholarship could benefit from more frequent analysis of theme parks as well. Cultural critics can add in-depth analysis of theme parks related to storytelling and culture. Though a few works in anthropology and sociology exist, the connection between storytelling and this popular leisure concept has hardly been touched on. Tourism and hospitality scholars could incorporate the findings about the storytelling potential of the theme park to contribute to richer scholarship about staging spaces and the guest experience. It is evident that storytelling is a key reason for the success of the industry, but it is only occasionally referred to in the surrounding literature and seldom applied to analysis.

The design philosophies of the artistic community surrounding themed entertainment is another area that the project highlighted. This discourse ought to be explored further, as it was shown to be complex. The self-perception of creative professionals as storytellers is a discovery that could apply to multiple scholarly fields. Also, industry professionals can contribute to the emerging discourse surrounding themed entertainment and continue to theorize their own work. Even though not all trade secrets can be revealed, it is important to continue the conversation around a medium that has emerged as a compelling narrative platform and cultural touchstone. Awareness of the theme park as an art form is only growing, and work like this expands the conversation and offers additional areas to examine.

## Limitations of the Project

Though this was an attempt to capture key aspects of theme park storytelling, there were limitations. They will be listed here in order of seriousness.

1. *Scope:* While interdisciplinarity is a strength for understanding various facets of a phenomenon, it means that individual theories or avenues were not given the same depth that would have resulted from a single-approach study. For instance, while narratology or new media studies were employed in service of this work, the inquiries only penetrated the surface of what is possible with those approaches. Likewise, a case study of one park or just of narrative dark rides or extensive study of just one of the “techniques” or “technologies” would have yielded more depth. It seemed that this project was the logical beginning and that further research can pursue those lines.
2. *Dataset:* Like much research, this one was limited by the dataset. While every attempt was made to have a sizeable sample of creative professionals (over one hundred) and to be inclusive of multiple disciplines and representative companies, there are likely professionals who would disagree with the statements made by other designers. Generalizations were only made when they had the support of a majority of voices, but they do not represent every voice. Not all narrative experiences were covered or even known to the researcher, and having that information may have yielded more accurate conclusions. Nonetheless, a large amount of narrative experiences was used so that basic conclusions could be made. The list of theme parks for Chapter 2 has limitations as explained in that section and the storytelling attraction lists, while substantial, are directed and not comprehensive. Additionally, the industry is constantly evolving, so

some of this information will change within a few years. The importance of storytelling as a whole, however, does not appear to be declining.

3. *Research Standpoint:* As explained in the beginning, this work and the researcher have standpoints that meant particular viewpoints or research preferences. This includes the notion that storytelling is a generally positive force and essential human act as well as the belief in the theme park as a medium worth studying as art and narrative. The principles and processes of research were followed for this project, which presumably eliminated undue bias, but all research has a standpoint.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

A few avenues of further research for this area of study are grouped here.

*Details and cases:* While this provided general discussion of storytelling in many areas, each category could be probed with more detail (whether this is a type of theme park, a type of attraction, or a particular region or time period). Case studies, like Moniek Hover's examination of Efteling's storytelling conditions, could be conducted at other individual locations. If viable, a large-scale industry survey about the unique qualities should be given to see if the six characteristics found in this study continue to be mentioned. Additional collection of designers' perspectives related to storytelling can expand this study and give it a broader focus. More interrogation and technically specific scholarship on theme parks as a technology would be fruitful. Work on themed entertainment other than theme parks would be valuable, as research on those forms is limited. Emerging markets could use more research to see if they keep working off the same models as the mature industry or whether they develop their own models. It would be useful to detail how concept art or theme park marketing schemes tell stories.

*Angles and approaches:* One area that could use more work is narratological analyses of theme parks. While this study looked at some basic terms, it would be productive to apply more advanced narrative terms to theme park stories. It might be worthwhile to discover more about the effects of theme park narrative on guests and ask questions about it related to guest recognition of narratives, awareness of techniques, and interpretation of stories in various contexts. Vincent Neveu and Tamberly Husson's studies of the connection between visitor's prior understanding of narratives and theme park expressions in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter could be expanded to include guests from different cultures, a diverse set of narratives (fairy tales, for instance), or other theme parks.

*Change:* As the industry will continue to evolve, scholarship needs to capture the evolving trends of this exceptional narrative medium. These changes may be related to design principles, storytelling techniques, technologies, operations, or regional models, but the fluid nature of the industry provides continuous openings for the application of scholarship.

In the way that the Sprookjessprokkelaar demonstrates the value of storytelling to others, I hope to demonstrate the significance of theme park storytelling to academic and industry communities. My goal is to become the gatherer of theme park stories and collector of the theme park storytellers' stories. I plan to further my effort into these areas in the future, but a robust subfield of interdisciplinary research focused on themed entertainment, with a community of scholars and creative professionals engaged with it, would be even more effective at producing meaningful work.

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWEES AND QUESTIONS

This appendix is related to the interviews given for this dissertation. It includes the overall interview questions and a list of creative professionals whose words are used in this study whether from interviews or archival research.

### **General Interview Questions**

(Additional questions were generated later in the case of some of the interviews)

1. Please state the companies you worked for, your positions with the companies, your years of service, and your overall background in the theme park industry.
2. What is your favorite experience you have been a part of creating? Why?
3. What role does storytelling play in your position?
4. How do you define storytelling? What are its components?
5. In your experience, have you seen any changes in the storytelling within parks?
6. Do you believe there is a diversity of industry approaches to telling stories? How?
7. How does a design team determine ways in which you are going to tell stories for a particular attraction?
8. How do you or the industry use technology to tell stories?
9. Do you think that theme parks tell stories in unique ways? If so, how?
10. Why do you create stories? Why is storytelling so powerful, and why has it had such an impact on the theme park industry?
11. Do you have any additional comments about the concepts of storytelling, immersion, theming, ways that parks tell stories, or technology?



## List of Interviewees

The following table lists the interviews conducted for the purposes of this research project:

Table 4: List of Interviewees

<b>Name</b>	<b>Interview Date, Type</b>	<b>Title at Time of Interview</b>
Steve Alcorn	March 31, 2017, email	CEO, Alcorn McBride; author; instructor
Bob Allen	March 24, 2017, in person	Chief Storytelling Officer, IDEAS Orlando
Anthony Esparza	June 7, 2017, phone	Chief of Creative, SeaWorld Parks
Moniek Hover	February 21, 2016, email	Professor of Storytelling, Breda University of Applied Sciences
Drew Hunter	March 1, 2016, in person	Vice President of Design, Sally Corporation
Rene Merkelbach	March 9, 2016, in person by proxy (Moniek Hover)	Composer
Ross Osterman	May 6, 2015, in person	Director of Concept Development, Universal Creative
Charlie Otte	May 7, 2017, phone	Creative Director, Velocity; Professor of Themed Entertainment Design at Savannah College of Art and Design
Darryl Pickett	March 9, 2017, in person	Principle Show Writer and Storyteller, Acomb Ostendorf & Associates
Taylor Jeffs	September 14, 2015, email	Director of Design, Goddard Group
Henry Jenkins	February 6, 2016, email	Professor of Communications, Journalism, Cinematic Arts, and Education, University of Southern California; author
Kirsten Kischuk	September 27, 2016, email	Design Coordinator, Nickelodeon Recreation
Ron Logan	February 11, 2016, email	Associate Professor, Tourism, Events, and Attractions, Universal of Central Florida; former Walt Disney Company entertainment executive
Scott Lukas	September 6, 2016, email	Chair, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Lake Tahoe Community College; author; themed entertainment consultant
Kiran Sirah	June 2, 2017, in person	President, International Storytelling Center
Larry Tuch	May 9, 2017, Skype	Writer and Creative Consultant, Narrative Solutions
Olaf Vugts	October 14, 2015, in person	Director of Imagineering, Efteling
Donna Wolf	June 8, 2017, in person	Storyteller and Actor-Interpreter, Colonial Williamsburg
Josh Young	July 15, 2017, email	Chief Creative Officer, Escape Room Adventures; author
David Younger	December 7, 2016, email	Themed Entertainment Consultant; author

## List of Archival Sources

The following table lists the creative professionals quoted in this dissertation, the person’s overall job classification, and what type of source the information was obtained from. This list focuses on creative professionals rather than executives or operations personnel. When it says “creative executive,” she/he is a creator who is now in an executive role within that organization; also, many of these professionals have a half dozen titles or trades, but usually only one area is tagged. Some are more associated with other mediums like film, music, animation, or other writing but contributed to a themed entertainment project. A few of the creative professionals I interviewed will be repeated here if they have additional work I consulted. “Published work” refers to a work (book, article, blog, website language) written by the creator, whereas “archival interview” means that the creator’s words were found in a secondary source.

Table 5: List of Archival Sources

<b>Name</b>	<b>Job Type</b>	<b>Information Obtained From</b>
Ackley, Jonathan	Game designer	Archival interview
Alcorn, Steve	Engineer, author, executive	Published work
Alfieri, Louis	Creative executive	Published work
Alfuso, Joe	Composer	Archival interview
Alexander, Peter	Producer	Archival interview
Allen, Jesse	Audio director	Published work, archival interview
Anderson, Mark	Creative director	Published work
Atencio, Xavier	Animator	Archival interview
Bacon, Karl	Engineer	Archival interview book
Baker, Jon	Composer	Archival interview
Baxter, Tony	Creative executive	Archival interview
Beatty, Chris	Creative director	Archival interview
Berger, Adam	Show writer, author	Published work, archival interview
Beyer, Steve	Creative director	Archival interview
Bezark, Adam	Creative director	Archival interview
Bloom, Phil	Ride designer	Archival interview
Bowie, Ian	Experience designer	Archival interview
Brower, Russell	Composer	Archival interview
Burke, Jeff	Show producer	Archival interview
Burke, Pat	Artist, writer	Archival interview
Butler, Bill	Creative director	Published work
Cameron, James	Film director	Archival interview
Carroll, Michael	Media production director	Archival interview

<b>Name</b>	<b>Job Type</b>	<b>Information Obtained From</b>
Carson, Don	Concept designer	Published work
Cashman, Joe	Production designer	Archival interview
Chiang, Doug	Creative executive	Archival interview
Cliff, Peter	Creative director	Archival interview
Collins, Larry	Project engineer	Published work
Comstock, Paul	Landscape designer	Archival interview
Corrado, Henry	Creative director	Published work
Counts, Rhonda	Art director	Archival interview
Coup, Thierry	Creative executive	Archival interview
Crump, Rolly	Animator, designer	Archival interview
Curry, Michael	Production designer	Archival interview
Daurio, Paul	Producer	Archival interview
Davis, Marc	Animator, designer	Archival interview
Davis, Marvin	Art director	Archival interview
Davison, Steve	Entertainment director	Archival interview
Delaney, Tim	Show producer	Archival interview
Disney, Walt	Producer	Archival interview
Dobbs Beck, Vicki	Creative executive	Archival interview
Dorsey, Don	Music producer	Archival interview
Durmick, Chris	Creative director	Archival interview
Eades, Mark	Show producer	Published work
Eck, Tracy	Lighting designer	Archival interview
Evans, Bill	Landscape designer	Archival interview
Eyerman, Will	Graphic designer	Archival interview
Fitzgerald, Tom	Creative executive	Archival interview
France, Van Arsdale	Training developer	Archival interview
Gibson, Blaine	Animator, sculptor	Archival interview
Gilmore, Alan	Art director	Archival interview
Girolami, Lisa	Show producer	Archival interview
Gizienski, John	Production designer	Archival interview
Goddard, Gary	Creative executive	Archival interview
Goff, Harper	Artist, production designer	Archival interview
Gurr, Bob	Ride designer	Archival interview
Hahn, Don	Animator	Archival interview
Handke, Danny	Show producer	Published work
Hanna, Craig	Creative executive	Archival interview
Harmon, Ryan	Creative executive	Archival interview
Heerwagen, Björn	Design and production manager	Archival interview
Hellwig, Stefan	Creative executive	Archival interview
Hench, John	Animator, designer	Published work, archival interview
Hettema, Phil	Creative executive	Published work, archival interview
Hicks, Michelle	Project manager, engineer	Archival interview
Hill, Rich	Creative director	Archival interview
Holt, Garner	Animatronics engineer	Published work
Hormay, Zsolt	Sculptor	Archival interview
Hunt, Vanessa	Art curator	Published work
Irvine, Kim	Creative director	Archival interview
Jeffs, Taylor	Creative executive	Archival interview

<b>Name</b>	<b>Job Type</b>	<b>Information Obtained From</b>
Johnson, Kevin	Technical director	Archival interview
Johnson, Rian	Film director	Archival interview
Jupiter, Amy	Media producer	Archival interview
Kahn, Norm	Creative executive	Archival interview
Kalama, Asa	Creative director	Archival interview
Kay, Ian	Cartoonist	Published work
Kirk, Tim	Design director	Archival interview
Kischuk, Kirsten	Design coordinator	Published work
Kurtti, Jeff	Creative director, author	Published work
Landau, Jon	Film producer	Archival interview
Lange, Chris	Creative director	Archival interview
Lanzisero, Joe	Creative executive	Archival interview
Larsen, Russell	Landscape architect	Archival interview
Lasseter, John	Animator, executive	Archival interview
Leclerq, Christophe	Show director	Archival interview
Lee, Newton	Computer scientist	Published work
Lelevier, Leticia	Graphic designer	Archival interview
Lewis, Don	Audio producer	Archival interview
Lima, Eduardo	Graphic designer	Archival interview
Lunde, Monty	Creative executive	Archival interview
Mack, Michael	Creative executive	Archival interview
Malmberg, Melody	Author	Published work
Malmlund, Ann	Production designer	Archival interview
Martiniere, Stephan	Artist	Published work
Mayrand, Luc	Creative executive	Archival interview
McCann, Tom	Engineer	Archival interview
McCoy, Shawn	Creative executive	Archival interview
McKee, Rich	Composer	Archival interview
Merritt, Christopher	Show director	Archival interview
Merz, Eric	Creative producer	Archival interview
Miller-Zarneke, Tracey	Animator	Published work
Mina, Miraphora	Graphic designer	Archival interview
Moreton, Paul	Creative director	Archival interview
Morgan, Ed	Ride manufacturer	Archival interview
Morosky, Jeff	Landscape designer	Archival interview
Morris, Rick	Sound director	Archival interview
Morris, Tom	Creative director	Archival interview
Morris, Zach	Artistic director	Archival interview
Naversen, Nate	Creative consultant	Published work
Nichols, Mark	Show producer	Archival interview
O'Connor, Ken	Art director	Archival interview
Osterhout, Paul	Creative executive	Published work
Parks, Ken	Creative director	Archival interview
Pickett, Darryl	Show writer	Presentations
Pieck, Annette	Project manager	Archival interview
Pitcher, Fangxing	Show writer	Archival interview
Poppinga, Björn	Wood sculptor	Archival interview
Priddy, Matthew	Technical advisor	Archival interview

<b>Name</b>	<b>Job Type</b>	<b>Information Obtained From</b>
Rafferty, Kevin	Show writer	Published work
Renfrow, Mark	Show director	Presentation
Revenson, Jody	Author	Archival interview
Roddy, J. Michael	Show director	Archival interview
Rogers, Bob	Creative executive	Published work, archival interview
Rohde, Joe	Creative executive	Published work, archival interview, presentations
Rothschild, Rick	Show director	Archival interview, presentation
Rouse, Jack	Designer	Archival interview
Rust, John	Composer	Archival interview
Ryan, Taylor Michael	Composer	Published work
Salkin, Leo	Animator	Archival interview
Schirmer, Mark	Show producer	Archival interview
Schneider, Ron	Actor, author	Published work
Schwarzer, Hendrik	Composer	Archival interview
Skees, Theron	Creative executive	Archival interview
Sklar, Marty	Creative executive	Published work
Sotto, Eddie	Creative executive	Published work, archival interview
Stamper, Dan	Music producer	Archival interview
Stapleton, Christopher	Producer, creative director	Published work, archival interview
Steele, Amy	Concept development executive	Archival interview
Stromberg, Robert	Special effects designer	Archival interview
Sullivan, Michelle	Landscape designer	Archival interview
Sunderland, John	Museum designer	Published work, archival interview
Surrell, Jason	Show writer, author	Published work
Tellingen, Simeon van	Creative director	Published work, archival interview
Trowbridge, Scott	Creative executive	Published work, archival interview
Ulmer, Daren	Creative executive	Archival interview
Updike, Joshua	Creative director	Archival interview
Vugts, Olaf	Creative executive	Published work
Want, Robin van der	Project development director	Archival interview
Wardley, John	Ride designer	Archival interview
West, Rick	Show writer	Published work
Wightman, Barbara	Show designer	Archival interview
Willebrand, Xaver	Composer	Archival interview
Williams, Diana	Creative development executive	Archival interview
Wojcik, Randy	Show director	Archival interview
Wood, John	Creative executive	Archival interview
Woodbury, Mark	Creative executive	Archival interview
Wright, Alex	Creative director, author	Published work
Younger, David	Themed entertainment designer, author	Published work, archival interview

## APPENDIX B: CHAPTER TWO INTERVIEWS

Table 6: Interviewee Comments on Storytelling in Culture

Interviewee	Comments
Steve Alcorn	Since stories are about a character’s emotions, storytelling is powerful because it elicits an emotional response in those who experience it. That’s why an attraction with a story is so much more memorable than a simple thrill ride.
Bob Allen	As far as we know, in the known universe, we’re the only species who does it. It is a uniquely human thing. We have the ability to synthesize reality. And we do it by putting together a plausible intersection of character, plot, setting, and so. There is good neurology and psychology under this. You make up a story every morning. You really do make up reality; it’s not a hyperbolic or a romantic or a fictional notion. What is story? It’s everything. It is the way human beings construct their universe, and they’re doing it all the time. We are storytelling machines. Given enough time, I think I could prove pretty empirically that story is what makes up most of the way people deal with reality or don’t.
Anthony Esparza	Story organizes your world and creates a clear emotion. It’s a setting to share, a shared experience with others, a chance to laugh and cry.
Drew Hunter	Storytelling by all accounts was probably one of the things that early early humans did. Storytelling has always been a part of human experience, always, as far as we know. You know even if they couldn’t say it to each other, but they could draw it or act it out. It’s intrinsic. It’s only natural that it would go in the entertainment aspect of life.
Kirsten Kischuk	People have always told stories – from the time we set foot on this earth! I don’t know if we can fully analyze why we do tell stories, but it probably has something to do with our emotions and our need to make connection with one another. Story immerses us in a world that is not the normal, everyday world that we live in. It gives us characters who are very much like us or very, very different. It tantalizes our imagination, fires up our minds and gives us new ideas about how to navigate our world and what its possibilities are. We are a people who have always told stories, and to surround people with story makes for such a richer, more interesting, and more nuanced experience.
Ron Logan	Stories create “expectation” and “purpose.” Story = the communication device that takes us all to that “world of fantasy.”
Ross Osterman	Storytelling is a great way to elicit emotion from people. Stories are kind of a way to connect people to their own emotions and to connect people to other people, whether it’s the characters in the story or just their friends or the audience they’re sharing an experience with. I mean, look, people have been telling stories since time began and it’s a means of communication that really works for people. It humanizes ideas or information. It puts a face on ideas and ways of looking at the world or each other. I mean I’ve read or heard humans tend to be hard-wired for pattern recognition. Like when you look at acoustic ceiling tiles or look at clouds, you immediately see a shape that looks like a bear. You immediately try to make something out of patterns and I guess to some extent you know maybe someone could say storytelling

Interviewee	Comments
	is trying to apply a pattern to ideas and emotions and feelings. It's what we do. Just saying "I'm scared" or "I'm happy" or "are you in love too?" or "how do you feel about this?" - when you put it in the context of once upon a time, it just makes it more digestible and relatable maybe and ultimately more powerful.
Charlie Otte	It is the way people define themselves and relationships to one another. It is how we understand the self, each other, and the world. It is a really old act. It is basic communication. Language may have even developed so that we can tell stories. It is the heart of what makes us what we are.
Darryl Pickett	I think narrative is innate in our species. I think even the way we talk about anything, the way we talk about what kind of day we had at work today tends to get filtered through sort of a story filter. The way that we understand our lives really is a narrative. And so we're drawn to it. Story is as old as language or older. It's really part of who we are as humans.
Larry Tuch	The human animal has consciousness. Now, the human animal can learn things and remember things, can even romanticize about things. It's sensitive to the nuances that make an experience, that have to do with one experience to still resonate; it affects the way people think and behave. The original software is language; it's code. Once you learn to say things and string them together, you explain things to your prehistoric neighbors and family members. How do you string them all together to come back home and explain why somebody got hurt by a mammoth tusk? Now you need to explain, you have new content. What happened? What was the precondition that made it happen? What was the cause and effect? What was the pivotal moment at which it could have been avoided? And what the hell does that mean to us? Now how do you package all that? Story. Story is interpretive. Those are the two exquisite artifacts of human imagination, One, language. Two, story. Once you get story, what the hell are we gonna build out of it? We need to explain things. A story is a carrier of cultural values. It has to do with survival. The story carries all that frame. Story can relieve a little pain by making you laugh. Story can teach you a lesson. Story can enshrine the key lessons of your culture that you want to pass from one generation to another.
Olaf Vugts	Everything has a story. And every experience has a story. "I was in Efteling and I saw Fata Morgana and it was great." The importance of storytelling within theme parks is the importance of sharing your memories. And it's not about experience itself but sharing your memory with the other one who is also sharing their experience. And that sharing of experience is your storytelling within theme parks, not about the story itself which you have been told.
Donna Wolf	It is part of our genetic makeup. We have to communicate. We have to make a human connection. Across the board, all kinds of people tell a story together. It is a genetic imperative to reach out and connect.



Table 7: Designer Joe Rohde Comments on Storytelling in Culture

Source	Comments
“From Myth”	Story structure is the way we form the thoughts that define our lives. The brain is a story-making machine. And story sense is something different from logic. That’s why a well told story, even though it may be logically untrue, affects us emotionally as if it were true. Story structure seems to be an inherent part of language and thought.
qtd. in Jacques	Story is human nature at the very essence. There are rules of order that say how we structure stories and how we conceptualize time. Both of these are so key to how our brains perceive the world, that in general, what is happening to us at any moment in our life is that we are telling ourselves a story — we’re translating everything that happens into story as it happens in front of us.
“Narrative”	I am interested in the functions of narrative in the human creature. Narrative is at the root of our divergence from other primates in the course of our evolution. Narrative is deeply embedded in our human state. We talk our way through the existence that we have. We are compulsive narrators, compulsive story formers. We are not existentialists. We are not alone. We are unified by some kind of core sense of narrative that holds us all together. We are compulsive pattern makers. Human beings are narrative creatures.

Table 8: Walt Disney Imagineering Comments about Storytelling’s Importance

Walt Disney Company Professional	Comments (source)
Steve Beyer	“Imagineers build emotional journeys for our guests in story environments” ( <i>The Imagineering Workout</i> 72).
Rhonda Counts	“At Imagineering, we value the story’s intent and the importance of being surrounded with or immersed in the story’s environment” ( <i>The Imagineering Workout</i> 80).
Tom Fitzgerald	“At Walt Disney Imagineering everything we do revolves around the story” ( <i>The Imagineering Workout</i> 10).
Tami Garcia	“Story games are especially good because they reinforce storytelling as our preferred means of communication” ( <i>The Imagineering Workout</i> 150).
John Hench	“Story is the essential organizing principle behind the design of the Disney theme parks. Imagineers interpret and create narratives for guests to experience in real space and time” ( <i>Designing</i> 67).
Bob Iger	“Five decades ago, there was simply nowhere on Earth where one could find a full-time group of creative and innovative individuals whose job was to imagine, design, and create three-dimensional, living stories” ( <i>Walt...Magic More</i> 8).
“Imagineers, The”	Despite discipline, “each Imagineer is a storyteller” ( <i>The Imagineering Way</i> 10).  “Everything we do at Imagineering is driven by story” ( <i>Walt...Magic Real</i> 42).

Walt Disney Company Professional	Comments (source)
	<p>“Imagineering is the art of living storytelling”; “The story of an attraction is told again and again as the project goes from idea to completion”; “Imagineers design rich environments that immerse Guests in a story” (<i>Walt...Magic More</i> 9, 26, 30).</p>
Jeff Kurtti	<p>“The core of Disneyland, and of nearly every successful Disney creative project, is the story it tells”; “Story is everything” (<i>Walt Disney’s Imagineering</i> x, 47).</p>
Fangxing Pitcher	<p>“What makes Disneyland unique, makes it different from other parks around the world, is the effort we put into storytelling” (qtd. in Feiran).</p>
Kevin Rafferty	<p>“Our way of working is fueled by our desire to tell a multidimensional story” (<i>The Imagineering Workout</i> 12).</p>
Jay Rasulo	<p>“First, everything is fundamentally story-based — we are storytellers. We use a broad variety of tools, technology and devices to deliver stories, (and) fundamentally every ride and attraction really is a story” (qtd. in Cellini, “New”).</p> <p>“We are storytellers whose medium is the three-dimensional world, and as we dream up new stories to tell, we invent new ways to tell them” (<i>Walt...Magic More</i> 9).</p>
Jody Revenson	<p>“Most Imagineering projects start with story” (<i>The Imagineering Workout</i> 4).</p>
Marty Sklar	<p>Imagineers attend the “Walt Disney school of story and placemaking” (<i>Dream</i> 65).</p> <p>“Everything starts with the story at Disney” (qtd. in Surrell, <i>Haunted</i> 6).</p> <p>An Imagineer’s job: “I help immerse people in real, physical three-dimensional experiences where the magic of Disney stories comes to life” (<i>One</i> 154).</p>
Tom Staggs	<p>“We start with a great story and design ideas to create an experience” (qtd. in Kinni x-xi); We have a “culture of world-famous storytelling” (qtd. in Kinni xi).</p>
Jason Surrell	<p>We still “use story as the organizing principle” (66); “While planning, always refer to the story and ask: what will strengthen the story experience?” (<i>The Imagineering Workout</i> 66).</p>
Barbara Wightman	<p>“At Imagineering a wonderful thing happens: ideas are expressed as stories” (<i>The Imagineering Workout</i> 131).</p>
Alex Wright	<p>“Story is the fundamental building block of everything WDI does. Imagineers are, above all, storytellers. The time, place, characters, and plot points that give our work meaning start with the story, which is also the framework that guides all design decisions” (<i>Disneyland</i> 13).</p> <p>“We are not all engineers. We are not all artists. But we are all storytellers and share a common sensibility regarding the value of stories” (<i>Disneyland</i> 19).</p>

## APPENDIX C: CHAPTER TWO LISTS

In the following lists basic storytelling terms are used to denote the presence of narrative elements (also in Appendix D). These terms are: *allusion*, referring to another (often well-known cultural) text outside itself; *character*, an entity involved in action within a story (in theme park experiences, usually recognizable intellectual properties, flat characters/archetypes, or the guests themselves); *conflict*, a struggle within a story (between characters, a character and nature, or character and self, etc.), often seen as what motivates and pushes narratives in particular directions; *narrator*, in this case, the presence of an overt, rather than implied, storyteller; *plot*, a sequence of connected events (with *events* being a unit of *action* with characters, or a *happening* without them); *scenes*, single event frames (action in one place, one time), the standard unit or division of plays, films, or dark rides; *setting*, background details expressing a storyworld (often including *motifs*, repeated images or things); *symbolism*, items or events that represent a deeper meaning or a larger event, often through *synecdoche*, or representing a whole of a story through a part; *theme*, a repeating, underlying idea or message within the story; *visual storytelling*, telling of a story through primarily visual (rather than verbal) means including film or architecture.

Table 9: Disneyland First Year Attractions

Name	Attraction Type	Closed	Source Material or Inspirations	Storytelling Elements
Autopia	Tracked car ride	Still Open	-	Setting
Canal Boats of the World	Canal boat ride	Still Open (story theme, new name Storybook Land Canal Boats 1956)	Madurodam miniatures park	Narrator, setting, visual storytelling
Casey Jr. Circus Train	Miniature train ride	Still Open	<i>Dumbo</i> film	Allusion, character, setting
Chicken of the Sea Pirate Ship and Restaurant; Skull Rock	Structure, restaurant; structure, seating	1982	<i>Peter Pan</i> film, <i>Peter Pan</i> children's literature	Allusion, setting
Circarama (various films)	Movie theatre	1997	Travelogue genre	Narrator, scenes, setting
Clock of the World	Structure	1966	-	Symbolism

Name	Attraction Type	Closed	Source Material or Inspirations	Storytelling Elements
Conestoga Wagons	Covered wagon ride	1960	West motif	Setting, symbolism
Davy Crockett Museum	Walkthrough exhibit	1956	<i>Davy Crockett</i> television	Allusion, character
Disneyland Railroad	Train ride, transport	Still Open	-	Narrator
Dumbo the Flying Elephant	Spinner ride	Still Open	<i>Dumbo</i> film	Allusion, character, symbolism
Flight Circle	Demonstration show	1966	-	Narrator
Golden Horseshoe Revue	Western revue show	1986 (similar show till 2003)	West motif, revue genre, <i>Pecos Bill</i> film short	Allusion, character, narrator
Indian Village	Structures, demonstrations	1972	Native culture	Character, setting, symbolism
Jungle Cruise	Tracked boat ride	Still Open	<i>The African Queen</i> film; True-Life Adventure film "The African Lion"	Character, conflict, narrator, scenes, setting, theme
Kaiser Aluminum Hall of Fame	Walkthrough exhibit	1960	Museums	Symbolism
King Arthur Carrousel	Carousel	Still Open	King Arthur legend	Allusion, symbolism
Mad Tea Party	Spinner ride	Still Open	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i> film	Allusion, symbolism
Main Street Cinema	Movie theatre	Still Open	-	Scenes, visual storytelling
Main Street Shooting Gallery	Shooting gallery	1962	-	Setting
Mark Twain Riverboat	Tracked boat ride	Still Open	Mark Twain works	Narrator, setting, symbolism, theme
Mickey Mouse Club Circus	Indoor circus show	1956	<i>Mickey Mouse Club</i> television show	Setting
Mickey Mouse Club Theater	Movie theatre	1982	-	Character, scenes, visual storytelling
Mike Fink Keel Boats	Boat ride	1997	<i>Davy Crockett</i> television show	Narrator, setting, symbolism
Monsanto House of Chemistry	Walkthrough, educational exhibit	1966	Museums	Symbolism
Mr. Toad's Wild Ride	Tracked dark ride	Still Open	<i>The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad</i> film, <i>Wind in the Willows</i> literary work	Allusion, character, conflict, plot, scenes, setting, theme
Pack Mules	Animal ride	1973	West motif	Setting, symbolism

<b>Name</b>	<b>Attraction Type</b>	<b>Closed</b>	<b>Source Material or Inspirations</b>	<b>Storytelling Elements</b>
Peter Pan's Flight	Suspended dark ride	Still Open	<i>Peter Pan</i> film, <i>Peter Pan</i> literary work	Allusion, character, conflict, plot, scenes, setting, theme
Rocket to the Moon	Theatre, simulation	1966	Collaboration with Wernher von Braun	Narrator, plot, setting, symbolism, theme
Sleeping Beauty Castle	Structure	Still Open	<i>Sleeping Beauty</i> film, fairy tale	Setting, symbolism
Snow White's Scary Adventures	Tracked dark ride	Still Open	<i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i> film, fairy tale	Allusion, character, conflict, plot, scenes, setting, theme
Space Station X-1	Walkthrough diorama exhibit	1960	Collaboration with Wernher von Braun	Setting, symbolism, theme
Stage Coach	Stage coach ride	1960	West motif	Setting, symbolism
Tomorrowland Boats	Free-moving boat ride	1956	-	Setting
<i>20,000 Leagues Under the Sea</i> Exhibit	Film sets	1966	<i>20,000 Leagues Under the Sea</i> film, literary work	Allusion, character, setting
The World Beneath Us	Dioramas, movie	1960	Science, museums	Character, conflict, plot, scenes, setting, theme

Table 10: Sixty-Six Top Theme Parks

(Ordered by most attendance; sources: TEA/AECOM *Global Attractions Attendance Report 2016 or 2015\**, Plautz\*\*, and estimate\*\*\*)

Park Name	City, Country	Year Opened	Classification	Recent Attendance (in millions)
Magic Kingdom	Lake Buena Vista, USA	1971	Theme park	20.3
Disneyland	Anaheim, USA	1955	Theme park	17.9
Tokyo Disneyland	Tokyo, JP	1983	Theme park	16.5
Universal Studios Japan	Osaka, JP	2001	Theme park	14.5
Tokyo DisneySea	Tokyo, JP	2001	Theme park	13.4
Epcot	Lake Buena Vista, USA	1982	Theme park	11.7
Disney's Animal Kingdom	Lake Buena Vista, USA	1998	Theme park	10.8
Disney's Hollywood Studios	Lake Buena Vista, USA	1989	Theme park	10.7
Universal Studios Florida	Orlando, USA	1990	Theme park	9.9
Islands of Adventure	Orlando, USA	1999	Theme park	9.3
Disney's California Adventure	Anaheim, USA	2001	Theme park	9.2
Chimelong Ocean Kingdom	Hengqin, CN	2014	Theme park	8.4
Disneyland Parc	Marne-la-Vallee, FR	1992	Theme park	8.4
Lotte World	Seoul, KR	1989	Theme park	8.1
Universal Studios Hollywood	Universal City, USA	1964	Theme park	8.0
Everland	Gyeonggi-Do, KR	1976	Themed amusement park	7.2
Hangzhou Songcheng Park	Hangzhou, CN	1996	Theme park	7.2*
Hong Kong Disneyland	Hong Kong, CN	2005	Theme park	6.1
Ocean Park	Hong Kong, CN	1977	Theme park	5.9
Nagashima Spa Land	Kuwana, JP	1966	Amusement park	5.8
Europa-Park	Rust, DE	1975	Theme park	5.6
Shanghai Disneyland	Shanghai, CN	2016	Theme park	5.6
Walt Disney Studios	Marne-la-Vallee, FR	2002	Theme park	4.9
Efteling	Kaatsheuvel, NL	1952	Theme park	4.7
Tivoli Gardens	Copenhagen, DK	1843	Theme park	4.6
Songcheng Lijiang Romance Park	Lijiang, CN	2014	Theme park	4.6*
SeaWorld Florida	Orlando, USA	1973	Theme park	4.4
Busch Gardens Tampa Bay	Tampa, USA	1959	Theme park	4.1

<b>Park Name</b>	<b>City, Country</b>	<b>Year Opened</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Recent Attendance (in millions)</b>
Universal Studios Singapore	Sentosa Island, SP	2011	Theme park	4.1
Knott's Berry Farm	Buena Park, USA	1940	Theme park	4.0
OCT East	Shenzhen, CN	2007	Themed amusement park	3.9
OCT Window of the World	Shenzhen, CN	1993	Theme park	3.9
Changzhou Dinosaur Park	Changzhou, CN	2000	Theme park	3.9*
OCT Happy Valley	Beijing, CN	2006	Theme park	3.8
Chimelong Paradise	Guangzhou, CN	2007	Amusement park	3.8
OCT Happy Valley	Shenzhen, CN	1998	Theme park	3.8
Canada's Wonderland	Vaughan, CA	1981	Amusement park	3.7
Port Aventura	Salou, SP	1995	Theme park	3.6
Cedar Point	Sandusky, USA	1870	Amusement park	3.6
SeaWorld California	San Diego, USA	1973	Theme park	3.5
Fantawild Adventure	Zhengzhou, CN	2012	Theme park	3.5
Fantawild Oriental Heritage	Ningbo, CN	2015	Theme park	3.4
Kings Island	Mason, USA	1972	Amusement park	3.3
Six Flags Magic Mountain	Valencia, USA	1971	Themed amusement park	3.3
Hershey Park	Hershey, USA	1906	Theme park	3.2
Six Flags Great Adventure	Jackson, USA	1974	Themed amusement park	3.2
Liseberg	Gothenburg, SE	1923	Amusement park	3.0
Six Flags Great America	Gurnee, USA	1976	Themed amusement park	2.9
Gardaland	Garda, IT	1975	Theme park	2.8
Busch Gardens Williamsburg	Williamsburg, USA	1975	Theme park	2.7*
OCT Happy Valley	Chengdu, CN	2009	Theme park	2.5
Dollywood	Pigeon Forge, TN	1977 (1986 Dollywood )	Theme park	2.5***
OCT Happy Valley	Shanghai, CN	2009	Theme park	2.3
Puy du Fou	Lew Epesses, FR	1978 (most of park 1989)	Theme park	2.2
Legoland Windsor	Windsor, UK	1996	Theme park	2.1
Legoland Billund	Billund, DK	1958	Theme park	2.0
SeaWorld San Antonio	San Antonio, USA	1988	Theme park	2.0***



<b>Park Name</b>	<b>City, Country</b>	<b>Year Opened</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Recent Attendance (in millions)</b>
Phantasialand	Bruhl, DE	1967	Theme park	1.9
Alton Towers	Staffordshire, UK	1980	Theme park	1.9
Futuroscope	Poitiers, FR	1987	Theme park	1.9
Parc Asterix	Plailly, FR	1989	Theme park	1.8
Parque Warner	Madrid, SP	2002	Theme park	1.8
Thorpe Park	Chertsey, UK	1979	Themed amusement park	1.8
Chessington World of Adventures	Chessington, UK	1987	Theme park	1.6
Heide Park	Saltau, DE	1978	Themed amusement park	1.5
Gronalund	Stockholm, SE	1883	Themed amusement park	1.5

## APPENDIX D: STORYTELLING ATTRACTION LISTS

The following tables\* provide lists of storytelling attractions in parks throughout various time periods and regions; refer to Chapter 2 for the parameters and discussions of the following lists. Throughout the tables, I emphasize attractions (whether rides, shows, or others) that are meant to be permanent. Some recurring seasonal entertainment is included as well. This is a subjective exercise, as others might interpret some of these experiences as non-stories or non-narratives and thus subtract them or include attractions that were not listed. Likewise, the presence or lack of particular storytelling elements is up for interpretation and availability of information; some are guesses based on videos or written descriptions. Because of language barriers, this was difficult for some attractions. This is a non-exhaustive and preliminary list that captures the commonality of particular elements of story, attractions types that frequently tell stories or particular types of stories, and time and regional variations. Some attractions are omitted if not enough information was found on them; it was not possible to find the years of operation for all of the attractions listed. Other attractions were omitted inadvertently.

In the following lists basic storytelling terms are used to denote the presence of narrative elements (also in Appendix C). These terms are: *allusion*, referring to another (often well-known cultural) text outside itself; *character*, an entity involved in action within a story (in theme park experiences, usually recognizable intellectual properties, flat characters/archetypes, or the guests themselves); *conflict*, a struggle within a story (between characters, a character and nature, or character and self, etc.), often seen as what motivates and pushes narratives in particular directions; *narrator*, in this case, the presence of an overt, rather than implied, storyteller; *plot*, a sequence of connected events (with *events* being a unit of *action* with characters, or a *happening* without them); *scenes*, single event frames (action in one place, one time), the standard unit or division of plays, films, or dark rides; *setting*, background details expressing a storyworld (often

including *motifs*, repeated images or things); *symbolism*, items or events that represent a deeper meaning or a larger event, often through *synecdoche*, or representing a whole of a story through a part; *theme*, a repeating, underlying idea or message within the story; *visual storytelling*, telling of a story through primarily visual (rather than verbal) means including film or architecture.

Notes:

- Because of the nature of theme park attractions, simply having a “beginning, middle, and end” or following standard dramatic structure is not the only criteria for storytelling. Instead, attractions are examined for utilizing common storytelling techniques. This list was meant to be inclusive of varying conceptions of storytelling.
- Attractions are considered separate entities, so “allusion” will be used even if the attraction can be counted as an adaptation of an existing property (for example, while Star Tours is based on the *Star Wars* series, it is a separate entity, but it alludes to the films many times).
- “Narrator” is generally used if there is narration within the attraction rather than only in the pre-show and queue, which more commonly have narration.
- Because theme parks are physical spaces, everything technically has a “setting.” Instead, the term setting is used here if it is integral to the experience. The setting is essential to a walkthrough, for instance, but many stage shows do not emphasize setting and could be ported to another location and be the same experience.
- “Theme” is used here in the literary sense of a recurring underlying message, not as a synonym for “decoration” or “motif.”
- Some of these narratives could be classified with additional terms like *montage* or *transmedia storytelling*. Those terms were discussed with representative attractions in

Chapter 3. This list concentrates on the ten most common storytelling techniques in the 66 theme parks listed in Appendix C.

- Names of attractions are generally translated into English.
- Storytelling elements are for the most recent incarnation of the attraction. For instance, the Haunted Mansion has been changed to add more plot, so that is represented in the list.

\*For space and ease of reading, these lists are available at this link:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/10z55B\\_pCqclOAZcNTMSgzPQyaS\\_3Vde1vk5jx7wHK1c/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/10z55B_pCqclOAZcNTMSgzPQyaS_3Vde1vk5jx7wHK1c/edit?usp=sharing).

## APPENDIX E: CHAPTER THREE INTERVIEWS

Table 11: Responses Related to Preference of Story over Technology

Creative Professional	Comments
Steve Alcorn	“A lot of the time I think they start with a technology and then decide what to do with it. This is backwards. The approach should be to come up with a great story and then select the best way to tell it” (personal interview).
Phil Hetteema	“As creators of immersive experiences, we’re always anxious to use the latest technologies and techniques to tell the story. The right pairing of technology and story to create a specific experience can be the height of success in our industry, but it’s easy to be tempted by the “latest thing.” Technology always needs to be in support of the experience, enhancing the story. Anytime the technology becomes the reason for an attraction to exist, you can be sure of one thing: The attraction will become dated in a fairly short period of time. However, a memorable experience with a creative blend of story supported by the right technology will continue to be memorable long after the technology itself begins to age” (qtd. in Palicki, “Phil”).
Drew Hunter	A ride should “never be about technology. It’s about storytelling. It’s about the experience. The technology should never get in the way of that.”
Asa Kalama	“You pick the right tools to reach the goal that you know the guests want. Don’t choose your tools first” (qtd. in Takahashi).
Darryl Pickett	“I think you’re in trouble if you let the novelty of technology dictate what you’re doing.”
Kevin Rafferty	“Technology should serve the attraction, not be the attraction” (qtd. in Sklar, <i>One</i> 214).
Joe Rohde	“Through technology, we continue to become more powerful in our way to create illusions, in our way to capture the attention of the audience, and it’s easy to become seduced by the power of technology” (qtd. in Martens, “Themed”).
Mark Schirmer	“When adding technology just for technology’s sake, the element that the guests connect with is lost and the longevity of the experience will be short lived as new technology is always right around the corner” (qtd. in Alton, “Mystic”).
Marty Sklar	“Technology should be in service to story” ( <i>One</i> 102).
Scott Trowbridge	“It’s not about adding new technology just for the whiz-bang effect, but asking if we can find new ways to tell a story” (qtd. in MacDonald). He does not want “guests to think about the technology” or they have “failed” (qtd. in MacDonald).
Larry Tuch	“Technology should never drive an attraction. It’s not the main show; it’s the enabler. If you want to have technology driving attractions, what you do is have a booth at a technology expo.”
Alex Wright	“Our approach never revolves around technology for the sake of technology – but rather technology applied in the service of great storytelling” ( <i>Epcot</i> 49).
Olaf Vugts	“Technology is subordinate to the main thing. Technique only supports the telling of the story. Technique may not bring the story; it should be one of the things you bring, not distracting.” Some attractions have an experience that says “look at the technology we have” or the “technique takes over the story,” which is not correct.

## APPENDIX F: CHAPTER FOUR INTERVIEWS



Table 12: Interviewee Comments on Theme Park Uniqueness

Interviewee	Comments
Steve Alcorn	In so far as they add physicality to traditional storytelling techniques used in radio, television and films.
Bob Allen	<p>Theme parks really are simply a way of dimensionalizing a narrative and allowing an audience to be in it with you. And that’s what Walt thought about. He said, “You know what, movies were great. What if I can invite all the audience members to be in the movie?”</p> <p>The theme park is a metaphor for the broader thing known as immersive entertainment. Their unique perspective is “I’m going to put the audience here, to live in the setting with me.” My audience is participatory in the story in both a physical and a narrative sense. And it’s fully immersive and interactive. Movies are like books, they’re just linear. You can talk back to the screen all you want but it doesn’t hear you. That does not mean that I think a theme park or immersive storytelling experience is any better than a linear book. It turned out that, you know, movies didn’t kill theater, television didn’t kill radio. There are lots of ways to deliver stories and the human being tends to like them all.</p> <p>If you want to over-generalize it, a theme park takes a theatrical experience, removes the fourth wall and invites the house up onto the stage.</p> <p>[Walt Disney] said, “You know, the thing I loved about Disneyland is, I can change it forever.” Once you make a movie, you’re done, the movie’s made. He said, “Here, I can play with this thing forever.” I might go out on a limb here and say that I think maybe the notion of “theme park”... That might be the most distinctive thing about it, as an entertainment vehicle or a storytelling system. If you think about all the others who talked about books, movies, television shows, online games, even theater. Once they’re done, they’re done. Because the guest is such a key part of a theme park experience and the interaction with the cast is such a key part, and it’s this big physical thing. That may be its most distinctive cool fact is that it can reiterate itself forever.</p>
Anthony Esparza	<p>This is the hardest industry to tell a story in. It is broad and wide with many ways to tell one. It is 3D, built environments, smells, media, and you have to coordinate all of the pieces. The ultimate artist is the theme park designer. They also need to assemble a team and need to know who they are trying to please.</p> <p>The theme park is a box to walk inside of. Everything outside the box is the outside, real world, “regular life.” But there will always be leakage, and if too much gets in, it can cause atrophy. Parks will always try to tell the next best story with the next best technology. Story changes the box and world and makes it different.</p>
Moniek Hover	Yes, because they allow for guests to immerse physically with all their senses in a story/storyworld. In a theatre the physical presence is also a characteristic, however, as audiences you are seated opposite the scene and use mainly sight and hearing to experience the story. In theme parks also other senses may be involved.

Interviewee	Comments
Drew Hunter	Well it's because you're in the middle of it. You know, you could read a book and in your mind you go there. You see it, you see the scenes. You create them yourself. Two people can read <i>Gone with the Wind</i> and see completely different versions. You know, possibly influenced by the movie but possibly they get it or they can read an Anne Rice novel. And you know, the mind takes you wherever you wanna go. No two are the same. And then a movie, you know it's there for you. Somebody has decided what it looks like. And the same way in a dark ride except that you are moving; you are moving in the adventure and it's happening around you. It happens very quickly, but it is a unique storytelling method that does literally immerse you in areas. Sometimes full scenic areas, sometimes video, but it immerses you, you're going through, you feel it. You experience it, and that's kind of unlike anything else.
Taylor Jeffs	The reason for theme parks to exist is that they're basically the only medium that can engage all five senses – the only medium that can truly be fully-immersive....this bleeds over into other mediums like some museums and escape rooms. Theme parks offer us the chance for a shared experience that no other medium can – one that equally engages guests both young and old. No film, video game, or mall can put guests in the middle of the world of <i>Harry Potter</i> or <i>Avatar</i> like a theme park can. As long as our industry continues to create experiences of this caliber, there is a bright future ahead.
Henry Jenkins	The key point here is that events in a story get translated into places and spaces in the attraction. It is more or less what also takes place with computer games. Both are spatially based systems for depicting the world.
Kirsten Kischuk	I think that one of the ways that theme park stories can be unique is that there are times that the “story” is left up to the viewer to fully interpret. For example, rides like “Pirates of the Caribbean” and “Haunted Mansion” have a definite theme, but not a definite story with a beginning, middle and end. The viewer is presented with scenes, but the way that those scenes are interpreted is left up to the viewer. What does the waterfall in “Pirates” mean? Are the pirates victorious, as the treasure in the last scene might indicate, or do they succumb to just rewards for their behavior, since at the beginning of the ride, we see bones and are told that “dead men tell no tales”? Who is this “ghost host” in the mansion and what is the story of all of those other ghosts? The viewer is not told why they are seeing what they are seeing or what it means, but this certainly has not diminished people's enjoyment of these rides. And in some cases, people have spent great amounts of time making up their own stories about these rides and the characters within them. A movie or a play with such disjointed and unclear story lines would not have the same popular appeal, but theme park “stories” can afford to be disjointed, subtle, jarring or unbelievable and still be enjoyed. Part of this may be because of how brief the rides are and how quickly guests move through environments. Part of it may be because there is so much sensory stimulus that the mind is less concerned with how neatly packaged the story is. Perhaps we enjoy the fact that the spaces and details give room for the imagination to find its own personal meaning and emotional resonance in what is being presented.

Interviewee	Comments
	<p>I think that sometimes, we may put too much emphasis on the need for there to be a well-packaged story when what we are giving guests is really an experience within a story world. Even the average guest is aware that on many theme park rides the main story is “something goes terribly wrong”. They see the formula and it becomes predictable. We don't necessarily need something to go horribly wrong in order to create excitement and emotion. “Soarin” has been a popular ride for many years. The only story that it has is that guests are going to go hang-gliding and see many beautiful things. In many ways, that is a very small story, like someone would tell over the dinner table when asked, “what did you do today?”. But it is a little story that people enjoy, and nothing goes “terribly wrong”. That's another unique way that we can tell stories – we can tell stories that seem very small and simple – but yet still make it seem compelling by bringing the guest into an experience that is much more unique and immersive than anything they can do in their ordinary, everyday life.</p>
Scott Lukas	<p>Yes, at an overall level, I refer to such storytelling as “design storytelling.” As I say in <i>The Immersive Worlds Handbook</i>: “A design story is told in three-dimensional space, using architecture, design, and forms of material culture. It may also include actors, performance, and forms of technology. Just like the traditional stories described above, the design story creates a world in which people can relate, interact, enjoy, and explore. The design story represents a melding of the techniques of design, interior design, architecture, and applications of technology and material culture with the techniques of storytelling and associated areas like performance, acting, and interaction.” At all levels, all theme parks use forms of design storytelling, however, there is notable difference in how storytelling is brought to bear on the guest’s experiences in theme parks.</p>
Ross Osterman	<p>Yeah, we certainly do and we certainly have weird challenges. When you go to a movie, you’re in a dark theatre and the guest hopefully outside of his popcorn and/or his or her date, you know is giving you undivided attention. We don’t always get that. There are a lot of distractions at a theme park: you’re there with a big crowd; it’s just more difficult sometimes to really tell a story in our context. That’s why we tend to keep our stories to some extent pretty simple and we tend to, in creative ways, try to repeat ourselves quite a few times. It’s kind of the old joke: we tell people what they’re about to see, we tell people what they’re seeing, we remind them what they just saw. Repetition in a clever way is our friend. And just to point out a couple of other obvious things; as opposed to a movie or reading a book, there’s the attention thing, we have a huge demographic of all ages, we have multi languages we have to deal with, so there’s all these challenges that we face that are to some extent unique to us. So we have to process all that when telling our stories. And in telling the stories once again we want the guest to be a character too so that’s a whole other wrinkle. When the forces of good defeat the forces of evil, we want our guests generally to be on the hero’s side helping to do that. So that they have to do something; they have to bump something or yell or push a button or take a certain path, so it gets complicated but that’s what makes us unique.</p>
Charlie Otte	<p>Yes, more so than film, and like theatre productions (like <i>Sleep No More</i>, not just a darkened room looking at a proscenium), there is immersiveness.</p>

Interviewee	Comments
	<p>There is a real-time communal experiential thing as well as scale. It seems that the experience is made simpler to accommodate more people, so there is less complex narrative, but it is fun even when crowded because it is communal and the story changes when there are more people there.</p>
Darryl Pickett	<p>One that is certainly different is that you don't have a lot of time. That you know, typically an experience is pretty short and that has a lot to do with the practicality of needing a lot of throughput, to get people through getting in and out efficiently. And so, even an hour and a half long movie, which is short for a movie, has enough time to introduce some plots and be character driven. You know theme park stories tend to be less character driven. Though characters may appear in them, generally you already know those characters. You're bringing some identification to them. So you're not being introduced to a character in this situation, in quite the same way, as if you're watching a film or a play. It tends to be a little bit more about setting and atmosphere and quick gags. There were gags that sometimes use different ways.</p> <p>In cartooning a gag, it means a one panel joke or humorous bit that delivers the humorous point visually instantaneously. In theme show, a gag kind of just (it may not be funny, it might be a scary moment or might be a surprising moment), but it has to communicate pretty much instantaneously. I often say when I talk to designers about story, I often say that one thing is that the visual design, nearly in any attraction, is so important. And that ideally you should be able to draw key moments in a single panel in a single image. It's a really carefully chosen moment that sort of delivers a lot, you get to fill in the blanks. Whereas you know in a movie you would see the whole sequence, you would see the whole thing happen. And you have shots and changes of angle and all of that sort of thing. In a theme environment, it's sort of a one take, your eyes are open all the time and unless you're passing from one room to another or something, you know, it's sort of flowing past you.</p> <p>It's interesting because it's a different way of thinking through things. I do write narrative forms; I write plays and I write stories and I've written a novel. You have this wonderful luxury of getting to know your characters and getting to lead your reader through an elaborate series of events. And in the theme park experience, generally speaking, you're kind of in a hurry. You want people to relax into it and enjoy it, but you're really guiding. The real art of it is in saying, "how do I get to this next idea really quickly without them feeling like they're rushed or without feeling like you're short changing them?"</p>
Larry Tuch	<p>Oh sure they do, but they steal and borrow from everybody. First of all, the person is uncorking the story on foot. I have a nice comfortable seat when film is telling me a story. And I have a nice comfortable seat in a way when I'm sitting at an immersive environment in the theme park. But from the moment you walk up to the gate and the gate says something to you about the place you're about enter to the first space you entered when you come through the gate and all the way down the different roads and the architecture and the spaces. That's different storytelling. That's three-dimensional storytelling. Some people heard about three-dimensional</p>

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Comments</b>
	storytelling in a 4-D environment, because the sensory effects surround you. So that's really a three-dimensional space and that's valid. So yeah, they do it differently. They define the art of how you tell story or evoke story in three-dimensional space. Remember you're providing experience so in certain situations it's appropriate and enough to evoke story. In other places, you need story as a driver.

## APPENDIX G: IRB LETTER



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board  
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**From:** UCF Institutional Review Board  
FWA00000351, Exp. 01/18/2022, IRB00001138  
**To:** Carissa Baker  
**Date:** February 27, 2017  
**Study Title:** Exploring a Three-Dimensional Narrative Medium: The Theme Park as 'de Sprookjessprokkelaar,' the Collector and Teller of Stories.

Thank you for contacting the IRB office regarding your Dissertation, as requested by Dr. Thomas Rudy McDaniel, Assistant Dean of Research and Technology, from the College of Arts and Humanities.

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